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Stephen E. Peeler
Vice President, Development
ASAE Foundation

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Their Game**
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Credit: (Background) Jason Keen

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Something for Everyone



As an association meeting planner, you know all too well the ongoing challenges of motivating attendees to engage in the sea of sessions and events offered at your annual meeting. But imagine if you're an association foundation executive tasked with enticing some of those same attendees to attend your foundation affairs that are taking place at the very same jam-packed annual meeting? What's more, foundations can't rely on membership dues to sustain them — they rely instead on contributions from members, partners and organizations — so the success of these events is vital.

"The challenge for us becomes not the format of the fundraising event at our annual meeting," says Stephen E. Peeler, vice president, development for the ASAE Foundation, who appears on our cover. "The challenge for us, as with any association foundation, is how do you distinguish yourself from the rest of the buzz and activities that are taking place at annual meetings? You're going to have vendors that are taking clients out, you're going to have committees that have to have meetings and the evenings are just about all you have, unless you do it pre or post annual conference."

He says that the keys to success come down to being able to offer something for everyone, and to offer a high level of donor recognition and access. "The two things they tell us they want most out of their donor benefits are access and visibility," Peeler says. "We're trying to position our foundation as a very high touch, very exclusive organization to be affiliated with." The ASAE Foundation's "something for everyone" at the 2015 annual meeting included the annual golf and tennis classic; the ASAE Donor Reception; a VIP Q&A with Josh Linkner; Leadership & Headshot Lounge; and ASAE Foundation's: The Classic.

Learn more about how Peeler and other association foundation executives are managing their fundraising events in our feature on page 26. As Joe Garecht, founder of The Fundraising Authority says in our story, "What I always tell people is, if you believe in what you're doing, it's important that you have a foundation and that it makes money so that you can accomplish things, then you really owe it to yourself and your association to think big about it."

Speaking of "big," this issue has "something for everyone" — it's jam-packed with special features covering a range of timely topics aimed at helping you meet those ongoing challenges of planning association meetings and conventions.

Harvey Grotzky
Publisher

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Renaissance Chicago Downtown Hotel Continues Multimillion-Dollar Renovation

CHICAGO, IL — The Renaissance Chicago Downtown Hotel is set to complete its \$8 million phase two renovation by March 2016. A brand new ballroom boasting views of the Chicago River, an additional 4,000 sf of meeting space and a new bar with inspiring city views are part of the updates. Located on the third floor of the hotel, the indoor/outdoor terrace bar seats 60 guests and features fire pits and authentic design features including glass, iron, greenery and reclaimed wood elements. The bar's additional event space, Urban Blue, allows for private events.

The hotel's elegant, 3,000-sf Looking Glass Ballroom will feature floor-to-ceiling windows showcasing views of Chicago's cityscape. The hotel also is refreshing and increasing the size of the junior ballroom space, Cloud Gate Ballroom.

Renaissance Chicago Downtown Hotel completed phase one in April 2015, with the unveiling of the \$24 mil-



The Renaissance Chicago Downtown Hotel.

lion lobby and guest room transformation. The revamped lobby's high-low design approach pairs luxurious high-end finishes with raw, gritty, concrete and graffiti-inspired surfaces. Experiential works of art by homegrown artists are

placed to intrigue; CTA bus-inspired windows from the early 1950s serve as a gateway into the chef's display kitchen at Staytion Market and Bar, the hotel's first-floor dining concept.

www.renaissancechicagodowntown.com

Denver Voters Approve Expansion of the Colorado Convention Center



Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock and Visit Denver President and CEO Richard Scharf (r) celebrate the approval of an expansion of the Colorado Convention Center.

DENVER, CO — Denver voters overwhelmingly approved an expansion of the Colorado Convention Center by passing a special initiative on November 3, 2015. The funds generated by extending current taxes that are set to expire in 2023 will go toward an expansion of the Colorado Convention Center and for construction of a new National Western Center that will be a year-round events, entertainment and educational facility. The new National Western Center also will be the home of Denver's oldest and largest event, the National Western Stock Show & Rodeo.

"We're thrilled to have the support of the people of Denver behind our city's convention and tourism industry," said Richard Scharf, president & CEO of Visit Denver, The Convention & Visitors Bureau. This is the third time in recent years that Denver voters have strongly supported the travel industry, having previously approved an expansion of the convention center in 1999 and an increase in tourism marketing dollars in 2005.

The future expansions and upgrades to the Colorado Convention Center will include the development of new flexible meeting space of up to 85,000 sf and the addition of 120,000 sf of new prefunction and service space, including a 50,000-sf outdoor terrace, all to be located on the roof of the existing convention center.

Visit Denver has launched an informational website at CCCExpansion.com to provide ongoing updates about the project. www.visitdenver.com

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Paul Ouimet Named Managing Director of DMAI's DestinationNEXT

WASHINGTON, DC — Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) has contracted Paul Ouimet to



Ouimet

be the managing director of the organization's DestinationNEXT initiative. Ouimet, who is the founder and CEO of NEXTFactor Enterprises Inc.,

was instrumental in the development of the DestinationNEXT phase one research and the architect of the scenario model and online assessment tool.

The evolving role of destination marketing organizations (DMOs) is undergoing unprecedented shifts due to systemic changes in travel consumer behavior and expectations, advances in technology and digital communications, and market forces demanding that DMOs develop sophisticated business models to support these ongoing changes. The DestinationNEXT initiative, launched in 2014, provides a scientific roadmap for DMOs to navigate this future, with insight culled from 327 participating DMOs in 36 countries.

Ouimet will lead industry workshops to help DMOs integrate these insights into their strategic planning. "It's an honor to advance my work with DMAI on the DestinationNEXT initiative," said Ouimet. "DestinationNEXT revealed transformational opportunities for DMOs to raise their profile and become more engaged in their local community. And the DMOs who we have worked with to capitalize on these opportunities are gaining a competitive advantage. I look forward to sharing that with the entire industry." (See related story on page 18.)

www.destinationmarketing.org

San Francisco Travel Introduces 'Meeting Neighborhoods'

SAN FRANCISCO, CA — The San Francisco Travel Association is introducing the San Francisco Meeting Neighborhood Network Connections — hotels and venues in unique parts of the city that work together to offer greater amounts of meeting spaces and guest rooms than a single hotel can provide.



D'Alessandro

"While Moscone Center is being expanded, San Francisco has increased hotel availability for 2016, 2017 and 2018. With the Neighborhood Network Connections, meeting planners can find flexible meeting space and accommodations for up to 2,500 on peak nights," said Joe D'Alessandro, president and CEO of the San Francisco Travel Association. "Attendees benefit by having an intimate neighborhood experience with the amenities of a citywide meeting."

The San Francisco Downtown Connection is comprised of four adjacent hotels with a combined 195,200 sf of function space (Hilton San Francisco Union Square, Park 55 San Francisco-A Hilton Hotel, the Hotel Nikko San Francisco and the Handlery Union Square Hotel) in the Union Square area.

The Nob Hill Connection offers five luxury hotels and more than 170,000 sf of function space (the Fairmont San Francisco, InterContinental Mark Hopkins San Francisco, Stanford Court San Francisco, The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco and the Scarlet Huntington).

Two of San Francisco's largest hotels, the Westin St. Francis and the Grand Hyatt San Francisco, comprise the Union Square Alliance with 86,000 sf of function space.

Three hotels in the South of Market area with 155,000 sf of function space (the Four Seasons Hotel San Francisco, San Francisco Marriott Marquis and Park Central Hotel San Francisco) make up the SOMA One Connection. SOMA is a seamless indoor/outdoor location near the soon-to-reopen San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of the African Diaspora and other institutions. For more information, visit www.sanfrancisco.travel/article/neighborhood-network-connections.

Caesars Palace Announces New Julius Tower

LAS VEGAS, NV — As the 50th Golden Anniversary approaches, the evolution of Caesars Palace Las Vegas continues with the reimagining of the iconic hotel's original tower, the Roman Tower, which will be completely reborn as the new Julius Tower. The \$75 million hotel tower renovation is part of an ongoing brand transformation of the Las Vegas resort. Expected to welcome its first guests January 1, 2016, the new 587-room Julius Tower will feature new design-savvy, modern rooms and suites. Julius Tower is located at the heart of Caesars Palace, with easy access to the casino floor and all of the resort's world-class amenities.

Highlights of Julius Tower guest room amenities will include 55-inch TVs equipped with a Sonifi system, luxurious Beauty Rest Bouvet Island Mattresses, a specially curated mini bar and English-themed Gilchrist & Soames in-room toiletries and amenities. Rooms also feature custom artwork that combines photographs of Roman statues with artistic hand-drawn costumes meant to inspire the notion of a Caesars Palace-themed Vegas show girl. www.caesarspalace.com

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1-9 As the fifth IMEX America closed on October 15 in Las Vegas, IMEX Group Chairman Ray Bloom **3** announced that the show had achieved new records. A total of 3,100 companies representing 150 countries exhibited including 80 new booths and 56 expanded booths while the IMEX hosted buyer program brought a record 3,000 buyers from 54 countries to the show. More than 10,600 people participated in the event. There were 66,000 business appointments of which over 57,000 were one-to-one appointments and booth presentations. More than 40 leading buyers from the corporate sector also came for the annual Executive Meetings Forum. **5, 7** A new educational initiative, the Play Room, sponsored by Play with a Purpose, drew 350 participants on Monday and many hundreds more when it moved on to the show floor for three days. The MPI Foundation Rendezvous, the IMEX America Night, in particular, had once again been a highly enjoyable networking event while Association Evening and the CIC Hall of Leaders had successfully introduced new formats. The new wellness initiative, "Be Well at IMEX," included a meditation room and **2** the first IMEXrun Las Vegas – Inspired by Rio de Janeiro, in advance of the Olympics. The route took in a section of the famous Las Vegas Strip. IMEX in Frankfurt 2016, is set for Messe Frankfurt on April 19–21, a month earlier than usual.

Credits: IMEX America



Credits: 1-3 ICCA; 4 & 5 DMC Network, LLC; 6 & 7 Questex

1-3 The 54th ICCA Congress was held November 1–4 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The three-day education program featured Claus Meyer, a chef, restaurateur and entrepreneur who is a co-founder of the World's Best restaurant Noma in Copenhagen as well as Restaurant Gustu, La Paz. A new addition to this year's education program was the President's Choice session at which Dr. Khetsiwe Dlamini, chief of staff at the office of the executive director, UN Women, discussed the role of women within the international meetings industry — an issue close to **2** ICCA President Nina Freysen-Pretorius' heart, as she is the third woman president of ICCA. **4, 5** The 3rd annual DMC Network and Ovation Talent Search held during IMEX America in Las Vegas boasted a record attendance of 950 industry professionals. **5** Lauren Blocker, program coordinator at Cappa & Graham Inc. took home first place singing Stevie Wonder's "Superstition" and won a seven-night European trip from Starwood Hotels with two first-class tickets on United Airlines. **6,7** HSMAI's National MEET 2015, the annual conference connecting qualified meeting planners with suppliers, was held in Washington, DC. Education programs included everything from The Future of Government Meetings to Thinking Outside The Box: Choosing a Unique Site. Next year's event is set for September 7-8, 2016 in Washington, DC.

Mobile Apps Deliver Big Results

K.C. Hopson, CMP



The 3 Types That Save Time, Money and Headaches

On the most basic level, mobile apps have exploded in popularity because they are easy to use. For most situations, you simply tap your smart device to make something happen. For meeting and event planners, mobile apps also solve many problems that were previously expensive, time consuming and frustrating to address. Most important, mobile apps are wins for everybody — attendees, exhibitors and show organizers.

Why? It's simple: They save time and money, are easy to use and help the environment, all at the same time. Here is a look at three types of mobile apps and how they deliver big results across the board.

1. EVENT ATTENDEE APPS

Event attendee apps have quickly become an expected feature at most conferences and trade shows. Among other things, attendee apps have replaced printed program guides, all the while adding interactive features such as social media and games. The event attendee app helps organizers and attendees in many ways:

The biggest success is placing the program schedule on

the app. Typically, the schedule offers times and locations of the program, but also detailed information about the session and speakers. Planners are reducing or completely eliminating the printed program thus saving thousands of dollars and avoiding embarrassments such as inadequate supply. Attendees can easily find what is next on their agenda rather than flipping through a printed program and seeing what items he or she has circled.

Related to this is the attendee's itinerary. If schedule choices are made during the pre-registration process, those selections are downloaded to the app. This saves the attendee the frustration of having to build his or her schedule at the last minute.

In almost all surveys, instant notifications are high on the list of app features planners and attendees love and require. This allows the staff to contact all or particular attendees about time-specific topics such as room changes. The attendee receives the information via a pop-up notification, email or a message within the app. This certainly beats running around and posting sheets of paper around the event venue!



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Also critical for planners are app surveys for each session. This is a huge improvement over previous methods where either paper surveys or online surveys were issued separately for each session. While app surveys eliminate a lot of manual work, the bigger win is the higher response rates. Because attendees can respond to each session as they are completed by simply answering a few questions on their phone, the planner is much more likely to get good feedback.

Event apps also can be monetized, which can help pay for the app and even bring in additional revenue. This can include the home page and the "splash page," each of which will generate thousands of impressions. You also can sell ro-

more attractive and easier to scan. This avoids the embarrassing "bar code dance," where exhibitor and attendee have to keep adjusting position to try to get a good scan.

Finally, lead-retrieval apps can be easily purchased online versus many of the older systems, which require paper forms or even fax!

3. ONSITE REGISTRATION AND SESSION TRACKING APPS

The winning trifecta is completed with mobile onsite registration and session tracking apps.

Using the same QR code as lead retrieval, show planners

Event planners can deploy mobile apps across the many functions and touchpoints of their events.

tating ads at the bottom of each page, culminating in many views. The end result is you typically can sell more mobile app sponsorships than what the app will cost. So not only is all the paper eliminated, but you actually make some money on the app sponsorships!

Related to this is the promotion of trade-show exhibitors on the app. The listings can include logos, links to the website, brochures and booth location.

Maps of the venue and nearby locales also can be included, furthermore reducing paper requirements.

2. LEAD-RETRIEVAL APPS

The old-fashioned lead-retrieval systems are expensive and hard to use, and exhibitors hate them for that reason alone. Fortunately, lead-retrieval apps designed for mobile devices solve all of these problems.

The most important thing is there is no new hardware that users have to learn. Most exhibitors already know how to use their smartphones, and there is a very short learning curve for lead-retrieval apps.

Because the apps are easy to use and do not require proprietary hardware, the show planner is spared the added expense and headache of flying in a technician to the show.

Another big win is that lead-retrieval apps are simply less expensive. Many systems allow show planners to mark up this lower price and make a commission. Typically, the marked up price of an app is still less expensive than past lead-retrieval offers, making apps a good deal for exhibitors without cutting a revenue stream from event planners.

The newer lead-retrieval apps use QR codes rather than unattractive 1-D and 2-D bar codes. The QR code is visually

can easily track session attendance, saving loads of time compared to other forms of tracking.

Event planners also can complete onsite registrations faster using tablets. Card-swipe devices such as PayPal Here, a mobile card reader, can be attached to the tablets for easy credit card processing.

Many systems allow you to issue CEUs via a PDF to the scanned attendees. These even can be tied to completed surveys, thus further driving up response rates.

Because planners are always on the move at a show, these apps can deliver real-time information at any time. This information can include contact information, session attendance and even payment data.

Attendee apps have been the focus of the new mobile event technology, but they really just scratch the surface of what can be accomplished through mobile. Event planners actually can deploy mobile apps across the many functions and touchpoints of their events, ultimately making their event easier and less costly to manage. And the technology is constantly improving. Expect to see new functionalities arise, including the use of "beacons" which, in conjunction with mobile apps, can provide relatively inexpensive and deep insight into attendees' behavior at the show.

AC&F

K.C. Hopson, CMP, is the President, CEO and Founder of EventRebels, and has been doing business with meeting planners, associations and others in need of registration, trade show, mobile and conference software solutions for over a decade. Author of two published books, K.C. frequently writes about technology and meetings on his company's blog. He is currently serving his second tour of duty on the board of Potomac MPI and is on the PCMA Digital Task Force. khopson@eventrebels.com, www.eventrebels.com

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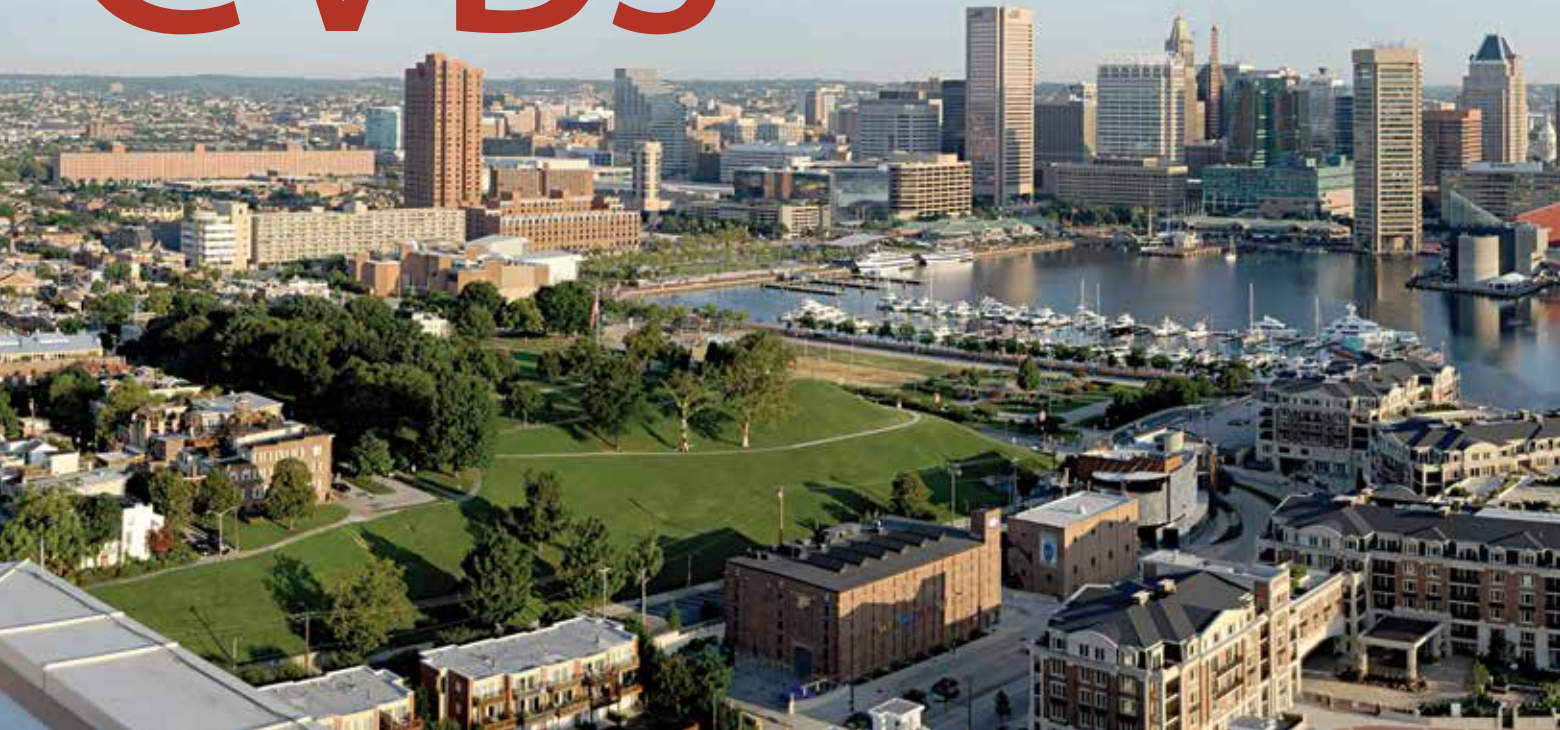
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CVBS^{Up} Their Game



DMAI's DestinationNEXT Highlights New & Improved Value Propositions for Association Conventions

By Sara Churchville

'Room nights is not showing the true value of my meetings," asserts Gregg H. Talley, FASE, CAE, president and CEO of association management company Talley Management Group in Mt. Royal, New Jersey. And since it's industry practice to use contracted room nights to determine whether an association planner has met the *quo* to the destination marketing organization's *quid* in an event subvention agreement — Talley is on something of a mission to change the standard.

An event subvention — a subsidy a DMO provides to help an association offset costs in exchange for a guaranteed level of attendance performance — may sound like a nefarious back-room deal, but in fact the Destination Marketing Association International hailed it as one of 20 best practices in its Destination-NEXT initiative. And subventions are on the rise globally, Talley says, thanks to "oversupply" of convention facilities, especially in the United States.

"It's better than blindly offering a deal," he says, "and more

tied to a concrete outcome." Still, Talley thinks it's time these subventions relied on a measure of economic impact more telling than room nights. "Thirty percent of attendees don't stay in the contracted room block," he notes, citing data from DMAI, and thus the true economic impact of the conference is, as he sees it, undervalued. Instead, he asserts that a DMAI economic impact calculator — or "any kind of third-party mechanism" — should determine whether the terms of the performance clause have been met.

Over the July 4, 2015, weekend, the international convention for Alcoholics Anonymous was held in Atlanta, where the CVB offered reduced facilities rent in return for booked room nights. "I made the number this time, but next time I may not," Talley says.

As attendees become increasingly willing to wait for last-minute bargains online, planners become increasingly unable to guarantee room blocks, he says, and are "penalized for behavior we're not in a position to control. You just start saying, this doesn't make sense, the risk you're asking me and my organization to take on." The AA meeting, for example, had 57,000 attendees and 10,800 rooms. "I'm interested in moving

Scott Craighead, CEM
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“DMOs can help you a lot more effectively than you can help yourself with negotiating with your hotel and venue — having an advocate that knows the city much better than you do, has a more holistic view of what other events are also happening and how that impacts your event.”



Baltimore will host the International Association of Exhibitions and Events' 2015 Expo! Expo! in December.

Credit: Baltimore CVB

that to an economic impact — by looking at what their business is valued over the course of the year — \$40 million using the DMAI calculator.”

The next cities scheduled to host the AA convention are Detroit and Vancouver; in both cities, “we have an arrangement

that works for both parties: a measure that’s total economic value as a layer on top of a desire for a minimum number of hotel rooms,” he says. Talley says he understands how challenging it can be to upend the standard model: “hotels control a lot of that discussion, call the shots.”

Denver is “willing to show that ‘your convention is important, we want it here, here’s what we’re willing to do.’ As a nonprofit, we don’t have a lot of money, and we have to look at these sort of packages.”

Stuart Ruff, CMP
Director, Meetings, Exhibitions and Events
RIMS, the Risk Management Society
New York, NY



Credit: RIMS

Denver made a no-risk “subvention” offer to RIMS, the Risk Management Society, to convince them to hold their 10,000-attendee 2014 meeting at the Colorado Convention Center.

Destination DC “went really all out with facilities and the entire site experience. They went to that extent to let us know that they wanted our business. It really made them stand out.”

Rob Webb, CMP, MBA
Director of Meetings & Travel Services
ASCD
Alexandria, VA



As such, an initiative like the partnership between Travel Portland and Airbnb — a DMAI case study for the “Next” practice of Shared Economy Collaboration — may not work for every DMO. Although Airbnb operates in good faith by collecting Portland’s 11.5 percent transient lodging tax on reservations made through its site — remitting revenue to the city while not operating at a distinct advantage over hotels — it’s not yet entirely clear what effect this could have on the event subvention calculus in Portland.

Still, Talley notes, DMOs have the DMAI calculator at their disposal. “They can help educate professional meeting planners; there’s a lot of room for discussion for setting a new standard.”

OFFERING INCENTIVES

When Stuart Ruff, CMP, director, meetings, exhibitions and events for RIMS, the Risk Management Society, decided to take a “risk” on an untried city in 2014 by holding the annual RIMS conference and exhibition — 10,000 people from 70 countries — in Denver, he considered it “smart of the destination to consider a subvention. We understand we bring millions and millions of dollars to a destination; we track that.” He says Denver offered a convention center rebate for bringing in a number of attendees that he felt confident he could meet. “They lowered it enough that we knew no other place would beat that,” he says. “They’re willing to show that ‘your convention is important, we want it here, here’s what we’re willing to do.’ As a nonprofit, we don’t have a lot of money, and we have to look at these sort of packages.”

HELPING MARKET THE CONVENTION BEFOREHAND

Subventions aside, Visit Denver has “rolled out a comprehensive marketing program for any client that’s going to be using our convention center,” says Justin Bresler, vice president of marketing and business development for the CVB and a member of the DestinationNEXT Advisory Group. “We package it by giving them resources to build attendance and to help attendees navigate the city when they’re here.”

The resources include a curated library of photos, downloadable video clips, postcards, email templates, starter articles for

the planner’s meeting website that Visit Denver can customize, and data feeds of business listings and event calendars in a “nicely packaged” XML, updated nightly. Visit Denver’s app developers even can instruct planners on how to tie the feed into their own meeting app. The DMO also does “pre-promotes” such as outreach a year before the conference to get attendees interested, uses the association’s Twitter hashtags to connect with attendees, and offers random “surprise and delight giveaways” such as a miniature figurine of the Colorado Convention Center’s iconic 40-foot-high blue bear sculpture.

FROM BEST PRACTICES TO NEXT PRACTICES

Of the top three information sources that most influence how planners perceive meeting destinations, DMOs/CVBs were cited most often (67 percent), according to Development Counselors International’s 2015 survey of some 200 North American meeting planners with global meeting planning responsibilities. Even the other two leading sources, business/personal travel (63 percent) and dialogue with industry peers (60 percent), did not make quite as much of an impression.

This was certainly no surprise for Destination Marketing Association International. For its 100th anniversary in 2014, it created the DestinationNEXT Initiative, a three-year, two-phase initiative whose stated goal is to “help DMOs to increase community support and engagement as well as build their destinations.” After considerable polling and other research, DMAI distilled its findings into Core, Best (“a practice that shows superior marketplace and/or community result”) and Next (“a new and innovative practice or idea that could be transformative for DMOs and destinations”).

NEXT PRACTICE: DMO ASSOCIATION DEVELOPMENT

Two case studies for DMO association development — developing the Dubai Association Centre and the African Society of Association Executives — already show promise. Talley was instrumental in organizing the African Society of Association Executives, which will launch in February 2016. As nonprofit management specialists in Africa, “they’re there; they don’t know necessarily that they’re in a profession,” Talley says of the executives. “Emerging destinations want to know how they can build up their not-for-profit infrastructure so it’s in a position to host international events. There’s an informal network now, and we wondered about formalizing the network, valuing the professionalism in that sector and recognizing the opportunity they have.”

Destination DC, whose president and CEO, Elliott Ferguson, is a member of the DestinationNEXT Advisory Group, has just partnered with the Dubai Association Centre, Singapore Exhibition and Convention Bureau and visit.brussels to form the Global Association Hubs Partnership, which they say will “assist international associations to grow and better serve their overseas members by using respective partner cities as regional conduits to extend their efforts around the world.” They also expect the partnership to bridge cultural differences, allow the cities to cross-promote expansion efforts, and “capitalize on the potential of each region’s growth in activities and membership.

The team will focus on research, attracting international business and creating unified city site visits.”

DMO association development is also about “activating your ambassadors in the local industries that you’re strong in a given destination, and identifying and turning on the assets that could work for you. There’s got to be a better story to tell and more to the destination pitch,” Talley says. “If there are three cities that can do the meeting, how are you going to go to the next level with other aspects you can bring to bear on the success of your meeting?”

He mentions Philadelphia, which leverages its local community of life sciences professionals for convention bidding, and León, Mexico, which has used its homegrown leather-making industry to successfully target related meeting business worldwide to bring to the destination. “Every destination has a dominant industry,” Talley says.

Ruff notes that the Nashville CVB offered not only event subventions but “research and insight into the world of business insurance, the history of it at the destination, with customer exhibitors that we could potentially have. They were really trying to show that my objectives could be met there. They attracted and enticed us to have a deeper conversation.”

A HOLISTIC VIEW

“DMOs are thinking more holistically now, of the entire at-

“I’m interested in moving (57,000 attendees and 10,800 rooms) to an economic impact — by looking at what their business is valued over the course of the year — \$40 million using the DMAI calculator?”



Gregg H. Talley, FASAE, CAE
President & CEO
Talley Management Group
Mount Royal, NJ



Credits: Atlanta CVB



The 2015 international convention for Alcoholics Anonymous was held at The Georgia World Congress Center (above) and Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta, where the CVB offered reduced facilities rent in return for booked room nights. “I made the number this time, but next time I may not,” says Gregg Talley, noting, “Thirty percent of attendees don’t stay in the contracted room block.”

tendee experience from the moment the person lands, and not just promoting the touristy or traveler part of town, but getting very good at telling the story of what locals like to do. Making it really memorable, not just seeing a downtown hotel and convention center, but to get out and check out the neighborhoods,” says Scott Craighead, CEM, vice president of exhibitions and events for International Association of Exhibitions and Events, whose CEO and president, David DuBois, CMP, CAE, is a member of the DestinationNEXT Advisory Group.

For example, for his expected 2,500-person Expo! Expo! Annual Meeting and Exhibition in December 2015 in Baltimore, Craighead, working closely with Visit Baltimore, discovered an unexpected restaurant. “It’s in a part of town that isn’t right in the heart of the convention district, in an area going through a renaissance period. People always have their preconceived notions about a destination, so you’re trying to get them to create their own experience and memories,” he says.

Given the recent “unrest,” as he and Visit Baltimore Senior Vice President of Convention Sales and Services Amy Calvert characterize it, a little extra effort was needed. Calvert’s team, including a director of public affairs who works closely with city officials, has created videos showing successful, unmenaced conventions, as well as customer testimonial videos, and provided written resources such as crime-is-down notifications from the Baltimore Police Commission and information about the city’s downtown and waterfront guides, available from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. “The DMO has been essential, showing their value in addressing that,” Craighead says. “If they didn’t exist, you wouldn’t have anyone to help you get through all that.”

“We really have tried to evolve our value proposition beyond being transactional,” says Calvert. “We want to stay relevant to our customers, more than just a portal to distribute business opportunities to our members. We try to be a partner in the success by trying to understand the objectives of the meeting, how they plan to promote it, and we help supplement that with customized solution services and support,” she explains. To this end, the CVB has hired a director of convention and meetings marketing and begun to create customized preshow marketing campaigns, including email blasts. “That level of assistance isn’t something we were providing five years ago,” Calvert says.

Says Craighead, “They are with us every step of the way as far as co-marketing plans and communications to attendees, and a pretty comprehensive plan on branding the event within the city, planning city tours, online resources for attendees, local ambassadors to have a presence at the airport and welcome people as they arrive and answer questions they might have.” Visit Baltimore also sent sales teams to IAEE chapter meetings to get members excited about the destination. “That’s something

AEM has stayed with Louisville because “it has a unique combination of proximity to our target audience, Class A exhibit space...and dining and entertainment options — all at an affordable price for both attendees and exhibitors.”

Sara Truesdale Mooney
Senior Director, Exhibitions and Strategy
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Milwaukee, WI



Credits: ICUEE/Association of Equipment Manufacturers

The Louisville CVB arranged for the official Kentucky Derby bugler to open and close the International Construction and Utility Equipment Exhibition.

we haven’t seen before,” he says. “DMOs can help you a lot more effectively than you can help yourself with negotiating with your hotel and venue — having an advocate that knows the city much better than you do, has a more holistic view of what other events are also happening and how that impacts your event.”

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Rob Webb, director of meeting and travel services, ASCD, spent his summer touring U.S. cities to line up destinations for the ASCD conference from 2021 to 2026. “It’s a seller’s market, but we’re looking long-term,” he says. “The cities that are in high demand that still show they want our business and are willing to work within our budget — teachers and administrators who can’t afford high hotel rates — the cities we ended up finalizing

for future years (DC, Chicago and Denver) showed they could accommodate us.”

He says Destination DC “went really all out with facilities and the entire site experience.” Representatives at all the hotel sites, and even their waitress at lunch, wore customized ASCD buttons. “They went to that extent to let us know that they wanted our business. It really made them stand out.”

The 2016 ASCD Annual Conference & Exhibit Show, where 8,000 to 10,000 educators from around the country and the world are expected, is slated for Atlanta, and the city’s CVB has already provided a video preview so participants can start making plans.

“One of the changes we’re trying to work toward at our conferences is experiences,” Webb says. “Attendees — I call them ‘participants’ — don’t just want to ‘attend’ an event; they want to participate more.” The CVB is offering a list of restaurants with discounts for a dine-around, along with facilitating a buyout of the Georgia Aquarium, two brand-new initiatives Webb trusts will increase attendance — at next year’s conference in Anaheim. ASCD’s CVB representative in Anaheim will be at the Atlanta conference with an information booth to answer questions and get a feel for how the dine-around and the aquarium buyout are received.

CONTINUALLY RAISING THE BAR

Sara Truesdale Mooney, senior director, exhibitions and strategy for the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM), has been hosting the International Construction and Utility Equipment Exhibition (ICUEE) in Louisville since the 1980s. The most recent exhibition, held in early October 2015, had more than 18,000 registrants and 1.2 million net square feet of exhibits.

AEM has stayed with the city because “it has a unique combination of proximity to our target audience, Class A exhibit space, outdoor space including areas where our exhibitors can demonstrate their equipment in job-like conditions, and dining and entertainment options — all at an affordable price for both attendees and exhibitors,” she says.

But the Louisville CVB, whose executive vice president, Cleo Battle, CDME, is member of the DestinationNEXT Advisory Group, continues to find new ways to support the association’s initiatives — this year, with a “new attendee acquisition program including a special hospitality lounge staffed by a knowledgeable expert, a benefit auction and a free local distillery Bourbon-tasting at the conclusion of the show. The tasting was a big hit and highlighted the local craft distilleries that Kentucky is famous for. They also arranged for the official Kentucky Derby bugler to open and close our show” and take photos with the attendees.

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Michele L. Schaffer
Vice President of Programming
Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita Support Inc.
Spartanburg, SC



Credit: AMC Support

“The (Jacksonville) CVB wanted to know what they could do to help me provide an amazing conference. ...They listened carefully to what I was saying and used those ideas to enhance our conference experience; overall, I feel they went above and beyond to help make our conference a success.”



Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita Support Inc.'s 2015 annual event was held in Jacksonville, where attendees enjoyed the Riverwalk on the St. Johns River.

When issues arose with the former catering company for the convention center, the CVB “sprang into action, not only trying to help resolve the issue within the venue but also running to a local bakery for boxes of fresh-baked cookies to offer exhibitors who faced particular challenges with their catering orders.”

San Jose is a penultimate example of a CVB raising the bar on technology offerings. San Jose, dubbed the “smartest city in America” as the Capital of Silicon Valley, flexed its high-tech muscle in 2014 when it launched “Wickedly Fast Free Wi-Fi” at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center, Mineta San Jose International Airport and within downtown San Jose — a smart marketing move to meet the ever-increasing bandwidth demands of meeting and convention attendees who come armed with multiple devices to stay connected. And as a further reflection of its culture of innovative thinking, San Jose boasts a unique, one-stop-shop destination marketing model, which allows planners to book the San Jose Convention Center, hotels, unique venues, menus, CVB services and more through one source: Team San Jose.

OFFERING PLANNERS EXACTLY WHAT THEIR CONVENTION NEEDS

Michele L. Schaffer, vice president of programming for Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita Support Inc., held her annual event for people with a rare neuromuscular condition and their families in Jacksonville in July 2015. Because so many attendees have “mobility differences,” it is a priority for the organization to source hotels with a large number of rooms that can accom-

modate wheelchairs, and cities in general that have a major airport, highly accessible public transportation, and many dining and entertainment options within easy reach of the conference hotel. Attendees also tend to be inundated with medical bills, meaning the meeting package needs to be both economical and of sufficient quality that attendees will make the trek with their families.

Jacksonville fit the bill, with both five-star and chain restaurants near the conference site. “When we ran into a couple of issues booking a specific group, the CVB (Visit Jacksonville, whose CEO Paul Astleford is a member of the DestinationNEXT Advisory Group) stepped in and provided us with not only additional contact information, but provided us with an introduction to a manager who had the issue resolved in less than 24 hours. Every time I had a question about resources, they stepped up and provided me with multiple organizations/businesses that had been vetted.”

The CVB also provided an information table during the event registration, providing maps, discount coupons and information on the most accessible and family-friendly attractions in the area. The CVB even offered information on different repair options for an attendee whose power wheelchair malfunctioned.

“The CVB also had signage posted at the airport welcoming our attendees. This was a first for us, and many families commented that they felt welcomed to the city as soon as they stepped off the airplane.”

Although there were no group offsite events (“transportation for 40 or 50 power wheelchairs can be rough!” she notes), the CVB got the Jacksonville Zoo to present at the convention. Individually, some attendees later visited the zoo as well as sports stadiums, local confectioners and beaches suggested by the CVB.

“The CVB wanted to know what they could do to help me provide an amazing conference. They provided suggestions and ideas regarding things that I had not considered. They listened carefully to what I was saying and used those ideas to enhance our conference experience; overall, I feel they went above and beyond to help make our conference a success.”

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Successful Foundation Fundraising Events

Donor Engagement and Recognition Are the Keys

By Karen Brost

The types of fundraising events association foundations put on at their annual meetings run the gamut from casual receptions to lavish galas to golf tournaments, walkathons and more. But no matter what type of fundraiser it is, there's one challenge that many association foundation executives share: how to get the attention of attendees and encourage them to participate.

As Stephen E. Peeler, vice president, development for the ASAE Foundation explains, "The challenge for us becomes not the format of the fundraising event at our annual meeting. The challenge for us, as with any association foundation, is how do you distinguish yourself from the rest of the buzz and activities that are taking place at annual meetings? You're going to have vendors that are taking clients out, you're going to have committees that have to



ASAE Foundation's: The Classic 2015 event was held at the historic Fox Theatre in Detroit. The Motown theme included a performance by former Commodores artist Lionel Richie, and a recording studio and lounge where attendees could create their own Motown hit.

RECOGNIZING DONORS

The ASAE Foundation's biggest event is a reception for its largest donors. "In the past, we had done a gala, and while the gala model is still very successful, we haven't done that in several years. We have decided because of the hard cost associated with the gala, it really makes a lot more sense to us to do a reception," Peeler explains.

"It's a meet-and-greet event that we do for our top donors (individuals who donate at least \$1,000 and organizations that donate at least \$5,000). Those donors get a chance to meet the keynote speaker as they come off of the stage at the annual meeting's open general session. They're in a separate room where they can ask their burning questions. Instead of being in front of 5,000 people, they're in a room with about 150 people.

"They love it," Peeler adds. "The two things they tell us they want most out of their donor benefits are access and visibility. They want to be seen as industry leaders or movers and shakers, depending on where they are in their career cycle, and they're able to have access to a speaker in a much more informal and intimate way that they typically would not have. This is a full, one-hour dialogue. It's very well-received." The foundation also hosts a separate donor appreciation reception for these individuals.

CULTIVATING FUTURE DONORS

The ASAE Foundation also recognizes the importance of cultivating a new generation of donors, so they also focus on young executives. A special donor lounge is open throughout the week as a place where donors can have a meeting, grab some quiet time or interact with fellow donors. "We also offer, for the young executives, a headshot lounge within that area because the ASAE Foundation wants to be the conduit for professional development," Peeler notes. "We figure that if someone is giving us that \$5 today, they could easily give us \$1,000 when they get that dream job. So if we help them by taking an executive portrait of them at the annual meetings, that's something they can use to increase their visibility in their community and in LinkedIn and Facebook pictures. We have five professional photographers and 10 hair and makeup artists. The lines are usually pretty steady, that's for sure!" he laughs.

The ASAE Foundation also hosts a networking happy hour each evening where young professionals can meet established

have meetings and the evenings are just about all you have, unless you do it pre or post annual conference."

The ASAE Foundation takes a multifaceted approach to keep donors and potential donors engaged, starting with a golf tournament that takes place in advance of ASAE's annual meeting. The organization has held a golf tournament for years, but has now added tennis and spa components to address the needs of non-golfers. "We wanted to make sure we had something to offer for everybody," Peeler notes.

Credits: Jason Keen



Credit: Chuck Fazio

Participants raise racquets to a successful ASAE Foundation tennis event.

donors who are at a point in their career where they want to give back. It enables these young professionals to approach people in the industry that they may not otherwise have a chance to meet.

COMMUNICATIONS COUNT

In order to cut through the clutter of communications attendees receive, the ASAE Foundation uses a multistep approach to make sure donors are aware of the exclusive events they're invited to. First, donors are sent an email invitation detailing the events, and then it's followed by a large, three-fold postcard delivered by snail mail. The foundation also creates a welcome letter that lists all of the donor events and the hours of the donor lounge and has it delivered to the sleeping rooms of its top donors. "We're trying to position our foundation as a very high touch, very exclusive organization to be affiliated with," Peeler notes.

CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

In recent years, in a grassroots effort, some of the donors to The American Pharmacists Association (APhA) Foundation asked that the foundation recognize the significant impact that women are having in the pharmacy profession. This resulted in a number of initiatives, including a new event at this year's annual meeting. The event, which is open to all attendees, is called Women in Pharmacy: Mix, Mingle and Margaritas. According to Lynette Sappe-Watkins, who was APhA's director of development at the time of this interview, Cardinal Health is a sponsor of the event, and the \$15 donation each attendee makes will help the foundation honor the pioneering women of the profession and advance women's and children's patient care services.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPONSORSHIPS

"Sponsors play a significant role in our ability to create these programs and to invest the energy to get them off the ground," Sappe-Watkins explains. "It's also a nice gesture of support to our other donors. It says that not only are we as individuals supportive

"We're trying to position our foundation as a very high touch, very exclusive organization to be affiliated with."



Stephen E. Peeler

Vice President, Development, ASAE Foundation, Washington, DC

of these programs, but others from the pharmacy community are interested in them, as well."

Joe Garecht, founder of a firm named The Fundraising Authority, works with organizations large and small to help them design profitable fundraising plans and "super-charge" their development efforts. He describes the importance of securing sponsorships. "The mindset that every nonprofit, including associations, should have is when you have a fundraising event, most of the money you raise, or a significant chunk of the money you raise, should come from sponsors. You have corporations that are looking for exposure, but also there are some folks that want to give because they support the mission of the (foundation)." He says that a good guideline is to have about 50 percent of the funds coming from sponsors, about 30 percent from ticket sales and the rest coming from activities such as silent auctions and raffles.

"I like to see a nonprofit get sponsors not just to cover the cost of the event, but to put them in the black. If you say you want to raise \$50,000 and it costs you \$10,000 to run it and you go out and raise \$11,000 from sponsors, you go into the event already paid for and \$1,000 already raised. It's a successful event already. Sponsors are irreplaceable when it comes to fundraising events."



Credit: Jason Keen

The 2015 ASAE Foundation Annual Golf & Tennis Classic in Detroit raised \$40,000 in net revenue to support the Annual Fund.

SILENT AUCTION SUCCESS

The APhA Foundation also organizes a wine-tasting and silent auction event each year. “I believe it’s been going on for about 10 years. It literally is a tradition at our annual meeting,” Sappe-Watkins explains. She did have a bit of advice for other organizations considering putting on a similar event. “It very much depends on the laws of the state where you’re having your annual meeting. Not all states and not all venues will allow you to bring in your own wine. The laws from state to state vary, and you have to find out ahead of time what that state’s rules are and what the venue’s rules are and corkage fees and all kinds of things, so it’s not a slam dunk that you can do it in every venue.”

The foundation forms a volunteer committee tasked with soliciting items for the silent auction. One person might be as-

“The planning and coordination required to have a successful event requires us to begin early. Almost as soon as one Nite to Unite ends, planning begins for the next gala.”

Jenny Lai

Vice President, ESA Foundation
New York, NY

signed to secure handcrafted items. Another might reach out to the state pharmacist associations for donations, and yet another might be assigned to contact the colleges and schools of pharmacy to request alumni-themed baskets to represent the schools.

Sappe-Watkins also describes a unique approach her foundation takes to secure additional items for the silent auction. “We will host a couple of jewelry parties throughout the year. They’re just like a jewelry party you might go to in someone’s home and the person who hosts it gets free jewelry. We’ll do that here (in the office) and the free jewelry becomes part of our silent auction.”

The foundation’s wine-tasting and silent auction attracts between 250 and 300 attendees. “The way that we do that is it’s free to come into the event and peruse the silent auction items,” she explains. “Anybody can do that. If you’d like to participate in the wine and cheese pairings you have to buy a ticket. That way, everybody is welcome to come in. We also use this as a joint fundraiser with the state pharmacy association foundations who participate.

“We’ve also got a couple of experiences that we put into our auction,” she continues. “For example, the CEO of APhA makes a very generous offer for up to two CEO-for-the-day experiences. Somebody will bid on that opportunity and then they come in and become CEO for the day here. We really treat them nicely and take them up to Capitol Hill.”



Credit: APhA

The American Pharmacists Association Foundation Annual Meeting fun run.

Garecht has seen a trend toward what he calls participatory fundraising. “People want to be entertained,” he explains. “That’s why silent auctions over the past 10 to 15 years have become so popular. A lot of people who we’re targeting as donors get invited to these (events) all the time, so nonprofits started saying, ‘we’ve got to make these fun.’ Silent auctions are fun because people walk around, they’re kind of gambling a little bit. Am I going to get the item? Am I not? People like live auctions because they’re exciting, and they’re something to watch. People also like raffles.”

He’s also seen some family-friendly fundraising events. “Instead of a sit-down dinner there are carnival games around the room and a kid-friendly band and food that appeals to both (kids and adults). There’s a regular bar for cocktails and there’s a milkshake bar on other side because that’s something interesting. I’ve also seen events where they charge \$100 a ticket, but rather than spending \$50 on food, they spend \$5 on food and serve hot dogs at the beach, but it’s still a high-dollar event.”

GREAT GALAS

Each year, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) Foundation hosts a gala event called Nite to Unite – for Kids (NTU). Jenny Lai, the foundation’s vice president, describes the event and its purpose. “NTU helps us make a difference in the lives of children in the U.S. and celebrates the entertainment software industry’s success. It features cocktails, tasting buffets, casino entertainment and

“Sponsors play a significant role in our ability to create these programs and to invest the energy to get them off the ground. It’s also a nice gesture of support to our other donors.”



Lynette Sappe-Watkins, CFRE
Former Executive Director
American Pharmacists Foundation
Washington, DC

live and silent auctions. The evening begins with a VIP reception that features exclusive tastings, networking opportunities and a preview of auction items. The gala officially opens with a program that recognizes an individual's philanthropic and professional leadership and contributions to the industry. This past year, we featured a special acknowledgment of our grantees and scholarship recipients."

The event attracts approximately 500 industry partners and other professionals who represent leading entertainment software companies. "NTU has raised more than \$14 million to support ESA Foundation efforts," Lai notes. "Funding goes to scholarships for women and minority students who are pursuing video game-related degrees and grants to schools and organizations that leverage video games and technology; all which create opportunities for youth across the country," Lai says.

She also describes what it takes to make the event successful.



The 2015 MPI Foundation Rendezvous was held at Draï's Beach Club and Nightclub in Las Vegas during IMEX America.

"The planning and coordination required to have a successful event requires us to begin early. Almost as soon as one Nite to Unite ends, planning begins for the next gala. Maximizing the budget can present its own set of challenges, but we are very fortunate to have several generous partners — including those who donate auction items, sponsor our casino entertainment and invest their time and resources in other ways to help make Nite to Unite a success. Perhaps the biggest challenge is designing a fundraiser that attracts enough participants and donors to make the investment worthwhile. We carefully hone all elements of Nite to Unite year after year through attendee post-surveys so that we can continuously improve the experience and create a fun and entertaining evening for our guests. We rely on communications strategies to promote the gala and drive ticket sales, which involves building email and social media campaigns and an event website."

Lai describes another way that ESA Foundation taps into its industry's expertise to benefit a good cause. "This past year, we

"The mindset that every nonprofit, including associations, should have is when you have a fundraising event, most of the money you raise, or a significant chunk of the money you raise, should come from sponsors."



Joe Garecht
Founder
The Fundraising Authority

partnered with Extra Life (a 24-hour video game marathon and fundraiser) to offer a new ESA Foundation Challenge. Gamers who participated in Extra Life were able to choose which Children's Miracle Network Hospital their donations would support. Our ESA Foundation Challenge was designed to award an additional \$30,000 to each hospital whose players raised the most money during the marathon and to the hospital with the highest per capita fundraising total. We were pleased to present grants to UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland in Oakland, California, and the Dell Children's Medical Center of Austin, Texas. Extra Life 2014 raised a record \$6 million for medical equipment, treatment and research at Children's Miracle Network Hospitals. Their continued success is a testament to the video game community's generosity and commitment to giving back, and we are proud to be an integral part of its success."

SMART STRATEGIES

Sappe-Watkins stresses the importance of keeping an open mind when planning fundraising events from year to year. "While you might do things that are traditional for your organization, there's always something that's going to be a little different based on the state that you're in and the volunteers that you bring to the table. Always be open to what new opportunities come about as a result of the venue you're in or the volunteers that come forward. They all bring about some unique opportunity."

Garecht also recommends that foundations explore other fundraising opportunities such as launching a crowdfunding campaign. "The sweet spot for a crowdfunding campaign right now is \$10,000–\$25,000, so I always recommend to every organization, to get your feet wet, start with that." He also recommends continually monitoring the number of man hours that go into planning each fundraising event to determine if they're sufficiently paying off or whether some of those hours would be better spent making calls to potential donors.

"What I always tell people is, if you believe in what you're doing, if it's important that you have a foundation and that it makes money so that you can accomplish things, then you really owe it to yourself and your association to think big about it."

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Finding Room to Maneuver in

Big Box Contracts

The Ins and Outs of Convention Center Leasing Agreements

By Patrick Simms

Convention centers have a reputation for being relatively inflexible when it comes to contract terms, but that's only in comparison to the greater flexibility often shown by hoteliers. There is certainly some room to maneuver when it comes to convention center contracts, aka "leasing agreements," and the facilities can be accommodating in view of client value and client relationships, just like hoteliers.

"I feel they are negotiable; they want to work with you," says

Buffy Levy, director, convention and trade show services, SmithBucklin. "I've really not had an experience where a center has said, 'Absolutely not, we can't honor any of the things you've requested.' To me it has never been an unpleasant process." The current seller's market, Levy observes, has led to some convention centers requiring groups to sign farther out, but apart from that, the centers remain strongly motivated to bring in association meetings for the economic benefit of the city, and that plays into their negotiability.



The Washington State Convention Center in Seattle.

Credit: Lara Swimmer

Francisco. Hotel contracts “have become increasingly difficult to negotiate,” she says, “and terms are becoming exceedingly challenging to manage. I can only hope this trend doesn’t fully transfer into the convention center space.”

One trend that does not favor the negotiability of leasing agreements has been noted by Tonya Almond, CMP, vice president, meetings and continuing education, American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD). Contract negotiation, traditionally within the purview of the convention salesperson, has in recent years been assigned to a designated “contract administrator” at many centers, presumably to maximize the salesperson’s time. The result can be a loss of the “relationship factor” that assists planners in negotiating with the salesperson, and the process becomes more “cut and dried,” Almond feels. For one, the administrators do not seem empowered to negotiate all the terms. “If they’re supposed to be these experts on the contract, why are they still going back to legal to get some of the (requests) approved?” she questions. “What level of authority do they have to make some of the changes?”

“In addition to data referencing the economic impact of past conventions, we provide demographic information on the type of delegates who will be experiencing the city.”

Tonia Fykes, CEM, CMP
Vice President, Event Operations
Biotechnology Industry Organization
Washington, DC

Negotiation with state-owned centers also can be more cut and dried compared to those that are city or county owned, in the experience of Jeffrey W. Wood, meetings director for the American Institute of Chemical Engineers (AIChE). “If they’re state owned, the state wants its revenue and rates are what they are. A county or a city has a different viewpoint on the purpose for their centers, and that is to fill the sleeping rooms. So they’re much more negotiable,” Wood explains.

The negotiating party on the supplier side — a city-owned vs. state-owned center, a salesperson vs. a contract administrator — can thus make a difference as to flexibility.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The leverage a buyer brings to the table is also a factor. It’s helpful to make the center aware, in quantified terms, of the kind of economic impact one’s convention represents (if the representative does not know already), as well as other benefits of hosting the event. “In addition to data referencing the economic impact of past conventions, we provide demographic information on the

NEGOTIATING A SELLER’S MARKET

On the other hand, the seller’s market has made hotel contract negotiation overall more challenging for planners, contrary to the platitude that hoteliers are more flexible. “I am not finding it more or less difficult to negotiate convention center contracts in the current market. Hotel contracts, however, are a different story,” notes Tonia Fykes, CEM, CMP, vice president, event operations with Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO), whose 2016 International Convention will be held at Moscone Center in San



Tonya Almond, CMP
V.P., Meetings & Continuing Education
American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
Chicago, IL

“We hold (our annual session) over Memorial Day weekend, and there are not many associations out there that want to meet over a holiday weekend.”

type of delegates who will be experiencing the city,” says Fykes. “Our list includes heads of state, CEOs/decision-makers, manager/influencers, etc. We also outline the geographic impact, as more than one-third of our attendees are from outside of the United States; this can provide a city with word-of-mouth marketing that reaches well beyond the U.S. borders.” Similarly, Almond emphasizes that attendees of the AAPD Annual Session “have a healthy income, well into the six figures, and they bring their families and office staffs. And we do a ton of social events in addition to what they spend individually.”

One also can pave the way for concessions by being willing to

ample, held its last annual session May 21-24 at the Washington State Convention Center. “We hold (our annual session) over Memorial Day weekend, and there are not many associations out there that want to meet over a holiday weekend,” says Almond.

Wood has found it helpful to highlight the relative simplicity of the AICHe Annual Meeting as a means of obtaining some leverage. “We don’t really tax the center with what we do; it’s not a complicated event. Once the conference gets going it kind of runs itself, if we’ve done our specs right, which I ensure we do,” he says.

CONTRACT CONCESSIONS

One of the concessions Wood typically tries to obtain is to have the center lease and charge for just the space the event will actually use: “I try to have the center prorate it so that if we’re only going to use 30,000 sf out of the 50,000 sf, I only want to pay for the 30,000, and then I only want to pay for the net that’s used for commercial purposes.” Not all centers are amenable to those terms, he has found. “Some have a minimal hall rental, and what we do may fall under that.” Rental credits for a certain F&B minimum also can be negotiated, depending on factors such as the size of the group and the competitiveness of the center’s market.

Wood’s negotiation process is the first of four stages of contract review at the AICHe. Following his efforts, the contract passes to the business owner, who oversees programming and meetings together; to the controller, who focuses on the exact wording of the clauses; and lastly to the executive director, who gives the final approval.

LEGAL COUNSEL

Many associations rely on legal professionals to look over the wording after the meeting professionals have negotiated the agreement. “For me, one of the most important things is to involve the legal counsel,” says Levy. “Never sign a contract without having legal look at it, because we’re meeting and event planners, not lawyers.” Legal review focuses on the expression of clauses

such as indemnification and force majeure. Indemnification, for example, is rarely mutual and must be made so through negotiation. Says Wood, “They want to be indemnified but they forget to indemnify us. But I want to be protected if one of my employees does something (negligent) onsite; I don’t want to be sued either.”



Credit: Biotechnology Industry Organization

The 2015 BIO International Convention was held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia.

book the convention for more than one year at the center, and through the ability to meet on dates that are not as easy for the center to get business on, such as off-peak times. Both tactics — booking volume and booking on less desirable dates — are familiar ways of gaining leverage with hoteliers. The AAPD, for ex-

Fortunately, he says, "I haven't found a lot of resistance to (making it reciprocal)."

Similarly, one wants to ensure the force majeure clause is balanced, meaning that it excuses the group, not just the center, from performing in the case of certain specified events. Those contingencies are a common focus of contract review, and planners and legal professionals have various ideas about what should be included in the clause. Says Levy, "Suppose the clause has five or six things that are specifically spelled out, but that's not what it is that happens that changes the world and prevents you from having your event. So we try to include the words 'and any other cause beyond the parties' control,' giving us some flexibility. If the center does not agree to it, I typically ask our attorney to have a conversation with them. I find that even if they say no right up front, our lawyer and their lawyer can often work to some arrangement that our lawyer is happier with."

"Acts of terrorism" is commonly included among the contingencies, but Wood has observed that it is often limited to terrorism in the host city. "That doesn't cut it for us. The whole country shut down when we were attacked here in New York, for example," he explains. The force majeure clause also should specify what percentage of attendance must be affected due to transportation curtailment for the clause to take effect. For instance, no airline shutdown may occur, but a significant amount of attendance may nonetheless be prevented due to a ground transportation problem, if many delegates are driving in. These kinds of issues, which are particular to the meeting at hand, must be discussed in formulating a fair force majeure clause.

ANCILLARY FEES AND CHARGES

Ancillary fees appearing in the "Terms and Conditions," "Rules and Regulations" or other sections of the contract also merit special attention during negotiation. A few examples follow:

Convention sponsor displays. Some convention centers charge a fee for these displays, which is usually a small percentage of the overall sponsorship amount, Fykes notes. "Due to the unique nature of our sponsorships, we typically look to have this fee waived or reduced. I find that most centers are willing to discuss each situation and work with us on an amicable solution," she says.

Room setup and turnover. What items are included in room setup (tables, risers, podiums, water for speakers, etc.) are important to clarify. There also may be a labor charge for room turnover, such as reception to theater-style. Terms vary on this item: Sometimes one free turnover is included; in other cases only overnight shifts incur a fee; and so on. "It's negotiable, so if you give them enough F&B, they make a percentage off the turnover charge," Wood notes.

Medical technician. Wood has experienced at least one case where a convention center had a nonnegotiable clause requir-



An exhibitor engages with attendees at the American Institute of Chemical Engineers' 2014 Annual Meeting.

ing a medical technician present while the show is in progress. The tech is paid hourly, and the overall expense is not insignificant, says Wood. "You need to have (him present) during move in, move out, plus during the hours that the hall is open, throughout the week."

Wi-Fi bandwidth. Which areas have free Wi-Fi, and charges for additional bandwidth in those areas must be considered in light of the group's needs, and a planner should be prepared to explain those needs upfront. "You have to negotiate it, and they probably won't unless they see your Wi-Fi and Internet needs all at once," Wood advises.

F&B distribution at booths. One of Levy's main clients is the North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers (NAFEM), and she once noted a contractual requirement to pay a health services fee for each booth that is distributing food or beverage. "In our case, there would be some (distribution) because exhibitors show what their equipment does. It turned out the fee was for public shows," she relates. "But I needed to understand what the ramifications were for us."

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Along with ancillary fees, the contract or the policies will include information on exclusive service providers. These should be investigated not only to be aware of costs, but also to deter-

"I try to have the center prorate it so that if we're only going to use 30,000 sf out of the 50,000 sf, I only want to pay for the 30,000, and then I only want to pay for the net that's used for commercial purposes."



Jeffrey W. Wood
Meetings Director
American Institute of
Chemical Engineers
New York, NY



Credit: NAFEM

The North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers held its biennial meeting and trade show in February in Anaheim, California.

mine opportunities to use outside service providers. Assuming an exclusive service provider is not safety-related, the use of the group's own service provider instead can sometimes be negotiated, if that would be desirable. "Let's say it's exclusive in-house AV and you've got a three-year agreement with an AV company; you're going to want to negotiate the ability to bring in that AV company," Levy says. She adds, "If you have an outside AV vendor, some buildings have rules about where they can store their empty crates, and so then it costs more if you have to have them moved offsite and brought back."

Whether rigging is an exclusive, and if so, in what areas, is also important to know. "In one case the policies said rigging was exclusive in some areas, so I wanted to make sure I understood where it is," Levy relates. "I wanted to know where can my decorator do the rigging and where do I have to use the exclusive provider to do rigging. I prefer to keep the business with our decorator; they do all the work for us." Similarly for cleaning services:



Buffy Levy
 Director, Event Services
 SmithBucklin
 Chicago, IL

"I try not to ask for every little thing, because not every little thing matters to our groups, and (the convention center) will know when you're being unreasonable. ...You need to really understand what is most important for your association."

If it's a nonexclusive, "could you have your decorator do it or is it cheaper through the building?"

Thus, from a budget-control perspective, it's certainly worthwhile to read what can be a very extensive "Policies" or "Terms and Conditions" section in order to determine negotiation opportunities with surcharges and services.

Other aspects of the agreement that need clarification also can catch one's eye. In reviewing contract materials for a NAFEM convention, Levy noted the statement: "Use of courtyard is granted on a case-by-case basis." "I knew that we needed the courtyard because we were going to do all our food service out there. They said you can have it," she says. In retrospect, the clause was "probably more of an out for them," in case the center needed the space for some other reason. "But I didn't know that when I was reading it."

IN IT TOGETHER

In theory it's possible to negotiate a multitude of items on a leasing agreement, from rates and F&B minimums, to clauses such as indemnification and force majeure, to special fees and exclusives. But a shrewd negotiator does not attempt to get every concession, focusing instead on those most important to the program. It's part of maintaining a good working relationship and earning a reputation for being a fair client. "They're in it to make money for the city, and we're in it to do well for our association. So I always approach it like we're in this together," says Levy. "I try not to ask for every little thing, because not every little thing matters to our groups, and (the convention center) will know when you're being unreasonable. So I think what is key is that for each contract, you need to really understand what is most important for your association."

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High-Level Expertise and Excellent Execution

Savvy Executives Trust AMC's for Top-Notch Conference and Trade Show Planning

By John Buchanan

Since the Great Recession and the increased challenges it brought to the task of planning association meetings and conventions, more and more associations have opted to employ association management companies (AMC) to handle the day-to-day job of facilitating meetings of all shapes and sizes.

It's not just short-staffed small associations who need the sophisticated services AMC's can provide. Even large associations with in-house planners call on AMC's to help handle the overwhelming demands of hosting a major event with many moving parts requiring complex planning and execution.

Most association management companies offer both full-service and à la carte business models. And major AMC's do not



Veronica H. Moore, president of Association of Fraternity/Sorosity Advisors, speaking at the 2014 AFA Recognition Luncheon in Nashville.

consider other AMC's their primary competition when it comes to planning meetings. Their most common form of competition is independent meeting planning companies.

But for associations, there is a critical differentiator, says Phelps R. Hope, CMP, senior vice president of meetings and expositions at Kellen Company in Atlanta. "The real distinction between an association management company and a meeting planning company when it comes to planning meetings for the association market is that we understand the process from within the process of how an association is run and managed," Hope says. "And that means we understand the connectivity of what we do to the rest of the management functions of the association, versus a standalone meeting planning firm, which only really focuses on



Credit: Greek Yearbook

the fundamental elements of a meeting. But they don't necessarily understand how that function might affect the association's membership or overall mission or governance."

Given that critical factor, the Chicago-based North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers (NAFEM) has been fiercely loyal to their AMC — SmithBucklin — for the last 33 years, says Deirdre Flynn, NAFEM's veteran executive vice president. Its biannual trade show draws 550 exhibitors and more than 20,000 attendees. SmithBucklin, with offices in Chicago and Washington, DC, offers full-service management and outsourced services to trade associations, professional societies, technology user communities, industry consortia, charitable organizations, corporations and government institutes. Flynn says the expertise

“The real distinction between an association management company and a meeting planning company... is that we understand the process from within the process of how an association is run and managed.”



Phelps R. Hope, CMP
Senior Vice President
Meetings and Expositions
Kellen Company
Atlanta, GA

of SmithBucklin has been essential to the steady growth of the NAFEM trade show over the past four decades.

"NAFEM started its trade show in 1973," Flynn says. "And over that time, it has grown from a net 55,000 sf of exhibit space to net 330,000 sf. And participation has grown from 200 companies to 550 companies. So because we are an every-other-year show, and trade shows are unique in terms of planning, we looked to an association management company, because they have the talent and expertise to manage trade shows. They have also done it for other associations and professional societies."

Until 2002, SmithBucklin managed all of NAFEM's operations. But then the association converted to an independent model with its own management team, but kept SmithBucklin onboard for meeting planning and management services.

"For a trade show that only happens every other year, you do not need a full-time staff year-round to manage that process," Flynn says. "Even if you tried, you'd have trouble keeping the talent level and expertise at the level of the latest trends and best practices in terms of what trade shows are doing. And it's

also difficult to maintain an internal staff that has the marketing and other related skills that a good association management company has."

So it makes fundamental and obvious sense in such a scenario to outsource event planning to a major AMC. "And by doing that, you get a company that has specific expertise in that area and which has people who do nothing but multiple trade shows of every size and scope every day, and are used to bringing citywide meetings like ours to major destinations and convention centers and managing the logistics and exhibitors," Flynn says. "And that final capability is especially important for us, because our members are our exhibitors. Usually it's the other way around and meeting attendees are your members."

Veronica H. Moore, president of the Fort Collins, Colorado-based Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA), agrees that the staff experience and credentials of an AMC deliver a key benefit for associations that lack the resources to replicate them on a day-to-day basis.

As a result, since 2011, Moore has worked with Synergos,

No Meeting Is Perfect and No Two Meetings Are the Same

As any meeting professional knows, no meeting is perfect and no two meetings are the same. Three senior members of the Front Row Meetings and Events division of Association Headquarters (AH) share a few exceptional case histories.

Forced to Move in Less Than 24 Hours

Robin Geary, CMP, is a senior meeting/exhibit manager at AH. Having worked at AH for nine years, Geary has managed multiple annual and specialty educational conferences in North America. In September 2014, Geary and her team arrived onsite in Atlanta and began setting up as usual for an upcoming National Air Duct Cleaning Association (NADCA) meeting. She was approached by the general manager of the facility and told that, effective immediately, the meeting space was being shut down by the city of Atlanta with no explanation as to why. With no time to waste, Geary and her team started emailing and calling to relocate the conference and notify 135 attendees.



Geary

The NADCA Fall Technical conference was torn down, packed up and moved with less than 24 hours to reset and contact every person that was already en route to the conference.

"We didn't have time to panic. It's not an option in this industry," says Geary. "They were closing the hotel regardless of whether we wanted to move or not so we had to immediately put a plan in motion for moving to a new property."

All members were successfully moved to the new location, and the conference went on as planned due to the expertise and flexibility of the meetings team.

Juggling Two as One Spanning the Globe

When planning a meeting or event, it's rare that the manager is located in the geographical area of the venue. Site visits



are a requirement and conference calls are a must. Shannon Fagan, CMP, a senior meeting/exhibit manager at AH, manages the American Transplant Congress (ATC), the joint meeting of the American Society of Transplant Surgeons (ASTS) and the American Society of Transplantation (AST).



Fagan

While the societies have common goals, the objectives that each wants to accomplish while onsite at the Congress vary. Each has presidential dinners and events that occur at the same time — all of which need to be arranged by the meetings manager. Fagan and her team oversee all aspects of the American Transplant Congress including the onsite scientific program.

an association management company also based in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Synergos has a lot more staff capacity to do things that it would not be easy for us to do internally," Moore says. "Our prior structure was to have an executive director and administrative assistant run the conference. And that's just two people. So the rest of the functions we needed would be staffed by volunteers. So the difference now is that we have a group of professionals who work in the meeting planning industry every day and know the trends and have the skills to really put on a great conference. The real difference for us is that now we are able to have a high-functioning conference. And that means our attendees benefit from the way the meeting is planned and executed by professionals. And that also includes the marketing and public relations services that support and promote the meeting."

In pursuing the services of an AMC, Moore helped deliver a major innovation by creating an AMC from scratch.

"After board-level discussions, the business model we ultimately chose was to become a client and an owner of Synergos," she

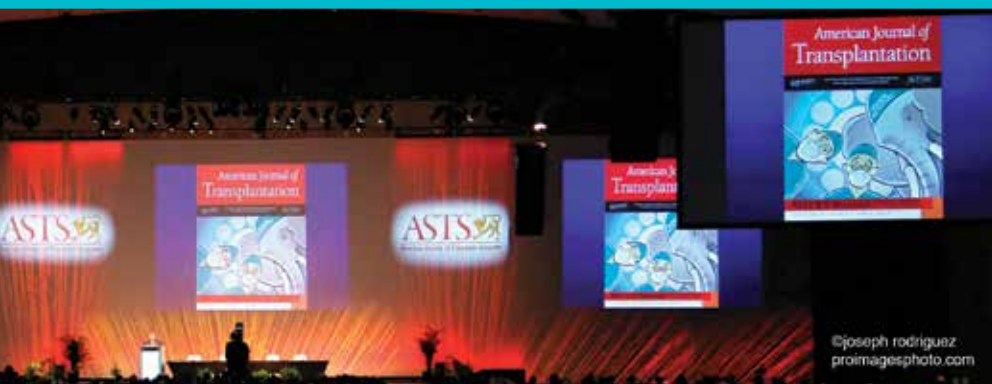
"So the difference now is that we have a group of professionals who work in the meeting planning industry every day and know the trends and have the skills to really put on a great conference."



Veronica H. Moore
President
Association of Fraternity/Sorority
Advisors
Fort Collins, CO

says. "We were in the position of being able to see not only how our meeting would be improved, but also how the central office would operate. We now have a lot more general initiatives come out of our office, too, because we also have the staff capacity to be able to do more things when it comes to running the association."

AFA restructured itself to have its newly created AMC oversee and manage day-to-day operations across the board, with Moore



Before the Congress, there are emails and phone calls between both of the organizations involved. The challenges? Of the 5,000 Congress attendees, 45 percent are international. This requires that the meetings staff schedules meetings around not only the already busy schedules of doctors, but also individuals who are located around the world.

"It's a great meeting but it demands a lot of juggling," said Fagan. "We have a large team made up of staff that take on various aspects of the meeting. Coordinating can be a challenge, and none of us have a simple 9-to-5 schedule, but we continue to have a successful Congress year after year."

Working From the Ground Up

AH has worked on behalf of many cli-

ents in the allied health fields to execute some of the most prestigious annual conferences for physicians and nurses. A new partnership with the Commission for Case Manager Certification (CCMC) will result in the first annual CCMC New World Symposium in January 2016 at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas.

A certifying body of 37,000 case managers, CCMC required that their event partner have a clear understanding of programming requirements for a conference offering continuing education credits.

"This event is a great example of how meeting teams often use the talents and skills of those around them to market an event, especially a brand new one," said Senior Meeting/Exhibit Manager Beth Mauro. "CCMC will also benefit from the

many vendor relations developed over the years among event team staff."

Unlike organizations that need to start from scratch when launching a show, CCMC's partnership with AH gives them access to previously vetted vendor partners, saving precious production time.

One Contact for All Services

Whether it's an onsite crisis, a global meeting or a first-time event, AMCs bring together passionate and creative meetings, sponsorship and exhibit sales, website, marketing, design and public relations professionals to offer a broad range of event solutions. Association and non-profits can go to one contact for a variety of services and know that the messaging and branding will be consistent regardless of the department they are engaging.

Front Row Meetings and Events is one of four divisions of AH, a Mt. Laurel, New Jersey-based company that provides professional management services for non-profit organizations. Front Row's team of certified meeting specialists are creative relationship experts with negotiating power and partnerships with hotels, CVBs, audio-visual companies and other industry vendors.

— **Association Headquarters Inc.**



For large conventions and conferences, an AMC makes conference planning a breeze from registration coordination to closing ceremonies.

and other board of director members overseeing operations. The association now co-owns Synergos with the Association of Fraternal Leadership & Values, whose CEO assumed the top post at Synergos.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS AND VALUE

In addition to staff credentials and capabilities, another important benefit of using an AMC for meeting and event planning is bottom-line cost-effectiveness, Flynn says.

NAFEM uses a flat fee for services basis, which means they know exactly what they will pay and precisely what services they will get. Hotel commissions then accrue back to NAFEM.

SmithBucklin also handles exhibit space sales and floor management. “But we’re fortunate in that our exhibit space doesn’t really need to be ‘sold,’” Flynn says.

SmithBucklin also manages the configuration and management of meeting space for all educational and general meeting sessions. The company also works with NAFEM management to create meeting content, then manages its execution. That support also helps make the event cost-effective, Flynn says, because to perform those functions in-house day-to-day would be highly time-consuming and expensive for a biannual trade show that also aspires to meet the highest possible standard of content delivery.

Very much related to the general notion of cost-effectiveness is the aggregated buying power of an AMC, Hope points out.

“Because we’re buying hotel services for meetings for 130 associations, not just one, we have brand representatives at all of the hotel companies, and we can leverage that buying power on behalf of all of our clients,” he says. “That means we can get deeper discounts and better concessions. It also means we’re able to minimize liabilities and maximize revenue opportunities. And those apply to all of an association’s vendors, from convention centers to audio-visual companies to destination management companies to ground transportation providers.”

And, he adds, that kind of buying power and leverage are es-

pecially important now that the proverbial pendulum has swung back to a seller’s market. That means the negotiating power of an AMC, based on its total volume of annual business, is more important than ever.

Flynn agrees that SmithBucklin’s buying and negotiating powers are high on the list of the benefits of NAFEM’s longstanding relationship.

“Those factors are among the key reasons we leverage their abilities,” she says. “SmithBucklin works with every major city that NAFEM would look to potentially in order to place the show. They have knowledge of what works and does not work for us and our members. They do all of the hotel and convention center negotiations. And because of the number of meetings they do each year, they have longstanding relationships with all of the hotel brands and the convention centers in every major destination where we’ve ever hosted a show. They also have longstanding relationships with the destination management companies and special events vendors, production companies, decorators — all of them. So, while NAFEM’s name appears on the contract, all of the successful negotiation that we get happens because of the buying power of SmithBucklin. And what we get from that is good value and extremely good service from the cities we go to as a 20,000-attendee event.”

Moore seconds Flynn’s opinion that the relative buying power and sourcing expertise of an association management company is another key benefit of the business model.

“And it would be very expensive for us to replicate that kind of expertise internally with full-time employees if we wanted to,” Moore says. “From our discussions as we planned our strategy, not only did we want the best people we could find to do those jobs for Synergos, but we also wanted people that would make those kinds of decisions for us so we did not have to do it on our own. We want to spend our time thinking about the strategic direction of the conference, not the logistics and planning.”

Wendy Budin, president of the Eastern Nursing Research Society (ENRS) in South Orange, New Jersey, finds the buying

power of an AMC particularly important for her relatively small, 1,000-member association, which uses Fernley & Fernley as its AMC. Founded in 1886, Philadelphia-based Fernley & Fernley is billed as one of the most distinguished association management companies in the nation.

“We’re in Washington, DC, this year for our annual conference,” Budin says. “And Washington, DC, is a very expensive destination. But because of the buying power of Fernley & Fernley, we were able to get very good hotel rates. And that has helped us get strong registrations and be confident that we will have good attendance.”

THE CONTRACT CONUNDRUM

Yet another vexing issue for many associations, especially small ones with limited staffs, is contracting with hotels, convention centers and other venues. AMCs typically have contract negotiation skills that are superior to the internal staff of the association.

“We have a Kellen hotel template,” Hope says. “So when we book a hotel — and it doesn’t matter what the brand is — we use our contract. And all of the hotel brands accept our contract. So if you join forces with us, you get the benefit of our contract, which is obviously written to give the maximum benefit to the association. We feel that in today’s market, hotel contracts are weighted too much to their benefit. But we also offer what we consider a fair contract. But it is written to deliver maximum benefits to the association.”

Kellen introduced its innovative contract template in 2008, at the height of the global financial crisis and just as the meeting industry meltdown commenced. And it has continued its toughest negotiating tactic ever since.

“We do not sign contracts that have an attrition clause,” Hope says. “We negotiate contracts that do not have attrition clauses. It will have protections for both the association and the hotel under a new clause called ‘group room block performance clause.’ And that clause is based on performance through the life of the contract. So if we’re booking a meeting two years out, we have contracted check points within that time frame where both parties sit and identify the influencing factors that are impacting that agreement at any given time leading up to the meeting. “And as part of that process,” Hope says, “we talk about whether the competitive set for the hotel still exists in the same way. We address whether the overall quality of the hotel is still the same. We review whether the association meeting industry is still as healthy as it was when the contract was signed. We talk about the state of the association’s membership and whether room block pickup at the previous meeting was there. And if there is an influencing factor of any kind that might have a negative impact on the outcome of the meeting, then we might give back some rooms the hotel can then sell. But the hotel is getting those rooms back 18 months out or 12 months out or nine months out. We’re not waiting for a more standard cutoff point in a standard contract.”

“Washington, DC, is a very expensive destination. Because of the buying power of Fernley & Fernley, we were able to get very good hotel rates. And that has helped us get strong registrations and be confident that we will have good attendance.”



Wendy Budin
President
Eastern Nursing Research Society
South Orange, NJ

Given Kellen’s success with that tactic, Hope says he is surprised that so many associations are once again signing contracts that have attrition clauses.


“During the financial crisis, there were no attrition clauses,” he says. “But then everyone eventually went back to using them. But we said, ‘What, are you an idiot? Why would you sign an attrition clause?’ The industry needed to come up with something new. And that’s what we did. And we have not had a single problem with our approach since 2008, because of the intelligence and professionalism we brought to the issue.”

MAKING THE AMC DECISION

For associations that have not previously used an AMC, but are beginning to investigate hiring the right company, Flynn offers some simple advice, based on her experience.

“It’s all about a customer service match,” she says. “The association has to understand who your members are and what your overall goals are. But outsourcing helps an association executive focus on more strategic issues and not be mired in the day-to-day meeting management so much. And that then allows you to have a better and more strategic vision of where you want your event to go and to help direct that, but have people with particular expertise do the day-to-day planning and event management. But in the end, it’s all about the customer service you get. And the kind of relationship you have based on your goals.”

And in her case, with a major citywide trade show that uses the country’s biggest convention destinations, Flynn says there is a clear and distinct reason to use an AMC.

“For an event of the size and scope of our show, combined with the fact that it only happens every other year, if we managed it in-house and did not have access to as many people as we do by outsourcing it, everything else we do as an association would come to a standstill,” she says. “The show is a huge part of what we do as an association and very important to us financially, but we need to be able to have a broader focus and rely on SmithBucklin to manage a show we could never realistically manage on our own. Even if we wanted to do that, we wouldn’t be able to do anything else. And that would not serve our membership very well.” 



From the opening welcome event to the closing night session, associations attempt to set the right tone at their annual conferences. ASAE set the right tone in Detroit at the 2015 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition as more than 5,400 participants were treated to the best of the Motor City.

Setting

How to Set the Right Tone for Your

The last thing attendees want is the same old reception formats with crummy, meager food, too-long lines at the bar and extremely loud music. Not only are these complaints bothersome at the welcoming event, but they block attendees from achieving one of their main goals — networking to create and strengthen relationships. In addition, a reception that falls flat for any reason can generate attendee gripes throughout the entire event via social media.

Opening receptions are crucial because they set the tone for meetings and conferences. “The opening reception is important because it tees up everything,” says Claudia Betzner, executive director of the San Diego-based Service Industry Association (SIA). “We have a lot of content for our annual meeting, and it’s important to set the stage for that. If the welcome reception is successful and everyone is engaged, then the next few days will be productive. People will partner and talk with each other and set up meetings.”

That’s why Betzner planned a speed-networking activity for the opening reception at SIA’s annual conference last March at The Mirage Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. Speed networking was a good way to encourage mingling among the 200 attendees

from the United States, Europe and Asia. “Every few minutes, a bell would ring and people moved to a different eight-person table and talked to different folks. The purpose was to get them to network with more people than those in their own company or from their own countries. The speed networking lasted about an hour, during which we had about six 10-minute segments.”

Feedback from attendees after the conference showed that the activity was a big hit. “They said it was a good idea to have a networking speed round,” says Betzner. “They said that, because of the session, they were able to talk with people they never would have talked to and open up more business-to-business partnering opportunities.”

Other versions of speed networking also can spice up opening receptions say planners. For example, divide attendees into teams of three and rotate them among different “idea stations” (tables) in a ballroom to generate and share ideas. After a while, rotate entire tables of people to create an entirely different mix of ideas and networking.

Another version encourages attendees to find others with whom they have much in common. Every attendee finds one other person and holds a two-minute conversation in which



To create a sense of place and engage attendees from the get-go, the conference managers used the Henry Ford Museum, Hart Plaza and held the annual Classic at the iconic Fox Theatre. They also showcased the local and regional flavors of Detroit from cuisine to entertainment.

the Stage

Event From the Opening Note By Derek Reveron

both people write down everything they have in common. Each attendee switches to another person every two minutes when a buzzer sounds. The session ends after 30 minutes, and the people with the most in common are the winners.

The object is to find someone in the room who has the most in common with you. Everyone starts with a pen and paper. At the horn start, each person finds someone else in the room and

has a two-minute conversation in which both people try to find as many things in common as they can. After two minutes the horn sounds again and everyone switches. After 15 minutes, the people who have the most in common are declared the winners.

While some opening receptions are held in ballrooms and meeting rooms, others take place in exhibit halls among exhibitors. Such receptions can be rather perfunctory. However, the New York City-based American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) added extra touches to its opening reception at its annual conference, which was held in Montreal in November, and was attended by 2,300 people.

The reception was held in the exhibit hall at the Montreal Convention Centre. “We try to make it exciting for the attendees,” says Carine Desroches, ASME Meetings Manager. “Before we open up the hall for the reception, we ring a bell and everybody gathers in front of the exhibit hall where there is a huge ribbon across the door. We serve champagne and hors d’oeuvres to everyone, and our president says a few words. Then we have a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and everybody goes in for the reception.”

The reception is designed to encourage exhibitors, professionals and students to network with each other. “We do the



Claudia Betzner
Executive Director
Service Industry Association
San Diego, CA

“We have a lot of content for our annual meeting, and it’s important to set the stage for that. If the welcome reception is successful and everyone is engaged, then...people will partner and talk with each other and set up meetings.”



Claudia Betzner, the long-time executive director of Service Industry Association, is an enthusiastic proponent of networking at conferences to get the ball moving.

Credits: SIA

du Soleil-type performers and mimes. It depends on a group's budget and how grand or small they want their reception. And it depends on the type of atmosphere they want to create."

Koenig wanted to create a relaxed, outdoor atmosphere for a reception during a conference last year in Las Vegas at the Green Valley Ranch Resort Spa Casino. "We held it by the pool on a beautiful night," says Koenig. "We had colored up-lighting on the food stations. There were enough bars,

and they were far enough apart so that people didn't feel crowded or have to stand in long lines for drinks. We made sure that someone else on the banquet staff — a server or someone else — could jump in and help a bartender if needed."

Music was the key to the reception's atmosphere. "We had three women who strolled while playing the electric violin," says Koenig. "They did three or four 15-minute sets. When they weren't playing, we had soft background music. It wasn't so loud that you couldn't talk. That was important to this group."

CHOOSING THE TYPE OF ENTERTAINMENT

Musical entertainment works for some receptions but not for others. The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) held an opening reception for its annual conference last year at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront. There was no music. "We have had musical entertainment in the past, and that didn't add anything," says Phil Harris, AECT executive director and planner of the annual conference. "One year we had a jazz group made up of our members. That got thumbs down because it was too loud and people couldn't carry on a conversation. In Jacksonville, there was already enough noise with 750 people in the room. You had to be close to your conversational partner to hear the person."



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

"We do the reception in the exhibit hall because it's more interactive. Members get a different take because they talk with exhibitors. ...Attendees also like having the reception with students to network with them and share ideas."

Additional entertainment ideas to engage attendees: a comedy act that pokes fun at the organization's CEO; a mime who acts out the organization's conference theme; a "living statue" that portrays the conference's theme via dress and pose; an ice sculptor who crafts the organization's theme or logo in a live performance; a magician who works the theme or message into his magic act. Other ideas: The organization's top officers can perform karaoke of a song that matches the conference theme; "fire eaters" can provide a theatrical introduction for any "hot" new program or service.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE IDEAS

Many times a lackluster reception can be overhauled simply by providing the right amount and types of food. Under-



Meeting Solutions uses just the right dose and type of entertainment to set the stage for their events. They use jugglers, musicians, Cirque du Soleil-type performers and mimes, among many others. A live presentation of ice sculpting also is a big hit with their guests.



Credits: Jack Linquist, ARM

ordering is a big turnoff for attendees. "It's tied to knowing your counts," says Koenig. "The biggest thing to know is how many people will attend and have the right amount of food and staffing. I've seen planners not order enough, and it has happened to me as well. A lot of times people are just coming off a plane to a reception, and they are starving so they eat dinner at a reception and the food runs short."

Providing enough good food also encourages attendees to remain and network. "A lot of times, when you go to association programs, there is limited food and beverage," says Koenig. "So vendors grab their clients and take them out for dinner, pulling them away from the opening reception. We like to provide enough food and beverage to get people to stay, thinking 'Why

should we go out to dinner when we have so much good food.' Our sponsors really appreciate that so they can talk to people."

Some groups, on the other hand, may want to cut back on the amount of food to meet the needs of attendees. "It's important to have a clear, articulated purpose for your reception," says Harris. "We spend a fair amount of time discussing the purpose of





Phil Harris
Executive Director
Association for Educational
Communications and Technology
Bloomington, IN

“There were people commenting on the food and using text messages, Twitter and Facebook to share great conversations with others who weren’t participating. That’s something we don’t have to encourage. They do it automatically.”

our large group activities. It’s what caused us to cut time and food load of our opening reception in Jacksonville.”

At that meeting, Harris cut back on the amount of heavy food. “We also cut the time of the reception by a half hour,” he says. “It had been a two-hour event and we reduced it to an hour and a half. We did it so people wouldn’t feel so full and give them more time to go out to dinner afterwards and network, which has turned out to be a significant way to engage new members. One of the things we look for in selecting our location is the number of restaurants within walking distance of the reception.”

It’s important to match the types of food with the attendees. “You have to make sure you satisfy different needs, especially those of people coming from different cultures, countries and ethnic backgrounds,” says Betzner. “Make sure you have a variety of breads, meats, vegetables, cheeses and desserts. There needs to be a carving station and a vegetarian option.”

ROOM SETTINGS THAT PROMOTE NETWORKING

Room setup is another factor that contributes to having a good opening reception. “In Jacksonville, we didn’t have enough tables and chairs for everybody, and that was part of our planning,” says Harris. “We didn’t want everybody to sit down. We felt that they would mix more if they were standing, and would just sit there if we had seats for everybody.”

Koenig agrees that having fewer seats than there are people makes for a livelier reception. “Absolutely have fewer,” he says. “Have the tables in the middle but spaced out probably six feet apart. Don’t have tables next to the food or bar because you want people circulating and not clogging things up.”

Koenig advises interspersing tables with highboys — tall round tables around 30 inches wide on which people can rest food and drinks. “You want to have lots of highboys, not a lot of big round tables,” says Koenig. “People who come by themselves are leery of sitting at a big table not knowing anybody else.”

Planners offer the following additional setup advice.

- Consider attendees’ flight arrival times to ensure that they have enough time to check into hotels and clean up before the opening reception.

- Don’t hold opening receptions more than three hours long because they can exhaust guests, especially those who had lengthy flights, before meetings start.
- Have someone circulate with spare name badges to make sure everyone is wearing one. Badges are important because they serve as icebreakers and encourage networking.

Designating people as welcome ambassadors to encourage attendees to mingle also helps ensure successful opening receptions. “Our host committee circulates and grabs people who sit by themselves to introduce them to others and start a conversation,” says Koenig. “Lots of people come to conferences and don’t know anybody, especially if they are new to the industry, so you always want to have a committee or group of people who are willing to look out for them.”

Harris agrees. “It helps to have members pull in first time attendees to get them acquainted,” he says. It helps seal the kind of personal relationships that are a hallmark of the networking

“Our host committee circulates and grabs people who sit by themselves to introduce them to others and start a conversation. Lots of people come to conferences and don’t know anybody, especially if they are new.”



Brandon Koenig, CMP
President and Founder
Meeting Solutions
Wheeling, IL

activities that happen at our convention. We are trying to figure out more ways to encourage the networking of new members.”

One final tip: While planning opening receptions, planners should keep in mind that every detail of a reception, good and bad, is shared live during the event. “Every one of our members has at least two devices on them,” says Harris. “There were people commenting on the food and using text messages, Twitter and Facebook to share great conversations with others who weren’t participating. That’s something we don’t have to encourage. They do it automatically.”

Planners should not underestimate the power of an engaging opening reception. As Koenig says, “It’s important to lead off with a nice welcome reception because it lays the basis for your whole program.” The last thing planners want to do is repeat what they do at opening receptions year after year. Adding new touches annually encourages networking and promotes attendance.

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This tweetup was a great way to engage a segment of the American Occupational Therapy Association's membership — especially those who frequently share AOTA's accomplishments via social media. Thousands of followers give AOTA positive exposure, and tweetups allow tweeters to meet face-to-face.

Generating Non-Dues Revenue

Creative Ways to Capture Added Income From a Variety of Sources

By Mark Rowh

When it comes to increasing income from dues, there are two obvious choices: Raise the amount charged to each member, or expand the number of members. Fortunately, these are not the only ways to address needs for added revenue. Many meeting planners, as well as other association staff, are recognizing the importance of non-dues revenue and pursuing creative ways to capture it.

“Associations continue to do more with less and it is important to generate non-dues revenue,” says Matthew Lombardi, vice president of the conventions division of the National Association of Realtors, Chicago. He notes that companies want to sell and promote to association members and that creating these opportunities will provide new revenue sources.

In addition, non-dues revenues create an additional member benefit by helping keep member dues lower than would otherwise be the case. At the same time, such funds can help the organization address a growth agenda.

“Non-dues revenue sources help keep associations creative, relevant and innovative,” Lombardi says. “This is important when selling the benefit of membership to the next generation of members.”

Additional revenues also help insure against future budget challenges.

“In this day and age, it’s important to have revenue from a number of different sources so you do not have to depend too much upon revenue from one source,” says Frank E. Gainer, director of conferences for the American Occupational Therapy Association in Bethesda, Maryland. “This spreads the risk.”

VARIED APPROACHES

At the American Library Association (ALA), non-dues revenue is generated in a variety of ways, according to Mary Mackay, marketing director of the Chicago-based organization.

“As with any organization or business, diversification is critical for long-term financial health so we can weather the inevitable ups and downs in the different revenue-generating areas,” she says.

At ALA, such measures include face-to-face conferences, institutes, forums and symposia, as well as extensive publishing programs ranging from professional development-related books to the organization’s well-known READ celebrity poster series. Other revenue sources include e-learning programs, advertising revenue in journals and magazines, corporate sponsorships and individual donations.

“We’ve had success with all these programs,” Mackay says. “At the same time, we’re constantly evaluating and re-evaluating based on data and what our members and customers need to keep building the profession and libraries for the future.”

While conference and meeting fees do generate income, there is an ongoing effort to keep these fees reasonably low.

“We keep our rates as affordable as possible,” Mackay says. “Our creative energy goes into programming and developing relevant content so we attract as many members and others as possible to participate. Increasing the size of our audience — and delivering a memorable, professionally useful experience that members talk about and recommend to others — is more likely to guarantee our long-term financial health.”

“In this day and age, it’s important to have revenue from a number of different sources so you do not have to depend too much upon revenue from one source. This spreads the risk.”



Frank E. Gainer
Director of Conferences
American Occupational Therapy
Association
Bethesda, MD

Corporate sponsorships, on the other hand, may be fair game when it comes to profits.

“We offer a wide array of opportunities for corporate sponsors to participate in the association,” Mackay says. They include advertising in print and online journals, magazines, conference programs, and the conference show dailies, exhibiting at face-to-face events, and sponsoring webinars and other online events. Other opportunities involve sponsorship of awards and scholarships, some of which are named for the corporate sponsor.

“Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, wins a prize for sponsorship longevity,” Mackay notes. “They’ve sponsored shuttle buses at our national conferences for 50 years now.”

While not yet a major revenue source for ALA, Web advertising offers growth potential. At this point, the organization doesn’t accept Web ads on the website homepage or many landing pages, but some individual units within the association have specific Web advertising programs and partnerships.

“Especially with the focus on responsive design and mobile use now, we’ll be especially careful about integrating ads into our content,” Mackay says. “But it’s obviously a growth area. We don’t sell ALA member emails; instead, we have limited programs whereby we send emails out on behalf of a sponsor. We’re conscious of the need to keep email under control so our members don’t feel inundated.”

Selling branded merchandise is another successful strategy. At the annual meeting and some division national conferences, ALA operates e-conference stores onsite where attendees can buy regular branded items as well as conference-specific merchandise. Several library-focused events are held each year such as National Library Week, School Library Month, Banned Books Week, Teen Read Week and El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Día). For these events, librarians buy theme-branded posters, bookmarks, and other related products to promote activities in their libraries and communities.

The ALA also offers e-learning opportunities and webinars in multiple formats on numerous topics. While some of the as-

sociation's divisions offer online learning options as part of the membership dues, most are fee-based. On top of participant fees, some webinars also generate revenue by having corpo-

rate sponsors. For instance, with "American Libraries Live" and "Booklist" webinars, contributing sponsors have opportunities to present on the programs.

The Education Angle

Pre-conference workshops and extra sessions that are not included in basic conference fees can be a solid source of added revenue, as well as a valuable service to members.

A typical annual meeting of the American Dental Association, for instance, features nearly 100 workshops as part of the conference. Some take the better part of a day, while others may be completed in an hour. Examples from the upcoming conference in November include Cosmetic Smile Design (\$315 or \$295 with early registration); Forensics Odontology: A Hands-On Experience (\$235 or \$215 with early registration); Facebook and Beyond: Social Media for your Dental Practice (\$45); and the Total Wellness Dental Practice (\$35 or \$25 at the discounted rate).

Similarly, the National Association of Realtors brings in revenue through pre-conference workshops on topics such as Communication Directors Institute (\$125); Discovering Commercial Real Estate (\$69); and Professional Standards for Association Counsel (\$50).

The revenues produced by such activities offer a great supplement to dues and other income, but their impact can be even more significant if related costs are contained. In fact the smaller the investment in a given activity, the better. This may be especially true for associations, which unlike for-profit firms may have an obligation to keep expenses borne by members as low as possible, meaning frequent or steep increases in fees might not be a realistic option. To achieve healthy profit margins without resorting to such measures, consider these steps:

- **Save on instructor pay.** Typically,

payment to presenters is the single greatest expense in delivering a class. There may be little flexibility in this area for well-known presenters whose reputation or credentials are the chief draw for the session. But in some cases, substantial savings are possible. For example, an association staffer who is already on the payroll may teach classes or seminars for no extra pay. Or a guest presenter might accept a reduced fee in exchange for the exposure gained through marketing the session.

- **Take advantage of opportunities for repeat usage.** If a session is preserved in digital form via podcast, DVD or other means, selling copies following the initial

live presentation can provide a ready source of additional revenue. Copies can be marketed through listings on the organization's website at virtually no added expense. One caveat: contractual agreements with presenters should specify rights of the association for repeat usage.

- **Market ancillary materials.** Sale of books that have been mentioned in live sessions, research reports and other materials can bring in additional income. And grab some cheap marketing exposure in the process: When shipping such materials (or in providing electronic versions), include announcements about upcoming educational opportunities. —MR



The American Library Association raises revenue from various sources such as sponsorships and advertising in order to keep their education and conference fees lower for members.

Credit: American Library Association



Credits: American Library Association

The American Library Association raises non-dues revenue from face-to-face conferences, institutes, forums and symposia, such as those shown here.

NAR pursues similar strategies. Booth sales and sponsorships at its annual conference and expo are major revenue sources. The income helps conference planners keep registration fees as low as possible to aid in encouraging members to attend the Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference.

“Non-dues revenue from expo sales and sponsorships help augment registration fees, so we are able to pass along the savings to our members,” Lombardi says. “We also offer a tiered pricing system, with registration options to fit any schedule or budget.”

Lombardi says his association continually looks for new and creative ideas for conference exhibitors and sponsors. “We create a value proposition for companies to reach our members through channels we manage and control,” he says. “For example, we have an exclusive sponsor for the conference education session recordings. This sponsorship provides the company with year-long exposure through the program.”

Another success has been the exclusive sponsorship

of Conference Live, a virtual window into the conference experience.

“This sponsorship allows the company to have a voice in NAR’s conference communications, drive attendance to their booth onsite, and start important conversations with members,” he says.

The association also generates non-dues revenue by offering recorded conference sessions for purchase and download.

“Not only does this program bring in revenue, but it’s also a great sponsorship opportunity for the right partner,” Lombardi says. “And the members benefit by accessing education even if they cannot attend the conference in person.” He adds that re-

corded sessions also are available throughout the year, extending the reach of the conference beyond just the event dates.

Recorded sessions are available for purchase on both flash drive and disc, as well as through streaming or downloading the recordings. In addition, these materials provide an incentive for other participation by conference-goers. Since 2010, attendees who have registered at the highest registration level received a free set of streaming or downloads courtesy of the sponsor. The program is tied into the sponsor's focus on education for real estate pros and has allowed for a year-round sponsorship that lives on well past the event.

"This also increases the conference's educational reach to



Mary Mackay
Marketing Director
American Library Association
Chicago, IL

“Increasing the size of our audience — and delivering a memorable, professionally useful experience that members talk about and recommend to others — is more likely to guarantee our long-term financial health.”

members and provides one more source of non-dues revenue for the association,” Lombardi says.

Thinking beyond the actual event about ways to leverage the experience and meeting content benefits the organization as well as attendees, Lombardi adds. “It shows that the association cares about members even if they can’t attend the event in person.”

Gainer also stresses the importance of evaluating events for potential improvement. The conference team for his association holds an annual retreat where staff review feedback from participants and decide on what should be changed. Changes are communicated to attendees by listing them in a piece entitled “Your Feedback Makes a Difference.”

“We have focused on creating a more dynamic annual conference and expo,” Gainer says. “We have also been focusing on making the content more appealing to advanced-level practitioners.”

Continued attention to pricing levels is another key factor.

Catherine Mills, director of the Chicago-based American Dental Association’s annual meeting, says that while it’s important to keep dues low, members are willing to pay for educational activities or other events in which they see value.

“People always say they like free, but they are willing to pay,” she says. “This is especially true for the higher level, hands-on experiences.” At the same time, pricing should be reasonable. “You don’t want to look like a money-grabber,” she says.

It’s also true that well-placed discounts, while reducing revenues in the short term, can lead to long-term commitments that bolster overall income.

For example, the AOTA has benefitted from a “join now” program rate that offers a slightly discounted membership rate wrapped into fees for the annual conference. Almost 10 percent of attendees take advantage of the reduced rate, according to Gainer.

LOOKING FORWARD

Mackay says that possibilities for enhancing offerings and bolstering revenue should be an organization-wide priority.

“Everyone across the association is asked to be mindful of opportunities for diversifying our offerings in creative ways,” she says. “Our meeting planners work closely with exhibitors and sponsors to come up with mutually beneficial new products, programs and services.”

One area being considered by ALA is globalization.

“We’re looking to increase revenue from international programs and services in the coming years,” Mackay says. As a starting point, her association has begun collaborating with the Sharjah International Book Fair in the United Arab Emirates.

“The key in the international arena is to do good homework and be aware of where there are local interests and ventures in place,” Mackay says. “We can then determine where we can help them amplify what they’re already doing versus opportunities for new programs that can help the field of librarianship develop globally.”

Lombardi urges other meeting planners to spend time analyzing income possibilities.

“Do your research,” he says. “Determine your non-dues revenue goals and create opportunities to meet those goals. Also, learn what other associations are doing to successfully generate non-dues revenue.”

Mills agrees that it’s important to take an analytical approach.

“You need to look at the goals and plans for your organization,” she says. In the process, she adds, it becomes increasingly important to assess member interests. “People used to join just to join,” she says. “That’s not true anymore.”

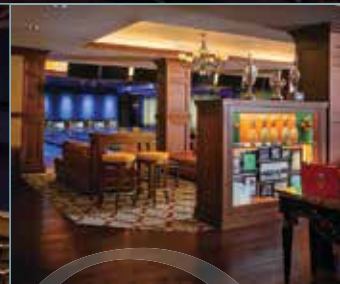
Collaboration also can be helpful.

“Know your members and industry,” Lombardi says. “Work with your current partners and vendors to create non-dues revenue opportunities at your events. Such revenue can help your association by funding special projects or new member benefits.”

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The Las Vegas Effect

The Power of the No. 1 Trade Show Destination's Draw Outweighs the Distractions

By Sara Churchville



City of 1,000 distractions? Sure. But with careful attention, association meeting planners still can keep attendees focused. The competition for their attention is worth it: The No. 1 trade show destination for 21 years running routinely outpaces the draw of any other convention city.

“Consistently we do Vegas because we try other places, but we lose 20 percent of our attendees when we do. Vegas is the place you love to hate, but whatever you like — it’s there,” says Claudia Betzner, executive director of Service Industry Association. But room attrition, on the other hand, can be as high as 25 percent, she says.

“There are so many package deals that when you block rooms, you have to have an attrition clause,” she notes. “Participants may get cheaper deals than you can offer since hotels continue to lower rates until occupancy is over 95 percent; attendees can find package deals — more than any other place in the world. Vegas is not a destination resort; 75 percent will stay at your property, not more.”

“Making sure that...your content is strong enough that people want to sit in a room and hear what people have to say instead of playing in Vegas — that’s probably the biggest challenge.”

Claudia Betzner, Executive Director
Service Industry Association, San Diego, CA



Credit: Las Vegas New Bureau



Doug Poindexter
President
World Pet Association Inc.
Monrovia, CA

“It was a tough sell at first to move to Vegas. We have not found the stigma — party town — to be true.”

She held her annual event for presidents and owners of high-tech service companies — about 150 this year — in March 2015 at The Mirage Hotel & Casino. “Ninety-nine percent of people who come to my events are men who started out as engineers or in tech,” she says. “Sometimes they bring their wives, but mostly they come alone and hang out with the guys and do guy things” such as NASCAR and March Madness.

She’s chosen The Mirage for the past 15 years, with intermittent events at Caesars Palace, Aria Resort & Casino and The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino, among others. “We have a lot of people who gamble and go to shows and do what casinos want them to do, so they always provide the best venue and best price.” She also appreciates the setup, which is such that the meeting spaces are convenient to the guest rooms. “You can easily run back to the room to get something, whereas some places it can be very far.

“Making sure that everything that you’re presenting is relevant and your content is strong enough that people want to sit in a room and hear what people have to say instead of playing in Vegas — that’s probably the biggest challenge.” To help keep attendees on point, she recommends planners engage speakers who are completely out of the industry, noting that “the same principles that motivate people to play football or fly under fire motivate a work force.” (*Learn more about SIA’s Las Vegas meeting in “Setting the Stage,” page 44.*)

Karen Autunno-Edmiston, meeting planner for Quarter Midgets of America, a nonprofit association of youth midget-car racers, also has found that Las Vegas just tends to bring in more attendees than other venues she’s tried since the 1990s, including in California, Connecticut, New York and Florida. “We have done multiple different surveys, and this is the one that works for us,” she says of the city. “The cost of the rooms — they have the cheapest that have all the facilities. For the class of room, it’s very reasonable.”

She has been holding her annual meeting of regional representatives from the clubs and the governing body — about 80 attendees — at the Orleans Hotel & Casino for the past four years. “The event center gives me a purpose room from my meetings; away from the hotel, very short walk, can go right over to the events center,” she says.

Still, she says she’s not locked in; each year she books for the coming year and listens to various proposals.

Doug Poindexter, president of the World Pet Association, has also sampled various cities for his SuperZoo convention, which draws close to 20,000 attendees, including 1,000 exhibitors. “We were in LA for a number of years, with a lot of driving in traffic. We wanted more national and international attendees, so Vegas is very good for that — it draws a large crowd.”

He has used Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino as the headquarters for SuperZoo since 2005. “Mandalay Bay gave us a little better footprint,” he says of his decision to move to the space from the Las Vegas Convention Center South Hall, where his organization originally partnered with the California Nursing Association until the event required more space.

For his latest event in July 2015, he also had a block of rooms at the Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas, Delano Las Vegas, Excalibur Hotel & Casino and Luxor Hotel and Casino. “The vast majority stay at their own brand or price point, or they rent out a condo for a week,” he says of his attendees.

For the summer event, he needed



The new Italian restaurant Carbone recently opened at Aria Resort & Casino.

Credit: Aria Resort & Casino



Credits: Mandalay Bay

The Mandalay Bay Convention Center's 350,000-sf expansion opened in August, for a total of 2 million sf of meeting and exhibit space.

ballroom space for about 2,000 people for the keynote address and also set up a concert at House of Blues, which could accommodate about 1,800 attendees. He also bought out the hall's Wi-Fi so all attendees and exhibitors could use it free of charge.

Of his experience at Mandalay Bay, he says: "They respond quickly to issues and problems and resolve them as quickly as they can, trying to help us make the whole process as smooth as possible." For example, the hotel allowed his decorator to come in a bit earlier.

"It was a tough sell at first to move to Vegas," he acknowledges,

because of the city's reputation for losing attendees to the tables. But for his organization's part, "We have not found the stigma — party town — to be true."

Becky Bosworth, meetings and conference manager, staff operations for the Arthritis Foundation, says meeting planners can do more to change the perception of Las Vegas; for example, by "showing visuals of the meeting space: How do I get from my guest room to the meeting?"

Her July 2015 meeting of about 80 people was really two events: leadership skills training and later, separately, a meeting of CEOs. She found that the location of Aria Resort & Casino worked well for both in terms of seeming...un-Vegas. "Get off the elevator, and it's like you're in Orlando or Chicago or wherever. The convention center is easily accessible from guest rooms, and you can't see the casino. It's a straight shot, so you don't lose anybody."

She also appreciated the feel of the hotel. "Aria is like a little hidden jewel. It's close to everything, but when you walk in, there's a very serene feeling. There's not a lot of noise and hype; you don't feel like one of thousands. From

Plans are in the works to expand and renovate the Las Vegas Convention Center.



Credit: LVCVA

the doorman to the front desk: friendliness, courtesy — it was so refreshing. You just don't see that a lot in other hotels, and sometimes you don't expect that in Vegas." She also notes that thanks to the hotel's special ventilation system, attendees don't even realize there's a smoking section.

Having a business center meeting room separate from the convention center helped expedite her meeting as shipments could be brought directly to the room. When her meeting grew, the ho-

"We have done multiple different surveys, and (Las Vegas) is the one that works for us."

Karen Autunno-Edmiston, Meeting Planner
Quarter Midgets of America, Tulsa, OK

tel also sent her diagrams showing exactly why she needed a new space and suggested one.

With an overlap of 1½ days between the groups, she planned two offsite dinners, one for the CEOs at the steak house The Stack, which was close to the show they were going to see. "Stack worked with our budget with a set menu, and the food quality was perfect for the group." She also noted that the restaurant was very accommodating of food preferences and special diets.

"Hotels forget sometimes that you're also working on other meetings; but here, there's one conversation, one email and boom, it's done."



Wynn Las Vegas and Encore combine for 260,000 sf of meeting space.



The Colosseum statues at Caesars Palace.

Credit: Caesars Palace

NEW & NOTEWORTHY RENOVATIONS

The Las Vegas Global Business District master plan, which will add at least 600,000 sf of exhibit space to the Las Vegas Convention Center and renovate the existing 3.2 million-sf facility, is still eight to 10 years away from final realization. Closer to completion is the China-themed Resorts World Las Vegas, expected to come online in 2018, when it will offer a panda exhibit, an indoor water park, a bowling alley, aquarium and ice skating rink, along with almost 6,600 rooms, a 175,000-sf casino and a 4,000-seat theater. How much of the nearly 2 million sf will be devoted to meeting space hasn't yet been determined.

Caesars Palace Las Vegas is renovating the 587 rooms in the Roman Tower, which will be rechristened the Julius Tower. The \$75 million renovation should be complete in time to ring in the new year. The rooms will feature 55-inch TVs, specialty mattresses and Gilchrist and Soames bath products.

The millennially minded Linq Hotel & Casino renovated its 2,253 guest rooms, including two lofts, in July. The hotel is part of a finished complex that includes the Linq Promenade, with several dozen bars, restaurants and shops, and the High Roller observation wheel.

Wynn Las Vegas' Encore Resort rooms and Encore Tower suites underwent a remodel that includes new furniture, linens and carpets; new giant-screen TVs and desk outlets; and remote controls to adjust the curtains and lighting. Every room also

Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

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SOUTH POINT
Las Vegas



Credit: South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa

South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa opened a new 60-lane, state-of-the-art tournament bowling and event center.

has 507-thread-count sheets made to order for the hotel and a Molton Brown bath product line “Coco & Tonka Bean,” also made specially for the hotel.

Mandalay Bay Convention Center has expanded by 350,000 sf, for a total of 2 million sf including 1.1 million sf of exhibit space. Only the Las Vegas Convention Center and the Sands Expo and Convention Center have more space in Las Vegas. The new space includes a 70,000-sf ballroom and a rooftop solar array.

Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino also is undergoing a resort-wide transformation with the upcoming \$100 million redesign of more than 3,000 guest rooms and suites. Created by the MGM Resorts International Design Group, the new rooms and suites will feature vibrant colors and bold statement pieces. Reservations for select remodeled rooms are now available. The project is expected to be completed by spring 2016.

This year, the final phase of the multi-year renovation of **The Venetian and The Palazzo Congress Center and Sands Expo** was completed. Recent improvements at Sands Expo included

a new \$6 million, 12,000-sf kitchen designed to provide higher quality food for trade show attendees, support show growth and increase energy efficiency by 35 percent. This is in addition to the recent total remodel and redesign of all lobbies and common spaces; construction of a 60-foot central atrium with a 30,000-sf, 3-D articulated ceiling; reconstruction of meeting rooms and business center; renovation of the building facade and porte cochere; and upgrades to the exhibition halls. Also, attendees will find upgrades to the technology and Wi-Fi infrastructure throughout the resort and convention center.

South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa opened a new 60-lane,

“Aria is like a little hidden jewel. It’s close to everything, but when you walk in, there’s a very serene feeling. ...You don’t feel like one of thousands.”

Becky Bosworth, Meetings & Conference Manager, Staff Operations
Arthritis Foundation, Atlanta, GA

state-of-the-art tournament bowling and event center. As part of a partnership between the United States Bowling Congress and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, the venue will host 122 days of professional bowling tournaments through 2017.

With a unique South Beach vibe after a \$200 million complete transformation, **The New Tropicana Las Vegas, a DoubleTree by Hilton** features all-new rooms, suites and luxury villas, a fresh redesign of the 50,000-sf casino, several award-winning restaurants, a new race and sports book, and Glow, a Mandara Spa and fitness center. And after a recent expansion, the Trinidad Pavilion and Meeting Rooms at the Tropicana now boast 42,000 sf of space. New Wi-Fi technology including wired and wireless Internet access is now available throughout the property’s approximate 100,000 sf of convention space as well as in the resort’s 1,467 guest rooms and suites.

NEW RESTAURANTS AND NIGHTCLUBS

The renowned New York City Italian restaurant **Carbone** has just opened its first expansion outside of the Big Apple at Aria Resort & Casino; it features tableside presentations by table “captains,” traditional specialties such as spicy rigatoni vodka, veal Parmesan and lobster fra diavolo and meatballs. The private dining Blue Room,

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Credit: Delano Las Vegas

The new Skyfall Lounge, located on the 64th floor of Delano Las Vegas next to chef Alain Ducasse's new Rivea restaurant, offers sweeping views of The Strip.

with walls made of New York subway station tiles, can seat 40; the main dining Red Room features a floor-to-ceiling Murano glass crystal chandelier. California coastal cuisine chain **Herringbone** will open at the resort in late 2015, featuring outdoor seating and live music with the "ocean-to-table" menu; and a new Rockwell Group-designed nightclub, **Jewel**, is set to open in spring 2016 and will be available for buyouts.

Rivea and **Skyfall Lounge** are now open at Delano Las Vegas. Helmed by chef Alain Ducasse, Rivea specializes in Mediterranean foods such as Provençal caponata with capers and pinenuts and pepper-crusted bison tenderloin. A 50-seat private dining room, Rivea+, offers wraparound views of The Strip. Skyfall Lounge also provides 180-degree views. Both are on the 64th floor.

The Park, AEG and MGM Resorts International's entertainment district project that will offer outdoor dining and strolling as well as connect Monte Carlo Resort and Casino, New York-New York Hotel & Casino and the new 20,000-seat Las Vegas Arena, is still on track to open in spring 2016. A new 5,000-seat theater at Monte Carlo has been added to the mix and will open in late 2016.

Salute, serving the food of Southern Italy, is now open at Red Rock Casino Resort and Spa, with Neapolitano chef Luciano Sautto at the helm.

Farm-to-table restaurant **Harvest** by Roy Ellamar will open at Bellagio Resort & Casino in December 2015. The restaurant will highlight regional American dishes made with locally sourced foods.

Reality-show restaurant **Wahlburgers**, established by Marky Mark Wahlberg and his brothers, will open at Grand Bazaar Shops at Bally's Las Vegas at the end of 2015. Gourmet burgers and drinks are on the menu.

Food Tours of America launched in Las Vegas in October with a **Vegas Celebrity Chocolate Walk** offered daily at 3 p.m.

Big Ern's BBQ opened its second soul food eatery in October in the Fiesta Rancho Hotel & Casino food court. The decor is similar to the original — barn style with a picnic table — and of-



Credit: Las Vegas Sands

The final phase of the multi-year renovation of The Venetian and The Palazzo Congress Center and Sands Expo was completed this year.

Meetings in Reno

About 450 miles from the lights of The Strip is the Reno/Lake Tahoe area. The Reno-Sparks Convention Center, which provides more than 500,000-sf of meeting space, hosted the National Science Teachers Association meeting in October 2015. The convention center is a 15-minute drive from the Reno-Tahoe International Airport, which offers free shuttle service to many of the area hotels. Here's a sampling:

Indoor walkways connect Silver Legacy Resort Casino, Eldorado Hotel Casino and Circus Circus Reno, which together offer more than 4,200 rooms, 182,700 sf of meeting space, and 28 restaurants along with bars, nightclubs, gaming and shows.

Grand Sierra Resort and Casino features more than 200,000 sf of meeting space; the Mexican restaurant Cantina, which offers 115 different tequilas; an indoor pool; a racquetball court; and almost 2,000 guest rooms.

Peppermill Resort Spa Casino is entirely powered by a geothermal well nearly a mile beneath the resort. All of its heat, including the hot water for the 43,000-sf Spa Toscana, emanates from this source. The resort has 10 restaurants, 16 bars, 106,000 sf of meeting space and 1,635 rooms.

The Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino has 398 guest rooms and outdoor seating at the all-day dining Sierra Café.

The Whitney Peak Hotel features a play area, "Base Camp," with the world's tallest exterior climbing wall at 16 stories; a 7,000-sf bouldering park; 11 meeting rooms including the



Peppermill Resort Spa Casino boasts more than 100,000 sf of meeting space.

Credit: Reno-Sparks CVB



The Reno-Sparks Convention Center has 500,000 sf of meeting space.

5,400-sf Whitney Peak Ballroom; more than 20,000 sf of event space that can host groups of up to 400 guests; and catering services by James Beard-nominated chef Mark Estee.

Built in 1877, Lake Mansion can accommodate meetings of up to 150 attendees in its two parlors, library, dining room, porches, courtyard and 700-sf enclosed Garden Pavilion.

Thunderbird Lodge has a 50-foot waterfall and about 5,400 sf of meeting space in six rooms, one of which is a 400-sf patio with, like the Lakeside Ballroom, views of Lake Tahoe. Two fireplaces make it a cozy option for housing up to 300 attendees.

The 64,000-sf Terry Lee Wells Nevada Discovery Museum has seven galleries as well as flexible space for meetings and events.

Sierra Arts, in the Riverside Artist Lofts in the Truckee River Arts District, can accommodate up to 120 people and, at the planner's request, contact information for players of the gallery's piano. A full kitchen and conference room are onsite.

— SC

fers an expanded menu of sides, including macaroni and cheese, collard greens with smoked ham hock, fried okra, sweet potato fries and bread pudding.

The upgraded **Center Bar** is now open at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas with a new lounge area, more cocktail offerings and better views of the casino floor.

Lavo Casino Club, which features blackjack table games with bottle service and the option to order from the restaurant's menu of Italian food, is now open at The Palazzo Las Vegas. The

space also offers dancing to a deejay and sporting events on multiple screens.

The Omnia Nightclub — the former Pure Nightclub — opened last March at Caesars Palace after a top-to-bottom makeover. The completely redeveloped 75,000-sf venue houses three distinct nightlife spaces: the Main Club including the Balcony level, Heart of Omnia; the sleek ultra-lounge; and the Terrace offering sweeping views of the Las Vegas Strip. Omnia is available for group buyouts for 200–4,000 people.

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BENNETT

The Louisville Convention and Visitors Bureau has named **Doug Bennett** as senior vice president of convention development. He was director of sales for the central division of Global Experience Specialists Exposition Services.

The Hawaii Visitors & Convention Bureau has named **Mary Neister** as vice president, responsible for leading HVCB's sales efforts for meetings, conventions and incentives. She most recently served as



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director of sales and marketing at the Hilton Waikiki Beach hotel.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel in Orlando, Florida, has promoted **Kristina Moehle** to group sales manager for the Southeast markets. She was a catering coordinator. **Kelly Hartig** was named group sales manager for the Midwest and West Coast markets. She was catering sales manager for the Country Club of Orlando.



HARTIG



LAKE

Visit Tampa Bay, Tampa Bay, Florida, has named **Kory Lake** as national sales manager and **Jason Carroll, CMP**, as regional account executive in the mid-Atlantic market. Both Lake and Carroll will focus on convention business in the Washington, DC, area. Lake most recently served as senior sales executive for the Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina. Carroll most recently was director of sales and events at The Florida Aquarium in Tampa.



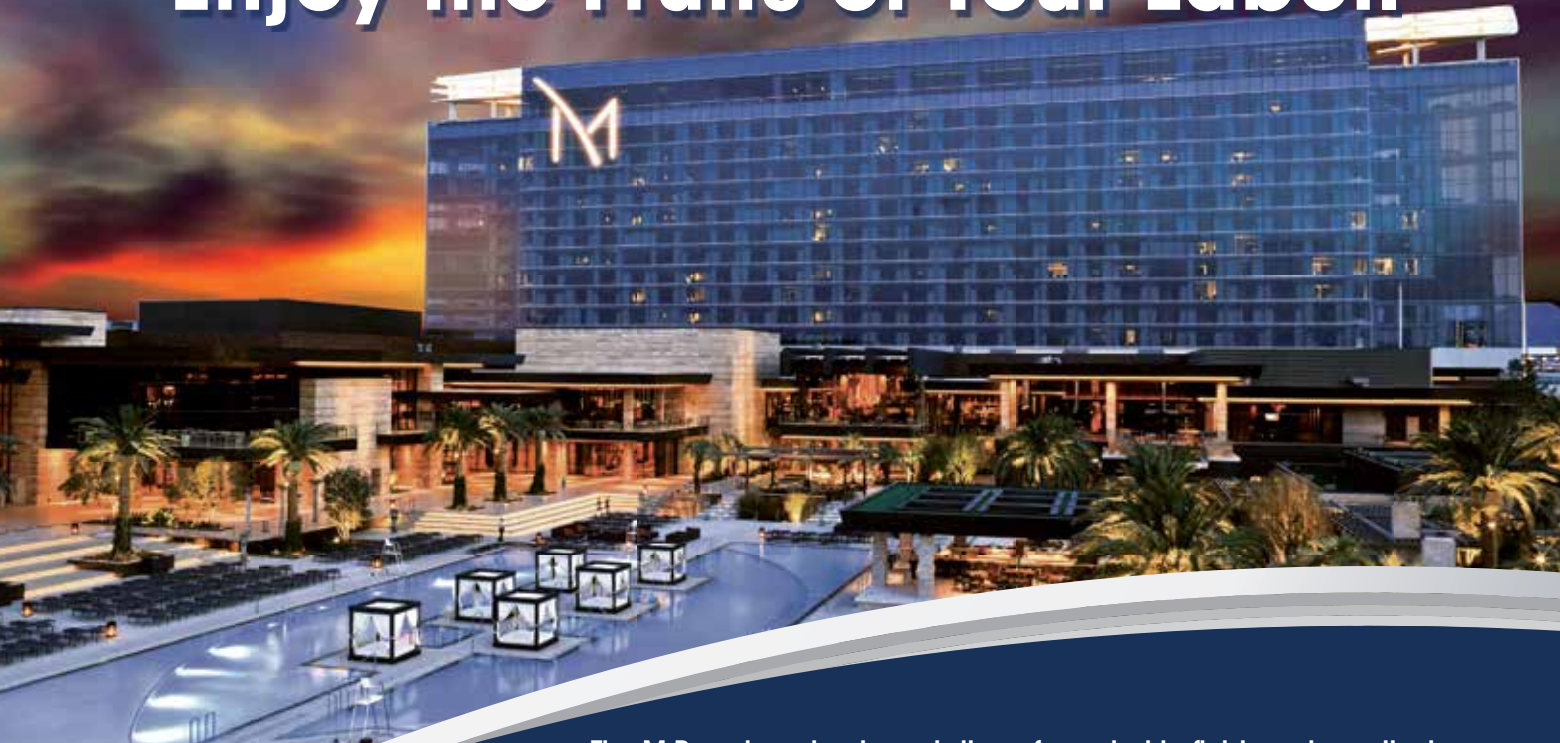
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