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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



Meetings at Sea

How Cruise Programs Are
Winning Over Attendees and
Making Life Easier For Planners

PAGE 12

Meetings Mean Business

Face-to-Face Meetings Drive Our Economic
Engine and Produce Measurable Results

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Roger Dow, President and CEO
U.S. Travel Association

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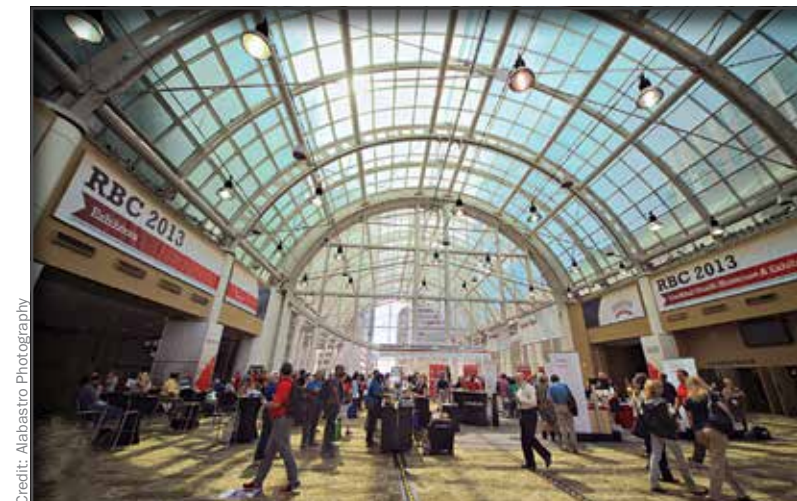
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Credit: Norwegian Cruise Line

The ropes course on Norwegian Cruise Line's Breakaway ship, which launched last year. **PAGE 12**



Credit: Alabaastro Photography

Attendees of Cardinal Health's Retail Business Conference cross the skybridge at the Washington State Convention Center. **PAGE 20**



Credit: SLS Las Vegas

SLS Las Vegas resort and casino debuted in August after a \$415 million renovation of the legendary Sahara Hotel. **PAGE 38**

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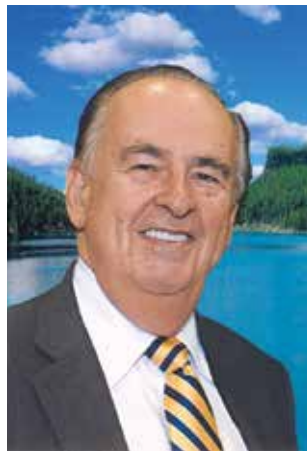
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Publisher's Message

There's No Substitute for a Handshake

Roger Dow once said, "Simply put, there's no technology available that can replace a handshake." Dow, who graces our cover this month, knows firsthand the significance of face-to-face relationships. After all, during a stellar 34-year career at Marriott International, he moved up the ladder from lifeguard to senior vice president of global and field sales, where he guided the brand's 10,000-person worldwide sales organization. Among his many accomplishments was the development of Marriott Rewards, the world's leading frequent traveler program.



Fortunately for our industry, Dow in 2005 accepted an offer to head up the U.S. Travel Association as president and CEO, where his expertise and influence are legion. In addition to leading the movement for creation of the Travel Promotion Act, which became law in March 2010 and established Brand USA, Dow also is the man behind the Meetings Mean Business Coalition, which was originally created in 2009 by U.S. Travel to showcase the incredible value that business meetings, travel and events bring to the U.S. economy.

For a timely and enlightening update on the re-launch of the Meetings Mean Business (MMB) movement, see our cover story on page 28. The most significant accomplishment, creating an unprecedented, industry-wide alliance, is a done deal. "For the first time, we have all of the different industry leaders, representing all of the different sectors, united behind a single, proactive campaign," says Dow. "MMB has successfully created a dialogue within the industry. It's an effort that reaches across business, professional associations and destination marketing organizations, and the greater travel industry, to offer one voice that extols the undeniable value of business meetings, events, conferences and conventions to all sectors of the economy."

Now, the other vital issue, say industry leaders, is to get the word out among all stakeholders to educate and enlighten them. As Dow points out, "We need to continually look for ways to capture the true value of a meeting or event whether it's in terms of the business value, return on investment, local impact or, sometimes harder to measure, relationship-building, and make sure that stakeholders within organizations can communicate that to their own management and beyond their organization to the broader industry."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

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Stay Well Meetings Launched at MGM Grand Las Vegas

LAS VEGAS, NV — Stay Well Meetings, the industry's first-ever wellness meetings experience, was recently unveiled at MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas.

Created by Delos, the pioneer of Wellness Real Estate, the program offers healthful environments for high-performance meetings with meeting rooms and spaces designed to optimize the health and well-being of attendees while complementing the existing Stay Well room and suite experience. Delos Advisory Board member and alternative medicine advocate Deepak Chopra, M.D., led the ribbon-cutting ceremony. www.delosliving.com, www.mgmgrand.com



The ribbon-cutting ceremony included (l to r) MGM Resorts Sr. V.P. of Hotel Sales Mike Dominguez; Deepak Chopra; Delos Founder Paul Scailla; and MGM Grand President and COO Scott Sibella.

Delano Las Vegas Opens on The Las Vegas Strip

LAS VEGAS, NV — The all-suite Delano Las Vegas debuted September 2 as executives and employees of MGM Resorts International and Morgans Hotel Group gathered to officially unveil Las Vegas' newest hotel, located just steps from the 1.7-million-sf Mandalay Bay Convention Center.

The non-smoking, non-gaming South Beach lifestyle brand hotel, which replaced THEhotel at Mandalay Bay, features more than 1,100 accommodations. There is 20,000 sf of meeting space within the tower, which includes the 1,257-sf Sage Living Room as well as 31 meeting rooms and four boardrooms. An additional 16,000 sf of space for breakfast and lunch meetings is located on the top floor with panoramic views of the Las Vegas Strip.

Dining options include 3940 Coffee + Tea; Della's Kitchen; and Franklin, which boasts more than two dozen craft beers by the bottle, wines-by-the-glass, small bites and appetizers.

Delano's guest suites boast one of the highest standard room square footages of any hotel in the city (725 sf). Each one-bedroom suite features a private bedroom, bold lighting fixtures and a spacious spa-style bath. The adjoining living room offers a 46-inch, flat-screen TV, wet bar, desk and its own powder room.

www.delanolasvegas.com



Delano Las Vegas.

Atlantic City's Reinvention Plan Targets Meetings and Conventions

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Responding to the closings of three casino resorts, Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian, along with Casino Reinvestment Development Authority Executive Director John Palmieri, Mark Giannantonio, president and CEO of Resorts Casino Hotel, and other tourism officials informed the public that significant progress is being made in the destination's ongoing transition to a destination that is not focused solely on gaming.

"We have made great strides through the public-private partnership between the CRDA, ACA and Meet AC with the state of NJ, Atlantic County and the city," Palmieri said. "We are on track to drive \$1 billion into the Tourism District within these first five years, which is all part of our plan that focuses on four key initiatives: attraction visitation, building the visitor experience, targeting meeting and conventions and investing in neighborhoods and job training."

Pre-development concepts in the works include the renovation of the Tropicana and a new public market that will serve as an anchor attraction connecting Atlantic Avenue to the Boardwalk. And Meet AC was created as a non-profit and is expected to add a potential 251,000 group room nights in the next three to five years.

Giannantonio said, "It's important to remember that there are still dozens of nightclubs, more than 100 restaurants, 15,000 hotel rooms and a full roster of year-round headline entertainment for visitors to enjoy. We also boast one of the most successful outlet shopping centers on the East Coast."

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News & Notes

Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort Confirms Summer 2015 Opening

HOLLYWOOD BEACH, FL — Inspired by the lyrics and lifestyle of singer, songwriter and author Jimmy Buffett, Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort confirmed its summer 2015 opening on the legendary Hollywood Beach Broadwalk in Greater Fort Lauderdale.

The resort's meeting and event spaces will include the 10,000-sf Compass Rose Ballroom, which will be divisible into four smaller segments, and seven additional breakout rooms. Also, the resort plans seven diverse food and beverage venues, including Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville, LandShark Bar & Grill, License to Chill Rooftop Bar, Lone Palm Bar and 5 o'clock Somewhere Bar.

The 15,000-sf St. Somewhere Spa offers 11 treatment rooms with gender-specific lounges and locker rooms complemented by a coed wet lounge featuring heated benches and two couples treatment rooms. www.margaritavillehollywoodbeachresort.com



Rendering of Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort.

Meliá Hotels International to Debut ME Miami in Spring 2015

MIAMI, FL — Meliá Hotels International recently announced ME Miami, Meliá brand's first property in the U.S. This new bayfront property, slated to open in spring 2015, marks a pivotal moment in the brand's evolving global expansion strategy by making its way to one of the most popular travel destinations in the world and the U.S. headquarters of Meliá Hotels International.

ME Miami will boast 129 rooms, two rooftop pools, and more than 5,000 sf of renovated space that will be converted into new food and beverage facilities with dining and event spaces. All public and private spaces, including a spa, will be completely remodeled. www.me-by-melia.com



Rendering of ME Miami entrance on Biscayne Boulevard.

Tropicana Las Vegas to Expand Convention Facilities

LAS VEGAS, NV — Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton announced a March 1, 2015, completion date for the expansion of the Tropicana Pavilion. The expansion, which also includes enhancements to the existing pavilion area, will increase the resort's total meeting and convention facilities to 100,000 sf.

The new 26,000-sf Tropicana Pavilion area will offer up to 11 separate breakout rooms, some with up to 16-foot ceilings, and will feature new private restrooms as well as new escalators. The current Tropicana Pavilion also will be enhanced, including a decorative acoustic treatment for the walls. Once the addition is complete, the Tropicana Pavilion will provide 55,000 sf of meeting space. www.trop.lv.com/las-vegas/meetings-conventions

Snapshots



Credits: 1. & 2. www.mikenakamuraphotography.com, 3. Walt Disney World Resort, 5. Orange Photography, 6. San Antonio CVB

1 ISES Live, Seattle 2014, was held in August at The Westin Hotel. Produced by the International Special Events Society, ISES Live featured a reception in Seattle Art Museum Sculpture Park, a President's Reception at the Space Needle's Skyline level and **2** a topiary photo op for attendees. **3** Recently at the MPI World Education Congress in Minneapolis, Disney Destinations sponsored a session, which was presented by Nolan Bushnell (second from right), founder of Atari Corporation and Chuck E. Cheese Pizza Time Theater. Author of *Finding the Next Steve Jobs*, Bushnell shared insights on ways to attract, hire and nurture creative talent. Disney provided attendees with Glow With the Show ears that interacted with Bushnell's presentation. **4** Paul Astleford, president and CEO of Visit Jacksonville, and Harvey Grotsky, publisher of *Corporate & Incentive Travel*, at a recent meeting in Jacksonville. **5** Students gather at MPI's WEC in Minneapolis from the IMEX-MPI-MCI Future Leaders Forum, a year-round program for students studying meetings and conventions, tourism or hospitality. **6** Synchronicities CEOs and client Maureen Goodman from the National Postal Forum gather in Nashville at ASAE 2014. Cassandra Matej (front left), director, San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau and Goodman. Jay Burrell (back left), president and CEO of the Anaheim Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau and Tom Noonan, president and CEO of Visit Baltimore.

By Christine Shimasaki

Before You Hit 'Send' — Does Your eRFP Follow This Call-to-Action Plan?

Most of us have a love-hate relationship with technology. What used to take days or even weeks to accomplish can now be done in minutes. As terrific as requesting — and receiving — instant responses can be, we often pay the price with information overload, impersonalization and getting lost in the sea of online communication. Nowhere is this more evident and frustrating to both the planner and the hotel community than in the distribution of electronic requests for proposals (eRFPs).

An improving business economy and the world of eRFPs have changed the corporate and incentive meeting planning landscape, ultimately creating a seller's market: With increased demand, desirable hotels in popular destinations can pick and choose the business they want. When widespread distribution is as easy as clicking a button, it becomes too easy to barrage hotels with proposal requests. And when bogged-down salespeople see a large distribution list, they give the RFP low priority and often either don't respond or send back a cookie-cutter proposal in lieu of a truly competitive bid.

In response to the often heard cry "I can't get proposals! Why don't the hotels want my business?" Ed Kady, associate director of sales for the 1,625 room Manchester Grand Hyatt in San Diego, says, "Sending an RFP to 30 hotels is truly wasting the meeting planner's and hotel's time. The majority of the hotels won't meet the meeting planner's needs." Indiscriminate distribution signals to the hotel that the planner doesn't know what they are looking for and that they don't take the RFP process seriously. It's no surprise, then, that many RFPs get buried and never result in a competitive bid.

Before the advent of online RFP engines, planners were more selective in the number and locations of hotels they contacted for proposals, simply because of time and effort constraints. But, by narrowing their interest to the top four or five properties appearing to be the best potential matches for the meeting, the planner was essentially pre-prioritizing for the hotel. From the hotel's point of view, nearly every lead or RFP that landed on the salesperson's desk had legitimacy and therefore attracted consideration.

Pre-select Before You Hit 'Send'

How can you keep from shooting yourself in the foot with too many eRFPs? Take careful aim.

To ensure you grab the hotels' attention and get the proposals you really want, narrow down the list before casting the RFP net. When your RFP is sent to too many properties, the hotel that might be the best fit may not take the time to dig for variables, flexibility or details that could result in an attractive proposal. So, instead of e-blasting the RFP out there, waiting to see what comes back, then deciding which of the responding hotels might work, try borrowing this approach from pre-electronic RFP days: start by narrowing the playing field, then take aim at three to five pre-determined "best targets" — and ultimately score a perfect fit.

Follow these four important steps in pre-selection before you send out even the first eRFP.

1. Make a wish list of what you really want/need to have a successful meeting:

- A big city or a smaller town?
- A high-rise convention hotel or a golf resort?
- 500 sleeping rooms, 10 breakouts and enough space to feed 750?
- Deluxe amenities or a value property?
- Easy accessibility? Does it matter?
- Cultural facilities, nearby family attractions, gourmet restaurants, warm weather, walkability and nightlife?

2. Compare your wish list with the characteristics you know about each of those destinations.

Use the "must haves" (mid-U.S. location, large hotels) to narrow the list of potential destinations that can provide them. If there are still more than five, narrow further based on the "nice to haves" (good shopping, convenient airport). Both empowerMINT.com's Destination Finder or Cvent's Destination Guide provide extensive destination information, which you may find helpful in narrowing your destination "hit list."

3. Talk to your CVB destination expert.

Once again, use empowerMINT.com's Destination Finder or Cvent's Destination Guide for contact information to reach a sales professional at each of the convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) in the destinations you've decided to target. Discuss the special personality of your meeting. Learn about appropriate hotels and what will make your RFP attractive to them.

4. Fine-tune your RFP accordingly to land on top of the hotel's priority pile.



Tips for Getting the Best Bid

Once you've narrowed down the number of serious hotel contenders, and you're ready to craft the RFP, be sure it includes the following:

- **Complete organizational information.** The more information you include in your RFP, the better. Provide an introduction that describes your group's needs, objectives and attendee profile — the "philosophy" of your organization and meeting.
- **Nuts and bolts information.** Provide the details of the meeting schedule, including session times, number of

seats (and type of seating preferred) for each breakout, meals, technology requirements, hospitality, possible exhibit space, etc. If you have held this meeting before, attach a copy of the previous program as a guideline. If there are certain non-negotiable items, a rate ceiling or deal-breaker concessions required, say so. Include the number and type of sleeping rooms your group requires each night, from earliest arrival to departure.

- **Three years of meeting history.** Think of your historical data as your "credit rating." Hotels give priority to groups that can demonstrate a consistent event history that includes the number of attendees, where they've stayed, the number of rooms they used and what they spent.
- **Demonstrate flexibility.** Every hotel has a sweet spot when it comes to date patterns, room nights, space usage and food and beverage spend. If you can consider an alternate time frame or pattern, say so in your RFP.

The CVB is Key

The CVB is the best first point of contact to help you identify properties that can provide the right fit for your meeting, and continues to be your partner throughout the entire site selection process. CVB sales professionals are uniquely qualified to deliver on this promise because they have a comprehensive view of the destination, local expertise and extensive in-market relationships. Through dialogue with the CVB sales professional, he or she understands both your hot buttons and where there may be room for flexibility. "If the CVB has a relationship with the customer and understands their needs," says Ed Kady, "they essentially qualify the lead together and the customer is guided in the right direction. The CVB should then share the insights they've gained with the hotel, and the result can be a more customized, competitive proposal."

By partnering with the CVB, being clear about your needs, and creating a complete and thoughtful RFP with a narrow distribution, you're on the road to a timely and complete response and successful site selection.

(Also see "Standout CVBs" on page 20.)

C&IT

“To ensure you grab the hotels' attention and get the proposals you really want, **narrow down the list** before casting the RFP net.”



Christine Shimasaki CDME, CMP,

is the managing director of *empowerMINT.com* and the Event Impact Calculator for Destination Marketing Association International. She previously served as executive vice president and chief strategy officer for the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau, as well as a distinguished career in sales with Marriott.

Meetings at Sea

Ships Ahoy!



How Cruise Programs Are Winning Over Attendees and Making Life Easier For Planners

By Gabi Logan

trendy dishes such as mojito shrimp ceviche. On the Norwegian Getaway, dinner excitement goes up another notch with the world-class, magic-filled Illusionarium, while guests can enjoy Broadway productions “Burn the Floor” and “Legally Blond,” performances by Grammy award-winners and delectable treats from Cake Boss Buddy Valastro.

Cruise lines also are changing their experience in port to expand their entertainment options. Carnival Cruises is creating a first-of-its-kind experience that allows guests to enjoy concerts from such performers as Chicago, Lady Antebellum and Jewel in port for 90 minutes in the main lounge before the ship debarks. VIP tickets include an artist meet-and-greet and photo.

Silversea Cruises, already known for

its immersive and inventive excursion options, is adding new off-the-beaten-path tours that allow guests to arrive on one ship, take a multi-day excursion, and depart on another. New options for 2015 will include a two-day bush-walking safari in Africa and one-night overnight in overwater bungalows in French Polynesia.

Opportunity Is Knocking

“The trend of corporate meeting groups cruising together is gaining more and more interest,” explains Christine Duffy, president and CEO of CLIA. “Hosting a meeting or corporate gathering on a cruise ship offers an experience for attendees that is intriguing, cost effective and highly efficient. Cruising delivers the greatest value proposition as well as the highest guest satisfaction rating

“For groups of all kinds, cruising offers many advantages including a cost-effective way of producing a meeting that doesn’t look and feel like every

other meeting, and exceptional value,” she says. “The all-inclusiveness of the typical cruise ship product is hard to match in a land-based venue. In addition to accommodations, meals and entertainment, cruise ships offer their conference centers at no extra charge. Most lines also provide standard audio-video equipment on a complimentary basis. Cruising provides the opportunity for great networking and teambuilding opportunities, and you have a captive audience.”

While some companies and their meeting planners are still waiting to dip their toes in the cruise meeting pool, others have been happily reaping the benefits for decades. “I love cruises because we want to do a meeting but also something fun,” says Gayle Warren, CMP, global events manager for Lehi, Utah-based Natures Sunshine Products.

“I’ve probably done a cruise every year if not every other year. They’re our go-to for meetings. Everybody loves to cruise. If it’s an incentive, we think, ‘What

will they want to do? Let’s send them on a cruise.’

“We had a very good experience this last cruise we did in April. We took 300 or 310 people on Royal Caribbean’s Allure of the Seas, and the ship was awesome,” she says. The largest cruise ship in the world when it was built, the Allure of the Seas accommodates 5,400 guests at double occupancy and departs from Fort Lauderdale for predominantly seven-night Caribbean itineraries, though it will turn to Europe in 2015. It has been named the best cruise ship by *Travel Weekly* for its signature experiences, such as the Tony Award-winning musical “Chicago” and the first Starbucks at sea. “We brought independent distributors that sell our product and earned the trip through sales and recruiting. We chose the top 200 accounts, and the top 20 got to be in the nice cabins and suites.

“I do know that our return on investment was very high,” Warren explains. “I’ve been doing these events for 18 years, and I remember saying to my co-

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CRUISE LIKE A NORWEGIAN

In the wake of the economic downturn, planners are still having to do more with less or uncover “new,” exciting destinations without traveling far from home. Many find that cruises fit the bill and then some. While cruises offer a clear savings over land-based itineraries due to their all-inclusiveness, which includes not only the rooms and F&B of an all-inclusive resort but entertainment, labor and activities as well,

they also showcase the latest food and entertainment trends.

Earlier this year, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) named growth of millennial guests one of the top trends in cruising, which is in line with one of the main shifts the meeting industry has encountered in recent years. To cater to this change, Norwegian Cruise Lines has added “Next enhancements” to its ships, balancing traditional entrées with



Credit: Carnival Cruise Lines

More Bang for Your Buck

The all-inclusive nature of cruises is one of the main draws for planners. “It’s the biggest selling point, because they can budget for travel lodging, F&B and entertainment all in one,” says Vicki McGowen, president of Reno, Nevada-based

worker, ‘Did we get complaints at all?’ and she said, ‘No, I didn’t. Did you?’ It was a great experience for us as well as attendees! We did a group photo in the AquaTheater, and people were smiling big time. There were lots of happy faces. It was clear they’d had a good experience.”

Jo Kling, president of Miami, Florida-based cruise event and ship charter specialists Landry & Kling Inc., has seen a significant shift in the last year alone in corporate bookings as more planners experience the mindset shift Warren describes. “We’re seeing more receptivity to the cruise concept,” Kling says. “Corporate incentive buyers who have been hearing for years about the exceptional experiences created during a meeting or incentive at sea — they’re finally getting it! When you pull away from shore, something shifts. Being physically separated from the shore and your normal way of life, opens you to new possibilities.

“The continuing corporate pressure on controlling meeting and travel budgets and the preference of today’s incentive qualifiers to have more memorable travel experiences rather than having more electronics, jewelry and things lead quite naturally to high-end ships and river boats where the staff to passenger ratio allows for more individualized service, more physical space, fewer lines and more refinement,” she continues.

“There is more focus on the luxury lines and river cruises for corporate programs because their great delivery of value. Special price promotions that corporate buyers become aware of demonstrate the great disparity in group pricing, which does not benefit from retail price promotions, so the value of the luxury brands is greater, with more truly ‘included’ elements.”

McGowen Marketing, who is currently planning a cruise with Celebrity Cruises for a group of airline pilots. “It makes it much more attractive for potential attendees because they know exactly what it’s going to cost, but it’s a more unique experience because you can visit three different ports of call.

“This trip is exclusively to Bermuda because it’s an attractive destination and a fun place to spend three days at the same port because you can do and see so much and come back to ship and have a wonderful dinner and show without the cost of Bermuda,” she explains. On its Bermuda routes, Celebrity operates the Celebrity Summit, a Millennium class ship that holds up to 2,158 people.



“The trend in incentives for both the trip winners and the hosts is to minimize the winners’ out-of-pocket expenses. Cruises offer an economical way to host a group in a contained environment.”

JULIA VETSIKAS, CMP, Senior Account Manager
United Incentives Inc., Philadelphia, PA

Incorporating Solstice class features, including additional lounges, world-class deejays, top Las Vegas entertainment, Broadway-style cabaret and more, Celebrity Summit caters to groups looking for high-value entertainment.

“This is really the way to see Bermuda. Hotels there are \$350 a night minimum. One time an attendee had to go to the airport there, and the airport hotel was \$800 a night. With a cruise, your food

and your lodging and entertainment are right there yet you can go out and spend the day on the golf course or at the beach or doing some shopping.”

For a four-night incentive trip for a company in the home furnishings industry, Julia Vetsikas, CMP, senior account manager for Philadelphia-based United Incentives Inc., planned a cruise to Nassau and Key West with one full day at sea for 1,000 guests. While planning an incentive of that size would typically be a big-ticket item for the company, Vetsikas turned to a sea itinerary rather than land one to offer attendees more in terms of sights and entertainment while saving the company on event expenses.

“The trend in incentives for both the trip winners and the hosts is to minimize the winners’ out-of-pocket expenses,” she explains. “Cruises offer an economical way to host a group in a contained environment. The out-of-pocket expenses for the winner are low, since meals and entertainment are included. They get to visit multiple destinations without having to worry about transportation between the ports. Guests appre-

ciated the quality of the ship and food, and that their out-of-pocket expense was relatively low.

“For the company, the costs are also controlled, and they have lots of opportunity to host their guests aboard the ship,” she says. “Since our group was so large, we had to be creative and Celebrity did a great job of accommodating us. My client appreciated the numerous hosting opportunities — nightly dinners, pri-



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vate cocktail receptions or excursions in port — because this all equaled to a lot of face time with their best clients.

“For our private events, Celebrity offered a variety of entertainment options to choose from,” Vetsikas explains. “We held a sales meeting for 800 people in the Celebrity Theater. We held two back-to-back welcome receptions in the Solarium. A highlight was a private after-dinner dessert reception in the Reflections Lounge. Our grand finale was a private cocktail reception for the entire group on the pool deck. We hosted all 1,000 guests, and Celebrity did a great job of transforming the space to make it feel special.”

Non-stop Networking

As much as incentives are about rewarding employees and corporate events are about effectively using the time you have employees together to produce productive results, one of the key aspects of face-to-face meetings is spontaneous networking interactions. Meeting planners are increasingly finding this networking element to be one of the biggest benefits of cruising.

“I think in the meetings industry in general, it has been a trend to focus on collaboration,” says Tracy Judge, CMP, director of business development, meetings and incentives at La Jolla, California-based Cadence Travel Management. “I’m seeing it across the

“On a cruise, there’s meeting space, and you can do activities together, but you’re not forced to be with people. ...It’s about the balance of collaboration and personalization.”

**TRACY JUDGE, CMP, Director of Business Development, Meetings and Incentives
Cadence Travel Management, La Jolla, CA**



board whether land or sea, and it’s a great opportunity for cruises because of their opportunities for collaboration.

“In incentives you’re trying to keep people together,” she says. “You’re bringing in the top salespeople from your organization, and you want them to spend time together, and collaborate and learn best practices so they go back into the field and do even better than they have. In Hawaii at a huge resort, people are all out and about. Or when you’re in Las Vegas, people just vanish,” says Judge.

“On a cruise, there’s meeting space and you can do activities together, but you’re not forced to be with people. They have the opportunity to be on their own or with their guests, but it’s much easier to bump into one another. It’s about the balance of collaboration and person-

alization.” That’s why, Judge says, the excursions offered on the cruise are important as well.

Judge’s team works with companies to determine the right balance between time at sea for focusing on business or networking and time in port for attendees to make individual plans and have fun. “Usually it depends on the length of the program. For a four-day, three-night cruise in the Caribbean, one day at sea is plenty,” she says. “If you’re on a seven-day cruise, you’ll have two, but you don’t want to trap them on the boat because you want them to have the itineraries they want, so they can come back from an excursion and do a dinner.”

Judge’s team recently planned a three-night Caribbean cruise for 100 employees of a start-up that typically gravitates toward all-inclusive resorts. “It’s hard to get the schedule right when you have a salesforce all around the country and you’re taking the whole team, but the Caribbean ones are really reasonable, because the ships are large, and there are a lot of options in terms of patterns, whether Thursday to Tuesday or Friday to Wednesday, so it’s easy to plan. It happens to us every once in a while that there’s already a big group in there, but I don’t see that happen actually that often.”

During land-based meetings and incentives, it’s not unusual to have several other groups at the same hotel, let alone sharing your event space. “Many times you get to a hotel and find out that someone next door in the banquet

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room is having a dinner dance at the same time and their music is louder than yours," says McGowen. "On a cruise, we're usually the largest group, we pretty much own the space, and we don't get interference from other groups. We run into each other on the ship and see each other everywhere. In a city you get up and everyone disperses all over Boston or Chicago. Here they enjoy the close proximity, have lunch with this person or go to a show with that one."

For her cruise with Royal Caribbean, Warren found that "the whole cruise was one big networking opportunity for attendees. It was one of the most positive comments I received from all the attendees. There was I think one other smaller group, but we didn't even notice them. We loved the conference center in the ship. The opportunity for meetings during the cruise was there all the time, and we had a lot of pop-up meetings where we could just go in." Even without booking out a ship, being the only large event going on in a space affords your group a level of privacy and interactivity that can't be replicated on land.

Easy for Attendees and for Planners

In comparison with traditional land-based meetings and incentives, meetings at sea have many powerful differentiating factors, but one that is often

overlooked is the savings in terms of time and energy these meetings create for planners. "Meetings at sea provide exceptional ease in planning. Depending on the line, group sales departments, dedicated group planners and shipboard meeting and incentive staff make planning and implementing a meeting or group program at sea an extremely easy, one-stop process," explains Duffy.

While a great planner can put on a fun and fascinating meeting or incentive that delights attendees (almost) anywhere, one of the biggest selling points of a meeting at sea is that someone else has already collected the options for you and will often help plan them.

"It's totally different when I have an event on the cruise ship," says McGowen. "You have general sessions in the theater, your social space in the lounge and you have lovely dining rooms and all the dining is together. The entertainment is spectacular and built into the budget, and they have entertainment every night. I don't have to go out and hire entertainment. Staterooms are assigned in advance. Attendees know where they'll be on the ship, what tours they're going to go on and who they're going to dine with."

Warren took advantage of the opportunity to book priority seating for all the shows, picking three that she knew her group would enjoy and booking VIP

seats ahead. "They thought they were treated royally. I talked to a few people to see what they'd like to do, but if you know your group, you'll know what they like. I knew they'd enjoy the three headliners, so I picked show times according to the dinner seatings.

"For daytime activities, we pretty much just figured the cruise line does it so well, if it's not broken, you know," says Warren. "Once you're on the ship, you can bring minimal staff, because attendees are taken care of, all their meals are there, and what more could they ask for in terms of entertainment."

McGowen agrees. "My last few cruises have been on Celebrity, and they're right there with me the whole time," she says. "They're bringing me the easel for my welcome banner before I even ask. I don't know when they take a break, but I think the customer service training on a ship has a higher standard, maybe because it's a smaller world than the hotel industry."

Now's the Time

In 2012, CLIA created a meetings, events and incentives task force, which is made up of 15 cruise line members who promote meetings at sea and focus on developing a strong relationship with the meeting and incentive industry. Cruises are adding more, well-equipped purpose-built meeting space to both new and existing ships, and reaching out to meeting planners with special packages.

While many planners find their site selection process eating up an increasing portion of their time as hotels return to a seller's market, cruise lines are in the midst of an ongoing campaign to increase their meeting and incentive business, which puts planners in a very favorable negotiating position. But though meetings at sea offer an especially cost-effective choice for planners now, as the word spreads, that may change down the line.

Though ships are adding meeting facilities, most can still only accommodate one large or a few small groups per sailing. So as the trend to take meetings at sea picks up steam, it might be time to hop onboard. **C&IT**

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Pharmacy professionals arrive at Cardinal Health's Retail Business Conference at the Washington State Convention Center in Seattle.

Standout CVBs

Some One-Stop Shops Are Better Than Others

By Patrick Simms

It's almost a cliché for a convention and visitors bureau to bill itself as a “one-stop shop” for planners, but recently, the idea has been taken a step further with the formation of Synchronicities, a partnership among three convention and visitors bureaus in disparate areas of the country: the Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Visit Baltimore and the San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau. Planners working with all three cities (e.g., for different installments of the same meeting) can now enjoy a “united sales and services platform,” as described by Casandra Matej, director of the San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The partnership also allows the CVBs

to expand their marketing reach, combine their resources and share knowledge. “One of the strengths of the Synchronicities partnership is the sharing of intellectual capital between the three cities,” says Tom Noonan, president and CEO of Visit Baltimore. “The communication between the cities will ensure consistent service delivery and simplify the meeting planning process.” According to Jay Burrell, president and CEO of the Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Synchronicities has already yielded ROI for the three organizations. “Senior leadership from all three destinations have dedicated the time and resources to make our solution very valuable for plan-

ners, and we are seeing results from our joint effort,” he comments.

A more localized “synchronicity” occurred 10 years ago in California, when Team San Jose was launched. The organization unified the San Jose Convention and Visitors Bureau, hotels, arts, labor and venues in order to further the city's tourism and overall events industry, including corporate meetings. Team San Jose serves as an intermediary for planners working not only with the San Jose McEnery Convention Center, but also with the Center for the Performing Arts, Montgomery Theater, Parkside Hall, City National Civic and South Hall. With the recent 169,000-sf expansion of the San Jose McEnery Convention Center, the

city has begun to draw more conventions. And via Team San Jose's convention calendar, planners can stay up to date on incoming groups in order to determine whether their desired dates will work. The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority has a similar calendar at Vegasmeansbusiness.com, which is an especially critical aid in a first-tier meetings hub. The site also allows corporate planners to categorize their event before submitting an RFP in the “What's Your Event?” section, which distinguishes among corporate meetings, executive meetings, incentive meetings and small meetings (under 500 attendees).

RFP Distribution

Once a planner has decided a city is viable and initiates the RFP process through the CVB, there are certain signs that he or she is dealing with a quality one-stop shop, observes Kevin Fleetwood, marketing director with Atlanta, GA-based CRIF Lending Solutions, a loan origination software company. “First off, somebody gets back to me immediately with who my contact person is: ‘Hey, I'm the person to send the RFP to. I'll be your primary contact, and in case I'm not here, this person is my backup.’” According to

Fleetwood, unless one has worked with the CVB before, it can be difficult to divine who the contact person is, even by looking at the CVB's website. When the organization identifies that contact, “I already know upfront that they are interested in my business,” he says.



“The thing that sets Visit Seattle apart from a lot of CVBs is that they really excel in relationship-building. ...One of the reasons I want to go back to Seattle is just so I can work with them again.”

Conni Siegmund, PMP, CMP, Director, Retail Independent Marketing
Cardinal Health, Dublin, OH

Fleetwood is currently working with the San Diego CVB for the 2015 CRIF Lending Solutions Forum, to be held next April at the Hyatt Regency Mission Bay Spa & Marina in San Diego. He has found the staff to be especially detail-oriented in the RFP process, which is one of his main reasons for using a CVB. He notes that his contact “read through my RFP and asked me questions about it. She knew my program very well, so that she sent out the RFP only to those properties that matched the specs in her opinion.” And when preliminary results were received, they were organized in a user-friendly spreadsheet. “She had it laid out in such a fashion that I could

easily go through it and check and see what worked and what didn't,” says Fleetwood. “That's especially key when you're comparing multiple properties in multiple cities.”

Smaller CVBs, he has observed, “have a tendency to let their hoteliers send the

results directly to you even though you request they not, either because they don't have the staff to (compile the results) or just because they've never done anything like that.”

And after the shortlist of properties had been established, another nice service that the San Diego CVB provided was to inform the other hotels that they are no longer in the running. “For the CVB to let them know was much better,” Fleetwood says. (See related story on page 10.)

Site Inspection Expertise

Planners are busy people, and the best site visits optimize a planner's time with



The plaza in front of the newly expanded San Jose McEnery Convention Center features the Idea Tree sculpture representing the bold thinking and vision that characterizes the Silicon Valley region's reputation for innovation.

Synergies and Synchronicities

Some savvy CVBs are attracting a bigger share of the meetings and conventions pie by teaming up in multi-city partnerships to leverage their sales and marketing efforts. Partnerships are formed to cross-sell destinations that share similar or complementary attributes and offerings — such as a youthful demographic, a cutting-edge cultural scene or a combination that offers a desirable geographical rotation — and that have meetings infrastructures with the capacity to handle similarly sized groups. Advantages include the opportunity to introduce planners to destinations they might not otherwise have considered. And planners can reap financial and logistical benefits when booking any combination of alliance destinations, including breaks on hotel room rates and enhanced, customized meeting services. Examples of CVB alliances include Seattle and Austin; Long Beach and Tampa Bay; and the Three-City Alliance of Portland, Pittsburgh and Milwaukee.

The most recent example is the formation of “Synchronicities,” a three-city alliance made up of the Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Visit Baltimore and the San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau. The three cities conducted in-depth research with meeting professionals via focus groups and surveys to shape Synchronicities into a partnership that offers value and the resources necessary to provide customizable options based on the needs of individual meetings.

“Synchronicities provides meetings professionals with a comprehensive solution when considering events in different parts of the country,” said Jay Burress, president and CEO of the Anaheim Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau in a statement.

In addition, working together through Synchronicities provides enhanced opportunities for the destinations to invest in industry education. Partnering with esteemed organizations such as IAEE, PCMA and Association Forum of Chicagoland allows the destinations to better anticipate industry trends and share these findings.

The partnership seems to be catching on: Synchronicities has announced that an organization has already selected Anaheim, Baltimore and San Antonio to host their annual conference in 2015, 2017 and 2018, respectively.



“Synchronicities” members (left to right) Jay Burress, president and CEO of the Anaheim Orange County VCB; Casandra Matej, director, San Antonio CVB; and Tom Noonan, president and CEO of Visit Baltimore.

C&IT

the most relevant meetings and experiences. A capable CVB goes a long way in that regard, helping to develop the itinerary and connecting the planner to the key players at the destination. The Long Beach CVB, for example, offers to “suggest venues, research date availability and make initial contacts to assist you in coordinating your...pre-planning visits.”

Farther up the West Coast, Conni

Siegmund, PMP, CMP, director, retail independent marketing with Dublin, Ohio-based Cardinal Health, benefited from a masterfully coordinated site visit to Seattle, thanks to the local CVB. “We bring out an army of people on our site visits, 20–30 people including meeting planners, our marketing team, exhibit company, AV reps and more. So I really leaned on the Visit Seattle crew to set up

all the relevant meetings I needed, and we would have three to four meetings happening simultaneously,” Siegmund relates. “They would help set up meetings with the convention center, IT people, in-house AV, different DMCs, different ground transportation companies and so on.” The ultimate result was a smoothly run Retail Business Conference, which brought thousands of pharmacy professionals to the Emerald City in 2013.

Fleetwood finds site visits especially effective when the CVB provides a guide to accompany the planner, a person who is knowledgeable on everything from airport transfers to local events taking place. “For example, I happen to be doing my site visits at the end of March, first of April, which also happens to be spring break time, and I had not a clue that people descended on San Diego for spring break,” he relates. Some CVBs, Fleetwood notes, will provide a guide who is “just sent to drive you around,” with little understanding of the planner’s goals for the site visit.

Apart from providing the “inside scoop” on logistical issues during the site visit, the CVB can help to keep it running on schedule. Not only will they make the introductions between planner and hoteliers, but they also can “keep the hotels on a time frame,” says Fleetwood. “They will tell them, ‘We’ve got an hour and a half,’ for example. Hotels tend to want to keep you at their property, which means less time spent at other properties. And if you are running behind, they call the hotel that’s next and let them know.”

Having a Plan B in case there is an unforeseen glitch in the site visit also is important. “In San Diego, a hotel called and said they had booked a meeting over the time I would be booking one, and so they were no longer available. And the CVB knew what to do over the time I would be meeting with that hotel: They took me around to Old Town San Diego and some of the other places that might be used for evening events,” Fleetwood relates.

To conclude the visit, the CVB asked Fleetwood how their service was and

whether he needed further information. And, as a nice touch, “they took all of my hotel materials and FedExed the package to my office for me so I didn’t have to carry it around.”

Promotional Assistance for New Media

CVBs have long offered a list of materials and services to help planners promote their event and the destination. The services in recent years have expanded to include new media. The Anaheim CVB, for example, provides editorial content, destination images and a video library, local media outreach and video coverage of the meeting, along with social media promotion and targeted blog posts.

And the New Orleans CVB has “a whole e-marketing plan put together,” notes Lorie Thomas, director, events and trade shows with Bellevue, Washington-based Concur Technologies. “So they were prepared to offer us all those services, which I thought was pretty re-



The San Diego CVB recommended the Hyatt Regency Mission Bay Spa & Marina as the perfect fit for the 2015 CRIF Lending Solutions Forum based on the company’s RFP.

markable.” Concur, which held its annual client conference in May in New Orleans, has its own social media and PR managers to handle the e-marketing, “but for companies that are smaller and maybe don’t have those assets, the CVB is prepared to fully support them and be part of their team,” Thomas adds. Quality

content also is important, of course, and Thomas observed that “if I had utilized their services, I wouldn’t have had to provide much editing.”

Similarly, Siegmund noted that Visit Seattle’s supplementary materials and marketing services were ahead of the curve. “We were using 13 differ-



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The Long Beach (California) Arena debuted its Pacific Ballroom last year.

ent hotels across the city, and they created a customized map for us that just had our hotels on it," she relates. And when it came to ensuring that enough pharmacy professionals filled those hotels for the Retail Business Conference, CVB reps were very hands on. "They did something no CVB has ever done for me before: They got on calls with our salespeople," says Siegmund. "We have an internal salesforce of 400 or so people who sell the packages to come to our show to our customers. And my Seattle contact would get on regional conference calls with our salesforce, (saying) 'Here are ideas for how you can sell Seattle to your customers.'"

Personalized Welcomes

What "sells" a city to attendees is not just its venues and sightseeing experiences, but also a sense of being at home in what may be an unfamiliar destination. With this in mind, CVBs often coordinate the installment of branding elements for the group's visit. Team San Jose, for example, allows groups to "Own the City" via welcome and event signage at the convention center and airport, on public transportation and street poles, and so on.

Toward the same end, Visit Jacksonville can (with 30 days notice) secure a welcome letter from city of Jacksonville

Mayor Alvin Brown, and/or a welcome letter from leaders at the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce.

For Hazelwood, Missouri-based Aclara's April 2015 Client Conference in Nashville, Bob Whittemore, marketing campaign manager, suggested an even more personal welcome from a city official, and the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. followed through with the idea. "This year they're working with the city and the mayor of Nashville is mak-

Credit: Long Beach CVB

ing hard to address areas of concern to make tourism in the country world class reminds Cruz. "We are increasing security and doing many, many things in the cities, in the venues and in the resorts. I know it is one of the things that meeting planners care about. We also care very much about it. I think it is one of the most important things we're working on."

Mexico's new government is working hard to address areas of concern to make tourism in the country world class reminds Cruz. "We are increasing security and doing many, many things in the cities, in the venues and in the resorts. I know it is one of the things that meeting planners care about. We also care very much about it. I think it is one of the most important things we're working on."

Vendor Referrals

One sign that a CVB really knows its city's resources is when a planner is truly pleased with the organization's vendor



The New Orleans CVB "kept in contact with us throughout the course of the planning and the event, and they followed up after to make sure we got what we needed."

Lorie Thomas, Director, Events and Tradeshow
Concur Technologies, Bellevue, WA

ing a welcome video for our customers that we're going to put on our website. That's huge," says Whittemore. "Our hotel, the Renaissance Nashville, the city, mayor's office and the CVB appreciate our business, and when you spend this much time and money in the city, it's nice to be appreciated."

A welcoming overture is extended south of the border as well. Cecilia Cruz, executive director for the meetings industry for the Mexico Tourism Board in Washington, DC, encourages planners to see what's new in Mexico for them-

referrals, and even develops lasting partnerships with those companies. For instance, the Nashville CVC recommended a certain DMC to Whittemore, "and I'm using that DMC for the third time," he says. The organization also has referred him to a company that will assist in coordinating a 5K run for the upcoming conference, personally introduced him to the owners of three venues that can accommodate an outside function for 650 participants, and recommended numerous honky-tonks for client events. "I've been very happy with all their rec-

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The Omni Nashville Hotel is integrated with the Country Music Hall of Fame and across the street from the Music City Center.



Credit: Omni Nashville Hotel

ommendations; they always point me in a direction that saves me a lot of time and a lot of money," he says. And unlike other CVBs Whittemore has worked with, the Nashville organization was more focused on fitting their recommendations to his needs. "I've worked with other cities that have a 'package deal'; they email you and say, 'This is what we'll do for you.' Nashville has always said, 'What can we do to help?'"

CSR Programs

With corporate social responsibility (CSR) on the minds of many planners, CVBs today often refer groups to organizations that can provide these kinds of activities. Visit Orlando is one example, matching groups with volunteer projects such as building houses, preparing meals, landscaping work and book drives. And the CVBs themselves regularly highlight social and environment responsibility at their destination.

The Greater Miami CVB, for instance, notes that The Greater Miami & the Beaches Hotel Association is working closely with the Miami-Dade Office of Sustainability to promote Miami-Dade's Green Lodging & Restaurant Program. One new feature is that hotel rooms in the city now have cards that guests can use to indicate that they would like to reuse these items during the course of

The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center opened the new 60,300-sf Great Hall last year.

their stay. Through the CVB, planners can learn of these initiatives and convey them to eco-conscious attendees.

Follow Through

During the meeting, the best CVBs stay in touch with the client, even



"I've worked with other cities that have a 'package deal'; they email you and say, 'This is what we'll do for you.' Nashville has always said, 'What can we do to help?'"

Bob Whittemore, Marketing Campaign Manager
Aclara, Hazelwood, MO

though the client is now primarily dealing with facility convention staff. The New Orleans CVB, for example, "stopped by our show to make sure everything was going well, which was impressive," Thomas notes. "Normally, once the sale has happened, you're kind of old news.



Credit: New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

They kept in contact with us throughout the course of the planning and the event, and they followed up after to make sure we got what we needed. They were very interested to make sure the whole experience from start to finish was a good one." That includes helping a planner with post-con communications. "I do a pretty extensive post-con document, and the Seattle CVB kept in touch with me to make sure they got all of our notes and feedback," Siegmund says.

The People Factor

To a planner, a CVB is more than just a list of meeting services, it is a group of people who deliver those services with a certain disposition and personality. "The way they treat me is the way I think they're going to treat the rest of their guests," Thomas maintains. "I'm looking for a CVB who's going to treat my customers, if they happen to reach out

to the CVB, with respect, excitement and enthusiasm."

The best CVB representatives also will give a planner a sense that he or she can depend on them. "The thing that sets Visit Seattle apart from a lot of CVBs is that they really excel in relationship-building," Siegmund says. "From their salespeople to their convention services people, I felt like they were my friends. And one of the reasons I want to go back to Seattle is just so I can work with them again."

Such a "good friend" always will have a planner's needs in mind, even during those times when their involvement isn't, strictly speaking, required. "It takes nothing for a CVB to send you an email to say, 'Hey, I know your program's a few months away. Is there anything we can help you with?' It's just good business policy," says Fleetwood. **C&IT**

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Meetings Mean Business

Roger Dow (opposite page) addresses the audience in Orlando at IBTM America in June during a panel discussion on the Meetings Mean Business campaign. Larry Luteran (inset) moderated the session, which included industry leaders (l to r) Paul Van Deventer, Deborah Sexton, Kevin Hinton, John Graham IV, David Dubois and Dow.

By John Buchanan

In 2009, in the wake of a severe economic downturn and the throes of what came to be known as the “AIG effect,” which made many corporate executives afraid to hold meetings, an emergency coalition of industry leaders from organizations such as MPI, ASAE, PCMA, IAEE and SITE came together under the leadership of U.S. Travel Association president and CEO Roger Dow. They mounted a defensive campaign dubbed “Meetings Mean Business” that is credited with saving the meeting industry from disaster.

In January, Meetings Mean Business (MMB) re-launched as a proactive campaign designed to ensure the long-term health of the meeting industry.

In June, its leaders convened for a

panel discussion at IBTM America’s annual meeting.

In August, they spoke with *Corporate & Incentive Travel* about the progress that has been made and what lies ahead for the initiative.

“In 2009, U.S. Travel helped quickly convene Meetings Mean Business (MMB) with industry leaders in large part to respond to a crisis,” says Roger Dow. “Our industry was under attack and we needed to mobilize quickly. We pushed through that trying time, showed the industry’s incredible value, and reset the tone of the conversation.”

Essential to that ongoing mission are some key facts.

For example, the meeting and events industry in 2012 generated more than \$770 billion in total output and \$280

billion in direct spending, as well as \$90 billion in federal, state and local taxes, according to a study from PwC. The industry also supports 1.8 million jobs — more than the computer, trucking or broadcast and telecommunication industries, notes Dow.

Likewise, Kevin Hinton, chief excellence officer at the renamed Society of Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE), invokes data released earlier this year by the Convention Industry Council in an Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy report, which states that during 2012, 1.83 million meetings were held in the U.S. and attended by 225 million participants. The economic contribution of meetings to U.S. GDP surpasses that of the air transportation, motion picture,

sound recording, performing arts and spectator sport industries. More than 67,000 motivational events and incentive travel programs were held in 2012 with more than 9 million delegates. Although incentive travel programs represent the lowest percentage of all meeting types, the direct spend per delegate of \$1,570 is the highest, Hinton says. It accounts for \$22.5 billion in direct spending in the U.S. Furthermore, Hinton says, the SITE Annual Forecast for Incentive Travel predicts that the industry will continue to grow at a significant pace through 2016.

Earlier this year, Dow says, Rockport Analytics released a report detailing the economic value of IPW (Pow Wow), the U.S. travel industry’s premier international convention, and found that it ri-

“For the first time, we have all of the different industry leaders... united behind a single, proactive campaign. MMB has successfully created a dialogue within the industry.”

Roger Dow, President and CEO
U.S. Travel Association
Washington, DC

valued the economic impact of the Super Bowl. For the host city, IPW produces more than four times as many direct expenditures; delivers more than five

times the amount of GDP value-added direct impact; and generates greater federal, state and local tax revenues. Moreover, the economic impact carries over for three years, Dow says.

“We need to keep telling these kinds of stories that speak to the industry as an economic engine,” he says.

Status Report

Since its creation in 2009, Meetings Mean Business has had significant and ongoing impact on the perception and performance of the U.S. meeting industry.

And its importance to the future of the industry cannot be overstated, says Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of Meeting Professionals International (MPI). “MMB represents an effort

Meetings Mean Business

where, for the first time,” he says, “a significant majority of the leading organizations and influencers in our industry are speaking in a single unified voice — telling a clear and consistent story of the value of our industry.”

Telling that story clearly is vitally important to the future of the industry, says Larry Luteran, Hilton Worldwide

“With MMB, we’ve created a mechanism to tell the positive stories, to gather facts and figures, and make sure business leaders, policymakers and other stakeholders understand the value of bringing people together for in-person meetings and events.”

Larry Luteran, SVP Group Sales and Industry Relations
Hilton Worldwide, McLean, VA

senior vice president of group sales and industry relations, who moderated the panel of industry association CEOs at the IBTM America event.

“For a long time, the public focused on a negative rhetoric about frivolous spending during industry meetings,” Luteran says. “But something that got lost in that conversation was a focus on the real impact and benefits of face-to-face meetings. With MMB, we’ve created a mechanism to tell the positive stories, to gather facts and figures, and make sure business leaders, policymakers and other stakeholders understand the value of bringing people together for in-person meetings and events.”

The progress made toward that goal in 2014 has been significant, says Deborah Sexton, president and CEO of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA). “What’s different now is that we have

all the leaders from across the meetings and events industry — destination marketing organizations, professional associations like PCMA and all the others, hotel brands, suppliers, incentive travel organizations and others — uniting behind one campaign. That gives us a louder voice and a broader platform to stand on as we promote the critical importance of face-to-face meetings.”

Key Accomplishments

Although MMB has had a positive impact on the debate over meetings, its biggest accomplishment has been rallying a broad range of industry leaders and influencers to a common cause that is being addressed with a collective and focused voice, Van Deventer says. “That will enable us to provide a consistent and strong message outside of our industry, bringing awareness and recognition of the significant economic scope and impact of the industry to a much wider audience,” he says.

Dow agrees that MMB’s key accomplishment is creating an unprecedented, industry-wide alliance. “For the first time, we have all of the different industry leaders, representing all of the different sectors, united behind a single, proactive campaign. MMB has successfully created a dialogue within the industry. It’s an effort that reaches across business, professional associations and destination marketing organizations, and the greater travel industry, to offer one voice that extols the undeniable value of business meetings, events, conferences and conventions to all sectors of the economy.”

That said, Dow adds, now the attention will turn to the education of rank-and-file stakeholders in the industry, such as meeting planners and hosts. “We need to continually look for ways to capture the true value of a meeting or event whether it’s in terms of the business value, return on investment, local impact or, sometimes harder to measure, relationship-building, and make sure that stakeholders within organizations can communicate that to their

own management and beyond their organization to the broader industry.”

Sexton concurs that a more broad and far-reaching educational initiative will be a critical step in the next phase of MMB’s evolution. “We have to educate people about the real economic impact of the industry and how meetings and events create jobs, stimulate local economies and lead to stronger business outcomes,” she says. “As an industry, we’ve come a long way since 2009, but there is still work to be done. As MMB looks towards the future, I think there will be a heightened effort to reach mainstream audiences. This includes a larger push towards consumers and key policymakers, as well as engagement with national and business press. These audiences are critical to the overall success of our sustained campaign.”

Building Momentum

Hilton Worldwide’s Luteran believes that continuing to build the brand momentum of the Meetings Mean Business campaign is critical to a full recovery of the meeting industry.

“We must continue to assertively advocate on this important issue because at some point in the future, meetings will again be under attack. But next time around, we will be much better prepared.”

John H. Graham IV, CAE
President and CEO
ASAE, Washington, DC

“We need to continue the momentum that we’ve built,” he says. “We need to keep highlighting the industry’s value to businesses, the government and communities. The next crisis is around the corner, and the more proactive we are now, the better equipped we will be to handle it.”

John H. Graham IV, CAE, president and CEO of ASAE, stresses the importance of increasing awareness of the economic impact of meetings to corporate America and the mainstream media. “The coalition is now working to reach these audiences, as well as educating corporations about the vital role the meetings industry plays in strengthening our economy,” Graham says.

Another extremely important goal, Hinton says, is “engaging with the federal government so that they stop their harmful rhetoric and avoid the passage of legislation that would be punitive to our industry. That’s an ongoing effort, but real progress is being made. Beyond government, we need to align our interests with the interests of the business community so that those who make financial decisions about meetings and events see them as productive investments and that we as meetings and event professionals are

“We need to align our interests with the interests of the business community so that those who make financial decisions about meetings and events see them as productive investments.”

Kevin Hinton
Chief Excellence Officer
SITE, Chicago, IL

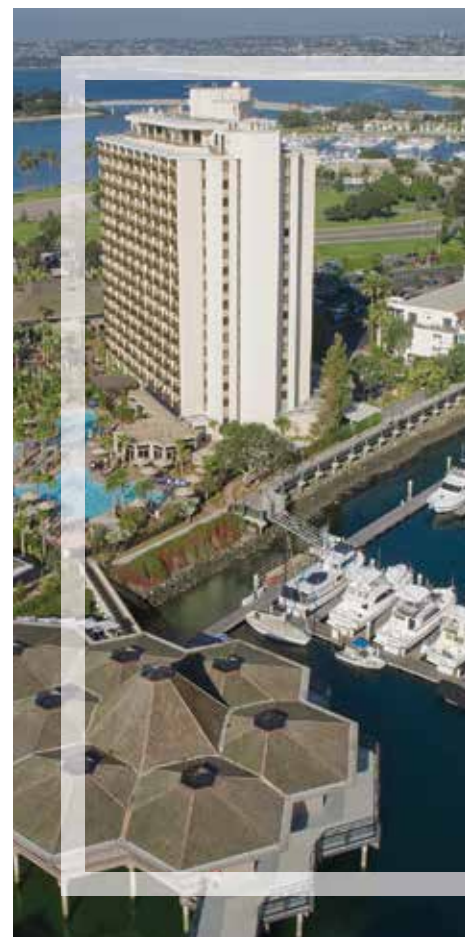
part of the solution to the complex issues businesses face.”

Graham agrees that encouraging more understanding and less criticism from government officials is important. “We are definitely making strides on Capitol Hill, as well as with other people outside

our industry, but there’s still plenty of work to be done,” he says.

To be successful in the long run and generate results that endure, MMB will require a broad, sustained effort over many years, Van Deventer says. “We also will need to expand our partnership to include other strategic partners, such as more global corporate executives and the airlines,” he says.

The U.S. Travel Association has invested in tools that help quantify the value of in-person meetings and events, Dow says. “For instance, a report by Oxford Economics reaffirmed that business travel drives corporate revenues and delivers profits to the bottom line. Business travel fuels growth, with every dollar companies spend on business travel generating \$9.50 in new revenue. Face-to-face meetings are essential for keeping customers and winning new business. Conferences and conventions are vital for gaining new insights and improving sales.



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Meetings Mean Business

As the MMB juggernaut continues to move forward, Dow says, “it will continue to leverage such compelling data points while also identifying qualitative examples that attest to the travel and meeting industry’s return on investment and economic impact.”

An immediate next step for MMB, Sexton says, is to continue gaining new supporters and advocates throughout the meeting industry. “That includes

“Our fundraising efforts have been very successful and that has allowed us to further enhance and execute a more proactive public relations plan.”

David DuBois, CMP, CAE, CTA
President and CEO
IAEE, Dallas, TX

event planners, incentive travel leaders, exhibition coordinators and more. MMB is looking to engage with all the members of the broader meeting community to ensure that all voices are being heard and the undeniable value of each facet of the meetings and events industry is continuously communicated through social channels, member communication, social media and public advocacy to all stakeholders. Additionally, we need to advance and broaden this initiative beyond the U.S. and engage the global stakeholders; utilizing organizations such as JMIC, SACEOS, IAPCO and forums such as IMEX and EIBTM to reach their audiences with our global message.”

Van Deventer adds that the far-reaching success of MMB “will be dependent on each member of the coalition successfully engaging and activating their employee and partner networks to build the grassroots momentum. MPI has done this with our own Meetings Move Us Forward Initiative, which was launched last December to help our members tell their own stories.”

Graham agrees that it’s very important for MMB to create and widely disseminate testimonials from a diverse group of people within and outside our industry so that the ROI of face-to-face meetings can be clearly and powerfully demonstrated. “These profiles, white papers and articles will help communicate how these meetings have impacted people personally and professionally, and how these events have led to the creation of new groups and opportunities.”

Luteran puts it even more simply: “We have to keep reinforcing the importance of meetings and events,” he says.

Meanwhile, says David DuBois, CMP, CAE, CTA, FASAE, president and CEO of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE), fundraising and effective public relations and communications programs on behalf of MMB are other vital objectives. “Our fundraising efforts have been very successful,” DuBois says, “and that has allowed us to further enhance and execute a more proactive public relations plan.”

Keep It Simple

Although MMB is, by definition, a complex and challenging undertaking as the meeting industry continues to evolve rapidly, its essential message must be kept simple and clear, its organizers say.

“The campaign name captures our essential message— Meetings Mean Business,” Dow says.

“Organizations depend on face-to-face meetings to win new customers, close new deals and develop high-performing talent. The business outcomes of face-to-face meetings far exceed any other. Nothing replaces face-to-face meetings when it comes to getting the job done.”

Sexton corroborates the opinion that a clear and unwavering message is at the core of MMB’s efforts. “The message is that face-to-face interactions are irreplaceable tools as we look to advance business and find solutions to hard problems,” she says. “Throughout the

coming months, MMB will continue to show how meetings drive positive business outcomes and provide a return on investment for both the private and public sector.”

And a big part of that message must be communicated to and fully comprehended by meeting planners and hosts.

“We are now actively engaging with meeting stakeholders to drive a conversation around the value of our industry,” Dow says.

Corporate meeting planners are critical to the conversation, Sexton says, because they are the audience that must continuously see measurable successful and solid ROI from their efforts.

Hinton concurs. “We need all meeting and event professionals to realize there is a lot at stake here,” he says. “My message to planners is that the upside here is real, but it’s not someone else’s cause to take up. It’s yours. Practice your answer to the question, ‘What do you do?’ Make sure it’s compelling and positions you as a business professional, which you accomplish through

“Additionally, we need to advance and broaden this initiative beyond the U.S. and engage the global stakeholders...to reach their audiences with our global message.”

Deborah Sexton
President and CEO
PCMA, Chicago, IL

the planning and execution of meetings and events.”

At the same time, Dow makes the point that the new incarnation of MMB is meant to be proactive and positive. “We re-launched MMB as an offensive campaign, not a defensive one,” he says. “With our front foot forward, we are enlisting the help of leaders across many industries to help share our story and

explain to our customers, the business community and political elites, that investing in collaborative, face-to-face meetings and events has a real and measurable return.”

Graham cautions that neither MMB nor the meeting industry at large can take for granted that the public, elected officials and policymakers understand the value of face-to-face meetings. “We must continue to assertively advocate on this important issue because at some point in the future, meetings will again be under attack,” Graham says. “But next time around, we will be much better prepared.”

A key element of that preparedness, Luteran says, is the “tool kit” MMB developed earlier this year available at www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com. “It includes messaging, talking points and social media content, to ensure that we all are speaking with one voice,” Luteran says. “Along with the tool kit, MMB

“We also will need to expand our partnership to include other strategic partners, such as more global corporate executives and the airlines.”

Paul Van Deventer
President and CEO
MPI, Dallas, TX

released a mobile app that features industry-relevant news, MMB-specific content, and updates.”

In early August, MMB launched its official Twitter handle @MeetingsMeanBiz with the hashtag #MMBusiness.

“That enables all of our supporters to track the news and join the Twitter conversation by following the handle and hashtag,” Luteran says. “These new

tools are critically important for the industry as it allows us to stay in touch with all of the announcements and news stemming from MMB and the industry as a whole. Moreover, it encourages us to get involved throughout the year, whether that involvement means a tweet or adding MMB language into our corporate newsletters.”

Five years ago, the meeting industry faced an unprecedented challenge that represented an existential threat.

Today, thanks to the innovative and aggressive efforts of MMB and its coalition of committed industry leaders, meeting and events are on their way back to the forefront of most corporate activities.

And next time there’s an economic downturn or another optics scandal, the industry will be in a much better position to respond.

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Stealing or Sharing?

Planners Need to Know the Difference and Pledge to Act Accordingly

When they take up the CMP designation, meeting planners must pledge to perform all responsibilities in accordance with the laws and regulations of the local, state or national governments under which they reside and communicate all relevant information to their employers in a truthful and accurate manner to facilitate the execution of their fiduciary responsibilities.

By Gabi Logan

But while this and other meeting planning ethics codes paint things in black and white, their generalizations often do not account for the shades of gray that meeting planners encounter in the field in the everyday tasks of doing their jobs. In the case of the Convention Industry Council (CIC) CMP Standards of Ethical Conduct, this particularly comes into play in the first two rules: maintain exemplary

standards of professional conduct at all times and actively model and encourage the integration of ethics into all aspects of the performance of one's duties.

Most everyone would agree that accepting an unrelated gift, such as a purse or an iPad, from a hotel or vendor could be construed as a form of bribery, but what happens when a planner goes on a FAM (familiarization) trip and has no intention of booking the destination or

finds it is not appropriate for the group's needs? Would that be viewed as abusing a free trip? Or what if a planner reviewed proposals from a DMC, didn't use them but implemented their ideas? Is that considered sharing or stealing intellectual property? And, if so, what are the repercussions of these violations?

What Is the Best Way to Research Destinations?

FAM trips are a core issue in meeting planning ethics, both because they are often necessary and because they are an easy ethical gray area, but they really stand for the entire area of accepting free items from potential future contract-holders. "In terms of FAM trips, I think that's a place where ethics can get very dicey," says Marcy DeBiccari, CMP, senior meeting planner at Albany, New

York-based Sematech. "It presents an opportunity for people to go away for some fun, and that's not fair for the vendors or cities or whoever is hosting. If you're not serious about having a meeting there, you're taking away from people who are."

Many companies, like DeBiccari's, have a loose official policy regarding FAM trips that relies heavily on trust in the planner's own personal ethics. "We don't have a formal policy in place; I need to present a justification presentation, showing this, this and this meeting might be a good fit for this place," she says. "By presenting the justification prior to going, you have to prove why you're going so it ensures the trip is an appropriate use of your time."

Ronald E. Havens, CMP, MBA, senior meeting planner and group travel coordinator at Culver City, California-based Sony Pictures Entertainment, shares his company's policy. "As long as they're known about and the management is aware, we're encouraged to familiarize ourselves, but if I'm lucky, I get one invitation a year," he says. For both Havens and his colleagues, FAM trips have become a rarer occurrence of late. "There have been fewer trips in recent years both because we have less time to go on trips, and we receive fewer invitations."

"To be honest with you, I can't remember the last time I went on a trip," DeBiccari concurs. "I don't receive a lot of invitations to go on FAMs." While the cost cutting and do-more-with-less meeting planning culture that has arisen from the recession clearly illuminates why planners have less time to go on FAMs, it's less clear why there are fewer invitations in circulation.

Optics may play a large part, as hotels and CVBs are sensitive to the internal and external perception issues, but there also is a slow renaissance going on with destinations that do offer FAM trips as they reorganize their itineraries to provide a heavy education component on the trip.

Lynn Walstead, CMP, senior meeting planner at Mounds View, Minnesota-based Medtronic Inc., finds this change happening, particularly in the medical device industry, in which companies feel

more optics pressure than in other industries. "There's an overarching policy that you have to make the right ethics decision or your manager does," she says. "On the whole, FAMs are discouraged unless you're truly using that destination or considering it. In the medical devices industry, I think because it is becoming more frowned upon, more companies are clamping down."

"If I'm considering a trip, it has an education component, not just seeing the hotel, wining and dining, and then leaving," she continues. "A broader FAM, if you want to call it that. Increasingly, I'm seeing truly educational content like you'd see in an industry event. Depending on the property, there will be a panel on F&B trends or a talk on the

"I think it's good to keep aware of how the company approaches those kinds of (ethical) questions and keep people on their toes regarding what they should and shouldn't be doing."

Ronald E. Havens, CMP, MBA
Senior Meeting Planner and Group
Travel Coordinator
Sony Pictures Entertainment
Culver City, CA

Sunshine Act or contract negotiation — stuff you'd find at a conference — given by industry speakers, other hoteliers or additional planners."

Another factor in the diminished number of invitations meeting planners experience may be increased selectivity on the part of hotels and CVBs, who narrow their invitation list to focus on companies that are more likely to eventually use the destination and need the extra experience of the visit to make that decision.

"Way back then, it used to seem like the invitations were more broad," says

Walstead. “And it was about coming down and having a good time with a little bit of site visits in there as well, but now, when I talk to people I know about other trips they’ve been on, I haven’t heard of them.”

“My guess is that they are segmenting different parts of their audience in terms of who should attend,” she continues. “There are certainly times I sell myself or the destination short on opportunity, and it may be something I would have considered if I attended, but when I am considering going on a trip, it’s a combination of my availability and if it’s a destination I would consider, but it also has to have an education component.”

As Walstead points out, without going on FAM trips, it can be difficult to know if an unknown location is really the right place for them. Havens keeps up on destinations profiled in trade magazines and does a lot of scouting at trade shows, and also uses personal vacations to check out properties in lieu of FAM trips. While that in theory extricates the potential dilemma of going on a work-related FAM and treating it like vacation, it can also be unfair to planners with little vacation time to have to treat their time off like a work-related FAM just to get on the group experience scouting potential destinations.

Digital Privacy Issues

No matter the confidentiality level of your meeting, Internet access has become so necessary and pervasive both for presentations and meeting setup

as well as attendee business responsibilities, that an entirely new area of meeting planning ethics has blossomed around attendees: information security concerns.

“When I am considering going on a (FAM) trip... it also has to have an education component.”

Lynn Walstead, CMP
Senior Meeting Planner
Medtronic Inc.
Mounds View, MN

In her division of Medtronic, Walstead and her group have been very slow to bring technology into their meetings in any form because of these issues. “It’s a touchy issue for us because of the company we are. We only just used our first app,” she says.

“For our meetings, because they are so specific to products and materials, we do not engage social media as part of it,” she continues. “We have not yet incorporated it as part of the meeting, because we would need to create boundaries and firewalls etc. to keep it within the meeting context. But in a way, we have not incorporated anything with our meetings to encourage sharing, because they also don’t get a chance. They come together to meet and then they go home.”

“Though I’m sure people are out there doing it on their own, that doesn’t fall under my purview,” Walstead explains. “There are medical forums out there that my manager monitors, and it’s part of his responsibilities to see some of the stuff that goes out there. You can’t really say you can’t do it, so it’s hard in this world of social media and access.”

DeBiccari, on the other hand, experiences both sides of the sharing spectrum, because she plans both confidential and non-confidential meetings. “When we plan confidential, we’re very careful about keeping track of what attendees are doing, because we deal with a lot of intellectual property,” she explains. “In our non-confidential meetings, we’re very free in allowing people to use their phones and social media, but for confidential meetings, we’re very careful in terms of monitoring.”

“We actually have confidentiality agreements in place, and on the first issue, there is a mention or reminder, but if it becomes an issue, it escalates quickly to legal,” she continues. “We’ve never had issues actually, because most attendees deal with it in their day-to-day lives so it’s already ingrained in their behavior.”

While meeting planners are under corporate pressure — and face serious internal ethics repercussions — for failing to protect the security of their own proprietary information, the line has become less clear in recent years what counts as intellectual property violation in correspondence with third parties.

Intellectual Property, Sharing or Stealing?

Due to the recession and other changes in the meeting planning industry, more and more new and seasoned planners are going independent or third-party, and in-house planners now often work with a patchwork quilt of external providers to put together their events.

In the course of evaluating ideas and considering which external parties to work with, many proposals come across planners’ desks, from something simple like a destination hotel from a sourcing

firm to something more unique, such as an entire gala concept from a DMC.

DeBiccari found herself on the other side of this issue at a previous job as a third-party planner, and it has forever changed how she handles her relationships with outside companies. “I had a client who was interested in doing something in Atlanta, Georgia, at the aquarium, and I had used a DMC there in the past, so I called and got a proposal and passed it on to my client,” she says. “They ended up not using the DMC or our company, but they used the ideas for their party.”

“I had actually left the company by the time it happened, but the community is small, and the DMC found out what had happened through their contacts at the aquarium,” she continues. “The DMC was certainly wary of working with that client again, so I told them the name of the client, because I felt badly for them and in case that situation ever arose again, I wanted them to be prepared.”

“Now, when I work with outside parties, I try to let the vendor or the DMC guide the ideas at least initially,” she explains. “If there’s anything I’ve seen in the past that I’d like to use, I use the baseline but make changes so I’m not stealing it. I think in this industry, a good idea goes a long way for everyone, and planners are willing to share ideas about what worked with them. They’re careful about IP (intellectual property) on the one hand, but on the other hand, they’re happy to share.”

Ethical Education

For Havens, ethical issues have few gray areas, because his company goes to great lengths to make sure that everyone on staff, regardless of department, knows what the company stance is on issues that affect all employees. “We have a yearly review that we take, that you take when you start as well,” he explains. “It’s a series of questions to make sure you’re aware of company policies, not specifically on meeting planning ethics.”

Offered similarly to how many companies offer sexual harassment training — online quiz style, to the whole company, with mandatory participation and

passing — the training and test create a common knowledge base as well as trust level among employees and management. “It’s all about knowing what is considered ethical and what’s not, dealing with company policy, clients and customers,” Havens says.

“I think in general it’s good to keep aware of how the company approaches those kinds of questions and keep people on their toes regarding what they should and shouldn’t be doing,” he continues. Havens finds that having such a policy in place virtually eliminates doubts of any kind for his team on typical meeting planning ethics issues they might encounter.

For companies in certain industries, such as medical companies that interact with physicians in their meetings, this

“When we plan confidential, we’re very careful about keeping track of what attendees are doing because we deal with a lot of intellectual property.”

Marci DeBiccari, CMP
Senior Meeting Planner
Sematech
Albany, NY

type of education also has become increasingly mandatory and standardized. Though Medtronic has separate meeting planning groups in different divisions and she herself is not involved in customer meetings and programs, Walstead has seen the overall move toward transparency affect the level of ethics awareness throughout the company.

“In our industry, we have to be so transparent with everything,” she says. “Luckily for me I’m not part of the customer world, and we have another group that is dedicated to Sunshine, but it makes it more work for everyone because you have to be an expert in what is a transfer of value. If you do something wrong, it’s going to be out there for everyone to see

that this doctor was involved. I think it’s unfortunate because it takes away from the purpose of having meetings, and it puts a whole different twist on a meeting.”

Increased ethical scrutiny can come from press, government regulation or changes in technology, but through one means or another, it comes. Whether on the level of a professional organization or individual company, ethics codes and education resources must find ways to remain dynamic and contemporary.

“Very recently, there were some changes with the CMM that turned some people off,” says DeBiccari regarding planned changes to the name, qualification standards and testing procedure for the CMM, which caused a swift negative backlash among meeting planners.

“Companies and organizations need to look to planners and get their opinions. I’ve found, in many of my experiences, that we’re really supportive of each other and likely to band together not necessarily against the certification organization but on our opinions on these issues. There are really interesting ethics topics that come to play on a daily basis with planners as an industry, and it’s something we have to be careful of,” she says.

Final Thoughts

In meeting planning divisions across industries, ethics have come front and center as a result of meetings and events hitting general news outlets in a negative light, whether it’s finance companies taking ill-timed big budget trips or physician spending for medical meetings coming under tighter scrutiny due to the Sunshine Act.

On the ground in the lives of most meeting planners, though, ethical issues come in smaller, more muddled guises. Planners, who have becoming increasingly efficient and business-savvy due to other changes radiating from the recession, are relying on their strong intuition to make good choices and typically coming out on top, but increased codification and education in individual corporations can go a long way to keep everyone on the same page and operating along the same ethical lines.

C&IT

Destination

Las Vegas Beyond the Ballroom

Planners Take Events Up a Notch by Finding New Spaces in Hotels and Offsite Gems

By Karen Brost

It's no secret that Las Vegas hotels offer an extensive selection of meeting rooms and ballrooms to choose from for corporate events. But sometimes, a different type of venue is a better fit for what planners have in mind. Carla Alarcon, director of marketing for Open Systems Inc. headquartered in Shakopee, Minnesota, found exactly what she wanted at the South Point Hotel & Spa.

Alarcon plans an annual users conference for approximately 250 IT and accounting professionals who use her company's software. Someone had recommended South Point to her, and Open Systems ended up having their event there three different years. "We were really looking for something that was a little off the beaten path so that we didn't have all of our customers going on The Strip. They're there to learn."



Pure Nightclub at Caesars Palace, which is currently undergoing a top-to-bottom renovation, will reopen in early 2015.

Credit: Caesars Palace



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In addition to a casino, the 2,163-room South Point includes a spa, a 400-seat showroom, a 16-screen movie complex, a 64-lane bowling alley, the 30,000-sf Spa Costa de Sur, an equestrian center with more than 1,200 stalls and a total of 165,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space.

At first, Alarcon thought about bringing in some Cirque-style performers to entertain her attendees in the hotel's ballroom. But then she asked her contacts at the hotel, "What about this little showroom? Can I just have that? They worked with me. They're the easiest people in the world to work with."

The South Point staff arranged for her to bring in the '80s cover band the Spazmatics to entertain her group. According to Perfect World Entertainment, the Spazmatics offer "all the awesome sounds, styles and way-cool dance steps from the 1980s decade we'd love to forget. Complete with skinny ties, Brylcreemed hair and horn-rimmed glasses, the Spazmatics recapture all the best of the worst."

Alarcon explains, "We let people know ahead of time that it was going to be a kind of funky night, and we just had a blast."



"(The Venetian's) precons are ridiculous in a fantastic way. It's a miniature performance and show, and it really gives a great start to the meeting."

Candie Clark Priest, DMCP, Director of Marketing AlliedPRA, Las Vegas

Alarcon explains the benefits of using a unique venue inside the hotel versus one that's located offsite. "We didn't have to transport people places, so when they're ready to go back to their room, they can go back to their room. To me, that's huge. The conference is only two days, and most people are coming in from the East (Coast), so they're three hours ahead on time. People can leave for a while if they want to gamble and come back into the showroom. Or they could go to a movie if they wanted to. South Point has a lot of different things to do. I just liked having everything contained."

In fact, South Point offered more things to do than Alarcon could fit into her program. "We thought it would be fun to do a rodeo one night, but it didn't work out with our timing," she says.

Alarcon describes another advantage of hosting an event in-house versus transporting attendees to an offsite venue. She says it helps planners avoid dealing with a common pitfall: "You get somewhere and somebody wants to go back. It never fails."

She had high praise for the South Point staff. "They're super fun. They've been there a long time. I've worked with sales people all over the country. Working with Mo and Rich out there is a dream come true."

The Right Venue Sets the Scene

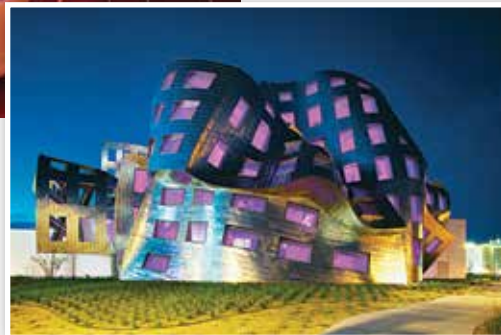
"When we start with clients, we really try to find out what the goals and objectives are for the meeting, and then we always want to give them a little bit of Las Vegas," explains Candie Clark Priest, DMCP, general manager of AlliedPRA Las Vegas. She

says that some clients look for traditional venues such as museums, but the AlliedPRA team likes to show them how something like a nightclub can become a fantastic venue. "I'm going to use Chateau (Nightclub & Gardens) as an example, which is on the rooftop of Paris Las Vegas. You step outside and you feel like you're in this garden and the legs of the Eiffel Tower cut right through the venue space and then you're overlooking the Bellagio fountains. That's really the start of a phenomenal event. The venue kind of sets the scene, and we enhance it from there."



Credit: Allied PRA LV/inset photo: Keep Memory Alive

The Keep Memory Alive Event Center at the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health downtown can customize lighting for any corporate color scheme.



We had the whole club. It was just so much fun. The second year we had the Boogie Knights, and they do the disco thing where they come out with the big shoes and big wigs and stuff. The fact that we had the showroom to ourselves, we could get wild and crazy. Our employees all brought outfits in. The third year, we did another band. The hotel worked with us on (booking) the bands."

Open Systems' showroom events followed a sit-down dinner and offered a nightclub-like atmosphere with an open bar. "After the nightclub, then everybody in their little goofy outfits went upstairs and went bowling," Alarcon adds. "It was a fun group of people."



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AlliedPRA staged this corporate event at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway's Neon Garage.

"We've had great success at the Keep Memory Alive event center downtown," she continues. "It's a fabulous facility, and they really include a lot for the meeting planner, so you get a lot of bang for your buck, and the catering is just fantastic." Priest says that the center's rental fee includes upgraded chairs, tables, linens and even centerpieces." What's really unique about that particular venue is the lighting that's also included. They can customize the lighting to any corporate color or they can mix it up and change it, and it's throughout, which makes it really awesome, both inside and out. A lot of times, that's something additional that you have to pay for, so that's a definite benefit." The Keep Memory Alive event center is at the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health, which was designed by famed architect Grand Geary.

"The Palms (Casino Resort) suites have always been fun and people love that," she continues. The Palms' Luxe Collection features a series of themed suites, including the Celebrity Suite, Director's Suite, Hot Pink Suite, Crib Suite (described as worthy of hip-hop royalty) and the Hardwood Suite, which has its own basketball court.

"The Las Vegas Motor Speedway has been very popular lately," Priest notes, "doing events down in the Neon Garage or in the Blackjack suite, and they can offer any of the racing experiences that are out there, as well. What's great is that you can do things like fireworks that you couldn't normally do on The Strip. I just did an event out there in April for about 200 people, and they did full food stations and a play-by-play live feed from pit row where all the guests did Richard Petty ride-alongs on the track. They alternated between dinner and the ride-alongs, went inside, had a great dessert and then they had a fireworks show."

Priest also describes how The Venetian makes creative use of a small theater it has outside of their convention area by using it to host what she calls "over the top" preconfs. "Their preconfs are ridiculous in a fantastic way," she says. "It's a

around making the winners of the annual trip feel special and important to their organization. We believe that creating experiences (like this) is so incredibly rewarding for our groups because we fully immerse them in a fantasy-inspired experience, one that they can't create on their own, and especially not in a ballroom."

Nicoletti explains how the program worked. "On the day of the event, we delivered to each attendee's room upscale, jeweled lanyards with backstage VIP all-access passes attached. Their instructions only directed them to wear the pass, be at the VIP limo pickup area in their club attire at 7 p.m. and to be



"We fully immerse (groups) in a fantasy-inspired experience, one that they can't create on their own, and especially not in a ballroom."

**Susan Nicoletti, Vice President, Meeting Operations
NHS Global Events, Skokie, IL**

ready to party like a rock star." The group was staying at The Cosmopolitan Las Vegas.

"Upon arrival to the Hard Rock Hotel," she continues, "they entered the hotel from a private, secured access point where bodyguards dressed in black suits met them and escorted them to the red carpet where they were photographed in front of a custom step-and-repeat-banner branded with the event name. Private elevators whisked them to the Penthouse Suite where the suite's entry hall was lined with mounted replica platinum albums labeled with their names and the award they won."

That was just the beginning of the attendees' rock star experience. Nicoletti explains, "The suite was decked out with

miniature performance and show, and it really gives a great start to the meeting."

Partying Like a Rock Star

Susan Nicoletti, vice president, meeting operations, for NHS Global Events, a Chicago area meeting and event consulting and hotel site selection firm, found a unique hotel location for a program she planned for a retail company. The venue they chose was the Penthouse Suite at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.

"Our theme for this incentive trip of 25 couples was Las Vegas VIP," she explains. "Each element of the trip experience was designed



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casino tables, billiards, deejay and electric guitar duo, lighting effects, large-scale, rock-band canvas art, celebrity psychic, makeup artist, hairstylist offering exotic hair extensions and hair color spray, and henna tattoo artists using replicas of famous rock star tattoo designs.” They also had a caricaturist capture the couples’ “rock star attitude” while sporting their choice of a black leather biker jacket or rhinestone-encrusted denim jacket.

The guests even learned how to dine like a rock star. “The food was served green-room style and included some unusual items labeled with the names of celebrity rockers who are famous for quirky snack and food requests when touring. Some of the items were bowls of all yellow M&Ms, seedless watermelon balls, fresh pitted cherries on toothpicks, PB&J sandwiches with crusts removed and cut into tiny circular shapes, and popcorn freshly popped in truffle oil and sprinkled with pink salt,” Nicoletti explains. “The bar was accented with a martini ice luge serving up a custom potion called ‘Famous.’”

The attendees also signed an electric guitar, which was presented to the president of the company to thank him for the incentive trip. At the end of the night, the guests returned to their hotel room to find their rock-style photo, imprinted to look like the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine, with the magazine’s reviewer singing praises about the trip-winners and thanking them for a great year.



Outdoor event space at the Chateau Nightclub on the rooftop of Paris Las Vegas overlooks the Fountains of Bellagio.

NHS Global Events added one more special touch to ensure an encore performance. “To encourage the recipients to be a top performer next year, inside a metallic envelope that accompanied the photo were two custom-designed concert tickets with the recipients’ names as the rock band detailing the location and date of next year’s trip destination. All of this was accompanied by each recipient’s platinum album replica displayed earlier at the suite, and a sincere note from the president of the company.”

Venue News

Scheduled to open in February 2015 is the **Venue Las**



Views of the city are unmatched from the rooftop patio of the Voodoo Steakhouse atop the Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino.

Vegas, which will feature 36,000 sf of versatile special event and meeting space with two full stories and a rooftop patio, including six indoor and outdoor event spaces for parties that can accommodate from 30 to up to 2,000 guests.

The Mob Museum, the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, recently added two new displays of rare gambling artifacts as part of a collaboration with the Museum of Gaming History. The first display features rare, early- to mid-20th century casino chips, photographs and other memorabilia from the 1946 opening of Bugsy Siegel’s Flamingo Hotel. The second display presents artifacts from legendary illegal gambling halls around the U.S. Located in downtown Las Vegas, The Mob Museum offers a variety of unique venues for private events.

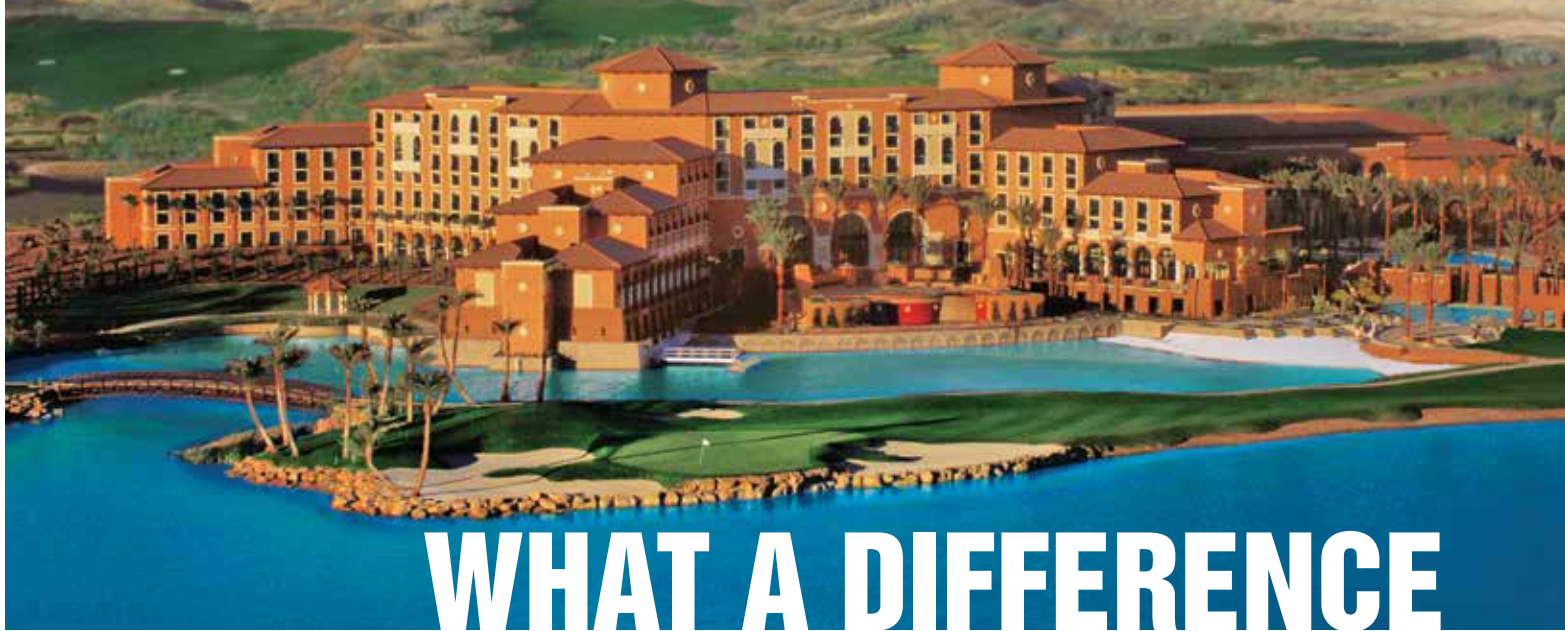
A new venue recently opened at Caesars Entertainment’s The Linq. Titled **F.A.M.E.**, which stands for Food Art Music Entertainment, the venue specializes in the street foods of Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Korea, China and Vietnam along with live entertainment that includes lion and dragon dances, Taiko drum performances and Gangnam-style music.

One of the most unique venues in Las Vegas, the **Neon Museum**, pays tribute to the city’s legendary neon signs by putting them on display in a “neon boneyard.” The venue recently opened its Neon Boneyard North Gallery at its downtown Las Vegas campus. The new facility contains approximately 60 rescued signs from Palms Casino Resort, New York-New York, Lady Luck and O’Shea’s, among others. The signs provide a dazzling backdrop for special events.

Las Vegas Arena Company, which is owned by AEG and MGM Resorts International, recently broke ground on a \$375 million indoor arena. Located between the New York-New York and Monte Carlo resorts, the new 20,000-sf arena will host sporting events, major headline entertainment, awards shows and special events. The arena will feature 50 luxury suites, more than two dozen private loge boxes and other hospitality venues, and is expected to open in the spring of 2016.

The **Voodoo Zip Line** at Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino is now open. Riders take off from the patio of **Voodoo Steakhouse** on the 50th floor of the hotel’s Masquerade Tower and are

Credit: Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino



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Credit: MGM Grand Las Vegas Hotel Casino

MGM Grand Hotel & Casino recently debuted Stay Well Meetings, featuring healthful environments that enhance productivity.

propelled at speeds up to 33 mph to the adjoining 20-story Ipanema Tower, covering one-third of a mile in 70 seconds. The VooDoo Steakhouse's rooftop patio event space offers great views of the city.

Pure Nightclub at Caesars Palace has been acquired by Hakkasan Group and is currently closed to undergo a complete remodel. The new nightspot is scheduled to open in early 2015.

Hotel Updates

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

Tropicana Las Vegas - a DoubleTree by Hilton announced a March 1, 2015, completion date for the expansion of the Tropicana Pavilion. The expansion, which also includes enhancements to the existing pavilion area, will increase the resort's total meeting and convention facilities to 100,000 sf.

The new 26,000-sf Tropicana Pavilion area will offer up to 11 separate breakout rooms, some with up to 16-foot ceilings, and will feature new private restrooms as well as new escalators. The current Tropicana Pavilion also will be enhanced, including a decorative acoustic treatment for the walls. Once the addition is complete, the Tropicana Pavilion will provide 55,000 sf of meeting space.

Caesars Entertainment announced in July that **The Linq Hotel & Casino** will welcome its first guests beginning on October 30, 2014. The Linq Hotel & Casino, combined with The Linq retail, dining and entertainment promenade and the world's largest observation wheel, the High Roller, is located

at the heart of Center Strip. The hotel, which is a complete re-imagining of the Quad Resort & Casino, will feature 2,256 brand new rooms and suites, a completely renovated welcome experience built around a signature lobby bar, all-new retail and spa amenities, and a new pool deck.

Caesars Entertainment also has recently opened its first standalone boutique hotel on The Strip. **The Cromwell** includes 188 rooms, including 19 suites, and is home to Drai's Beach Club Night Club and Giada, the first restaurant to be opened by celebrity chef Giada De Laurentiis.

Delano Las Vegas opened this month in the Mandalay Bay complex, bringing the chic style of its iconic sister property in South Beach to the Las Vegas Strip. Located in the 43-story tower that was formerly home to THEhotel, the new hotel will feature 1,100 suites, the Bathhouse Spa and Delia's Kitchen, a restaurant specializing in sustainable foods.

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



Credit: The Mirage

The Bare pool lounge at The Mirage.

Station Casinos is planning to invest \$20 million over the next year to create four new restaurant concepts at its **Green Valley Ranch Resort** in Henderson. The new dining outlets at the 490-room resort will include Mercadito Mexican restaurant, the Tippling Hall cocktail lounge, Pizza Rock pizzeria and Tony's Slice House, a traditional Italian venue.

Station Casinos' crown jewel, the **Red Rock Casino, Resort & Spa** 10 miles west of The Las Vegas Strip in Summerlin, is undergoing a major renovation, which will feature the addition of a Restaurant Row with four new dining outlets.

Among the MGM Resorts properties that are featuring new restaurants is **The Mirage's** 250-seat Tom Colicchio's Heritage Steak, which opened a year ago. And Masaharu Morimoto, renowned Japanese chef and star of Food

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Thistle Tower RACINO

ROADHOUSE



Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

Wynn and sister property Encore together offer more than 4,700 guest rooms and 260,000 sf of meeting space.

Network's "Iron Chef America," will debut Morimoto Las Vegas at The Mirage in 2015. Both restaurants offer private group dining options. The Mirage boasts other distinctive event venues outside the ballroom, including Siegfried & Roy's Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat, the Bare Pool Lounge and 1 Oak nightclub.

The **Monte Carlo Resort and Casino** recently completed a multimillion-dollar renovation of its outdoor area to create an open-air plaza and gathering area that offers six new dining concepts and live entertainment.

After a \$415 million renovation of the legendary Sahara Hotel, **SLS Las Vegas** resort and casino debuted in August featuring 1,600 rooms in three towers, three nightclub concepts, including one with a rooftop pool, and 80,000 sf of flexible meeting space.

The salons at both **Wynn and Encore** have been overhauled under the new artist-in-residence Claude Baruk, managing director for the salons. The Claude Baruk Salon at Wynn opens this month, while the Claude Baruk Salon at Encore reopened in March 2014. Claude Baruk offers techniques not available anywhere else in the world, the "Baruk 5-step system."

Westgate Resorts announced the acquisition of the LVH – Las Vegas Hotel & Casino as the newest addition to its portfolio of 28 resorts. The property was formerly known as the Las Vegas Hilton and will be renamed **Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino**. The LVH is a landmark property that, at one time, was the largest hotel in the world and was home to such legendary greats as Elvis Presley and Liberace. The hotel is located just one block off the Las Vegas Strip, is adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center, and is one of seven stations on the Las Vegas Monorail.

Planners who need a more serene, meeting-focused envi-

ronment can look to **The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort and Spa** in Henderson. Although it's only 30 minutes from The Strip, the Moroccan-inspired resort is a world away with its tranquil setting featuring lake and mountain views, a new three-acre white-sand beach cove and any number of water activities. The Westin takes advantage of its stunning environs by offering 50,000 sf of outdoor space from gardens and poolside decks to a terrace overlooking the lake. There is another 45,000 sf of indoor space including a 20,000-sf ballroom and naturally sunlit meeting rooms and boardrooms. The resort underwent a major renovation before re-opening under the Westin flag in 2012, and the Reflection Bay Golf Course will reopen November 1 following a major renovation.

Much More Than Entertainment

While Las Vegas hosts more than 22,000 meetings, events, conventions and trade shows each year, the city is always ready for more. So the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) recently unveiled two new advertising campaigns designed to reinforce the destination's image as a premier venue for hosting successful, memorable and cost-effective meetings and events. The first campaign "We're Here to Do More Than Entertain You" targets C-suite executives who are the final decision-makers on selecting a venue for their meetings. The ads will feature iconic Las Vegas entertainers such as illusionist David Copperfield, a Cirque du

Soleil performer and a Las Vegas showgirl in office settings. The second campaign "Neon Signs" takes a playful poke at dry-sounding meetings by showcasing their names in neon lights, and by taking items commonly used at meetings and covering them with jewels.

The LVCVA reports that convention and trade show delegates represent approximately 12.7 percent of all visitors to the Southern Nevada region, or approximately 5.1

million business travelers a year — critical to the health of the Las Vegas economy.

There's Always Something New

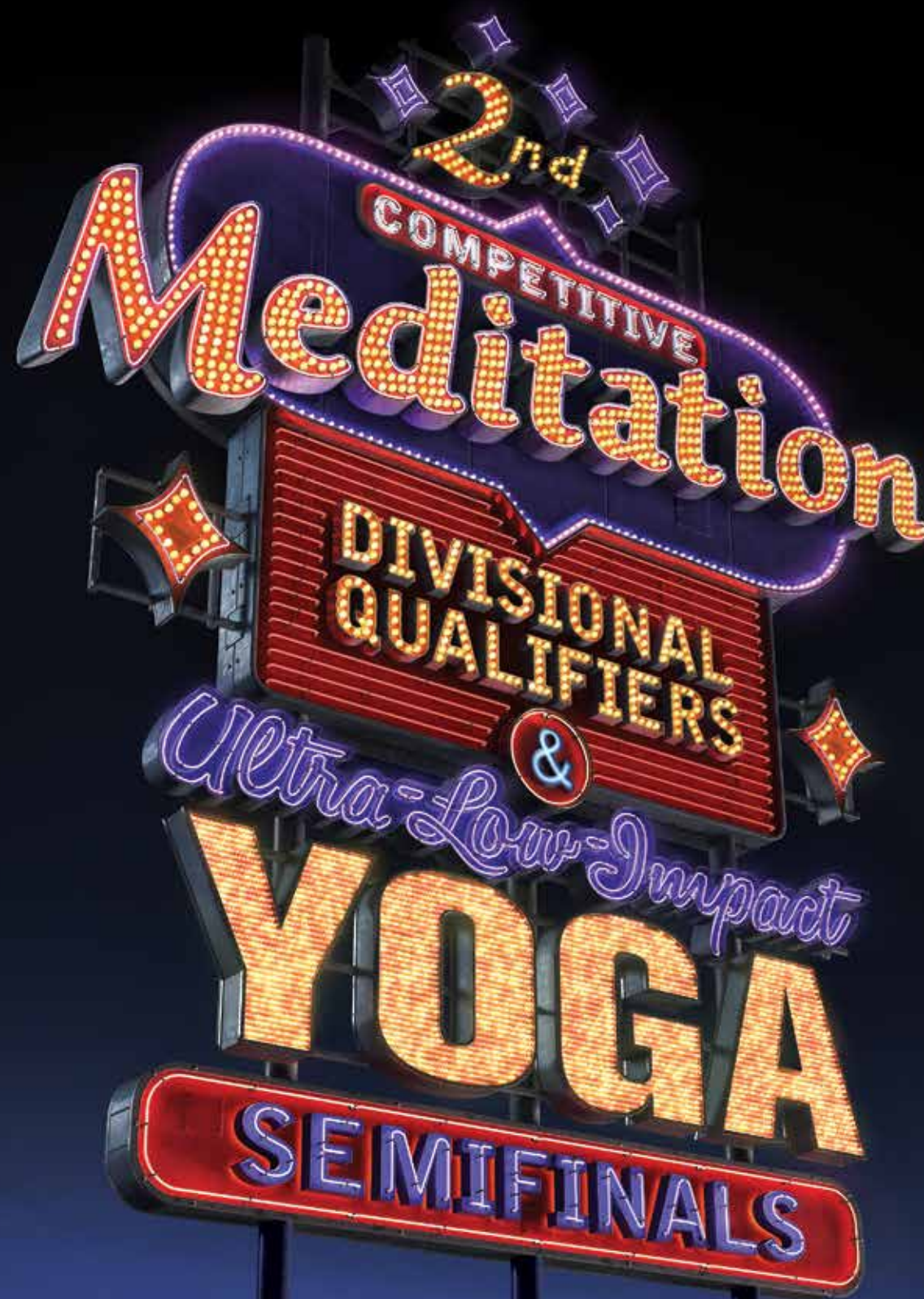
"We're constantly dealing with clients who have been here before or they're very well-traveled so they need to be wowed," AlliedPRA's Priest notes. "What's great and not great about Las Vegas is about every six months it reinvents itself with more great new venues. Sometimes that gets challenging for us as DMCs to stay on top of the next great thing, but as far as a meeting planner goes, they can come back here every year and there's something new that they haven't seen and tried."

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Credit: The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa

The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort and Spa is a world away with its tranquil, lakefront setting, yet only 30 minutes from The Strip.



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On The Move



CHOCK



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The St. Regis Princeville Resort, Kauai, Hawaii, has appointed **Donald Chock** as director of sales and marketing. He most recently served as vice president of sales and marketing with Wavecrest Resorts Inc.

La Cantera Hill Country Resort, by Destination Hotels & Resorts, San Antonio, Texas, has named **Danielle Johnson** as director of group sales. She was a group sales manager for Vail Cascade Resort & Spa in Vail, Colorado. La Cantera also named

Kerri Matthews as sales manager. She was director of Southwest sales at Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center in Grapevine, Texas. **Tiffany Ferguson** was named sales manager. She was national sales manager at Miramonte Resort and Spa, Indian Wells, California.

Kavin Schieferdecker was promoted to director of sales and marketing for the Hilton Anatole, Dallas, Texas. He formerly served as director of sales at the hotel.

Jerry Jensen was named director of sales and marketing for Hotel Contessa, San Antonio, Texas. Jensen, a 30-year veteran of the hospitality industry, was director of sales and marketing for Scottsdale Resort & Conference Center.

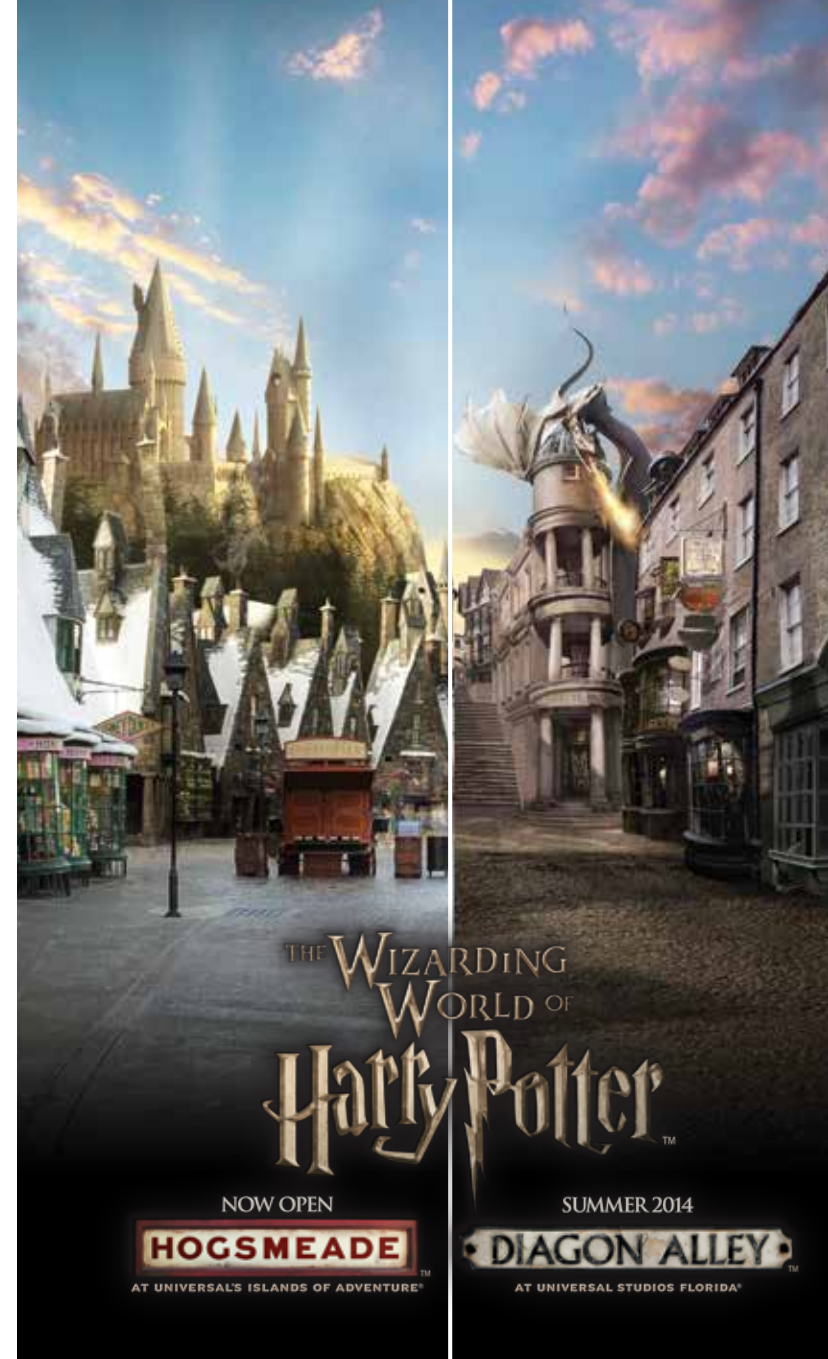
The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, Florida, has appointed **Elizabeth Brock** as regional sales manager based in Nashville. She most recently was a corporate sales manager for the Sheraton Nashville Downtown.

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