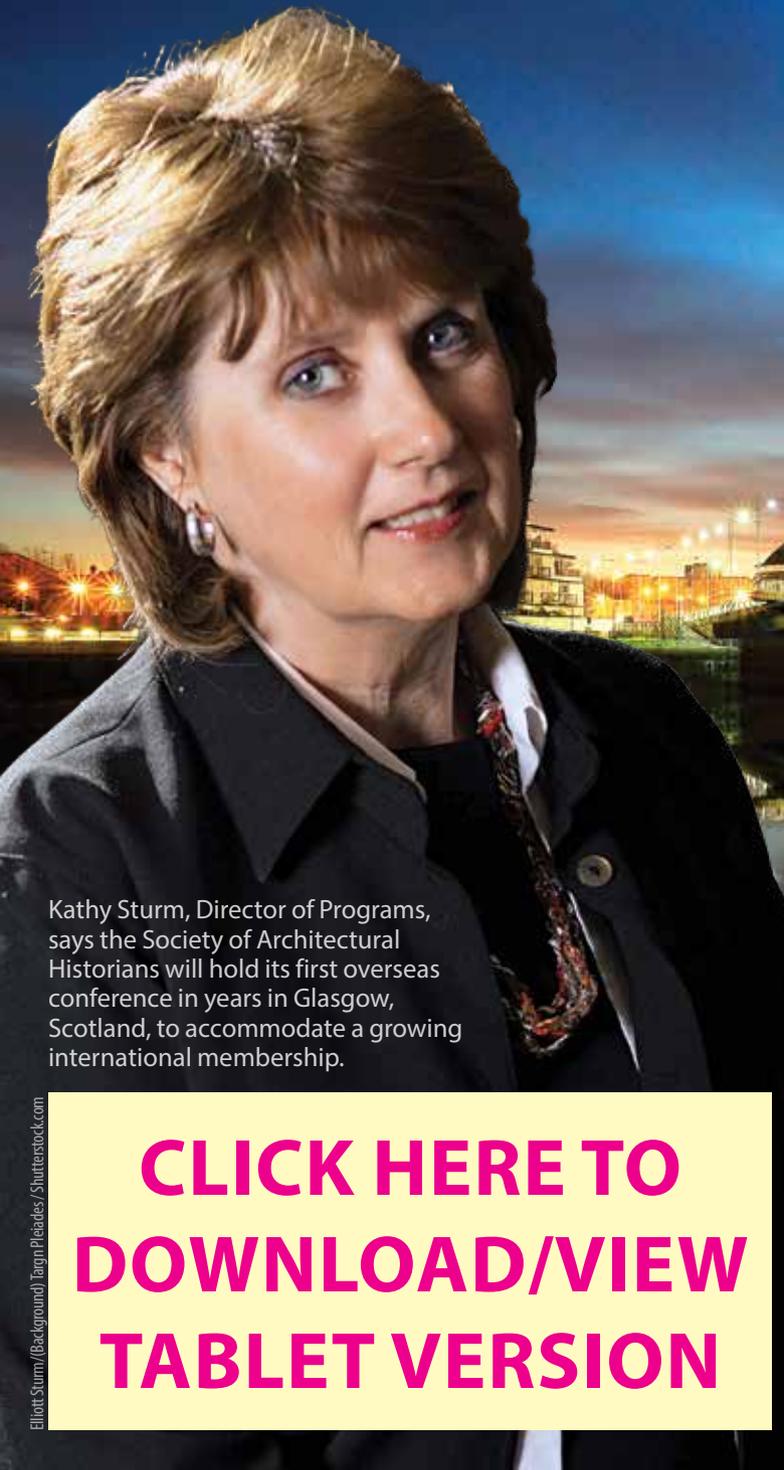


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Kathy Sturm, Director of Programs, says the Society of Architectural Historians will hold its first overseas conference in years in Glasgow, Scotland, to accommodate a growing international membership.

Convene Overseas?

How Planners Manage Meetings Outside Their Comfort Zone

PAGE 28

Top Attendee Engagement Tactics

New Tools to Expand the Experience

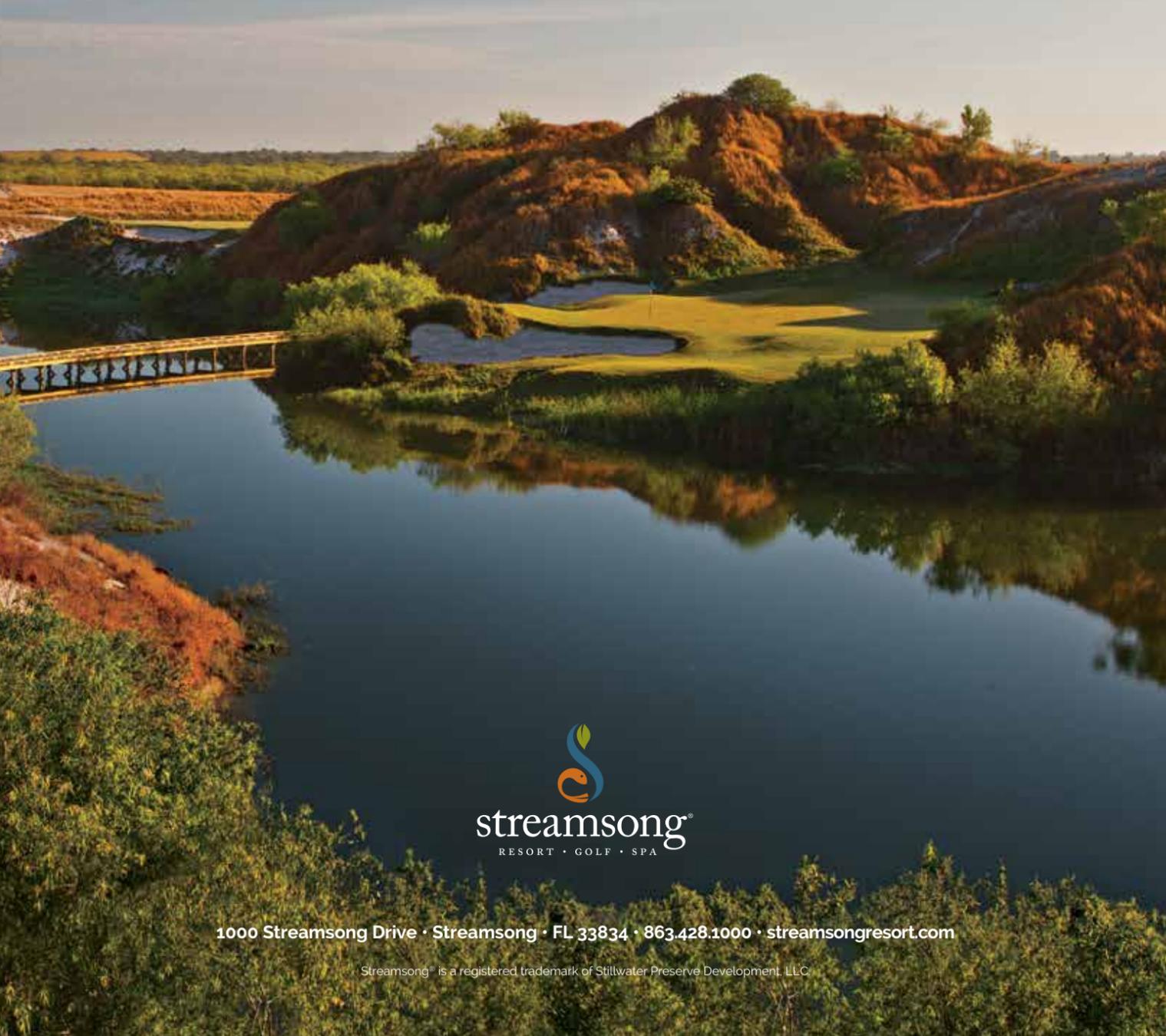
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THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

June / July 2015

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On the Cover: The Clyde Arc Bridge, which opened in 2006, is shown lit up at night in Glasgow, Scotland. Kathy Sturm, director of programs for the Society of Architectural Historians, which chose Glasgow for its 2017 Annual Conference, notes, "We felt that Glasgow presented a very intriguing case of a city that has reinvented itself over the years and incorporated modern architecture in with historic architecture."

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Leaving the Comfort Zone

There's an adage posted on the wall in my office: "If you fear change, you're in the wrong business." For most of us, trying something new often means getting out of our comfort zones — yet that's almost always the key to moving forward and achieving success. Three topics in this issue drive home the point.

The first is the daunting prospect of taking meetings and conventions abroad (see "Convene Overseas?" on page 28 and "Going Global," page 8). It's the key to retaining and expanding international membership. The Society of Architectural Historians will hold its 2017 Annual Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, the first overseas conference since the society's early years "...as we are growing by leaps and bounds in our international membership," says Kathy Sturm, director of programs, who appears on our cover. "It's a goal moving forward into the next 75-plus years to expand the opportunity to our global membership, especially those who just cannot afford to travel to the U.S., for whom it may be more affordable to travel to Scotland." Read about more planners who have stepped outside their comfort zones and taken a leap across the pond.

The second topic relates to the daunting challenge of keeping up with technology ("Top Attendee Engagement Tactics," page 24). Learning how to choose and use the right social media and other mobile tools is the key to keeping attendees actively participating before, during and after the event. Marie Hunter, senior director, meetings, conferences and events for the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, says, "We don't have to be afraid of new tools that accomplish that or the fact that they will expand and enhance the conversation." She adds, "The more savvy associations and planners now use those tools to create '360-degree' awareness around the meeting throughout that cycle."

Finally, choosing a newly opened convention hotel sometimes takes a giant leap of faith, yet the rewards can be great, not only for planners but for the cities that want to be large-convention contenders (see "Convention Game-Changers," page 18). The American Association for Justice chose the new JW Marriott Austin for their 2017 convention. "Preconstruction bookings can be a risk, but the JW delivered a top-notch product, and we are excited for our convention to come to the city," says Colleen Phalen, CMP, CEM, senior director, meetings and conventions.

Change is good, but sometimes defaulting to the comfort zone is good, too. Gaming resorts are tried-and-true, one-stop resources for first-class meeting facilities, great amenities and prime entertainment — plus predictably great attendance. Read all about the best bets in "The Big Winners at Gaming Resorts" on page 10.



Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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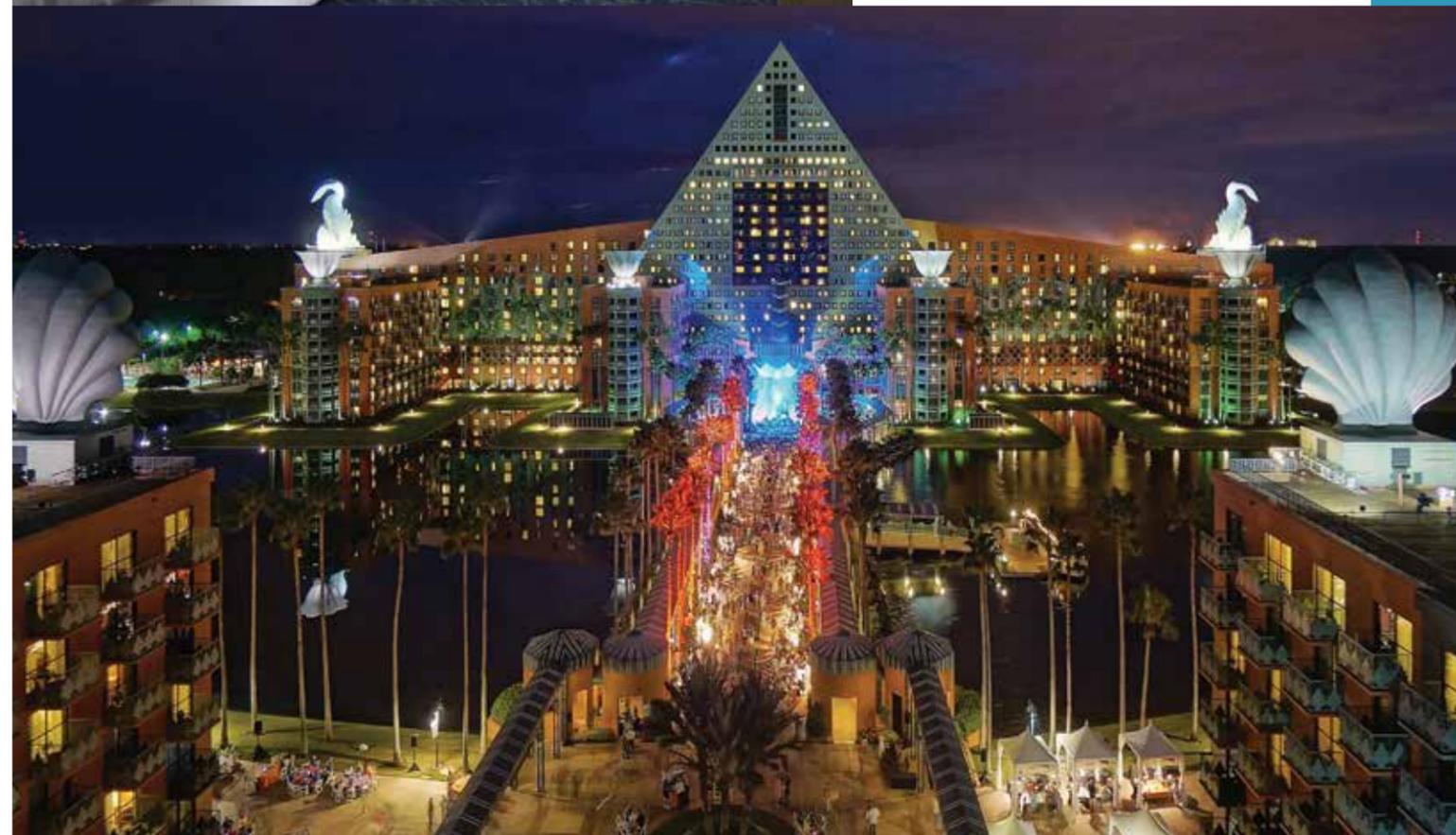
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Anaheim/Orange County VCB Changes Name to Visit Anaheim

ANAHEIM, CA — The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau (AOCVCB) on June 24 unveiled its new name, Visit Anaheim. After more than 20 years as AOCVCB, the destination marketing organization streamlined its name and introduced a fresh and contemporary new brand.



Burress

"A year's worth of brand exploration, consumer meetings and travel trade research told us clearly that we needed a name and brand that is reflective of our organization's mission," said Jay Burress, president and CEO, Visit Anaheim. "Visit Anaheim is a name that travel enthusiasts and conventioners can easily find and understand. It evokes a sense of discovery and clearly communicates that we have an incredible, awe-inspiring destination that people should come see for themselves."

Anaheim has undergone a massive revitalization and beautification effort, and is home to some of California's most exciting and prestigious attractions, entertainment and sports venues, theme parks and an exploding foodie culture and brew scene. www.visitanaheim.org

Plans Announced to Develop a Hyatt Downtown Convention Hotel in Kansas City by 2018

KANSAS CITY, KS — "Kansas City needs a major downtown convention hotel and has for several years," Kansas City Mayor Sly James said. "America has fallen in love with Kansas City and wants to have its conventions and large meetings here. The proposed agreement is the right development at the right location with the right hotel operator, and now is the right time to do it."

The proposed hotel would be built on property at 16th and Wyandotte streets, directly across from the Kansas City Convention Center's Grand Ballroom. Hyatt has been selected to be the hotel operator.

"This announcement is a game changer for the KC hospitality industry," said Ronnie Burt, Visit KC president and CEO. "Over the last 10 years, Kansas City has lost out on hundreds of groups, representing millions of room nights and more than \$3 billion in economic impact."

The convention headquarters hotel will feature approximately 75,000 sf of meeting, banquet and prefunction space, 9,000 sf of garden/terrace space, 15,450 sf of other retail, restaurant, bar and lounge space, a 9,913-sf recreational facility and a parking facility with 450–500 spaces. (Also see page 22.) www.HereToStayKC.com

Exhibition Industry Sees Highest Quarterly Increase in 8 Years

DALLAS, TX — The Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) released 2015 Q1 data collected for the annual CEIR Index report. The performance of the business-to-business exhibition industry, as measured by the CEIR Total Index, posted a year-on-year gain of 4.6 percent. This increase reflects strong industry growth, marking it as the highest increase since the second quarter of 2007.

2015 Q1 also marked the 19th consecutive quarter of year-on-year growth. While the growth of the exhibition industry lagged behind the GDP during most of last three years, the exhibition industry outperformed the macro economy as real GDP gained 2.7 percent year-on-year.

The year-on-year gain spread across all 14 sectors, especially Building, Construction, Home & Repair and Government. For the overall exhibition industry, all four metrics in the first quarter posted year-on-year gain. The strongest metric was in Real Revenues, which rose an impressive 7.3 percent, followed by Net Square Feet — increasing by 4.1 percent. Exhibitors increased 3.3 percent, whereas Professional Attendance could have been influenced the most by the severe weather and yet it rose a relatively strong 3.7 percent. www.ceir.org

Backsen Named Executive Director of the Omaha Convention & Visitors Bureau



Backsen

OMAHA, NE — Keith Backsen has been named executive director of the Omaha Convention and Visitors Bureau, beginning July 2015. Backsen, currently the vice president of sales and services for Visit Spokane in Spokane, Washington, has nearly 30 years of experience in the hospitality and convention industry.

"Keith brings enthusiasm and experience that will help Omaha grow as a tourism destination and convention city," said Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert. "He is well-known in the industry and will be a strong leader, innovator and mentor to our convention and visitors bureau staff."

Backsen is a member of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) and past president of PCMA's Pacific Northwest Chapter. He also is a member of ASAE and Destination Marketing Association International. www.visitomaha.com



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Credits: 1 Visit Denver; 3 National Conference Center; 4 Maria Bryk; 5 & 6 ECEF

1 The Colorado Convention Center celebrated its 25th anniversary with some of the most respected convention professionals in the country who collectively represent more than \$2 billion worth of convention business to Denver. **2** Convention industry leaders gather in the Washington, DC, office of U.S. Representative Danny K. Davis while they were in town for Exhibitions Day, which was created by IAEE and the Exhibitions Mean Business campaign to foster a stronger relationship with and build awareness among federal legislators and other government influencers. Pictured (l to r) are John Patronski, E.V.P. industry development of GES (Global Experience Specialists); Kristy Wagner, exhibit manager, Corcoran Expositions Inc.; Kevin Jackson, senior marketing manager, PCMA; U.S. Representative Danny K. Davis; Mary Pat Heftman, E.V.P. convention and strategic alliances, National Restaurant Association; Tom Corcoran, president of Corcoran Expositions Inc.; and Jimmy Mundo, advocacy manager of Choose Chicago. **3** Celebrating the turnaround success of the National Conference Center under new owners LaKota Hotels & Resorts are the executive team including (l to r) LaKota President and COO Sam Haigh; V.P. and General Manager Geoff Lawson; Danny Dolce; executive chef Chris Ferrier; and F&B Director Alan Reynolds. **4** Three of the more than 1,000 attendees at the 2015 ASAE Marketing, Membership, & Communications Conference held in Washington, DC, June 1–2, which recorded the highest number of participants in its history. **5** PCMA President and CEO Deborah Sexton and Peter Eelman, V.P. exhibitions and communications, Association for Manufacturing Technology, were among the 203 executives **6** at the Exhibition and Convention Executives Forum in Washington, DC.

Going Global

Phelps R. Hope, CMP



The Basics of Planning International Meetings

Taking your meeting international can be a heavy lift, regardless of the destination. But certain considerations can make it a lot easier. As you piece together a plan to go global (or if you're still deciding whether to make that leap in the first place), ask yourself the following questions:

Is it worth it? As with any major decision, look at the potential return on investment (ROI). Is the meeting of value to the organization you represent, and does that value outweigh the higher costs inherent in global meetings? Is it a deal-breaker to keep your event at home? First, consider what it is your group hopes to accomplish — possibly expanding an international membership base or simply giving a nod to existing international members who would appreciate an event in their own backyard. Likewise, oftentimes it is of value to a U.S.-based group to expose its members or employees to the global brand by way of a non-U.S.-based event.

What destination has the most appeal? Going global means more than throwing a dart at the wall and packing your bags, and it certainly is not meant to be a vacation-planning exercise for the key stakeholders. Members of your group likely have preferences, be it tropical destinations in Mexico and South America or historical sites in Europe. Perhaps the Asia-Pacific region holds exotic appeal for your group, or maybe they hope to make key business connections in that region. First, consider the business case for any destination and the reasons that destination would work to satisfy a strategic goal of your organization. Next, consider how adventurous your group is and whether they would welcome that destination as the site for their conference.

Have you done your homework? Vet potential destinations well in advance. Safety and political stability should be a top concern. Next, look at infrastructure, such as public transportation options to and from the airport and to in-town hot spots. How well-connected are the regional airports? For example, direct flights from the USA to some Eastern European destinations such as Hungary and the Czech Republic are limited. A trip that requires multiple connections can drain enthusiasm from both attendees and speakers. The same

goes for flight times in and out of the region — think jetlag and other inconveniences. Finally, find out if the destination offers a mix of special event and entertainment venue options for offsite events during the conference.

Are you keeping a sharp eye on costs? Expenses add up quickly abroad. It's important to consider whether the higher costs of accommodations and entertainment would drive away attendees. That said, there are ways to rein in expenses and make the trip more appealing. International airfares are almost always more expensive than domestic, but hotel rates often can be lower (depending on time of year and destination). Likewise, many European hotel and meeting venues offer a Daily Delegate Rate (DDR) that makes it much easier to plan a cost-effective and inclusive per-person rate where savings can be realized due to the bundled offerings of a DDR.

What about regulations? This is where things can get hairy. Requirements for visas and other special documents vary by country. The U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov) is an excellent resource to see what's needed and communicate it back to attendees. China, for example, has a notoriously stringent entry process, and some countries require a "Letter of Invitation" just to get in. As a rule of thumb, let attendees know that they should allow two months for processing of a visa application, and remind attendees that they need to have at least six months remaining before their passport expiration date after they are due to return!

Are you ready to sell? Going international sounds sexy in the early stages, but you have to get exhibitors there. As shipping across borders can be challenging, help them with the legwork. A designated Customs Broker is an easy one-stop-shop for handling international shipments. Similarly, General Services Contractors often are an efficient way to manage subcontracting at the destination. And by negotiating blended labor and materials handling rates, you can save exhibitors a headache. Be upfront about difficult time lines (if anything, pad time lines with a buffer). Lastly, make sure you communicate the increased potential for a stronger ROI to help overcome the additional costs and headaches involved with exhibiting overseas.

WHICH AREAS ARE TRENDING?

Now for the nitty gritty: where to go. Here are a few regional hot spots to keep in mind as you decide on a location.

EUROPE

Europe continues to be a front-runner for international meetings.

Rome — This city is becoming a popular destination, with interesting venues both conventional and new. The city continues to invest in new hotels.

Paris, Strasbourg and Loire Valley — France is attracting more meetings due to corporate headquarters located in the Paris region. Consequently, the French corporate meetings industry is booming.

London — Already a major international hub, London's investments in the 2012 Olympic Games brought new ac-

commodations, attractions and more.

sense of familiarity, the Middle East is quickly emerging as a popular global destination for meetings.

Dubai and Abu Dhabi — These two city-states located in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are among the most popular destinations in this exotic region of the world. The geopolitical environment is stable, and the cities certainly prioritize world-class facilities and entertainment options. It's also a practical destination, as English is a widely spoken language. Both cities are home to expatriate communities, which help to foster an impressive and diverse cultural mix. Additionally, eased travel restrictions and new flight routes have made this region much more accessible to Eastern European countries and India.

ASIA-PACIFIC

South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore — These three regions stand out in the Asia-Pacific region as the political

Remind attendees that they need to have at least six months remaining before their passport expiration date after they are due to return!

commodations, attractions and more.

Vienna — Centrally located in Europe, Vienna is compact, accessible and boasts a solid infrastructure ideal for major gatherings. It also is home to professional and enthusiastic multilingual suppliers.

Berlin — As a world-class center for culture, politics, media and science — and with a booming economy that favors visitors — it's no wonder this is among the most elite meetings locations.

Madrid — This city is one of the leading locales for international conventions and events. Attendees appreciate a dynamic mix of modern amenities and old-world attractions. And in the dead center of Spain, Madrid is a main hub between Europe and Latin America.

MIDDLE EAST

With well-known international hotel brands that put a strong emphasis on brand recognition and a welcoming

atmosphere is far less volatile. Likewise, an emerging middle class only adds more economic stability. All three destinations have the benefit of a comforting "Western" feel without sacrificing unique cultural aspects that allow event attendees to feel immersed in something exotic.

Taking a conference international can give you exposure to new markets, create lasting memories for attendees and reach future members, allowing your association's footprint to grow. All decisions when looking to go international should be approached strategically for desired outcomes of all involved. If done correctly, having a successful meeting outside of the U.S. can create real rewards for your association and attendees. (See related story on page 28.)

Phelps R. Hope, CMP, is senior vice president of meetings and expositions for Kellen Company, an association management company with offices and representation in the United States, Europe, China, the Middle East, India and Southeast Asia. He can be reached at phope@kellencompany.com or 678-303-2962.



The BIG Winners at Gaming Resorts

Planners Win Big With Better Attendance, Great Amenities and Prime Entertainment



By Christine Loomis

The prospect of holding a business meeting at a casino resort may pose a problem for some organizations, but gaming resorts can provide a powerful draw and attract many more attendees. Moreover, these resorts offer a great deal more than just slots and table gaming. Like other meeting-savvy hotels, gaming properties have staff members who know what planners need, as well as onsite amenities that range from ample meeting and function space to stellar dining, top-tier entertainment and engaging activities that have nothing to do with gaming.

Ask five planners whether gaming impacted their decision to meet at a gaming resort and the answers are hardly uniform. A national business agent for a government employee-based association brought a meeting to Atlantic City in March. On the subject of gaming, he says, "It is a positive. We put in long hours and when it is over, I want them to have some fun. I don't think we would have had the large turnout we did without the gaming aspect," he explains.

The Washington Library Association met at Tulalip Resort Casino in Marysville, Washington, in April. Executive Director Dana Murphy-Love, CAE, says that gaming was "not a factor at all in our decision, but I believe it is a positive feature for some of our attendees."

Ricki Garrett, Ph.D., executive director for the Mississippi Podiatric Medical Association, which met in Biloxi, Mississippi, in March, believes that "gaming is neither a draw nor a negative factor" for her members.

"We had our own section of meeting space that was closed in by the edge of the hotel. Our F&B was able to be self-contained, and no other groups would walk through since we were the 'end of the road.'"



Shawn Bryant
Director of Meetings
Ambulatory Surgery Center
Association
Alexandria, VA

As for gaming itself, "It was not a draw for us," Bryant says. "I don't think our members had a positive or negative idea of it, at least from the evals."

Planners shouldn't dismiss casino hotels simply because a group has no interest in slots and tables. With gaming resorts sprinkled across the country, finding ones that meet planners' needs is an easy task. The best options attract a remarkably diverse selection of conferences and attendees — gaming enthusiasts and not.

ARIZONA

Like many gaming resorts in this country, Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona, is a Native American enterprise, which

And when Beverly Hastings, CMP, meetings and events project manager for Jacksonville, Florida-based American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, was planning a regional meeting in Las Vegas in June, she specifically chose a hotel where the meeting room was away from the gaming. "I personally didn't want to have to walk through the casino to get to the meeting room," she says.

Casino smoke was more of a factor than the gaming for Shawn Bryant, director of meetings for the Alexandria, Virginia-based Ambulatory Surgery Center Association, which met in Arizona in October. A number of his attendees liked the fact that they didn't have to walk through a smoky casino to get to meetings.

gives groups the opportunity to integrate aspects of the native culture into meetings if they choose. Talking Stick, owned by the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, has a stellar collection of Native American artwork, for example. It also has all the attributes one expects of AAA Four Diamond resorts, including golf and a spa.

The layout of the meeting space was a positive for Bryant's 100 attendees. "We had our own section of meeting space that was closed in by the edge of the hotel," he says. "Our F&B was able to be self-contained, and no other groups would walk through since we were the 'end of the road.'"

Bryant also liked that the hotel is an all-suite property and offers a variety of restaurants. While “the view from the high-end restaurant was amazing,” Bryant notes that his group typically goes with lower costs for F&B. At Talking Stick that doesn’t mean boring. “Each meal and snack break offered good variety,” he says.

Scottsdale itself was definitely a draw because of its accessibility, airlift option and, not surprisingly, the weather. “Attendees loved the number of balconies around the meeting space so they could enjoy the outdoors on breaks.”

The resort also offered a few surprises related to the casino and its location, something Bryant says should be communicated to attendees in advance. “I assumed that like in Vegas, the meeting space would be far from the guest rooms and would involve a long walk through the casino,” he says. That was not the case. “It was



The Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona is owned by the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

Credit: Talking Stick Resort

employee group. “We were looking for an inexpensive location with enough room to do our training and after-training activities for my members to enjoy,” he says. “Bally’s had it all.”

The group used Bally’s conference and meeting rooms, the hotel’s AV equipment and booked the hotel’s catering for breakfast. “The technical people were great. They were always there offering advice and ready to take on any problems,” he notes. “Conference rooms were big, clean and set up perfectly for our needs. Service was outstanding.”

Atlantic City is home to well-known chefs and restaurants, and the group gathered at two Pacific Avenue eateries. About Morton’s The Steakhouse Atlantic City, the venue for a dinner meeting, the national business agent says, “I can’t say enough about the food and service.” The group also visited Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill at Caesars in Atlantic City, which he describes as “good food and service at very reasonable rates.”

In the end, both the city and hotel delivered exactly what the government association’s national business agent wanted. “It is a beautiful location, a fun town and offers reasonable, affordable rates for my members,” he says. “The only surprise was that there were no surprises. You usually have something go wrong when having a large event. Everything went fine, no problems.”

“I wanted a hotel that most likely would not have a motivational sales group in the next room. I’ve been to the Tuscany and know it to be quiet and calmer than some of the others, and that’s a good fit for this event.”



Beverly Hastings, CMP
Meetings & Events
Project Manager
American Association of
Clinical Endocrinologists
Jacksonville, FL



Credit: Meet AC

The Steel Pier’s Observation Wheel is making its way in three parts to Atlantic City from Italy. The final shipments are expected to arrive by Labor Day.

just a short walk from the guest rooms to the meeting space,” and the casino (and its smoke) could easily be skipped. Being able to avoid the casino between accommodations and meetings, Bryant notes, “is rare in gambling properties” and definitely translated to a positive for his attendees.

ATLANTIC CITY

New Jersey’s most famous gaming destination is ideal for groups looking for an affordable meeting site with lots to do when meetings wrap up. “I cover a large area: half of New York State, half of New Jersey, the tip of Connecticut and the Caribbean,” the government association’s national business agent says. “Atlantic City is ideally situated to have my members attend my training sessions. And with all the activities available — the casino, shows, restaurants, the beach and boardwalk — I cannot think of a better location in the tri-state area. The prices are great also!”

Bally’s, part of the Caesars Entertainment family of hotels and casinos, served as host hotel for the 300-plus government em-



Credit: Mohegan Sun

A second hotel, the seven-floor, 400-room Earth Hotel (r) is being added in 2016 to the Mohegan Sun resort in Uncasville, Connecticut.

To other planners considering Atlantic City, he says, “Put your trust in the people of Bally’s, especially Judy Sereni. They will put together an event that your members will remember, and it will be problem free.”

CONNECTICUT

Billed as the largest resort of its kind in North America, Foxwoods Resort Casino encompasses four hotels, 2,200 guest rooms, 150,000 sf of conference space, six casinos and more than 30 restaurants and lounges. There are shows of every variety, 20 bowling lanes, and the Rees Jones–designed golf course has come in at No. 1 on multiple lists of Connecticut’s top courses.

Attendees can enjoy two opulent spas as well as the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center, which provides insight into the history and culture of Connecticut’s Native American people. The museum also offers 64,000 sf of rentable space. In May, the resort announced the opening of Tanger Outlets at Foxwoods, 300,000 sf lined with popular outlet stores to entice shoppers.

Also in eastern Connecticut is Mohegan Sun, owned by the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut. Accommodations are currently within the 34-story, 1,200-room Sky Hotel. In March, the resort announced a major expansion to include the seven-story, 400-room Earth Hotel, slated to open in fall 2016. Meanwhile, the resort has plenty to attract attendees in addition to its meeting space: three casinos, a spa, a golf course, multiple restaurants and bars, and three entertainment venues including a 10,000-seat arena.

BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI

Set on the Gulf of Mexico, Biloxi, Mississippi, combines its gaming industry with Gulf beaches, fresh-caught seafood and Southern hospitality, and Garrett thinks planners should not miss an opportunity to take a meeting there. She brought her group of 100 members of the Mississippi Podiatric Medical Association to the Beau Rivage Resort & Casino in part because she had been there many times before.

“I had repeatedly used it during my 7½ years as executive director of the Mississippi Nurses Association and had always considered it one of my favorite hotels,” she says. “The staff are wonderful and there is a lot of attention to detail. The fact that it overlooks the Gulf of Mexico also is an incentive for hosting a meeting there.

“The service is always excellent from the moment you check in until the moment you check out. Our board had an excellent experience at the Italian restaurant, Stalla. Everyone also enjoys the beautiful shops in the Beau Rivage and the gorgeous flowers.”

Among the highlights was a Friday evening reception at the hotel. “It featured Creole food and, unlike some receptions, our members stayed all evening and enjoyed the food, music and visiting,” Garrett says. Another plus, she adds, was the Bloody Mary/Mimosa break provided by catering. “Our members thought it was fun.”

The city, too, attracts attendees. “Biloxi is a good fit because it has a lot to interest our members, including the Beau Rivage, beaches, shopping, gaming and cultural centers,” Garrett says. “It also has a very relaxed atmosphere. There are many wonderful restaurants in Biloxi, and it is a wonderful place for members to take their families.”

LAS VEGAS

Although it attracts groups from across the nation and the globe, Las Vegas also is a setting for regional meetings that draw



Credit: Beau Rivage Resort & Casino

Recreational water activities are among the popular amenities at Beau Rivage Resort & Casino in Biloxi on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi.

on the more than 2 million people living and working in the greater metropolitan area.

Hastings had to put together a short meeting focused on diabetes for 200 members of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists in the area. But booking space without hotel rooms can be a challenge in Las Vegas, which is one reason Hastings chose Tuscany Suites & Casino.

“I chose to be off The Strip as this is a small (by Vegas standards) event and has no room nights, which limited space selection in several Strip hotels. Some wouldn’t even consider us;



Credit: Meet AC

A rendering of the Playground, a hub for live music, dining and entertainment, in front of Caesars Palace Atlantic City. The first level is now open.

others wouldn't give me a room until six weeks out — not an option for me."

Because the event is educational, Hastings wanted a hotel without the typical Las Vegas frenetic activity, another challenge in this highly energized city. "I wanted a hotel that most likely would not have a motivational sales group in the next room (which happened at the Hilton a few years ago), as that is very disruptive. I've been to the Tuscany and know it to be quiet and calmer than some of the others, and that's a good fit for this event," she says.

And the price was right. "Cost is a huge factor for this event," Hastings notes. "It's pharma-grant supported and complimentary to attendees, so we appreciate savings."

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Murphy-Love, who also is president of Melby, Cameron & Anderson, an association management company based in Edmonds, Washington, is very familiar with Tulalip Resort Casino. "Several of our clients have meetings at Tulalip. It is a great location, just a little north of Seattle, but close to restaurants, the Skagit Valley, etc. The hotel rooms and meeting space are among the best in the United States. Our delegates rave about this hotel."

The 2015 Conference is the second that the Washington Library Association has held at Tulalip, and the group will likely meet there again in 2018. "Service is excellent. Many of the staff members have been with Tulalip since it opened in 2008. The venue is beautiful and centrally located, and meeting space and hotel rooms are separate from the gaming space and non-smoking," Murphy-Love says.

This year, the theme for the group of 350 created a nice pairing opportunity for the resort's catering staff. "Our theme was Libraries are Market Fresh, so the chef customized menus for us to highlight local fresh foods," Murphy-Love says. "We used hotel catering for all of our functions and the food was excellent."

While the group didn't have any scheduled events offsite this year, Murphy-Love notes that the hotel provides free shuttles to the outlet mall next door as well as to the Hibulb Cultural Center, a facility interpreting the history and culture of Washington's Tulalip tribes.

If there is any downside to Tulalip Resort Casino, it is its popularity. "Meet in the middle of the week," Murphy-Love advises. "The hotel sells out on weekends to visitors, mostly from Canada."

The bottom line is this: Whether you and your attendees are gaming enthusiasts or not, there are many reasons for considering a gaming resort for your next meeting — wherever in the country you may be convening.

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

Atlantic City Perhaps the biggest news for the region is the \$125.8 million Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center. The final steel beam was signed and installed in October. When it opens in August, the development will become the largest convention center-hotel complex between Baltimore and Boston, featuring two 50,000-sf ballrooms that can be divided into 29 sections and utilized by up to 5,000 attendees. More than 2,500 hotel rooms will be directly accessible from the meeting space.

In April, the shuttered **Revel Casino Hotel** in Atlantic City was finally purchased for \$82 million by a developer. What's currently known is that the property will have a name change. Stay tuned for more.

Caesars Entertainment has been busy opening restaurants this past year. Martorano's opened at Harrah's, Buca di Beppo and Boardwalk Cupcakes are now open at Bally's, and famously irate Chef Gordon Ramsay has launched an English-style pub at Caesars Atlantic City, where he installed the Hell's Kitchen season 13 winner, La Tasha McCutchen, as head restaurant chef.

In November, **Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa** announced plans for a \$13 million property-wide renovation that includes a redesign of the Borgata Buffet and renovations to the spa, casino, front desk area and Borgata suites. In March, the resort also an-



Credit: Venetian/Palazzo

The headquarters hotel for IMEX America is The Venetian | The Palazzo Las Vegas — connected to the Sands Expo, home to the October trade show.

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SOUTH POINT
Las Vegas





“Service is excellent. Many of the staff members have been with Tulalip since it opened in 2008. The venue is beautiful and centrally located, and meeting space and hotel rooms are separate from the gaming space and non-smoking.”

Dana Murphy-Love, CAE
Executive Director
Washington Library Association
Edmonds, WA

nounced plans to build an outdoor entertainment venue, Festival Park, as well as a new nightclub to be completed later this year. The first performers taking the stage at Festival Park this summer include Meghan Trainor, Willie Nelson, Darius Rucker and Counting Crows.

Tropicana Atlantic City announced completion of its \$50 million, resort-wide revitalization in May. Upgrades to the North Tower hotel rooms, a completely renovated casino, the all-new AtlantiCare LifeCenter Fitness Center and the new Tropicana Multimedia Light and Sound Show are part of the improvements.

Resorts Casino Hotel announced plans for a \$9.4 million expansion of its convention space that will create an additional 12,500 sf and 11 new conference rooms, for a total of 64,000-plus sf of meeting and function space. The renovation, slated for completion this summer, also will include guest bathrooms in the Ocean Tower.

Biloxi MGM Park, a sports and entertainment complex across the river from Beau Rivage Resort & Casino, is scheduled to open this summer. It will be the home of the Major League Baseball



Sky Pool, an upscale, exclusive pool specially for Sky Suites guests, at the Aria Resort & Casino, Las Vegas.

Credit: MGM Resorts International



The front desk at South Point Hotel, Casino and Spa, which is located near The Strip in Las Vegas.

Credit: South Point Hotel, Casino and Spa

Milwaukee Brewers AA farm team and a venue for events, concerts and outdoor festivals.

Las Vegas Last summer, **The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino** began renovating its standard guest suites, giving the super roomy accommodations a lighter, brighter aesthetic and desks with a media “hub” system featuring USB charging facilities among other business-friendly elements.

Arriving for a convention late at night? Flying out early? For guests at **The Mirage** that’s no problem. Pantry, a 24-hour eatery that opened last fall, offers breakfast and dessert 24/7 with lunch and dinner available from 11 a.m.–6 a.m.

Mandalay Bay Convention Center is adding 350,000 sf of exhibit space and other upgrades for a total of more than 2 million sf. The \$66 million project will be fully completed in January 2016, with portions ready as soon as August.

Michael Mina’s Bardot Brasserie, a celebration of Parisian café culture, opened at **Aria Resort & Casino** in January. The menu features traditional brasserie fare and the cocktail program highlights classics from such famed Parisian watering holes as Harry’s Bar and Bar Hemingway.

South Point Hotel, Casino and Spa’s new \$35 million bowling tournament facility, South Point Bowling Plaza, boasts a full schedule of tournament events. The South Point Bowling Plaza, a 90,000-sf facility, features 60 lanes with two parallel rows of 30 lanes, a 360-seat viewing area and a 720-unit locker room.

New Mexico **Sandia Resort & Casino** announced changes and improvements in place and on the drawing boards. The new Roadrunner Casino & Grill is now open, and for ease of accessibility it’s connected by a climate-controlled bridge to a new 1,700-space covered parking garage. The Green Reed Spa also is getting a makeover, and guests can expect a new Sandia Golf Club state-of-the-art banquet and event center accommodating up to 450 guests.

Reno In keeping with its green/sustainability environment, in October, **Peppermill Resort Spa Casino** began incorporating locally grown and produced food into its daily operation. In addition to food, local organic tea is served at the spa, and local craft brews and whiskey are available at The Terrace. AC&F



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Convention Game-Changers



The new JW Marriott Austin, the city's largest hotel, is within walking distance of the convention center.

New Convention Hotels That Are Putting Cities on the Site Selection Map

By Patrick Simms

“Preconstruction bookings can be a risk, but the JW delivered a top-notch product, and we are excited for our convention to come to (Austin).”

Colleen Phalen, CMP, CEM
Senior Director, Meetings and Conventions
American Association for Justice
Washington, DC

Austin to host the AAJ's Winter Convention in 2017, the first time the event will be held in the city. About 2,500 attendees are expected at the convention, which will be a “takeover” of the property. “Austin has been on our radar for some time,” says Phalen. “The growth in infrastructure and global recognition has made Austin a desirable destination to hold our major convention. And the JW Austin is also now a destination and attraction unto itself.”

Marriott has emerged as one of the top “hoteliers to watch” for association planners, given several major new properties the company has and will debut in key cities such as Miami, Los Angeles, Nashville and Austin. This year the hotelier opened the JW Marriott Austin, the city's largest hotel and the brand's largest in North America at 34 stories and 1,012 guest rooms. The Marriott certainly can be considered a “convention hotel,” not only due to the 42 meeting rooms and 112,000 sf of function space onsite, but also since the Austin Convention Center (ACC) is within walking distance.

MARRIOTT ON THE RADAR

According to Colleen Phalen, CMP, CEM, senior director, meetings and conventions, American Association for Justice, the new hotel “was definitely a determining factor” in choosing

“Having additional rooms that close to the convention center will increase Los Angeles’ review and consideration (by groups).”

Ellen Shortill
Director, Convention and Meetings
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Rockville, MD

Among the highlights of the LEED Silver-certified hotel is a fifth-floor pool deck and bar, and interior design elements that celebrate the spirit of Austin and the state of Texas. “The hotel's infrastructure and design make it a perfect place to hold a self-contained meeting,” Phalen notes. “The meeting space is laid out perfectly for a group our size, and the technology fulfills the needs of the requirements we have for our show. I was also so impressed that the hotel was one that actually looked better when completed than the renderings. Preconstruction bookings can be a risk, but the JW delivered a top-notch product, and we are excited for our convention to come to the city.”

By 2017 the JW Marriott will be joined by another mammoth property in this progressive city, the 1,066-room Fairmont Austin, which broke ground last November. The Fairmont, featuring 100,000 sf of function space, will be located next to the ACC. Including the existing 800-room Hilton Austin, this trio of convention hotels will be a boon to the ACC, which has been



A new 775-room tower and function space will connect via bridge to the existing JW Marriott L.A. Live and Ritz-Carlton Los Angeles hotels.



Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center, which opens in August, is the largest convention center-hotel complex from Baltimore to Boston. MPI has selected the venue to host its 2016 World Education Conference — the first time MPI has hosted a conference in New Jersey.

underperforming in recent years. According to a 2013 market analysis by consulting service HVS, the ACC “currently operates at only 40 percent capacity due to a lack of hotel room availability for large conventions and events.”

Similarly, both Nashville's Convention Center and Music City Center will benefit from a new, 532-room JW Marriott Nashville in the downtown, expected to open in June 2017. And on the West Coast, the Los Angeles Convention Center (LACC) will be complemented by a greatly expanded JW Marriott L.A. Live by 2018. AEG is developing a 755-room tower that will connect to the existing 878-room JW Marriott L.A. Live and 123-room Ritz-Carlton Los Angeles hotels by means of a bridge across Olympic Boulevard. Also part of the project is an additional 75,000 sf of function space at the West Parking Garage Event Deck, linked via two short bridges to the existing approximately 100,000 sf of function space immediately to the north of the Event Deck.

PLANNER ADVISORS

While the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) will not likely be able to take advantage of L.A. Live's new tower for its 2017 convention at the LACC, Ellen Shortill, ASHA's director, convention and meetings, has been highly involved in the project in a consulting role. Also serving on the Customer Advisory Board for other cities, Shortill notes that Los Angeles “has been the only one to specifically invite me into the architectural design process and ask for more details than I've experienced other cities (ask for),” she relates. She and five



Rendering of the Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter Hotel & Expo Center.

Credit: Design by Nichols Brosch Wurff & Associates, Inc. (NBWW)

looked like it had been presented for some kind of an awards dinner. And several of us asked, 'How many meeting rooms can you break that into?' Convertible meeting space is everyone's favorite thing. And while the meeting space doesn't necessarily have to be all on one floor, it does need to be easily accessible from many directions. We discussed the fact that sometimes you have 'stacked' meeting space, which is fine, but if you only have one set of escalators, (you have a congestion problem) when 5,000 people try to go from level three to level one during 15–30 minute breaks between sessions."

With these kinds of discussions informing the JW Marriott L.A. Live's design, the final product surely will achieve high levels of customer satisfaction among meeting groups. "The JW with the expansion (will be) the obvious choice for people as the leadership or headquarters hotel because of the quantity of rooms," says Shortill. "Having additional rooms that close to the convention center will increase Los Angeles' review and consideration (by groups)."

MIAMI WORLD CENTER

A new 1,800-room Marriott Marquis will lead many association groups to take a fresh look at Miami, especially as the hotel will be part of the new, 27-acre Miami Worldcenter. Scheduled to break ground in the third quarter of this year and to be completed by the fall of 2018, the Worldcenter will house 600,000 sf of function space, including a 100,000-sf exhibition hall on the ground floor, a 65,000-sf main ballroom and a 1,500-seat theater. The Worldcenter's 765,000-sf shopping mall, anchored by Bloomingdale's and Macy's, would be a particular attraction to attendees of the Duty Free Show of the Americas, notes Michael Payne, executive director, International Association of Airport Duty Free Stores (IAADFS). "We're in a shopping environment with airport duty free stores, so it would have a nice synergy. But

other planners were recently on a call to discuss candidate ballroom designs for the new meeting space. "There was one really great graphic of a potential ballroom. It was stunning but clearly

Convention Hotel Renovations

Hotel renovations are so pervasive that it becomes challenging for any busy meeting planner to stay up to date. But it is considerably easier, and more important in the context of large association meetings, for planners to keep projects at major convention hotels on their radar. Two such projects are the recently completed renovation at the 1,298-room Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center and the in-progress renovation at the 963-room Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront. With 100,000 sf of meeting space at

the former property and 110,000 at the latter, each is well suited to either host conventions independently or support events at the local convention center.

The **Detroit Marriott**, connected to the Cobo Center by the People Mover, concluded a \$30 million guest room, meeting space and concierge lounge renovation last December. The one-year project sought to express Detroit's character in the guest room redesign, and the glass architectural features of the renovated meeting areas took inspiration from the Detroit River. Several



The newly renovated Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center offers 100,000 sf of meeting space, including The Ambassador Ballroom.

Credit: Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center



Hilton Cleveland Downtown, opening in 2016, will connect underground to the Cleveland Convention Center and the Global Center for Health Innovation.

Credit: Hilton Cleveland Downtown

the other aspect is that there are a lot of travelers from South America and other regions who look for shopping when they come to Florida. So if you've got a situation where people are coming to our show and bringing spouses or guests and they have an adjacent shopping area, to me that's a benefit."

The IAADFS has utilized Miami for board meetings and seminars, but currently the infrastructure is not ideal for the Duty Free Show, which brings in nearly 3,000 attendees. The Miami Beach Convention Center, with 500,000 sf of exhibit space, is too large for the group, Payne feels. "We wouldn't have the whole center so there would be another event going on at the same time, and we have a tendency to capture the space that we're in and turn it into our event," he explains. In addition, the hotel package would consist of multiple hotels. Both issues would be resolved with the Worldcenter and accompanying Marriott Marquis. "Obviously I haven't seen the final design of the Worldcenter, but my sense is that it would be the right size," he says. Rounding out the site choice advantages would be Miami's robust international airlift: "The flight connections into Miami are important for us," says Payne. "In this international business that we're in, we get a lot of Latin American and Caribbean traffic, as well as European traffic."

THROWING A HYATT INTO THE RING

Marriott is not the only major hotelier with new U.S. properties that will entice association meeting groups. Hilton will bring two properties on the market in 2016 that support the Cleveland Convention Center and Palm Beach County Convention Center, respectively. The 600-room Hilton Cleveland Downtown, opening June 2016, will house 46,000 sf of meeting space and feature a rooftop bar as well as underground connections to the Cleveland Convention Center and the Global Center for Health Innovation. The 400-room Hilton West Palm Beach is being built adjacent to the Palm Beach County Convention Center, and will offer two ballrooms, eight conference rooms and other function space.



The 400-room Hilton West Palm Beach is being built adjacent to the Palm Beach County Convention Center. It is slated to open in 2016.

Credit: Hilton West Palm Beach

of the hotel's 52 deluxe suites now have dedicated space for hosting small events. Significant high-tech additions for groups include new digital meeting signs and touchscreen reader boards in the main lobby and near the meeting room space on all three levels. These monitors provide details about events in the hotel as well as local conveniences and attractions, and are equipped with wayfinding capability.

Northeast Florida's largest convention hotel, the **Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront** is in the midst of a multimillion-dollar guest room renovation scheduled to be completed

in October. Similar in approach to the Detroit Marriott's guest room project, the Hyatt Regency's will evoke the local environment with hues and photography that express the beauty and tranquility of the St. Johns River. The project also includes renovations to the hotel's rooftop Fitness Center and Regency Club lounge, and the addition of six hard-walled meeting rooms on the fourth level of the hotel's Terrace Building. Attendees are sure to be pleased with the redone Regency Club, which will offer workstations overlooking the city skyline and a meeting room available for small gatherings.



The Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront is currently renovating all guest rooms.

Credit: Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

For up-to-the-minute news on new and renovated convention center hotels, visit www.themeetingmagazines.com. — PS



Tom Pellet
Meetings & Conventions Director
American Academy of
Family Physicians
Leawood, KS

“Obviously if Kansas City is going to compete for shows that are 5,000 or better total room nights, they’ve got to have the hotel package, the airlift package as well as the convention package.”

said Ronnie Burt, Visit KC president and CEO, in a press statement. “Over the last 10 years, Kansas City has lost out on hundreds of groups, representing millions of room nights and more than \$3 billion in economic impact.” Also in proximity to the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, the new headquarters hotel would offer groups approximately 75,000 sf of meeting, banquet and pre-convene space, and 9,000 sf of garden/terrace space. Amenities include restaurant and retail space, a 9,913-sf recreational facility and a 450–500-space parking facility.

“Obviously if Kansas City is going to compete for shows that are 5,000 or better total room nights, they’ve got to have the hotel package, the airlift package as well as the convention package,” notes Tom Pellet, director, meetings and conventions, the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP). “So the problem Kansas City has had up until now is they have a good facility as far as the convention center is concerned, but the number of rooms they have in the downtown corridor limits them being able to attract larger conventions.” While the American Academy of Family Physicians’ National Conference is regularly held at the Kansas City Convention Center, “we’re putting a hold on booking everything from 2018 on, in order to be able to take a look at whether the Hyatt goes up and exactly what their meeting space will be. And then we’ll negotiate with all the hotels accordingly,” Pellet explains.

The new hotel would considerably tighten the concentration of attendees residing around the center, and that is not only an advantage in terms of logistical convenience for delegates but also a cost-saver. “When a meeting planner is looking at a city, they’re going to look at the surrounding hotels, the quality of those hotels, their price and also their proximity to the center. The further out they are, the more they cost an organization because then they have to get involved in busing,” he explains. Furthermore, a headquarters hotel increases the options for meetings outside of the convention center due to the hotel’s own significant function space, and holding part of the event there can serve as leverage for contract negotiations with the hotelier. With about 5,000 medical residents and students coming in for the National Conference, the AAFP needs all the meeting space it can get: “We do several other meetings here in the hotels, and the hotels are limited in function space,” says Pellet.

The additional 75,000 sf of meeting space at the Hyatt would be a real game-changer, and that’s exactly what new convention hotels are to a city. They typically serve to make the city’s number of guest rooms proportionate to the amount of business the convention center is doing, or at least to concentrate more rooms and hotel meeting space in proximity to the center, which is generally attractive to association planners. It is encouraging to see many cities, both first and second tier, partnering with tried-and-true, upscale hoteliers to raise their profile in the convention market.

Developers are also planning a 225-seat restaurant, fitness center and landscaped pool area with cabanas.

A proposed Hyatt convention hotel would support the Kansas City Convention Center by bringing 800 guest rooms situated directly across from the center’s Grand Ballroom. Construction

is scheduled to begin next year with completion by 2018. “This announcement is a game-changer for the KC hospitality industry,”



Construction will begin next year on a proposed Hyatt convention hotel across from the Kansas City Convention Center. (Inset) The west entrance street view of the Hyatt as seen from the Grand Ballroom of the convention center.



Credits: Kansas City CVB

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Top Attendee Engagement Tactics

Savvy Planners Use New Tools to 'Expand and Enhance' the Experience

By John Buchanan

In the meetings arena, no topic is more prevalent today than attendee engagement. And as the list of options provided by rapidly evolving technology continues to grow almost daily, a key issue becomes a focus on the tools and tactics that work best. And what works for one association meeting planner might not work as well for another.

But there is wide consensus among planners on one key point: A successful meeting is now defined by genuine attendee engagement more than it is by any other factor.

"Attendee engagement is a big topic and it is changing very quickly now," says Renee Radabaugh, president and managing director of Delray Beach, Florida-based Paragon Events, a 25-year-old event planning and association management company. "So because of that, there is a lot of 'noise' out there about it. And by 'noise,' I don't mean that as a bad thing. I mean there is a lot of conversation about what is going on when it comes to the idea of attendee engagement. There are so many buzz words now, like gamification, that are used to imply that there is a structure to all of this stuff. But it's really something that's all over the place in terms of what you either want to do or can actually do."

There is a much greater appreciation among associations and

their meeting planners of the ever-expanding role of technology tools in driving attendee engagement and a growing awareness that meetings are becoming a multidimensional experience, notes Marie Hunter, senior director, meetings, conferences and events at the Piscataway, New Jersey-based Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), the world's largest professional association dedicated to advancing technological innovation and excellence for the benefit of humanity. "So we don't have to be afraid of new tools that accomplish that or the fact that they will expand and enhance conversation."

Furthermore, the notion of continuous engagement before, during and after the meeting is now an established best practice, and the tools are in place to be able to do that, Hunter says. "And so the more savvy associations and planners now use those tools to create '360-degree' awareness around the meeting throughout that cycle," she says. "But at the same time, there is also room for growth in terms of doing all that and creating a robust conversation that is ongoing."

From a planner perspective, Hunter says, "the most important issue is how to grow your skill set professionally, or to partner with others who have the skills to do a better job. It's now quite easy for planners to get up to speed on using specific tools. But then the issue becomes how they fill that gap between finding

and developing relevant content and curating that for their audience. It almost becomes a sort of 'editorial' function. In our organization, we are doing that now. But I don't think it's being done very widely yet."

As Hunter sees it, the two key ingredients in the recipe for innovation in terms of attendee engagement are truly excellent content and robust conversations about it. "And today, if you do not have both those things," she says, "you will erode your audience and not have the level of engagement you want."

Corbin Ball, a leading meeting industry technology expert and consultant based in Bellingham, Washington, says the critical issue today is one of semantics and perception.

Ball cites what he says is an emerging transition from the age-old term meeting "attendees" to meeting "participants." In other words, he says, the relatively passive perception of attendance is being eclipsed by the precise and all-important notion of full participation, enabled by the ever-increasing array of technology tools that foster that level of involvement.

There also are different levels of engagement, Ball says. "If you're talking about engagement in the meeting room, that's one level," he says. "Then there's the overall sense of engagement at the event." Then, too, there is the level of engagement with colleagues and peers — before, during and after the event. So for many planners and meeting hosts, Ball says, the notion of engagement begins on the day the meeting is announced and carries forward far into the future once the meeting is over.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The explosion of social media is one of two primary drivers that have redefined the notion of participant engagement at meetings, Ball says. "And it has opened all sorts of doors that allow you to engage people and get them talking about the meeting, including giving their input before, during and after the event. But the other big change is that while meetings used to be driven by a 'top down' (dynamic), now they are 'bottom up.'"

That inverted reality, by definition, is a result of engagement that has directly generated ever-increasing interest in being part of the creation and presentation of the meeting, rather than just attending the meeting.

At the same time, however, the ongoing proliferation of social media creates a challenge for many planners, Radabaugh says. "And that challenge is that there are so many social media tools out there now. You have the obvious ones like Facebook and Twitter, then you have newer ones like Tumblr and Foursquare. The list just goes on and on. And sometimes, it's a matter of the economics of it and what your budget is. But you also have to look at the outcome you want and then (assess) that against what a particular tool can do."

There also are very good tools, such as Constant Contact, that are usually not thought of as social media or engagement tools in

"The more savvy associations and planners now use those tools (for continuous engagement) to create '360-degree' awareness around the meeting throughout that cycle."



Marie Hunter
Senior Director, Meetings
Conferences and Events
IEEE
Piscataway, NJ

the same sense that Facebook or Twitter are, Radabaugh says. "But we use it a lot and it is a great engagement tool if you use it right."

Meanwhile, there also are well-defined extremes, at either end of the performance spectrum, in terms of how well meeting planners and hosts use technology for attendee engagement, Radabaugh points out. "On the one hand, it is absolutely imperative now that you use social media tools," she says. "But on the other hand, I think that a lot of associations do a mediocre job of it — at best. And because most people have what amounts to a 7-second attention span now, it's very important that you know what you're doing and that you do it right if you want to engage people and have them stay engaged. If you don't capture their attention right off the bat and give them something that makes them want to come back for more, there will be a dozen other things competing for their attention."

THE MOBILE REVOLUTION

The second major driver of engagement cited by Ball is mobile technology, which is transforming the Internet in general and not just in terms of meetings.

"Mobile technology is really what allows engagement to happen during the meeting," Ball says. "In addition to using social media, people are taking pictures or sending Tweets and doing other things that involve them in the event. And then there is a whole list of specialized apps that get people involved in the meeting, such as the things that allow for polling or other forms of feedback in real time during the event."

Mobile technology and the emergence of smartphones have increasingly brought engagement tactics directly into the meeting room. "It used to be that meeting organizers and speakers wanted you to turn off your phone in the meeting room," Ball says. "Now they want you to leave them on because of all the things you can do with them during the meeting that help keep you engaged."

Radabaugh cautions that although virtually all associations and their meeting planners are now trying to create some kind of mobile app, "there is no such thing as 'one size fits all' when it comes



Daeger uses QR codes on extremely detailed posters: “They have scientific references and lots of charts and graphs. They are very visual presentations of the research that has been conducted.”

Rachel Daeger, CAE
Associate Director
Society for Nutrition, Education
and Behavior
Indianapolis, IN

to these things. You have to know exactly what you want to do and why you want to do it.”

As a result, she recommends getting professional guidance from a vendor, rather than relying on a do-it-yourself, off-the-shelf approach.

GAMIFICATION

One of Radabaugh’s primary tools is gamification.

But, she adds, it should not be used as a mere curiosity that is currently very fashionable. “You really have to understand what it is,” she says. “And again, one key to using it properly is that you have to create good content. You can’t just say, ‘Go on this scavenger hunt and earn points.’” In other words, she says, planners have to think of it as an important engagement tool and use it for a precise purpose, not just to have some fun.

Radabaugh’s preferred gamification vendor for the last six years has been Play With a Purpose, which helped pioneer the very concept almost a decade ago — long before it became the red-hot tactic it is today.

The most fundamental key to its successful deployment, Radabaugh says, is fully understanding that its real purpose is to steer a particular kind of behavior, such as attending what is perceived as the most important session at the meeting or directing attendees to the show floor and the exhibits of major sponsors.

“But another important use is to get people to absorb and remember as much important information as we can,” Radabaugh says. “And in order to do that, you have to make it fun. So another way to understand and use it is to think of it as using the principles of a ‘game’ to have people take a deep dive into the information you want them to remember.”

Related to that is the fact that the essence of the game must in some way be directly connected — and relevant — to a particular objective of the meeting and support retention of that goal-related content. It can’t just be about “winning a T-shirt,” Radabaugh says. “If you haven’t created real interest in and credibility for what you’re trying to accomplish, then it was just a goofy game. But on

the other hand, if you use gamification right, the engagement that it produces is astounding.”

SECOND-SCREEN TECHNOLOGY

Yet another highly innovative and powerful engagement tool is second-screen technology, which simply means using more than one device for more than one function. For example, attendees can follow a speaker’s presentation on a laptop or tablet while using a smartphone to respond to poll questions or send live Tweets as a form of interactivity.

Another way to think of it is that attendees can watch or follow one thing while doing something else.

Hunter agrees with Ball that second-screen technology is now a key tactic for planners who truly understand the full dimensions of participant engagement during meeting sessions. “And I don’t even call it second-screen anymore,” she says. “I see it as multiscreen.”

For example, a third screen could bring in feedback from remote participants back at company headquarters or in a regional or overseas office. “You shouldn’t just think of it as multiple screens,” Hunter says. “Think of it as a multidimensional experience.”

And for a tech-savvy association meeting planner, she says, it is not a trend. It is a mainstream best practice.

Her current idea of genuine next-generation innovation is to use Google Hangout to engage people from multiple locations and then live-stream that via YouTube and use Twitter to send questions and get feedback.

Rachel Daeger, associate director of the Society for Nutrition, Education and Behavior (SNEB) in Indianapolis, has started using what she considers a top engagement tactic: QR codes.

She uses them to give attendees easy access to posters mounted in meeting rooms that serve as supplemental onsite materials to support articles published by researchers in SNEB’s professional journal.

“The posters are extremely detailed,” Daeger says. “They have scientific references and lots of charts and graphs. They are very visual presentations of the research that has been conducted. And the authors are there to discuss the posters with attendees.”

Although the posters are published online, they have long and complex URLs that often lead to mistakes when typing them into a browser, so Daeger uses abbreviated URLs created at Google’s Goo.gl site to link to QR codes that make onsite capture into smartphones or tablets quick and easy.

Another of Daeger’s current go-to tools is Keyhole.co, which allows SNEB to track Twitter reach before and during a meeting.

“Our members are heavy Twitter users,” Daeger says, explaining that Keyhole.co is a dashboard tool that is set up before the meeting to track and report on use of SNEB’s meeting hashtag before and at the event. Keyhole.co updates in real time and is used specifically to track the reach of a particular hashtag — how many attendees are reached by that hashtag.

Daeger also uses the tool before the meeting to track use of the meeting hashtag and track Tweets. After the meeting, Daeger says, it also serves as a broader engagement tool, especially for reaching and identifying influencers and then recruiting them to promote next year’s conference. It also can be used after the conference to see which topics and sessions generated the most interest among attendees, which allows improved content planning for next year’s event.

CONTENT IS NO. 1 TACTIC

Despite the constant expansion of the universe of technology tools used to engage attendees, the simple fact remains that one basic tactic trumps all of them.

“Content is king,” Radabaugh says. “And most of the time, meeting planners and the host association are not putting in the time and energy to really build great content. They say things as simple as, ‘Come to our meeting, where you’re going to learn how to achieve your potential.’”

If that is your message, she says, it’s not very exciting and it’s not going to truly engage many people in today’s business world. “The real issue is the ability to tell people, very precisely, why they should come to the meeting and what you want them to take away from it,” Radabaugh says. “That’s the starting point when it

comes to engaging people and keeping them engaged.” And the opposite also is true: If you fail to engage someone from the start, Radabaugh stresses, it is going to become increasingly difficult to ever truly engage them.

“The other issue I see today is that a lot of people also ask, ‘Well, whose responsibility is it to engage people?’” Radabaugh says. “And the answer is that it’s everybody’s responsibility — the organizer or planner, the association that is hosting the meeting and the attendees, who should be engaging each other.”

At the same time, meeting attendees will continue to drive an important element of the debate over what constitutes effective engagement. And such discussion will be dictated by the constantly evolving role of technology.

“As more and more of these tools become available, and as more and more people think of themselves as active participants in the meeting, as opposed to just being attendees, I think they will continue to expect more and more of these kinds of capabilities,” Ball says. “In their lives outside the meeting, they are doing these types of things on a daily basis, so they will increasingly expect the same level of ability to connect with people at meetings. So that’s why planners and speakers will have to think more and more about how to use these tools to improve the quality of their events.”

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Convene Overseas?

By Patrick Simms

How Planners Manage Meetings Outside Their Comfort Zone

Two of the Scotland's many memorable venues for corporate group events include Kingmills Hotel in Inverness, which offers seven grand event spaces; and (inset) Inveraray Castle on Scotland's West Coast.

Many association planners are used to working within their domestic comfort zones, regularly circulating the annual meeting among well-known U.S. cities and facilities. But new developments in an organization's membership and/or the field it represents can motivate an international site choice, requiring a planner to step out of that comfort zone.

FACILITATING INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION

Both of these drivers have been in place at the Chicago, Illinois-based Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), which will be holding its Annual Conference in 2017 in Glasgow, Scotland — the first overseas conference since the society's early years. "This year the SAH is celebrating its 75th anniversary, and as we are growing by leaps and bounds in our international membership, we thought it was the right thing to do to host an international conference," explains Kathy Sturm, director of programs. "It's a goal moving forward into the next 75-plus years to expand the opportunity to our global membership, especially those who just cannot afford to travel to the U.S., for whom it may be more affordable to travel to Scotland." Developments in the SAH's field also justify international site choices: Sturm identifies a "growing interest in international topics," such as Asian and German architecture, evinced by the scholarly papers being submitted. "We felt that Glasgow presented a very intriguing case of a city that has reinvented itself over the years and incorporated modern architecture in with historic architecture," Sturm says.

Similarly, Chicago-based PRISM International (Professional Records and Information Services Management), a trade association for the commercial information management industry, is considering staging events in new international locales in response to developments in its field. "Those associations that are less U.S. or North America focused are realizing that the growth of industry and potential attendees is really overseas, and they are putting money toward developing their level of education overseas," says Darlene Somers, CMP, senior meetings manager at Association Management Center, which plans conferences for PRISM. "The movement from paper to virtual is spreading across the globe, and PRISM International is really looking at widening their reach to include India and Asia-Pacific. So we have to focus on an area where the industry is either really hot for the association or an area where we feel like we can develop the industry more. But we also have to select cities that people are willing to travel to."

UNPREDICTABLE TURNOUT

In moving with the trend of globalizing memberships and industries, planners may end up choosing sites where meetings have an unpredictable turnout, either favorably or unfavorably.

"This year the SAH is celebrating its 75th anniversary, and as we are growing by leaps and bounds in our international membership, we thought it was the right thing to do to host an international conference."



Kathy Sturm
Director of Programs
Society of Architectural Historians
Chicago, IL

Of course, that element of uncertainty is part of stepping outside one's comfort zone and taking meetings to new frontiers.

For example, Jessica Wong, conference officer for The Cognitive Science Society, University of Texas - Austin's department of psychology, notes a lower turnout for the society's first annual meeting outside of North America and Europe. The meeting is held three years in North America and one year in Europe to reflect a membership that is about two-thirds North American and one-third European. But the 2012 meeting in Sapporo, Japan, was "a nod to our Asian membership," says Wong. "We picked Sapporo because our Asian membership is strongest there. But the issue was that we had one of our lowest attendances: still over 800, but not at that 1,000-plus level we normally get. For many students (travel expenses) were a bit out of the price range."

On the positive side, the following conference, 2013 in Berlin, saw the society's highest turnout at 1,300, due in part to "the rebound effect for those that hadn't gone to CogSci the year before," says Wong. And even if an association experiences a lower than expected attendance at a new international site choice, the exposure to a new region and the greater engagement for a certain geographic segment of the membership can benefit the association.

KEEPING COSTS DOWN

The other side of maximizing ROI is controlling costs for global meetings, and Sturm has seen this objective become easier to attain with the incentives that some cities are offering groups. "Part of the reason we looked at an international destination was that there seems to be a more embracing opportunity to take conferences outside of the U.S., with more benefits being offered to organizations that come from other countries," she says. "There are benefits offered by Scotland, and as an organization, that's very cost-conscious — we wanted to be able to tap those benefits and opportunities. It almost becomes a responsibility." Keeping costs down for delegates is particularly important in associations with a significant academic membership, such as the SAH. "With the limitations in funding to attend scholarly conferences over the years, we're constantly looking at ways to keep our costs as low as possible so they are all able to attend," says Sturm, who is working



Darlene Somers, CMP
Senior Meetings Manager
Association Management Center
Chicago, IL

“We have to focus on an area where the industry is either really hot for the association or an area where we feel like we can develop the industry more. But we also have to select cities that people are willing to travel to.”

place like a convention center does,” says Wong. “To get a hold of people and make sure things are set and ready tends to take a bit longer. Convention center and hotel venues, even though they cost us a little extra, definitely help us when it comes to planning and execution.”

While there are plenty of affordable international cities with convention infrastructures that may work for a given association group, some are more marketable than others. And planners certainly want a city with some tourism appeal. “I think it’s an ongoing battle for meeting planners to find wallet-friendly cities that are also a draw,” observes Heather M. Seasholtz, CMP, director, meetings and events with Talley Management Group. “We often look at the second- and third-tier cities in Europe. For example, Lisbon, Portugal and Manchester, England, are becoming very popular destinations that don’t have the high price point of Paris or Vienna. Nice, France, although it can be expensive, is still an easy flight hop for our attendees (and lacks the Paris pricing.” Somers notes that in general, Europe is becoming more affordable for groups as the euro “gets closer in parity to the U.S. dollar.”

with Visit Scotland and the Glasgow city bureau to secure negotiated rates at a variety of lodging options, from hotels to hostels and campus housing. The conference venue likely will be the University of Strathclyde, says Sturm.

For similar reasons, affordability is the top site search criterion for the Cognitive Science Society, but the organization forgoes the savings that can come with university meeting venues. “We tried to use a university venue a couple of years ago, and the problem was that university settings don’t have the infrastructure in

Meeting Across the Pond

The Chicago, Illinois-based Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) will be holding its Annual Conference in 2017 in Glasgow, Scotland. It will be the first overseas conference since the society’s early years, and the incentives offered to the group by the city paved the way for the site choice, remarks Kathy Sturm, director of programs. But Scotland is doing much more than that to attract tourism and meeting groups. The tourism industry is expecting \$8 billion in investments across the country this year, including new hotels, venues, group activities and technologies. For example, the National Museum of Scotland has announced \$15.5 million

in funding to open 10 new galleries across the country by 2016. And in Glasgow, delegates can now take advantage of new apps by Guide Me Tours designed for the exploration of Floors Castle in Glasgow; Traquair House in Innerleithen; Abbotsford in Melrose; Thirlestane Castle near Lauder; and Inveraray Castle in the town of Inveraray. Following is a sampling of new meetings industry developments in other Scottish cities:

Edinburgh. Scotland’s capital has launched a citywide reward scheme for convention delegates consisting of a card and supporting app entitling them to a variety of exclusive offers from 55 of the city’s most iconic venues and businesses. In addition, the four-star, 120-room Mercure Hotel Gardner’s Crescent opened this spring near the Edinburgh International Conference Centre. Scotch aficionados will note that the Scotch Whisky Experience recently launched the Scotch Whisky

The Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre.



Edinburgh International Conference Centre.

Experience tour, with new private event suites available.

Inverness. The Kingsmills Hotel underwent a \$7.8 million expansion, adding 40 guest rooms, 13 Garden Rooms and a 4,413-sf event space.

Perthshire. The Gleneagles Hotel opened the 26,909-sf Gleneagles Arena this spring. The venue accommodates groups of 500-2,000 and includes four indoor tennis courts.

Aberdeen. The Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre recently retained Gold accreditation from the Green Tourism Programme, making it the first venue in Aberdeen to achieve the Gold Award.

— PS

SOURCING ONSITE VENDORS

Site selection is only the first hurdle in planning a successful global meeting; a subsequent challenge is the sourcing of onsite vendors. CVBs, tourist boards, DMCs and international hotel sales reps all can offer referrals, but colleagues are also an important touchstone. “PCMA has a really great global professionals group and cohesive communication among that group,” Somers says. “So I can reach out to a number of people to say, ‘Hey, I’m doing a program in Amsterdam; give me your three best options for AV companies you guys have worked with.’ What my peers tell me has carried a lot of weight.”

Sourcing offsite venues for special events also can be facilitated through peer referrals. However, many budget-conscious associations bypass these events, as do some medical associations, especially those with physician attendees where the PhRMA Code must be followed. “With medical budgets being the way they are, it’s hard to do the offsite events, and medical is very different than it was 10 years ago, when the focus wasn’t so much on the pharmaceutical spending,” Seasholtz explains. Yet there are simple ways to express the local culture at the meeting that do not involve venue rental or excessive ancillary spending. At



Jessica Wong
Conference Officer
Cognitive Science Society
Department of Psychology
University of Texas - Austin

“We picked Sapporo because our Asian membership is strongest there. But the issue was that we had one of our lowest attendances. ...For many students (travel expenses) were a bit out of the price range.”

an association meeting in Nice, for example, Talley Management Group presented delegates with some of the splendid pastries the city is known for. “We try to bring in (the local culture) on any design elements of the program, such as the music being played as attendees walk in,” Seasholtz says. “That’s where we’re able to bring it in on a budget.”

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

In many destinations, a language unfamiliar to attendees will be part of the culture, but planners can take measures to ensure they are not inconvenienced by communication barriers. If possible, airports without English signage should be avoided, or attendees should be provided with information on how to navigate the airport. “Many of our people do speak English and are looking

“We often look at the second- and third-tier cities in Europe. For example, Lisbon, Portugal and Manchester, England, are becoming very popular destinations that don’t have the high price point of Paris or Vienna.”



Heather M. Seasholtz, CMP
Director, Meetings and Events
Talley Management Group
Chicago, IL

for that on the signage to get to baggage claim etc.,” says Seasholtz. Wong has also found it helpful to fully inform attendees of transportation options from the airport to the meeting site or hotels. “Cab is the obvious option but then others, such as train, subway or bus. What’s been particularly great is when the tourist board gives us a discount off of the shuttle service.”

As far as the professionals that planners work with overseas, there will seldom be language barriers, as English, “the language of business,” is generally spoken. “We often engage a PCO (professional congress organizer) when we’re outside of the U.S., and many times that’s to assist us with the housing and registration components, and any transportation needs,” says Cathy Vjeh, CMP, director of global events for the Skokie, Illinois-based International Society for Stem Cell Research. “My experience has been that many times the account managers or salespeople that you’re working with are fairly fluent in English. We do make it a point to mention that any kind of a technician or individual that would be working with us directly onsite needs to either be fluent in English or have access to an English speaker who can assist us,” she adds. Says Seasholtz, “When you’re onsite in the city there could be (communication) issues along the way, but that’s when you rely on your convention services manager to help communicate down through the ranks.” Wong reports that she has overall “been quite impressed with the level of proficiency that non-native speakers in the travel and hospitality industry have with the English language.”

NON-STANDARD CONTRACTS

Somers describes a cultural barrier she has experienced in the European hotel industry with regard to contracts. “The standards for contracts are not necessarily the same in a European city,” she says. “What are considered to be standard group clauses in America that nobody would even blink at can be red flags for companies over there.” For example, one hotelier insisted on a 30-day cancellation policy for those booking inside the group’s block, instead of the normal 24-hour policy, which the hotel maintained for non-group business. Somers felt that this much less favorable policy effectively offset the savings advantage of booking inside

the block. "And it wasn't just a one-night cancellation, it would be for the entire length of stay. I tried to work with the hotel and explain why that would be seen as more of a penalty," Somers says. "But trying to explain that different perspective was incredibly time-consuming. The hotel wants to make sure that they're not left holding the bag financially. I want to make sure that my attendees see value in staying inside of the block. I'm not exaggerating that it was probably an eight-week conversation. It was

incredibly helpful that my national sales office in Chicago got involved and were the third party in the conversation. We eventually compromised on a seven-day cancellation policy, but that was a huge cultural barrier."

Fortunately, the cultural differences groups will encounter when meeting overseas are generally positive and rewarding, on both personal and professional levels.

(See related story on page 8.)

AC&F

Panama and Mexico Updates

Panama. Holding a conference in Panama City, a burgeoning international financial and business center, confers a host of benefits centering on the fact that it is the world's second largest Free Trade Zone, according to Phelps Hope, CMP, senior vice president of meetings and expositions for Kellen Meetings (see AC&F December/January 2015). That means that the U.S. dollar is used as legal tender. In addition, he noted, "Panama offers an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax exemption, which allows U.S. companies to deduct expenses for meetings held there."

The city has experienced a hotel boom, fueling its growth in the meetings, conventions and incentive market. Currently offering some 13,000 hotel rooms, Panama City's notable hotel openings in the past few years include The Westin Playa Bonita, offering 611 rooms and 65,000 sf of meeting space;



The Cancun Center will complete a renovation in June 2016.

Hilton Panama, with 347 rooms and 30,000 sf of meeting space; Trump Ocean Club International Hotel & Tower, with 369 rooms and 45,000 sf of meeting space; and Hard Rock Hotel Panama Megapolis, with 1,500 hotel rooms and 10th floor meeting space that features sweeping views of the city skyline and accommodates from 14 to 560 attendees. The Hard Rock and the 240-room Radisson Decapolis Panama are connected to the Megapolis Convention Center by elevated walkways. The Megapolis

Convention Center, which is located in the Multicentro Mall, features an 11,811-sf Grand Ballroom that can be divided into nine separate meeting rooms and can accommodate 3,000 attendees. The Megapolis complex also features the Majestic Casino.

Mexico. The Cancun Center, located in the heart of

Cancun's Hotel Zone, is in the midst of a makeover that began last fall and is expected to be completed in June 2016. Interior meeting spaces and common areas already have been upgraded, with design concepts inspired by the natural elements of the Caribbean. In 2014 the center hosted 12 major conferences and 13,000 meeting and convention delegates; the 2015 calendar of events includes 19 large conferences with approximately 23,000 participants. The Cancun Center has 700,000 sf of exhibition space.

Los Cabos, which currently boasts more than 50 resorts with more than 14,000 guest rooms combined in San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas, is expected to add more than 3,000 hotel rooms over the next three years. In the works in 2015 is a JW Marriott; coming in 2016 are The Hard Rock Hotel, Vie Vage by Auberge, Le Blanc Spa & Resort and others; and in 2017, Nobu Hotel, Ritz-Carlton Resort, Montage and Solaz. The Los Cabos Convention Center offers 72,000 sf of meeting space, which accommodates up to 5,000 people. **C&IT**



The Hard Rock Hotel Panama Megapolis.

Credit: Hard Rock Hotel Panama

Credit: Cancun Center



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PACE

The Westin New York Grand Central has appointed **Kerstin Pace** as director of sales and marketing. She was director of sales and marketing for The Westin Dublin.

Wynn Las Vegas has promoted **Steve Blanner** to vice president of sales and **Pedram Pakneshan** to executive director of convention sales. Blanner was executive director of convention sales and services. Pakneshan was most recently director of convention sales.

Visit Baton Rouge has named **Jazz Traylor** as senior sales manager. He was senior event manager at the River Center in Baton Rouge.

Loews Regency San Francisco has named **Austin Phillips** as director of sales



TRAYLOR

and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing for Stanford Court San Francisco.

Discover Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, has named **Suzanne K. Stianche** as national sales manager. Previously, she worked in marketing communications for Air Products in Lehigh Valley.

Sarah Singer Gagnon was appointed as director of group sales for the New Orleans Marriott. She was director of sales and marketing for Wyndham New Orleans French Quarter.

Hyatt Regency St. Louis at The Arch has appointed **Carrie Stremsterfer** as associate director of sales, responsible for large convention business. She most recently



PHILLIPS



GAGNON

opened the new Hilton Garden Inn Washington DC/Georgetown.

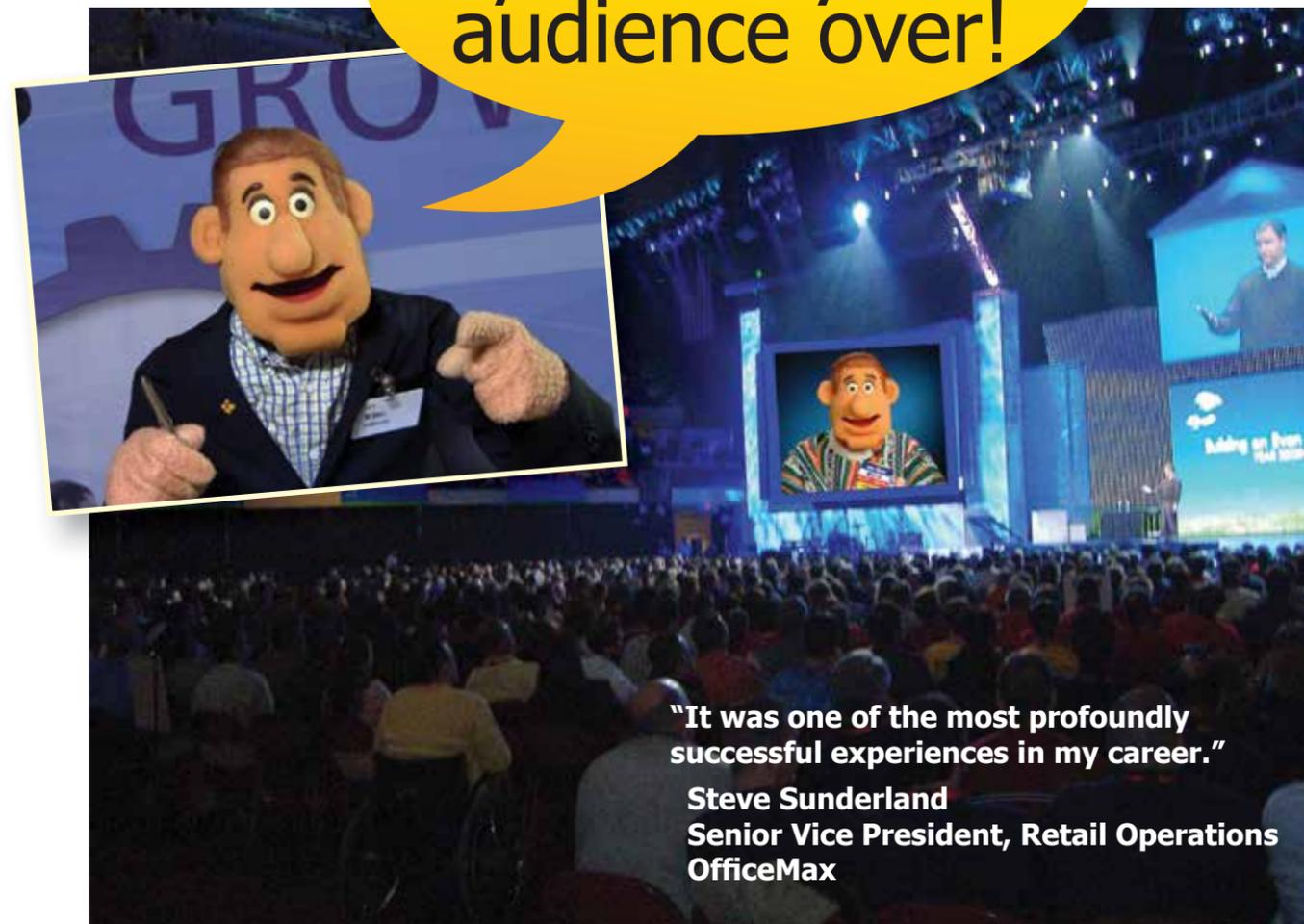
The Wilmington and Beaches Convention & Visitors Bureau, Wilmington, North Carolina, has promoted **John W. Sneed II, CHSP**, to vice president of sales and services. He previously served as the CVB's director of convention sales. **Molly Johnson, CMP**, and **Amy Higgins** were named senior sales managers. Johnson was with the Hilton Wilmington Riverside. Higgins was in sales with the Oklahoma City CVB.

The Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau has promoted **Keri Willard** to sales manager in the convention development department. She was a convention sales assistant. AC&F



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