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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



New & Renovated Hotels

Advice to Planners
From Planners
PAGE 12

DMC Success Stories

Making Planners
Look Like Heroes
PAGE 20

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President & Managing Partner,
Applied Meetings & Hospitality
Solutions, and the newly renovated
Sheraton Nashville Downtown.

Engagement Trifecta
PAGE 26

● **Las Vegas**
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● **Orlando**
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Credit: AlliedPRA Orange County



AlliedPRA Orange County staged dinners at Disneyland that mirrored the theme of the four different event spaces. **PAGE 20**



Credit: Steve Spatafore/Las Vegas News Bureau

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Credit: Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort



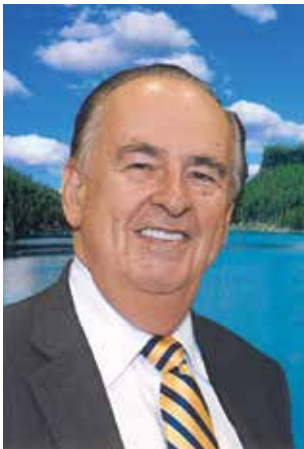
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Publisher's Message

Knowledge Is Power

The more you know, the better off you are. At least that is certainly true in this business as meeting planners need all the information they can get their hands on when selecting new or newly renovated properties. There are great opportunities you will learn on page 12 in our cover story, "Choosing New or Newly Renovated Properties: Advice to Planners from Planners," as well as stressful challenges if you don't do your homework. As Mark Benson, CMP, president and man-



aging partner of Applied Meetings & Hospitality Solutions in Orlando, who is on our cover this month, reminds planners, "When you are using a new or newly renovated place and you do your research about the property, it can pay off in dividends, but if you don't, it can come back to bite you.

"Knowing what's fresh in the pipeline is one of the first things people want to do on a regular basis, just not when the need arises, adds Benson. "Be current and know what's happening in all the big cities regarding major renovations and new builds, so when you need to book a property you will already know if you should have any concerns."

Colette Givens, program manager at Total Event Resources, in Schaumburg, Illinois, has sage advice especially for new planners: "Even when you book a property several years out, always make it a practice to ask, 'Are there any renovations planned?' You never want to be in a situation where you pull up to the hotel a few days before the meeting and you see a crane in front of the property with major renovations taking place. That's a real disaster for your guests," she says.

Gregorio Palomino, principal of CRE8AD8 in San Antonio, Texas, in "The Engagement Trifecta," an event marketing feature on page 26, suggests planners realize that "rather than relying on a particular technology or a set of tools, the most important secret to success is to focus on the old adage that 'knowledge is power.'"

"Do your homework on your attendees," Palomino says. "And know your attendee demographics. Know what you excel in, in terms of technology and social media, and focus on your strengths. Be open to new ideas and new technology tools. And be creative. But it's all about your attendees and their experience — the value they get from your meeting. If you always think that way, your meetings and events will be successful."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Coming in 2015, Eden Roc Miami Beach and Nobu Hotels have unveiled plans that will introduce Nobu Hotel at Eden Roc Miami Beach. This exciting new concept will brilliantly fuse Nobu's unique style of artistry with Eden Roc's classic heritage. Additions include 210 Nobu inspired guest rooms, 15th floor Penthouse suites with panoramic views, a signature Nobu restaurant and bar, Nobu Lobby Bar, enhanced banquet menu offerings and a new ocean front dining concept.

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News & Notes

Hilton San Diego Mission Valley Completes \$12 Million Renovation



The executive lounge at Hilton San Diego Mission Valley Hotel.

SAN DIEGO, CA — The Hilton San Diego Mission Valley Hotel announced the completion of its \$12 million renovation. The latest renovations, totaling over half a million dollars, include an expansive outdoor deck, landscape redesign and revamped meeting rooms.

The dramatic reinvention of the Hilton San Diego Mission Valley includes a new 5,000-sf outdoor event deck built into the lush hillside and equipped with LED globe string lights and heaters. The renovation also includes a new foyer for the Kensington Ballroom, as well as several new boardrooms, breakout room and office spaces. All design upgrades feature new carpet, wall coverings and lighting with sleek finishes in modern and contemporary brown, blue and orange tones.

The property also unveiled a renovated outdoor area, featuring a retiled pool, resurfaced deck and new outdoor furnishings. Prior to the outdoor renovations, the hotel completed a top-to-bottom redesign of its 350 guest rooms and opened Polanco, the property's new Spanish-inspired dining destination.

www.hiltonmv.com

Encore at Wynn Las Vegas to Upgrade Tech and Room Amenities

LAS VEGAS, NV — The Encore Resort and the Encore Tower Suites at Wynn Las Vegas will undergo a design refresh beginning summer 2015, with a projected completion date of fall 2015. The project includes updated furnishings, floor coverings, technology, aesthetics, and custom bed linens.

Led by Architectural Digest Top 100 designer Roger Thomas and the team at Wynn Design and Development, the room modification includes upgraded in-room 55-inch 4K televisions, as well as enhanced technological amenities such as USB ports and outlets for mobile phones and tablets at bedside and desk with environment controls allowing guests to adjust curtains and lighting from the comfort

of their Wynn Dream Bed. Other notable changes include Black Galaxy granite tops and custom-woven floor coverings.

Upon completion of the renovation, Wynn and Encore will be the only resorts in the world to feature the highest thread-count bed sheets in every standard guest room. The resort invested \$9 million and engaged a private manufacturer to produce the 507-thread-count, 100-percent Egyptian cotton linens exclusively for Wynn Resorts.

Wynn Las Vegas features 2,714 guest rooms and suites, and Encore, an expansion of Wynn Las Vegas, features an additional 2,034 all-suite accommodations. Combined, the two resorts boast approximately 283,000 sf of meeting space. www.wynnlasvegas.com

Kalahari Resort Opens in the Poconos

POCONO MOUNTAINS, PA — The Nelson family, owners of Kalahari Resorts and Conventions, officially opened the doors on the company's first East Coast resort, located in the Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania.

The resort is home to the state's largest indoor waterpark and also includes: 457 units including one-, two- and three-bedroom suites; an outdoor waterpark and pool, a large sundeck, whirlpools and a swim-up bar; 30,000-sf family entertainment center with activities such as mini-bowling, cutting-edge arcade games, a 5-D theater and black-light mini golf; three full-service signature dining experiences; Spa Kalahari & Salon; 100,000-sf convention center and 6,000 sf of retail.

The resort is authentically African themed, including the handcrafted artwork adorning the walls, the Rwandan coffee beans served throughout the resort and the souvenirs sourced from local artisan communities throughout Africa. When the addition is completed in spring 2017, the resort will boast nearly 1,000 guest rooms, an expanded outdoor waterpark and have the distinction of being America's largest indoor waterpark (200,000 sf).

www.kalahariresorts.com

The Ritz-Carlton, Philadelphia Will Unveil Property-Wide Renovation in 2016

PHILADELPHIA, PA — The Ritz-Carlton, Philadelphia, a storied hotel on the Avenue of the Arts, will undergo a massive renovation beginning later this year. The updates to the hotel will include all new guest rooms and meeting spaces, a refreshed lobby experience and public spaces, along with a new restaurant, bar and lounge. The multimillion-dollar project will begin in October 2015 and will be complete by spring 2016.

The iconic hotel is rooted in history, originally built as a reproduction of the Pantheon when it opened in 1908 as The Girard Trust Company. The property-wide enhancements will focus on the scenography of the building — explore history and experience the arts — paying tribute to its rich past. The new design tells a story through neutral colors, textures and materials of money and currency, with pops of metallic and bronze, and will bring a fresh and sophisticated feel to the hotel.

Meeting spaces will be updated to reflect a seamless transition of neutral colors through each function room, with a nod to history through historic motifs from the building in the furniture details, with an updated clean aesthetic. Updates to the lobby, lounge, restaurant and bar will come at the end of the renovation cycle, and more details will be shared when available. The hotel will remain open throughout the renovation.

Set in the heart of Center City, The Ritz-Carlton, Philadelphia offers unprecedented access to history in the nation's birthplace, located just steps from Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell. The Ritz-Carlton features 299 elegantly appointed guest rooms, a spa, 26,000 sf of meeting space and more. www.ritzcarlton.com

IMEX America Touts New Education Program for 2015

LAS VEGAS, NV — IMEX America, now in its fifth year, will again offer a wide range of valuable and inspiring new ideas, knowledge and experiences through its highly popular education program when it takes place in Las Vegas at the Sands Expo and The Venetian/The Palazzo, October 13–15.



BAUER

Providing a centralized and convenient location, all the education on the show floor will be located at the Inspiration Hub in a variety of formats, from Seminars, Campfires and Meet the Expert to Hot Topic Tables and a Research Pod. This will create a “learning hot spot” at the heart of the show with more than 100 sessions hosted by leading experts in their fields. Creativity techniques, always enjoyed by participants, also will be woven into education across the show.

There also are multiple opportunities for buyers and exhibitors to add to their knowledge through co-located events, including the daily MPI keynotes and the Smart Monday, Powered by MPI, program on October 12. Smart Monday for the second year also will include the PCMA Business School as well as Association Focus with sessions delivered by ASAE and ICCA. Rounding out the education programs, the Future Leaders Forum, Executive Meetings Forum and the Faculty Exchange sessions also will take place again this year at IMEX America.

Carina Bauer, CEO of the IMEX Group says: “Our education program evolves each year so that it continues to reflect changes in the industry and engages buyers and suppliers, whether they are looking to gain CMP/CEU Points, catching up on technology trends or exploring the latest sustainability solutions. There is something for everyone, whatever their preferred learning style or interest.”

An At a Glance schedule of major events at IMEX America 2015 is also now available at www.imexamerica.com/events/at-a-glance/schedule. To register please visit www.imexamerica.com/register.

The Grand Hyatt Playa del Carmen in Mexico Now Open

CHICAGO, IL — The Grand Hyatt brand announced that it added a new resort, Grand Hyatt Playa del Carmen Resort, to its world-class portfolio when the hotel opened in Mexico on the Riviera Maya along the Caribbean Sea on June 15, 2015.

The 314-room Sordo Madaleno-designed urban beach hotel boasts a unique fusion of sleek and contemporary design aesthetics blended with Mayan-inspired elements in the guest rooms, restaurants, bars, lounges and event spaces that pay tribute to local surroundings. Grand Hyatt Playa del Carmen Resort is located on the iconic Mamitas Beach, in the heart of Playa del Carmen, just steps from the city's famous 5th Avenue.

Previously announced as Hyatt Playa del Carmen, the property underwent an extraordinary transformation from an upscale resort to a luxury offering while under construction. www.playadelcarmen.grand.hyatt.com

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www.TheMeetingMagazines.com



News & Notes

Hilton Los Cabos Reopens After Multimillion-Dollar Renovation



The Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort.

LOS CABOS, MEXICO — Hilton Worldwide, in partnership with MetLife Inc. and Thayer Lodging Group, announced the official reopening of Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort in Los Cabos, Mexico, debuting phase one renovations following a multimillion-dollar transformation. Hilton Los Cabos returns as a refined beachfront resort experience, featuring reimagined culinary concepts, 65 new Club-level suites, a 7,000-sf spa and salon, and additional enhancements and upgrades property-wide.

The resort unveils the first phase of its renovation campaign with three new F&B concepts, a new local hat shop, redesign of the resort landscape with private cabanas and hammocks, and considerable enhancements to the resort's 375 guest rooms and suites. In August, the resort will unveil La Vista Club, an entirely new "hotel within a hotel" concept with 65 rooms and suites. Slated for completion in September 2015, the resort will present a new spa concept focusing on holistic health, wellness and fitness. Renovations also will include the opening of Vela, a fine dining concept with world cuisine inspired by Mexican culture, history and ingredients. www.hiltonloscabos.com

Paradise Point to Debut New Meeting and Event Space

SAN DIEGO, CA — This fall, Paradise Point, a Destination Hotel on San Diego's Mission Bay will debut a new 15,500-sf meeting and event space on their private island resort. The Sunset Pavilion, a modern space that will accommodate all types of functions, from corporate meetings to large-scale galas, will bring Paradise Point's total meeting space to more than 80,000 sf and solidify its position as the biggest conference hotel in Mission Bay.

The new Sunset Pavilion can accommodate groups of more than 1,000 guests, with the ability to divide into two separate rooms. The pavilion's design will feature 120 feet of glass walls and doors showcasing sweeping views of Mission Bay, spacious ceilings that rise from 13–28 feet and 4,000 sf of outdoor prefunction space on the adjacent terrace. The space will feature extensive technological and electrical capabilities, including full rigging capabilities for AV, wireless capability for up to 2,000 devices and full LED control panels for lighting, heating and air conditioning in both sections.

www.paradisepoint.com

New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge Unveils Part One of Its Evolution

BROOKLYN, NY — Brooklyn's largest hotel, the iconic New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge in downtown Brooklyn, unveils the first chapter of its \$43 million renovation and reposition. This month, the hotel celebrates the opening of new chic spaces: The Bar (Greatroom) and exclusive M Club Lounge. At The Bar, a thoughtfully curated menu provides a taste of the borough by showcasing top local food purveyors and businesses from Brooklyn Roasting Company to Brooklyn Winery, Ovenly and McClure's pickles, to name a few.

The Bar, located off the grand entrance, is the hotel's new social hub featuring a style that embodies local industrial chic reflective of its downtown Brooklyn neighborhood. Design details convey an urban edge with glass,

metal, subway tiles and white marble tops. The new M Club Lounge, a signature feature of select Marriott Hotels, was created specifically for frequent Marriott Rewards members. Tableside food service at The Bar offers a laid-back vibe, and a menu that celebrates the borough.

The hotel's Front Desk has been reimagined. From concierge pods that welcome guests, to a large abstract mural based on a photograph of the Brooklyn Bridge, the contemporary look is modern and vibrant. The redesign of the hotel's ballroom and meeting rooms, one of the city's largest and most versatile venues, will be completed in September 2015. Renovations of the hotel's 667 guest rooms will be completed in 2016.

www.brooklynmarriott.com

Snapshots



1



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3



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5



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7

Credits: 1-5 Lotus Eyes Photography; 6,7 ibtm america/Reed Exhibitions

1-5 A record good time was had by all at the 47th annual Pow Wow in Orlando. More than 6,500 delegates from 73 countries, including more than 1,300 international and domestic travel buyers and 500 media from the U.S. and abroad, attended the U.S. Travel Association's annual IPW. The event convened at the Orange County Convention Center, May 30–June 3. Nearly 100,000 pre-scheduled business meetings — a record for IPW — took place between travel buyers and U.S. travel organizations. "IPW is an extraordinarily unique event, which brings the entire international travel and tourism marketplace to the U.S. in one location," said U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow (**3 far right**) who with Chris Thompson, president and CEO, Brand USA, presented Nora Gherras of Compagnies du Monde a Chairman's Circle Honors award and medallion. "The business conducted at IPW will have a tremendous effect, not only on the local economy initially, but several years into the future." **4** Peter Greenberg, CBS News travel editor, Tim Croyle, WestJet Vacations Inc. and George Aguel, Visit Orlando president and CEO, enjoy the Chairman's Circle Honor dinner at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. IPW 2016 will be held June 18–22, at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. **6,7** Attendees mingled at ibtm america, held in Chicago June 9–11. More than 5,200 pre-scheduled appointments took place over the course of the three-day show. At the first-time, closed-door event, both exhibitors and Hosted Buyers took part in a pre-show mutual match system where each selected whom they wanted to meet and do business with. The 2016 ibtm america is June 15-17, 2016 at Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville.

attended the U.S. Travel Association's annual IPW. The event convened at the Orange County Convention Center, May 30–June 3. Nearly 100,000 pre-scheduled business meetings — a record for IPW — took place between travel buyers and U.S. travel organizations. "IPW is an extraordinarily unique event, which brings the entire international travel and tourism marketplace to the U.S. in one location," said U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow (**3 far right**) who with Chris Thompson, president and CEO, Brand USA, presented Nora Gherras of Compagnies du Monde a Chairman's Circle Honors award and medallion. "The business conducted at IPW will have a tremendous effect, not only on the local economy initially, but several years into the future." **4** Peter Greenberg, CBS News travel editor, Tim Croyle, WestJet Vacations Inc. and George Aguel, Visit Orlando president and CEO, enjoy the Chairman's Circle Honor dinner at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. IPW 2016 will be held June 18–22, at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. **6,7** Attendees mingled at ibtm america, held in Chicago June 9–11. More than 5,200 pre-scheduled appointments took place over the course of the three-day show. At the first-time, closed-door event, both exhibitors and Hosted Buyers took part in a pre-show mutual match system where each selected whom they wanted to meet and do business with. The 2016 ibtm america is June 15-17, 2016 at Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville.

By Rachel Portela

The Wow Factor: Custom Builds and Productions Are the Next Frontier

Sometimes an event calls for something truly “outside the box.” A great brainstorming session leads to a big idea, yet you’re stumped as to how you’re going to pull it off. Whether it’s transforming an exhibit hall entrance into a ship or creating a 10-foot 3-D prop in the shape of an event logo, it is key to approach a custom production using best practices in order to have the best possible outcome.

Understanding the Need

A custom production is when a design team can interpret a client’s brand, theme and event goals to create an end product to amaze, inspire and establish a connection between event attendees and organizers. For example, one metroConnections client’s theme, “Shifting into High Gear,” was brought to life with the creation of a working gear structure, tabletops with gear designs and a walkway of gears inspired by the yellow brick road from “Over the Rainbow.” Another conference had the metroConnections creative team building floating dragonflies, designing garden-inspired table décor and creating a stunning light display.

Depending on time line and scale, picking an existing cookie-cutter stage, set or prop design sometimes seems like the only cost-effective use of your team’s budget. But is it truly cost-effective if the event, props and branding are subpar? The goal is to “wow” and win at your events, so research ALL your options. There certainly are companies with in-house artists, craftsmen and production assistants who can interpret your budget, your theme, your site and your needs and can provide a unique attendee experience. Including metroConnections, specialized production companies are able to adapt to one-of-a-kind builds and designs, big or small, so never fret that your event isn’t big enough to warrant a custom production.



Credit: metroConnections

This behind-the-scenes photograph shows the metroConnections team bringing a client’s custom production to life.

Beyond designs, production companies are trained experts in AV or they have excellent connections in the AV world; a production company can help you navigate the world of the unknown. It’s their job to get you the best gear and best deal while also creating an amazing visual experience for attendees. If meeting planners go straight to an AV supplier, they run the risk of possibly not getting what they want, simply because they don’t know the whole story or what it is they’re looking for.

Getting Started

Once you’ve decided to do a custom build for your next event — where should you start? The first step is to look at a list of production companies and study their past work and previous clients. This will help you easily weed out the new or less experienced companies from the established and experienced ones.

Once you’ve got a list of contenders, arrange meetings with each of them so you can learn about their company and better understand their workflow process. A good company will show their potential clients examples of the planning tools they will provide, such as renderings, diagrams, onsite schedules, content list, show calls and more. At this initial meeting, event planners should come with a budget and a list of questions to ask each company that focus on areas of importance for your program. In return, a good company will come prepared with solid answers and examples to support what they are proposing. In addition, a good company will respect your budget, suggesting ideas that are both impactful and manageable within the parameters given. If they keep trying to sell more than you are comfortable spending, move on to the next company.

Once you’ve settled on a production company and have shared your ideas, the process ought to begin with them pro-

viding renderings, pictures and storyboards to make sure their interpretation of your vision is accurate. Be sure that the budget is clear to them, and provide them with all the information they might need, such as what you've done for previous programs, what has worked in the past and what can be improved, the event agenda, any overall theme or identity they want to convey, and the main executives and their presentation style.

Avoiding Common Mistakes

To keep the production process as smooth as possible, there are particular pitfalls to avoid. Once initial creative documents such as stage-set renderings are provided, it's crucial to share them with all levels that need to give their approval before signing off with the production company. You don't want to get the stamp of approval from a meeting manager, then months into the design and build send an emergency email to the production company asking them to stop because one of the C-levels wants to adjust something with the set. This costs money and can easily set the production planning process behind schedule.

Another mistake often made is not rehearsing after putting a lot of money into a beautiful production. Your production company provides you with all the tools you need to make your show a success, but they can go to waste if rehearsing is ignored. Production teams often discover new information from speakers during rehearsals, allowing them to adjust things accordingly. For example, they might find out that a speaker wants her notes displayed in one of the confidence monitors, and the extra time they have allows them to provide the proper equipment for her presentation rather than having to scramble the day of the event. In a particular instance, we

had 19 speakers as part of a singular event, and by working with the production team on content, rehearsals and props, all 19 presentations went off without a hitch.

Lastly, you want to avoid cutting the budget on your own without input from the production company. If you need to hit a budget number (such as cutting \$5,000 from the total), discuss with the production team the most advantageous way to do so. They may be able to suggest the best areas to cut with the least impact on the show.

Share Information

For the best success, be sure to share with the production team all you can about your company's identity. What is the corporate culture and demographic? Are employees tech-savvy, or more old-fashioned? Information like this is priceless for a production team and will guide them in their design process. Discuss content use — a big center screen or multiple screens are a great and dynamic look, but they also come with an additional level of content work. The production company can work with you to develop content for screens if desired, but if your company plans on using only PowerPoint presentations with little focus on content, a modular set may be the better option.

If you have any items that already have been created for the program, such as signage, conference identities or websites, be sure to share them with the production team, as they can weave their design into the final product. The best sets and productions are the ones that flow with the program as a whole.

By following these best practices in hiring and working with a production company, you can offer an amazing and engaging event for your customers or employees, making it an experience they'll never forget!

C&IT

“For the best **success**, be sure to share with the production team all you can about your **company's identity**.”



Rachel Portela

began her career at metroConnections within the Event Services division in 2009. In 2011, she transitioned to the fast-growing division of Production Services with the title of show producer. In 2014, she was promoted to director of production services, co-directing and overseeing the division with Sr. Technical Director Bill Sather. Rachel utilizes her industry experience and leadership position to guide and encourage her team, develop and apply processes, and instill the core values of service and quality in all aspects of the division. Contact the metroConnections production team at production@metroconnections.com.

Choosing New or Newly Renovated Properties

Advice to Planners From Planners

By Ron Bernthal

What corporate meeting planner wouldn't like to organize a corporate meeting in a brand new hotel property? Or bring their group into a venue that has just finished major renovations?

Actually, going into contract with new builds or recently renovated properties can provide great opportunities, but stressful challenges as well.

"Last year we were working with a client who had chosen a Chicago property for their three-day corporate meeting for 400 participants. They knew that part of the property was being renovated, however, the specific meeting space within the property that suited their needs was not scheduled for renovations," says Colette Givens, program manager at Total Event Resources, in Schaumburg, Illinois. "However, as we got closer to the meeting dates, the property asked us if we could move the group to another location within the hotel, as winter weather had slowed the renovation process, and it would now impact our clients' meeting space, with the possibility of knocking and drilling noise above the meeting room."

"When you are using a new or newly renovated place and you do your research about the property, it can pay off in dividends, but if you don't, it can come back to bite you."

Mark Benson, CMP
President & Managing Partner
Applied Meetings & Hospitality
Solutions, Orlando, FL



Sheraton Nashville Downtown

Givens was able to move the group into one of the newly renovated meeting spaces on the property, but the meeting room's temperature control system was still being adjusted, and trim work along the floor and baseboards was not quite finished, all of which are somewhat minor details that might not concern the average hotel guest, but as a meeting manager, these are the kinds of details that are noticeable.

"In the end the client was happy, but with some frustrations about having to move the meeting space at the last minute. The property was very understanding and provided us with some nice concessions, so everything worked out OK," Givens says. "Typically, when we do an RFP, we ask specifically, 'Is construction planned before or during our planned event?' Whatever the answer is, yes or no, we always put this into the contract, making sure we include details as to the extent of the renovation, the dates, and which areas of the property will be affected. We also will insert language regarding monetary concessions if the meeting space and/or guest rooms are affected by unplanned renovation work."

Givens had worked with a client who had wanted to meet at the Red Rock Casino, Resort & Spa in Las Vegas, which was still under construction at the time. Her firm wasn't sure if a meeting for 200 persons in a new Las Vegas property could go off without any hitches, but because the property was brand new, the venue provided the group with extra support staff to make sure the group had a great experience, without any disruptions or logistical problems during the three-day event.

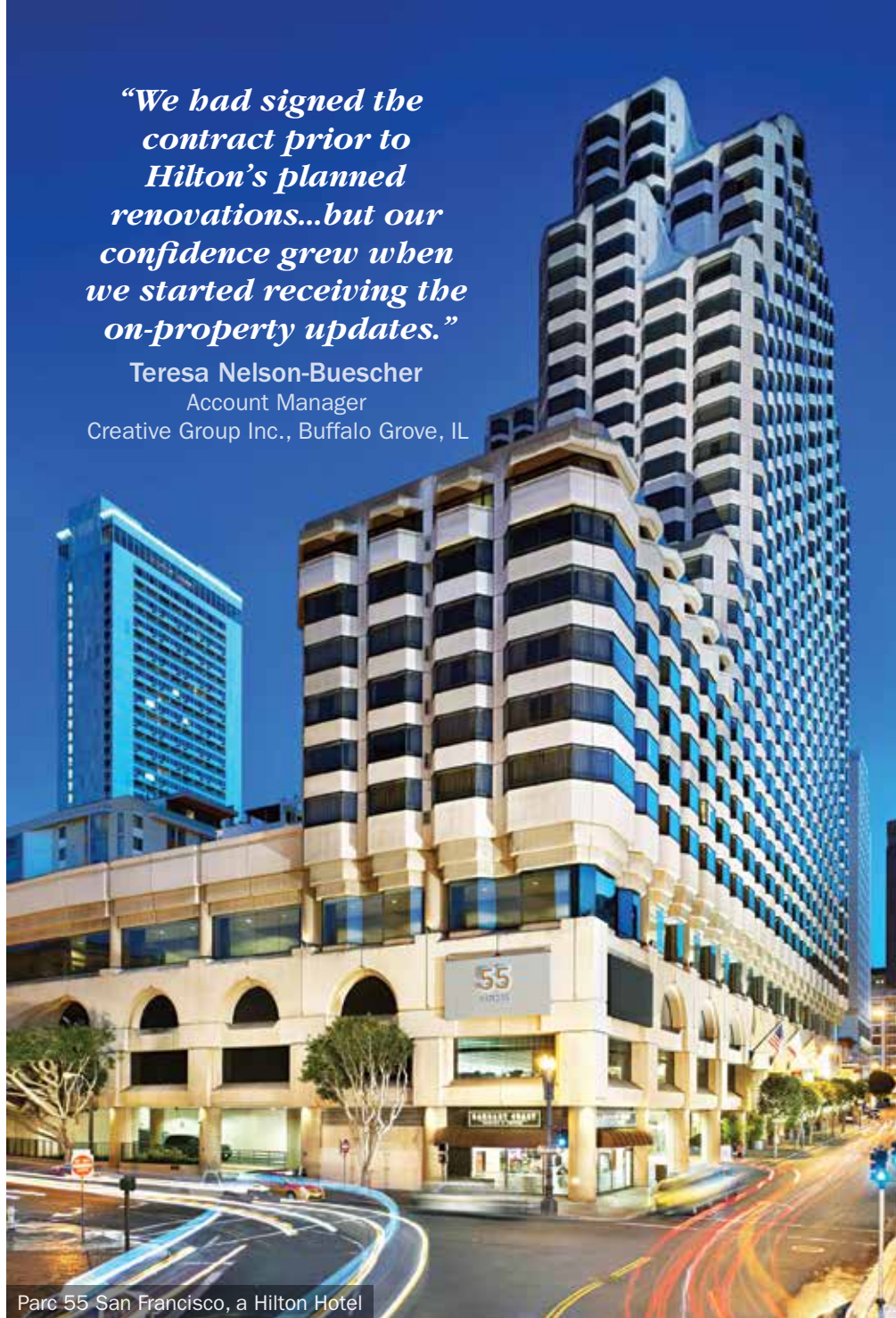
"My advice to new planners is that even when you book a property several years out, always make it a practice to ask, 'Are there any renovations planned?' You never want to be in a situation where you pull up to the hotel a few days before the meeting and you see a crane in front of the property with major renovations taking place. That's a real disaster for your guests," Givens says.

Doing Your Homework

"When you are using a new or newly

"We had signed the contract prior to Hilton's planned renovations...but our confidence grew when we started receiving the on-property updates."

Teresa Nelson-Buescher
Account Manager
Creative Group Inc., Buffalo Grove, IL



Parc 55 San Francisco, a Hilton Hotel

renovated place and you do your research about the property, it can pay off in dividends, but if you don't, it can come back to bite you," says Mark Benson, CMP, president and managing partner of Applied Meetings & Hospitality Solutions in Orlando. "Knowing what's fresh in the pipeline is one of the first things people want to do on a regular basis, just not when the need arises. Be current and know what's happening in all the big cities regarding major renovations and new

builds, so when you need to book a property you will already know if you should have any concerns."

"During a 40-room, four-night meeting last fall at the Sheraton Nashville we knew there was going to be major renovations, and our group was booked at the end of the renovations," says Benson. "To minimize risk we went forward with the meeting, but with a contingency plan, something you should always try and plan for. Fortunately, the renovations were actually completed on time, a

New & Renovated News

Here's a sampling of new and newly renovated properties of note:

The 400-room, new-build **Hilton West Palm Beach** celebrated its topping out in April. The 12-story hotel, which will connect to the Palm Beach County Convention Center, is scheduled to open in early 2016.

Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas is undergoing the final phase of its resort-wide transformation with the upcoming redesign of more than 3,000 guest rooms and suites. The approximately \$100 million remodeling project is expected to be completed by spring 2016.

Slated to open in 2018 is the new \$750 million, 1,800-room **Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter Hotel & Expo Center**, which will boast more than 600,000 sf of conven-

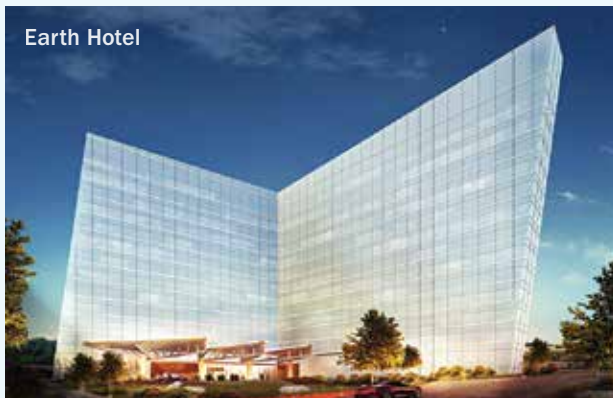
tion facilities, including a 100,000-sf ground floor exhibition hall, a 65,000-sf main ballroom, a 1,500-seat theater and 390,000 sf of meeting rooms and event space.

Mohegan Sun executives in March announced plans to add a second hotel to the flagship property in Uncasville, Connecticut. The seven-floor, 400-room Earth Hotel will allow for an opportunity to recapture the almost 500,000 room nights turned away in 2014.

Nemacolin Woodlands Resort southeast of Pittsburgh is celebrating the completion of its \$30 million reno-

vation. The property-wide transformation is the largest project of its kind in the resort's 28-year history and features dramatic floor-to-ceiling upgrades spread across three phases, including four of the resort's six lodging options, the 32,000-sf Executive Conference Center and public spaces.

Scottsdale Resort &



great experience was had by the group, and we had a great financial deal.”

Benson likes to ask himself the question: What is it going to look like if things are not going to be ready before going into contract with a venue that is just opening or in renovations? He checks with the project manager to find out what the construction time line looks like so he isn't surprised if bad news comes out. Benson says it makes a big difference if a group is meeting for a training session, where participants are coming from various parts of the country and would be hard-pressed to reschedule if it had to be cancelled, or a corporate group that could more easily be postponed or relocated.

Of course, when Benson is dealing with a chain property, with its large support staff and space inventory within the chain, the process of scheduling a meeting in a new or under-renovations property becomes a lot less risky.

“We have a group that is in discussions right now with the new Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando, expected to open in summer 2016. It will be one of five resorts in the Universal Orlando theme park area, all managed

by Loews,” Benson says, explaining that the same construction group was involved with all the neighboring hotels; the ownership is the same for each property; and all the properties have historically opened on time, so, “if you do run into a problem at the venue you booked, the nearby properties have the inventory and are more than willing to help out.”

Staff Training Shows

One of the difficulties that sometimes crops up with new properties is the lack of training for hotel group sales managers and support staff. LoriAnn K. Harnish, CMP, CMM, CTA, manager of meetings and events for US Foods, does about 150 meetings a year and every once in a while contacts a new property where new staffers do not seem to recognize an opportunity when it comes knocking. Just this past April, Harnish attempted in vain to do business with a new hotel in the Phoenix suburb of Mesa. “It is very close to our office and my first impression has not been the best,” she says. “It is a franchised property and their customer service and interest in my call was zero.”

In most cases, however, new sales

staff at just opened properties, or those at venues undergoing major renovations, will do whatever it takes to give the meeting planner a sense of confidence that the property is ready and able to provide the space and staff to make the meeting a success.

“Earlier this year I worked to organize a marketing training event for one of our pharma clients at Parc 55 San Francisco, a Hilton Hotel, which became part of the Hilton family shortly before our meeting dates,” says Teresa Nelson-Buescher, account manager for Creative Group Inc., a large meeting planning and incentive management firm. The Parc 55 venue is a large property with 1,024 rooms and 30,000 sf of meeting space. “We had signed the contract prior to Hilton's planned renovations, and I was initially concerned about that along with the recent change of ownership, but our confidence grew when we started receiving the on-property updates from the staff, and by the end of the event I was happy with the result.

“All the attendees were pleased with the overall experience. They raved about the new guest room accommodations and the level of hospitality provided

Marriott Marquis
Miami Worldcenter
Hotel & Expo
Center



Conference Center in Arizona embarks on a massive renovation this month that will transform the independent resort and revitalize its amenities. In September, the property will be unveiled as **The Scottsdale Resort at McCormick Ranch, a Destination Hotel**. The first phase of the renovation will inject \$9 million into the property, introducing a new restaurant and bar, transforming the main pool, adding significant outdoor meeting and event space, and enhancing guest rooms.

Tropicana Atlantic City recently completed a \$50 million renovation that includes upgrades to its North Tower



Tropicana
Atlantic City

hotel rooms, a completely renovated casino featuring new games, an all-new AtlantiCare LifeCenter Fitness center and the spectacular Tropicana Multimedia Light and Sound Show.

Washington, DC's landmark **The Watergate Hotel** will reopen this fall upon the completion of a dramatic \$125 million renovation. Recently accepted into Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), the hotel will offer 337 elegant guest rooms and suites as well as expanded meeting facilities (27,000 sf), including the newly constructed 7,000-sf Moretti Grand Ballroom and the new Cecchi Junior Ballroom.

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by the staff. Attendees also enjoyed the creativity of the chef's menu, and they even noted that the food quality exceeded their expectations," says Nelson-Buescher, who credits the Hilton staff for making the difference for this two-night, 327-participant training event. "When searching for the perfect property to host a meeting, ensure you find a staff that has a can-do attitude, and really cares about the success of your meeting. The hotel staff was very detail-oriented, which enabled them to deliver a

level of service that truly impacted the overall success of the event."

On the Site Selection List

"We use new and newly renovated properties all the time," says Christine Plitt, CMP, director of event logistics at Pragmatic Marketing, a Scottsdale firm that specializes in corporate training events. "Whenever we hear that a property has just opened or finished renovations, we always put it

on our list to see it. It seems like whenever there's a property refresh, there's also a reset among the staff, where the staff thinks hard about their priorities and levels of service. Also, we often get really great financial deals, like for our event at the Hilton Scottsdale Resort & Villas, which wanted to get their name out again after a long renovation."

Although meeting planners often dread the word "renovations," the fact that a hotel undertakes an expensive



"We often get really great financial deals, like for our event at the Hilton Scottsdale Resort & Villas, which wanted to get their name out again after a long renovation."

Christine Plitt, CMP
Director of Event Logistics
Pragmatic Marketing, Scottsdale, AZ



Hilton Scottsdale Resort & Villas

“My advice to new planners is that even when you book a property several years out, always make it a practice to ask, ‘Are there any renovations planned?’”

**Collette Givens, Program Manager
Total Event Resources, Schaumburg, IL**

upgrade to spur business tells some meeting planners that a property with formerly outdated public spaces and/or fraying room furnishings, is worth another site inspection. Mindy Gunn, CMP, CMM, vice president and meeting and event planning manager for Enterprise Meeting and Event Services, which handles meetings and events for Wells Fargo NA, says that for a recent employee recognition event at a large conference/convention hotel she did a repeat site inspection after learning that the property had undergone a major renovation.

“I had been to the property years before, and likely would not have considered it as a potential venue,” says Gunn. “They actually did a great job, installing new carpeting, new walls and updated meeting spaces. Of course, one lesson I learned, and the property learned as well, was that the new carpeting, in an area where we were to have a red-carpet arrival, was spotlessly clean because it was Teflon-coated. Apparently, however, no one thought about the fact that Teflon doesn’t stick to anything, including the tape holding down our own red carpet walkway, and within minutes our red carpet walkway began to buckle after the first few people came across. In the end, the hotel staff managed to keep it down and safe, and our participants were very impressed with the hotel’s new space and improvements, as well as by the staff’s ingenuity and humor dealing with the carpeting snafu.”

Communication Is Key

From both the meeting planner’s perspective, as well as hotel sales personnel, the most important element

when meeting groups are booked into brand new or newly renovated properties is communication.

“We do about 60 percent corporate business and use our 10,000 sf of meeting space mostly for corporate meetings, but our property is under renovations presently,” says Michael Sanford, director of sales at the Embassy Suites Seattle North/Lynwood, a Hilton property located near Puget Sound, 12 miles north of downtown Seattle. “We are finishing up with our guest rooms now, and then will finish with the atrium space and meeting rooms by the end of the year. We really believe in honesty when dealing with our meeting planners who have booked groups at the property during this period. We talk to them well in advance about the renovation schedule, and keep them updated as their meeting dates get closer. We post our guest room renovation dates on the property website, and have nicely designed signs placed in our

“My first impression (of a new hotel near Phoenix) has not been the best. It is a franchised property and their customer service and interest in my call was zero.”

**LoriAnn Harnish, CMP, CMM, CTA
Manager, Meetings & Events
US Foods, Tempe, AZ**

public areas, showing guests what the finished product is going to look like.”

Another perspective from the hotel side comes from David Jacob, CMP, assistant director of sales at the Laguna Cliffs Marriott Resort & Spa in California, a 378-room property overlooking the Pacific with a 14,000-sf spa and 50,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space. Jacob understands that knowing when to renovate is as helpful to the property as it is to potential group business. “While we were going through a \$55 million full-property renovation a few years ago we continued to accept small meetings. We had less room inventory, of course, and

our ballroom was unavailable, but since the renovations were done during the economic downturn around 2011, when meetings tended to be smaller and more subdued, the hotel was not affected to any great extent,” says Jacob.

“During that period of time the overall meeting volume and space demand around the country was lower than it is today, especially for corporate meetings at high-end coastal resorts. During major renovations it is really important for both parties to be transparent and forthcoming, and start the communications and contract process early, figuring out ways to minimize any potential impact. In our case, we’re a pretty big resort, so when one wing is closed, it does not affect the rest of the property if you do it right.

“When you sell a property that is being renovated, you have to pedal a little faster and harder,” Jacob continues. “During our renovations we had to move our restaurant services to another part of the resort, but the quality of the food stayed the same. As long as you take care of the details, it will work out pretty well, and any hard dollars the client can save, in terms of food and beverage, or rebates to the master bill, or perhaps (in the case of Marriott) with points which they can use for their own organization or for charity, will make the contractual process that much easier.”

It’s All About Relationships

When planning corporate events, the relationship between meeting planners and the host venues is as important as the signed contract itself. “You know, relationships between venues and meeting planners are often long-term, and it is important to be honest about ongoing or upcoming renovations,” says Jacob. “Clients should know what they’re buying, and if a hotel sales manager sells someone a bad deal once, it will certainly not be forgotten. This is really a small industry, people are always moving around, and you end up bumping into the same people wherever you go. So, it’s not only the property’s reputation you want to preserve, but your professional reputation as well.”

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Hilton Austin

Surrounded by the excitement of downtown Austin's business and entertainment districts, the towering 31-story Hilton Austin is one of the largest hotels in the area. The hotel combines upscale comfort with modern millennial design, complete with the finest array of meeting, dining and recreational facilities.

Each of the hotel's 801 guest room, suite and executive lounge accommodations has undergone a total makeover. The upgrade included all new furnishings, soft goods, accessories and artwork.

Hilton Austin offers the best in Austin dining, including their signature restaurant Finn & Porter, with its award-winning steaks and the freshest seafood and sushi. Breakfast and lunch are served in the Liberty Tavern, and gourmet coffeehouse Java Jive on 5th offers sandwiches, wraps and salads.

Meeting Facilities

Featuring one of the largest ballrooms in the city, Hilton Austin offers 80,000 sf of flexible meeting space for events of any size, including 37 breakout rooms and a 26,000-sf ballroom. Two ballrooms can be divided into five different rooms to accommodate individual group needs. The wraparound prefunction space features outdoor terraces and leads into both ballrooms. Other features include built-in AV capabilities, an onsite event services manager and creative menu planning with an award-winning chef

Located adjacent to the Austin Convention Center and nearby many attractions such as Austin's 6th Street live music and entertainment district, the Warehouse Entertainment and 2nd Street districts, guests are sure to experience the unique charm and lasting spirit of Austin.

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Is Monterey County the most inspirational meeting destination? It's an interesting question, and the answer can be found with the notable movers and shakers who come to Monterey to be inspired, invigorated and to learn something new. With 99 miles of pristine Pacific coastline and more than 46,000 acres of vineyards, Monterey County offers up views and experiences that are truly one of a kind.

Inspirational Destination

Recent meetings enforce the fact that Monterey is the most inspirational meeting destination — most notably, the EG conference, the TEDWomen Conference, and the Forbes AgTech Summit. All of these organizations have hosted or plan to host conferences in Monterey County in 2015. Each are great examples of companies leveraging the inspiration of the destination as they look to stretch the imagination of attendees.

“When we first produced the TEDWomen Conference here in Monterey, one of the things we loved was that the destination allowed us to give our attendees a place where they can feel inspired and get away from the responsibilities of their daily lives, which is really important to us,” said Janet McCartney, co-owner and executive producer of Procreation Design Works Inc., explaining why the conference returned to Monterey.

Merging history and legacy, and being the center point for Monterey meetings, the Monterey Conference Center is located in the heart of downtown and is undergoing a \$45 million renovation in 2015–16. The renovation will result in 40,000+ sf of

flexible meeting space and will be LEED-EB Certified by the U.S. Green Building Council. With its bright, inviting design and its convenient location, the center will offer spectacular views of downtown. The building will be upgraded with the latest technology to connect people around the world with ease. The first floor of the renovated building will be completed in late summer 2016, with the grand reopening scheduled in early 2017 — in time for the center's 40th anniversary.

“We already know from our clients that Monterey's scenic beauty and unique characteristics provide inspiration and enhance the desire for meeting planners to book their conferences in our extraordinary destination. This renovation provides an advanced facility sought after by meeting planners to complement their memorable meeting and destination experience,” said Tammy Blount, president and CEO of the Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau (MCCVB).

Downtown Makeover

Not only will Monterey feature a renovated conference center, but downtown Monterey is also undergoing a makeover with several revitalized spaces and places, making it easier and more exciting to walk about Monterey.

It would be a shame not to share the natural beauty of the region while conference attendees are visiting Monterey. Nestled on the Central California Coast, Monterey County has a 65-degree average year-round temperature, which makes climbing the spires at Pinnacles National Park, hiking in Big Sur's Pfeiffer State Beach, or kayaking through the National Marine Sanctuary ideal any time of year. To be inspired, all meeting attendees need to do is walk outside and experience all of the extraordinary offerings that can be found throughout Monterey County.

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FYI: First floor of renovated center opens late summer 2016 with grand reopening in early 2017. Features 40,000+ sf of flexible meeting space including 19,600-sf exhibit hall; 500-seat theater; and partners with three hotels for an additional 61,000 sf and 700 sleeping rooms. Adjacent hotels continue to offer uninterrupted service. Renovated center will be LEED-EB Certified by the U.S. Green Building Council.

INNOVATION REINVIGORATED



The Monterey Conference Center has played host to some of the world's most innovative thinkers and progressive companies since its opening in 1977. This 'hub' of innovation is soon to undergo an amazing \$45 million transformation to prepare it for the next generation of breakout thinking.

The renovated Monterey Conference Center will be a state-of-the-art, LEED®-EB certified facility with 40,000+ square feet of flexible meeting space — over 70,000 square feet if you count the adjoining hotels.



The Grand Reopening is in early 2017.

For more details about the venue and the Monterey Conference Connection, please visit MontereyConferenceCenter.com.

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Destination Management

Success Stories



Credits: AlliedPRA Orange County

AlliedPRA Orange County created seven different dining experiences at seven art galleries for seven different groups including the two shown here. The DMC set up a kitchen at each gallery and made sure each dining room matched the theme of the art gallery.

DMCs Pull Off Miracle Events and 'Make the

Imagine planning a very large and complex meeting without hiring a Destination Management Company (DMC). That means one planner, perhaps aided by a staffer or two, would search for, vet and negotiate with multiple venues, vendors, entertainers, tour operators and restaurants.

The do-it-yourself approach might reduce expenses. However, bearing the burden of endless details in-house could increase the chances for mistakes.

It also would take mountains of time and possibly detract from time spent on other meetings, thereby offsetting any cost savings.



Hosts New Orleans, a Hosts Global Alliance Member, arranged this special event for thousands on the floor of the Louisiana Super Dome.

Planner Look Like the Hero'

By Derek Reveron

So why not hire a DMC? They are destination experts who work regularly with local vendors and can negotiate good deals. They can quickly suggest and secure the right venues for a gala dinner, extravagant theme party or any other meeting or event. They can cut through mounds of red tape to help planners obtain exclusive use of downtown streets and special venues.

After all, a DMC can be a planner's best friend and trusted partner.

Masters of Complexity

AlliedPRA Orange County office used its connections to plan a complicated retreat at the Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, California, for about 450 employees of Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP, a large New York-based law firm. The firm selected AlliedPRA to handle a similar re-

treat at the same property several years ago but discontinued the meeting after the recession hit.

The law firm again turned to AlliedPRA after deciding to hold the four-day retreat. "We reached out to them again because they have all of our historic information," says Eleni Thomas, senior manager, events, Weil, Gotshal & Manges. "I wanted to make sure that when we reintroduced the retreat, there was some consistency. They still had a record of all the activities we did, and our usage and attendance counts. It was very helpful for planning purposes."

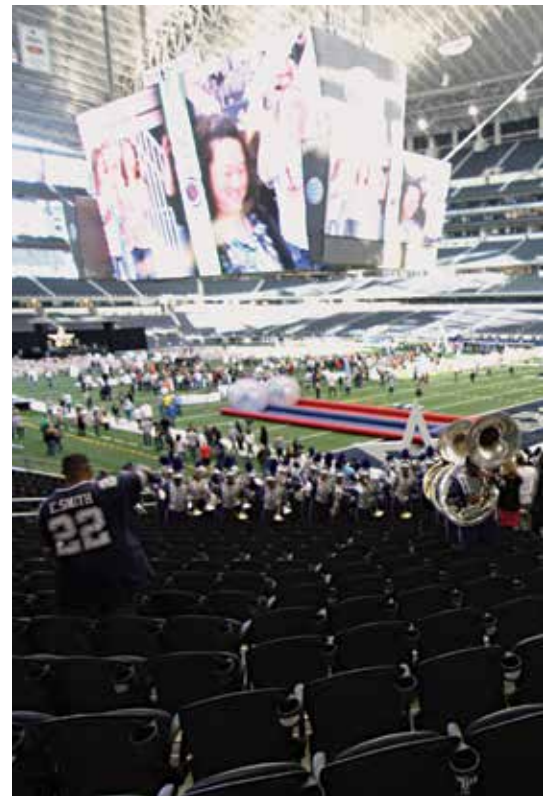
Thomas and AlliedPRA discussed goals for the meeting. "It was like planning several meetings in one," she says. "We sat down with the AlliedPRA team and talked to them about the culture of

our programs and where we were able to spend extra and not do so to avoid problems that might eventually come up."

Teamwork was flawless. "We communicated daily," says Thomas. "They felt like an extension of my team. I'm in New York and don't have any feet on the ground in California, and my department runs over 300 other programs a year. It was imperative to have someone who could do the legwork I couldn't do. Plus personalities matched, which doesn't happen every time you work with a DMC. I wouldn't have been able to pull it off without that relationship."

Dining Creativity

AlliedPRA's imagination was on full display with group dining events, including an evening dinner. "There weren't enough of the types of restaurants in



Access Destination Services arranged an event for 2,300 attendees at AT&T Stadium, the home of the Dallas Cowboys. Jeff Davis, partner – Texas, Access Destination Services, says, “The objective was for every person walking into the event to feel it was just for them.” The event was deemed “the highlight of the meeting.”

the area, and we wanted to divide up the guests into equal groups,” says Liz Smith, CMP, CTA, national sales manager, AlliedPRA Orange County. “So we took over seven art galleries in the area and divided them into seven groups with seven different dining experiences.”

Two of the galleries had hosted dining events before. “With the other five galleries, we had to vet and create the kitchen and everything onsite for the execution of the program,” says Smith. “The decor of each dining room matched

the theme of the gallery. For instance, the modern art gallery had a clear table with avant-garde types of centerpieces.”

On another evening, attendees wanted to meet as teams, have dinner at their meeting sites, and then have the entire group of 450 come together afterwards. “Based on that, we put together an event utilizing Disney’s event spaces,” says Smith. “Guests traveled via bus to Disneyland, had free time in the park, and then dined in four separate event spaces. Dinners inside the event

spaces mirrored their theme and design. After dinner, everyone came together for a private viewing of World of Color, a show at Disney California Adventure Park featuring projected images and special effects on a large water screen.”

The final-night gala dinner was held at Mission San Juan Capistrano, a historic Catholic mission. “We dined in the courtyard with long, linen-covered tables and jewel-toned centerpieces that reflected the colors of the garden and up-lighting on the palm trees,” says Smith. “At the end of the night, the head of the company was so impressed with the program that he took the stage and led a standing ovation for the planner. That really is the goal of a DMC — to make the planner look like the hero.”

Overcoming Obstacles

Planners look like the biggest heroes of all when they use DMCs that hurdle



Credits: Access Destination Services

last-minute barriers to create complex events that wow attendees.

That's what Access Destination Services did for 2,300 attendees at the annual four-day sales meeting earlier this year for a major corporation. The highlight of the meeting was an event on the last night at AT&T Stadium, the home of the Dallas Cowboys in Arlington, Texas. "The objective was for every person walking into the event to feel it was just for them," says Jeff Davis, partner – Texas, Access Destination Services. Because of the number of guests, the large space and everybody arriving at the same time, we had a challenge in making every guest feel important."

Attendees took over the stadium for about five hours. "We wanted it packed with a kind of controlled chaos, almost like a game day," says Davis.

Attendees entered the parking lot of AT&T stadium simultaneously in buses and were greeted by drummers and Rowdy, the Dallas Cowboys mascot. Guests entered the inside of the stadium by walking through tunnels filled with cheering "fans" dressed in Dallas Cowboys gear. Inside the stadium, in the stands, attendees were greeted by

two high school marching bands and live video of themselves on the giant, center-hung, four-sided HD scoreboard with screens totaling 13,000 sf.

Attendees then walked down to the field, where several games included a bungee run, shuffleboard and pool. Guests also participated in zorbing, which involves rolling along the ground inside large transparent balls.

Between activities, guests enjoyed meals. "They had large buffets and bars on the field," says Davis. "Lines were limited in length because of how we positioned events on the field. About half the people wanted to eat immediately while the other half played games."

The event turned out exactly as planned. "It was the highlight of the meeting," says Davis. "This was one of those evenings where everything turned out beautifully."

Success was achieved despite last-minute challenges. Within 34 to 48 hours of the event start time, the participant count increased by about 400 people. The challenges were: "Can the caterer provide that much more food in such a short time frame, and can we get more buses and staff?" says Susan Gregory, Access Destination Services director of marketing – Texas. "Do we have room for them to do everything we want them to do on the field to make this a special event for them?"

Connections Count

A solid relationship with AT&T Stadium helped Access Destination Services obtain what it needed from the stadium and vendors. "We do 12 to 20 events at AT&T Stadium a year and have a very good relationship with them," says Gregory. "There are five different departments you have to work with, and they don't have one point of contact. We are very familiar with all those departments. Because we have repeat business, we can negotiate better with them and provide clients with better services."

Kristi Cline, creative director for DMC Destination Nashville, also provided examples of how important local connections are for a successful partnership. Cline had to dramatically alter plans for

a technology-intensive meeting at the last minute for a top technology company, which hosted 800 potential business partners (heads of start-up companies) at a three-day meeting in Nashville.

The centerpiece of the meeting was a contest called "Pitch Hop," a takeoff on the rap music term "Hip Hop." Pitch Hop was a contest in which attendees created rap videos to pitch business ideas to the technology company hosting the event.

Two months before the scheduled event date, Destination Nashville started planning it via conference calls with company officials scattered around the world. They decided to hold the event at Marathon Music Works in Nashville. Company officials finally visited Nashville about a week before the event.

"We met with them at the venue, and it was decided that it was too small to have people creating rap videos in one space while people spoke on stage in another space because the two activities would compete with each other," says Cline.

So Cline suggested on the spot that attendees create their rap videos in a bus. "By the time we left Marathon Music Works and arrived at my office, we had already procured a tour bus," says Cline. "We took out the bus seats, kitchen and everything else, and built a high-tech recording studio in the front of the vehicle and video studio in the back that were separated by a sliding door."

The bus was parked next to the venue. Attendees signed up for time slots to record raps, choose their wardrobe from the options provided and shoot videos with the help of technicians. The bus had its own Wi-Fi system, servers and generators to provide power. Banners wrapped around the outside of the bus were branded with "Pitch Hop" and the technology company's name and logo. Judges chose the Pitch Hop winner, who received \$35,000 in business transactions with the technology company.

Cline acknowledged that switching Pitch Hop over to a bus a week before the event was like walking a high wire. "But that's what I do every day," she says. The event won this year's inaugural Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI) Ex-



“The head of the company was so impressed with the program that he took the stage and led a standing ovation for the planner. That really is the goal of a DMC — to make the planner look like the hero.”

Liz Smith, CMP, CTA, National Sales Manager
AlliedPRA Orange County, Costa Mesa, CA

excellence Award for Excellence in Technology Integration.

More Success Stories

Oftentimes when a DMC is part of a large global network, the success stories keep rolling in. Terry Epton, CIS, CITE, DMCP, president of Hosts New Orleans, a Hosts Global Alliance Member, reports, “I am so pleased with our company’s direction and our continued robust growth. Hosts Global and its Hosts Global Alliance (HGA) will soon be hosting more than 200 clients at its Annual HGA Global Forum, which will be held at the Royal Sonesta Boston, July 30–August 3. HGA DMC members from around the world will gather along with meeting and incentive planners in a one-of-a-kind networking and educational opportunity. The HGA Global Forum features state-of-the-art industry education, a key component of which will feature Rodger Stotz, chief research officer for the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF). Stotz will facilitate a discussion during the HGA Global Forum that will focus on IRF’s new groundbreaking research highlighting the changing roles of DMCs in the meeting and incentive industry. Hosts Global was instrumental in seeing that the IRF research survey was distributed to the membership of ADME International as well as our DMC Partners, who do business in more than 190 locations around the world.”

Epton continues, “Locally, in my hometown of New Orleans, Hosts New Orleans worked closely with the Risk Insurance Management Society’s Annual Conference & Exposition (RIMS). On arguably the busiest and most popular week of the year in New Orleans this past April, when city was home to the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and

the annual PGA Zurich Classic, Hosts New Orleans was chosen to execute 41 special events associated with RIMS. These events ranged from intimate and elegant 35-person exclusives to huge special events for thousands utilizing numerous venues in the city, all featuring the best of New Orleans cuisine, music and culture. I am enormously proud of our Hosts New Orleans Team!”

Tips on Selecting a DMC

Choosing the right DMC is a crucial decision because it has a big impact on the attendee experience. Planners and DMCs offer the following advice on selecting a DMC. (See related story on page 38.)

- **Weigh options.** “You should talk to a few DMCs. Don’t feel you have to go to one and be done,” says Thomas.
- **Seek recommendations.** Ask suppliers, hoteliers, vendors and the local CVB for recommendations. Check the website of the Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI) www.admei.org, which lists members by destination and indicates those who have DMCP and CMP certifications.
- **Ask for references.** “Ask the DMC to refer clients they have handled with similar types of events that are around the same size and complexity,” says Thomas. “What extras did they bring to the table?”
- **Is a DMC a preferred vendor?** Some properties have lists of preferred DMCs. That means there is some kind of contract or agreement for the hotel to refer the DMC to potential clients. “That doesn’t always mean they are among the best DMCs in the destination,” says Smith. “On

the other hand, a preferred DMC is familiar with the hotel and its inner workings and knows the staff.”

Know Payment Options

Charging policies vary and include percentage markup on program costs, per-attendee charges, management fees, à la carte pricing and the cost-plus method (the retail cost multiplied by a percentage to develop the total cost). “Make sure that what you understand that charging policy (to be) in the beginning is the same throughout and there are no surprises,” says Thomas. “I’ve heard about instances where planners agree to a certain cost structure and then fees start popping up that weren’t discussed at the start.”

- **Buying power is important.** Consider DMCs that do high-volume business with local vendors and have a reputation for negotiating good deals. Such DMCs can help planners stay within budget.
 - **Get a problem solver.** Ask DMCs about times when they overcame serious last-minute obstacles and setbacks to make a meeting successful.
 - **Timeliness is important.** Seek DMCs with a reputation for completing complex projects on time, because more meetings now have shorter turnaround times.
 - **Ask about certifications and awards.** “Our company rated our Orange County office No. 1 for operations out of all AlliedPRA international and domestic offices last year,” says Smith. “That’s something I would want to know if I were a planner, because you know it’s not only the sales team that gets you in the door, it’s also the day-to-day execution you get.”
- Partnering with a DMC allows planners to focus on what they do best while delegating the details of local activities, entertainment, special events and the like to an expert in those areas. The time and effort saved by using a DMC translates into better meeting planning efficiency and overall cost savings. And, who knows, you could be the hero at your next event.

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The Engagement Trifecta

Gamification

Use Gamification, Mobile Apps and a Focus on Community to Relive the Meeting Experience All Year Long

By John Buchanan

When it comes to creating a successful meeting or event, it's no longer enough to simply pick a great destination, invite people to attend and present compelling content. Today, more than ever before, aggressive and effective marketing is required. And nothing can be taken for granted.

Ryan Rutan, developer evangelist at Austin, Texas-based Jive Software, is well aware of the requirements for effective marketing in today's world.

"When you're running an event, you know you have to have a good story, you have to have a lot of preparation, you have to have entertainment," says Rutan, who plans Jive Software's "Jive World" annual user conference that draws 1,500 attendees. "So there's a lot of work that goes into that, just to prepare to be able to do the event."

However, he points out, planning the

event is only half the battle. The other half is marketing.

"It's about ever-present talking and communicating all the time," Rutan says. "So if your event isn't clearly part of your larger annual marketing strategy, if it isn't an integrated story that goes along with your overall marketing message as a company, then you're going to have a lot of money invested — and you might get some interest in it and accolades out of it — but you won't get the full return on investment you want. You have to understand that the experience the attendee

has might not be the same experience you want from a business perspective, in terms of ROI. Sometimes those are two distinct and different things."

And since the recession, Rutan says, the specter of ROI has cast an increasingly larger shadow over events and their budgets.

"I think event marketing is suffering a little bit, from what I call an 'ROI perspective,'" he says.

"In other words, today it's about being able to actually quantify the impact and business value of a multiday event that

keeps customers engaged the entire time and invested in the conference.”

Because of the ROI challenge, one of the key issues Rutan and his management focus on is “turning a three-day event into a six-month activity and being able to justify the ROI you get from that. The other thing is that now most companies say they do more with less. They want everything to be more efficient, including their meetings.”

And increasingly, ROI — however it might be measured — is a critical factor in the efficiency equation.

And that is not simply as result of the recession, Rutan says. “I think it’s more about the fact that people have been talking about ROI from meetings for so long that we’ve actually gotten mature in the way we measure it.”

At the same time, however, Rutan believes that sometimes ROI leads to what he calls “nickel and diming” the event — to its detriment. In turn, that makes a powerful marketing effort even more important.

And that requires investment. “And if you’re going to make an investment, do it right,” he says.

“Go big. Don’t cut corners.”

Technology Is Key

In the Internet age, where communication is instantaneous and constant — and competition for the attention of attendees is more acute than ever before — the process of launching and promoting a meeting or event starts long before attendees show up onsite.

And how well technology is used is often the deciding factor between whether your meeting is a resounding success — or a flop.

In addition, modern technology — and especially social media — has shifted the emphasis from an informational message to an experiential message. That means using all available means to leverage an attendee’s goals, imagination and enthusiasm.

“As an example of what progressive meeting hosts do today, we had a client that was taking an incentive trip to Fiji,” says Gregorio Palomino, CDMP, CEP, CWP, CM, CSEP, principal of San Antonio, Texas-based CRE8AD8. “And we were able to hype that trip not just with text, but also with pictures.”

Palomino and his client created a closed-access private website where only people going on the trip could see it and interact. “And we posted new content every day to really get people excited about the trip and the experience they were going to have,” Palomino says. “For example, a skydiving outing was on the itinerary, so we posted photos of people skydiving and asked our attendees, ‘How excited are you to soon be jumping out of a plane over Fiji?’”

As a result of its ability to generate collective interest and enthusiasm, social media also is a major factor in event marketing today. In fact, no weapon is more powerful than social media when it comes to building awareness of and excitement about an upcoming meeting or event.

Over the last few years,



Mobile Apps

Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn reigned as the big guns. But more recently, newer tools such as YouTube and Vine have gained in popularity. Vine is a video-sharing platform that allows users to post mini-videos that are no longer than six seconds.

No matter what tool is being used, the essential consideration is that all messaging be focused on the self-interests of attendees, rather than the interests of the meeting sponsor.

“Your message can’t just be, ‘Register for the event,’” says Traci Browne, owner of Philadelphia-based Red Cedar Marketing and author of *The Social Trade Show* (Que Publishing, June 2012). “It has to be about creating something that will show that you as the event organizer are the source for the most up-to-date information in your industry.”

In other words, Browne says, the meeting or event must be perceived and understood by attendees in a larger context of “What’s in it for me? Why is this important?”



A Focus On Community

It can't just be about asking people — or directing them if they're internal employees — to come to the meeting. The most effective information is always attendee-focused and not event-focused, Browne stresses.

"And that's where so many meetings and events fall down," she says. "All they do when they start out is say, 'Register now for an early bird discount.' It's all about 'register, register, register.' But if people don't care about your event, if you don't explain to them why they should care and what's in it for them, why would they register? Their real concerns are what am I going to learn at the meeting? What kinds of people am I going to meet? Why is the event worth my time and attention? So that's the kind of information you should be using in your day-to-day promotion of the event. Otherwise, no matter how much time people spend on your website, they're not going to have any idea why they should come to the meeting."

Selecting Your Tool

Another factor to bear in mind is that each social media tool has a singular and inherent advantage. Therefore, each

is the pre-event creation of "Twitter chats," which create a community of communication and shared interests around the event.

"Before the event, you can start twitter chats between speakers and attendees," Browne says.



Ryan Rutan, Developer Evangelist
Jive Software, Austin, TX

"And that way, attendees get a taste of what will be presented at the event. They also get to meet, via Twitter, other people who have the same interests they do. And all of that builds buzz for the meeting."

By the same token, YouTube allows private broadcasts to a targeted audience. And that means an opportunity to give attendees a taste of what they'll see at the meeting, such as speakers or new products.

"And," Palomino says, "if your videos are really cool, they will go viral within your universe."

Even more important, Browne says, is the fact that

"Their real concerns are what am I going to learn at the meeting? ...Why is the event worth my time and attention? That's the kind of information you should be using in your day-to-day promotion of the event."



Traci Browne, Owner
Red Cedar Marketing, Philadelphia, PA

brings a different capability into the promotional process.

"The biggest advantage of Twitter is that it's concise and to the point," Palomino says. "And people can retweet things they get excited about, which is another way to build buzz for a meeting or event."

A current best practice, Browne says,

"video is the most underutilized tool out there for event promotion. And I don't understand that, because events are all about visuals. And so much of the Internet is moving to video instead of just providing text content. But almost every piece of information meeting and event planners produce is text instead of video."

Other Tactics

Although it has been done for years, another time-tested tool is an event-specific website. Large companies typically create it within their intranet system, while smaller companies create a simple, standalone website.

"The biggest element that is missing from the modern conference is the part that the community, or attendees collectively, should play. To achieve that has been a...trifecta between gamification, mobile apps and a focus on community."

"I'd like to be able to say that every company does that now," Palomino says. "But not everybody has the budget to be able to do that. But I definitely think it's important now to have a custom website for every meeting."

A key reality is that a smaller company can typically get that done more quickly and less expensively than a large company, Palomino says. "A small company doesn't have all the red tape that a large company does, so it's just simpler for them to get it done. And instead of relying on an IT department, they can just farm the project out to a local freelance Web designer that can get a website up and running in a few days."

However, says Browne, the critical consideration today is the surge in mobile technology and the increasing ubiquitous use of mobile devices by attendees.

Therefore, she says, all event websites today must be optimized for mobile devices such as smartphones and iPads.

"And with the younger generation, you don't even have to ask them to share information," Browne says. "They just do it. They literally share what they're doing, every minute of the day."

Avoiding Pitfalls

Just as there are new things that work, such as YouTube or Vine — or

even Twitter — there are old things that have lost their ability to deliver.

One of them is the once-popular e-mail blast.

It is increasingly difficult to reach people via a traditional e-mail campaign, Palomino says. For example, most bulk e-mails now go to spam folders. “That’s why mass BCC mailings don’t work anymore,” Palomino says. “They get blocked.”

The key to success today is a subscription-based e-mail program that people opt into in order to receive ongoing information and updates about the meeting or event. “But even doing it that way, the average open-and-read ratio today is under 30 percent,” Palomino says. “So you can’t really rely on e-mail as a primary tool.”

And if e-mail is going to be used most effectively, it must be used in its most modern incarnation in the era of mobile technology. Instead of sending e-mails to a Yahoo or gmail address, the state-

“Know your attendee demographics. Know what you excel in, in terms of technology and social media, and focus on your strengths. Be open to new ideas and new technology tools. And be creative.”

of-the-art is to use the various text platforms created by cell phone providers, such as @sprinttext from Sprint. “The thing to do now is use text e-mail addresses, so when you send it out, it goes as a text message to their smartphones or iPads,” Palomino says.

Gamification

One of the new kids on the technology block, especially for deployment to mobile devices, is gamification.

Like a growing number of planners, Rutan is an enthusiastic proponent of the cutting-edge technology that allows the motivation and direction of specific behaviors before, during and after a meeting by using games that deliver rewards. Rutan uses the industry-leading gamification platform from QuickMobile.

“The reason gamification works for us

is that we have a very passionate user base,” he says.

“That means a user base we can tap into. So I started working on gamification right away as soon as I got this job. The first time we did it, it was just sort of OK. It was like a lot of work for just a little bit of return. But we didn’t have it on a mobile app. That meant we didn’t have an opportunity to gamify the actual conference.”

As a result, his deployment of the innovative technology quickly evolved. “We started focusing on creating games that would engage people and give them the experience we wanted them to have,” he says, “versus having people go out and have their own experience and then possibly dial into something that we weren’t necessarily that interested in from our perspective.”

Jive Software now perceives the proper use of gam-



**Gregorio Palomino, Principal
CRE8AD8, San Antonio, TX**

ification as “a way to influence the right outcomes,” Rutan says.

For example, last year they directed people to particularly important sessions by using gamification and giving away rewards such as iPad Minis. “The goal was to really reinforce the things we wanted people to be focused on at the conference,” Rutan says. “And from their point of view, it was about what they could do to have the best possible experience at the conference. And for us, that means making sure they know what it means to be a successful attendee.”

Jive Software now uses gamification and its own technological capabilities to heavily leverage its customer community. “And we try to make sure that everything is actionable,” Rutan says. “And that gives us a deeper level of engagement with our customers.”

Unfortunately, from what he observes and hears anecdotally, Rutan believes that not that many companies pursue attendee engagement to the extent Jive does. “There are a lot of companies that gather a lot of information about their attendees and events,” he says. “But I don’t think there are many that know how to use that information or get the right kind of information to leverage engagement the way they should be doing.”

Meanwhile, he notes, meetings and events are constantly becoming more democratic and attendee-controlled — a direct result of the initial impact of social media empowerment.

“And that’s something we practice,” Rutan says. “At JiveWorld now, 90 percent of the content being presented is being presented by customers.”

But most companies still lag behind in that kind of effort, Rutan says.

“I think the biggest element that is missing from the modern conference is the part that the community, or attendees collectively, should play,” he says. “And for us, being able to achieve that has been a matter of a trifecta between gamification, mobile apps and a focus on community. And then beyond that, there is the issue of treating all this as a year-long exercise in engagement, not as just a conference that lasts for three days. It’s really about re-living the experience over and over again and keeps them engaged.”

Palomino says that another important consideration is that rather than relying on a particular technology or a set of tools, the most important secret to success is to focus on the old adage that “knowledge is power.”

“Do your homework on your attendees,” he says. “And know your attendee demographics. Know what you excel in, in terms of technology and social media, and focus on your strengths. Be open to new ideas and new technology tools. And be creative. But it’s all about your attendees and their experience — the value they get from your meeting. If you always think that way, your meetings and events will be successful.” **C&IT**

Destination



Credit: Las Vegas News Bureau

Las Vegas Ingenuity

Maintaining the Status Quo — But Not

Las Vegas is perpetually evolving, but for all its continued shiny newness, there's an old French saying that perfectly captures a truth about the city: "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" — the more things change, the more they stay the same. Building goes on, hotels come and go, The Strip changes and new areas emerge, but it's the things that don't change — the constants that planners and groups can depend on — that make Las Vegas the place to meet.

By Christine Loomis

Here's what remains the same no matter how much the city's physical landscape evolves: Las Vegas offers convenience. Las Vegas is fun. Las Vegas understands business. Las Vegas has entertainment options that excel on every level, and meeting space and accommodations galore. Las Vegas delivers and planners know it.

Planner Testimonials

"Whenever you look at destinations that can support highly complex large-scale meetings, Las Vegas always surfaces to the top of the list," says Jim Krausen, V.P. of sales at Motivation Excellence Inc., a full-service agency that plans and executes incentive and meeting programs. Krausen brought a group of 1,650 retailers to the city in September.

"Las Vegas has outstanding value, great air service, fantastic

venues, great customer service and all the meeting space one needs," he says. "For this particular client, we needed large amounts of meeting space for general session, large interactive breakouts, and an exposition hall that was flexible enough for us to repurpose the space and create a full retail store to launch the holiday season. When we presented the options to our client, Las Vegas was the hands-down winner, and that's why for



Credit: Joshua Liberman

Former NFL star Joe Thiesman mingles with attendees of the Trace3 Evolve conference, held earlier this year in Las Vegas.



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“In terms of hotel rooms, meeting space and entertainment, Las Vegas is a one-stop shop. It’s also a central location for our customers and the accommodations are great for events.”

Stephanie Hannah, Director of Strategic Marketing
Trace3
Irvine, CA

the last 30 years Motivation Excellence business in Las Vegas has grown each and every year.”

Stephanie Hannah, director of strategic marketing for Trace3, an IT solutions provider, sees the same thing. “We have been meeting in Las Vegas for more than eight years, and each year our event gets larger and better!”

Hannah brought a group of nearly 700 to Las Vegas in January for the Trace3 Evolve conference, and they’ll return again in 2016. Hannah points to the convenience factor, which works on several levels. “In terms of hotel rooms, meeting space and entertainment, Las Vegas is a one-stop shop. It’s also a central location for our customers and the accommodations are great for events.” And, she adds, “You can accommodate a large group of people in one space and provide entertainment and great options for food.”

Christa K. Salibo, senior national account manager with Experient, part of Maritz Travel, brought 1,000 attendees to the city in April for a client’s multi-unit franchising conference. “This client really feels like Vegas is a great fit because of the convenient opportunity that the group has for walking to and from restaurants and evening entertainment,” she says. “And they feel that Vegas has something for everyone.”

Stellar Staffs

While the city’s expansive facilities and infrastructure meet groups’ physical needs, the staffs at hotels and venues are tasked with meeting needs in a different way. When asked what considerations go into choosing a hotel for a group, Salibo puts good service first. “Service is always at the top of the list, along with the quality and standard levels of the hotel,” she says.

But it was the dedicated customer service of the national sales manager Salibo worked with at Caesars that really made the difference for her meeting. “She not only made it her mission to understand my client’s pro-



(Near left) Steve Wynn himself conceived and wrote the new ShowStoppers Broadway musical spectacular at Wynn Las Vegas. (Far left) The \$28 million Jeff Koons Popeye sculpture was installed in Wynn’s Esplanade in 2014.



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Credit: Delano Las Vegas

Classroom meeting space at the new Delano Las Vegas.

At the core, of course, meetings are about business, and that's something Las Vegas understands. The city provides a setting in which groups easily balance their solid business goals and objectives with all the entertainment and dining options available in the evenings. "For this particular group," Salibo notes, "the highlight of the meeting is the overall opportunity to network and conduct business with folks from all over the world in a formal business setting, as well as a fun and exciting evening environment. Las Vegas really embraces the goals of this organization as it relates to meeting their objectives, and I think that is the reason they keep coming back."

Hannah also chose Caesars, based on availability, pricing and meeting space. "Caesars had great space, service and worked with me to meet my budget," she says.

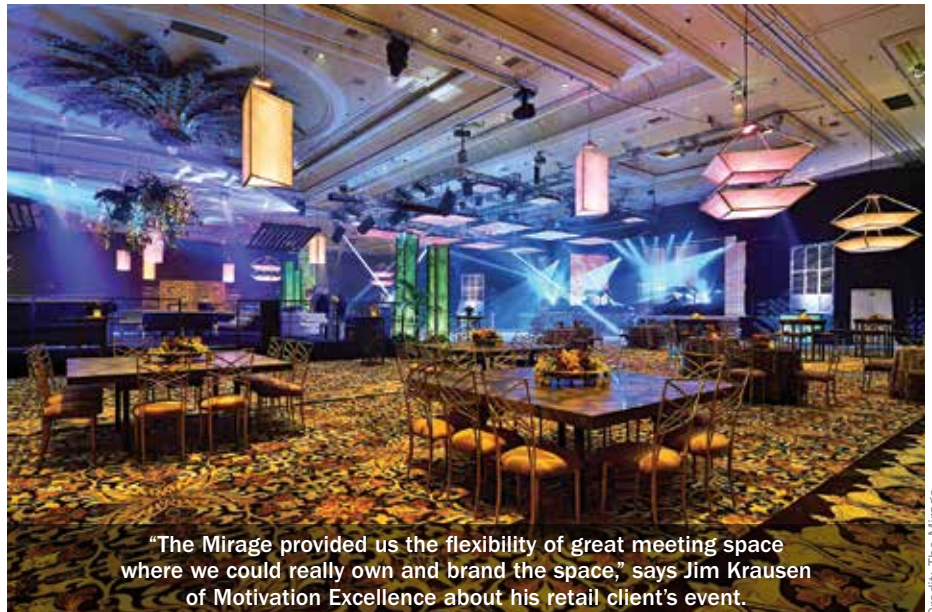
In addition to venues at Caesars where, Hannah notes,

gram and needs, she also made it her mission to understand my needs, my work style and expectations as their representative," Salibo says. "She made the process seamless and a joy to work through."

And, Salibo adds, because she did understand the diverse needs in play, she was able to craft a tailored offer that "made it almost impossible for the client to pass up."

Part of what Caesars offered was access to restaurants and venues at any Caesars hotel, especially important as the group was broken up into multiple small groups that ate at different restaurants. "The client loved the idea of being able to book dinners and special events at other Caesars properties and still receive F&B credit toward their F&B minimum," Salibo says. "I think that was a huge decision-making factor because it gave them so much more flexibility and options for their evening events."

And when all was said and done, the attendees provided positive feedback about all the restaurants as well, a win-win situation.



Credit: The Mirage

"The Mirage provided us the flexibility of great meeting space where we could really own and brand the space," says Jim Krausen of Motivation Excellence about his retail client's event.

"Every meal was out in time and the service was great," the group also used 15 restaurants around town, as well as Drai's, a nightclub, for the entertainment portion of the meeting. Again, service was notable. "The nightclub was very accommodating and we were able to brand the entire place with our company branding," Hannah says.

Hotel Selection

In a city with so many hotels, narrowing the choices can be a complex process. "Choosing the right hotel is sometimes an art and sometimes a science," says Krausen, whose Fortune 50 retail-services client was based at MGM's Mirage. "When we source hotels and venues, it becomes the total package that wins the business," he says. "It has to start with the right fit for our clients, both from a culture and demographic, and then it has to fit the meeting needs and budget."

Among other things, Krausen says, "The Mirage provided us the flexibility of great meeting space where we could really



Credit: Caesars Entertainment

The Omnia Nightclub opened at Caesars Palace in March.

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“This is a very complex program with a million moving parts, and throughout the planning process the entire staff at Mirage was right there to support our crazy ideas and make them come to reality.”

Jim Krausen, Vice President, Sales
Motivation Excellence
Schaumburg, IL

own and brand the space.” The Mirage team also extended an excellent offer with a great rate and concessions package. But it went well beyond that.

“From the time we originally sourced this business, The Mirage came forward as the hotel that really wanted the business,” Krausen says. “We have an outstanding sales manager, Dara Pierce, who led the team at Mirage to secure this business and win over our client.”

The best part, Krausen notes, is that it did not stop at contract signing. “This is a very complex program with a million moving parts, and throughout the planning process the entire staff at Mirage was right there to support our crazy ideas and make them come to reality. When we got onsite to execute the meeting, the entire staff made us feel that they really wanted us there. From top management through the servers at breakfast and lunch, everyone was engaged with our audience. They interacted with our guests and thanked them for coming to The Mirage. They weren’t just going through the motions. They wanted to please us and please our attendees, and it showed throughout the entire event. It was not so much that we transformed a ballroom into a showcase, but that the service made the entire program.”

The attendees noticed it, too. On the group’s post-program survey, there were consistent comments about how outstanding the service was throughout the entire hotel.

Service Beyond the Hotel

Service outside of The Mirage followed suit. “Motivation Excellence conducts a lot of business in Las Vegas, and we utilize all sorts of venues and entertainment options for our groups, so we are very knowledgeable on what each venue has to offer for our clients,” Krausen says. “With this particular client we needed a venue that was cutting-edge, cool, hip and, bottom line, fun. We selected Hakkasan at MGM Grand to host one of the dinner events. We utilized the branding opportunities that exist within the space to build out the event and have it sponsored, helping to reduce the overall budget for our customer and make it a total win-win for the sponsoring company.

“Hakkasan is a venue that really knows customer service. The food was outstanding. We also utilized the house deejay, who was fantastic and really knew how to play to a corporate audience. The overall experience was just amazing. The venue prides itself as being a ‘club,’ but the team really knows how to host a corporate event.”

Know Your Group

In spite of the city’s many attributes and strengths, the fact is that Las Vegas is not for every group, and it’s up to planners to assess the options accurately. Gaming, for example, can be a positive and a negative.

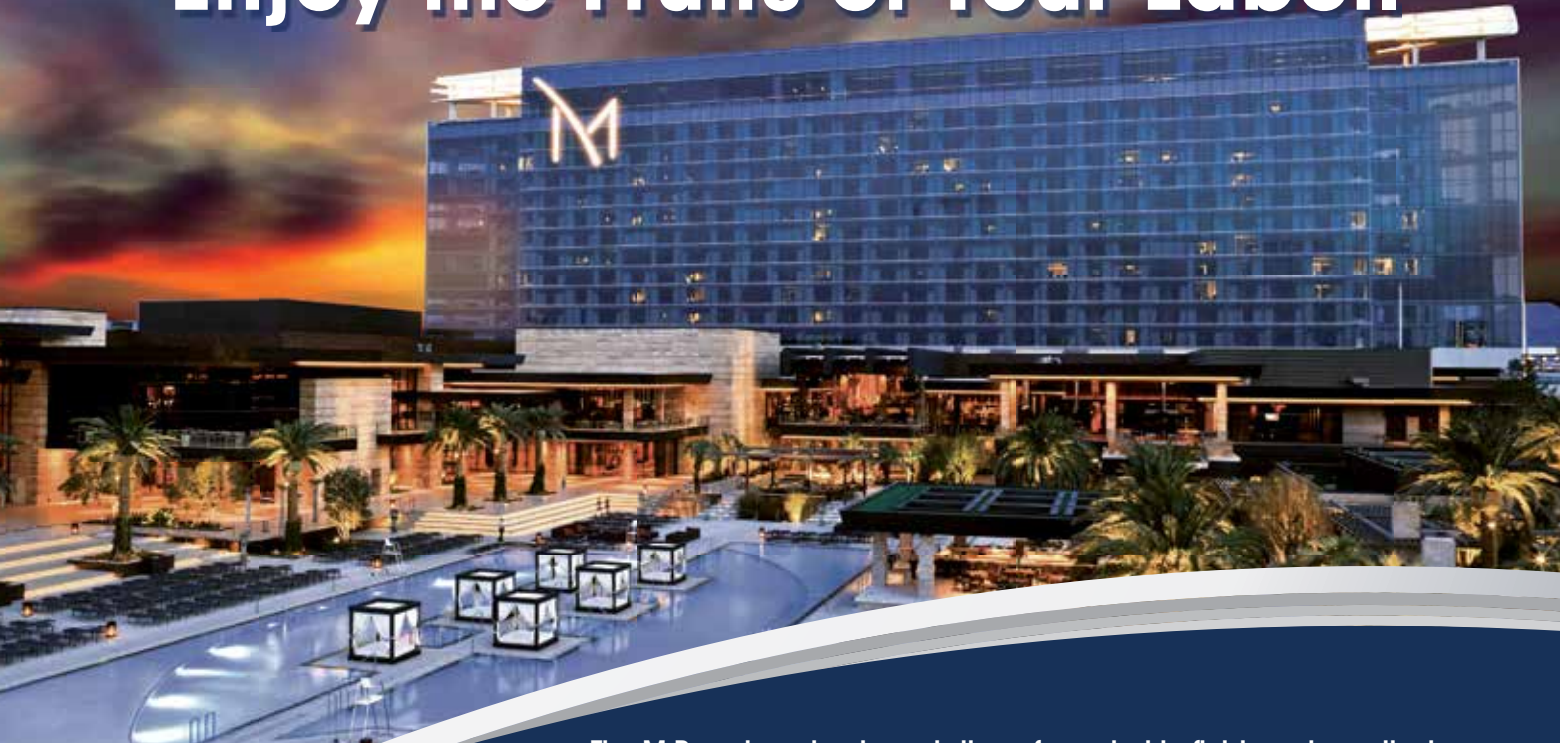
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The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino features gondolas on the Grand Canal and a secluded main pool.

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Credit: Baskow and Associates

Las Vegas showgirls flank Jaki Baskow.

Jaki Baskow, CEO and founder of Baskow and Associates, a DMC and entertainment company that has successfully operated in Las Vegas for nearly 40 years, says planners should ask a lot of questions before

What to Ask When Hiring a DMC

signing with a DMC. Even more important, they should ask the right questions. It goes without saying that references from other clients are a must. But there's more. Here's what else to ask:

- **Does the DMC have deep knowledge and experience of the city? How long has the company been in business?**
While a DMC that's new on the scene can offer creativity and enthusiasm, longtime connections can provide access to star power and hard-to-book venues that other companies might not be able to provide.
- **Does the DMC have preferred buying power with local vendors?**
In addition to getting an extraordinary experience for a group that individuals typically couldn't get for themselves, planners want the best deal for that experience. A DMC's connections can make a big difference.
- **Does the DMC have proper**

liability insurance and workman's compensation?

If the DMC isn't properly insured, you and your company or client can be liable should anything go wrong.

- **Is the DMC keyed in to the newest in technology, such as holograms, 3-D imaging and other cool capabilities?**

If you want to wow your clients, you want access to the latest technology and event elements — and someone who knows how to use them to memorable effect.

- **Has the DMC representative asked you for details about your group, past meetings and past events?**

The right fit goes both ways. Working with a DMC team that takes time to get to know you and what has worked well for you in the past will create a better event — one tailored to your group as opposed to a cookie-cutter experience the DMC is comfortable with.

— CL

(See related story on page 20.)

so they trust us to source and select locations and venues that fit within their culture and demographics," Krausen says. "For this particular meeting, gaming had no impact. The purpose is to excite and engage the attendees so they can bring the message back to their associates to create increased sales and profits. The value we receive in Las Vegas lends itself more to the return-on-investment calculation than a draw of the destination. However, when it comes to Las Vegas, it's extremely important to know who your customers are and how they would perceive the nightlife and gaming before selecting the city."

Room Pirates

For groups that do select Las Vegas, Salibo points to a potential challenge she refers to as "room pirates," a growing concern. "Las Vegas seems to be a target for third parties that solicit

group attendees to book into their blocks, claiming they are the client's designated third-party housing company," she says. "On multiple occasions, my client had to reiterate to its general attendees and exhibitors that they should not book with these erroneous third parties but rather directly with the hotel using the link provided on the client's website. With the proper communication to attendees, this issue can be minimized, but

it's definitely something to take note of."

For thousands of groups, there's no question that Las Vegas is well-endowed in the assets category. "Over the years I have booked dozens of meetings in Vegas," Salibo says. "I think when planners book Vegas they always see an increase in attendance because it gives attendees an opportunity to attend a meeting and also have great fun enjoying all that Vegas has to



Credit: South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa

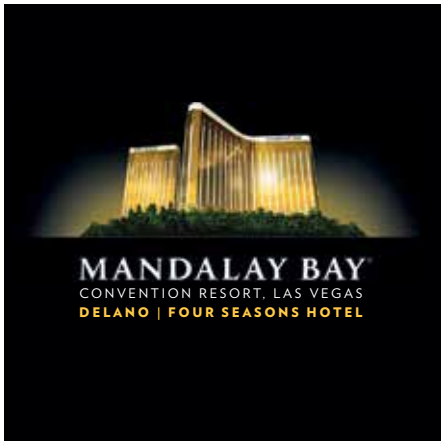
South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa opened a new 60-lane, state-of-the-art tournament bowling and event center in late 2014.



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“I think when planners book Vegas they always see an increase in attendance because it gives attendees an opportunity to attend a meeting and also have great fun enjoying all that Vegas has to offer.”

Christa Salibo, Senior National Account Manager
Experient Inc.
Oceanside, CA



Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

The European pool experience at Encore.

offer. Vegas is a great value because attendees and organizers are getting more bang for their buck right off the bat.”

In the end, hotels change, new venues are built, room counts increase and DMCs find surprising new ways to impress clients. But the dynamic of providing solid business infrastructure, concessions and programs along with stellar service and one of the most engaging entertainment districts in the country is the constant that keeps Las Vegas front and center for planners. Things change, but that stays the same.

New & Noteworthy

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) is in the process of planning its ambitious Las Vegas Global Business District, which includes expansion of the current Las Vegas Convention Center and some of the hotels and neighborhoods around it, with an eye toward increasing the city’s already impressive convention business. With the recent purchase of the Riviera Hotel and Casino, the LVCVA is moving forward with its plans, which will add 750,000 sf of new exhibition space and 187,500 sf of additional meeting space to the Las Vegas Convention Center. The renovation of the existing facility includes adding a 100,000-sf general session space and another 100,000 sf of meeting space.

More than 22,000 conventions were held in Las Vegas last year, 70 of them new business. Housing continues to increase to meet the growing need. At the end of 2014, the city’s room

count was 150,544. Based on current and planned construction on the books as of May 2015, the count will increase to 153,383 in 2017 and to 156,769 by 2018.

The New Tropicana Las Vegas - a DoubleTree by Hilton expanded its Trinidad Pavilion and increased the resort’s total meeting and convention facilities to 100,000 sf. Among the features of the meeting space, as well as across the resort, is significantly upgraded bandwidth providing one of the fastest Internet services available at any Las Vegas hotel. The new infrastructure allows for streaming of high-definition video without jitter or latency, downloading large business presentations, using cloud applications and sending/receiving large files or photos and other digital data without delay.

Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino recently announced the final phase of its resort-wide transformation with the upcoming redesign of more than 3,000 guest rooms and suites. The approximately \$100 million remodeling project is expected to be completed by spring 2016. The **Mandalay Bay Convention Center** is in the midst of a major renovation and expansion that will add 350,000 sf of exhibition space for a total of 2 million sf when completed in 2016.

Ideal for small meetings and incentive groups, the luxury **Delano Las Vegas** opened last fall adjacent to Mandalay Bay. The non-smoking, all-suite hotel features 1,100 accommodations and 20,000 sf of indoor meeting space with 31 meeting rooms including four boardrooms plus engaging social locations. An additional 16,000 sf of space for breakfast and lunch meetings is located on the top floor with panoramic views of



Credit: Aria Resort & Casino

Sky Suites at Aria Resort & Casino recently unveiled the upscale Sky Pool — a luxury “secluded hideaway” with its own private entrance for Sky Suites guests only.

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It's not just 170,000 sq. feet of flexible ballrooms, boardrooms and breakout space that makes The Mirage the perfect destination to host your next meeting or event. There's far more to enrich your group's experience. Here's 10 reasons why meeting planners choose The Mirage year after year:

1. All meeting spaces rest ground level with easy access to freight doors, which makes the load-in and load-out process a breeze.
2. Guest rooms and elevators are just steps away from our meeting spaces, giving your guests a quick pathway back to AAA Four Diamond luxury rooms.
3. Outdoor meeting spaces like the St. Croix Patio offer your guests fresh air and fresh perspectives with lush greenery and scenic views.
4. We're committed to paradise, including the environment. We've earned 4 Green Keys by Green Key Global for leadership in sustainable practices.
5. We live to deliver your vision. Our friendly convention sales and service teams are the best on The Strip.
6. Nowhere else in Las Vegas can you host an event alongside white tigers, white lions and a family of bottlenose dolphins.
7. Our Center-Strip location places you and your guests at the heart of everything you love about Vegas.
8. The group dining options are exquisite, with Tom Colicchio's Heritage Steak, Morimoto Las Vegas (arriving in 2015), STACK American Steakhouse by Chef Brian Massie and so many more.
9. We have the best entertainment in Vegas, with everything from The Beatles™ LOVE™ by Cirque du Soleil® to Boyz II Men to Terry Fator: The VOICE of Entertainment.
10. Finally, the iconic Mirage Volcano. Where else can you be greeted by more than 150 flame shooters, 620 show lights and 130 water effects choreographed for your viewing pleasure?

Contact our friendly conventions staff today to start planning your dream meeting or event.

the Las Vegas Strip. Delano debuted a new outdoor events venue this summer — Delano Beach Club — which offers a full buyout for evening receptions on the pool deck.

The Linq Hotel & Casino has just completed a full resort renovation of 2,253 guest rooms. The \$223 million makeover marks the completion of Caesars Entertainment's Linq Complex, which comprises the hotel, the Linq Promenade and the High Roller observation wheel.

South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa opened a new 60-lane, state-of-the-art tournament bowling and event center in late 2014. The \$35 million, 90,000-sf facility features a 360-degree viewing area. The United States Bowling Congress in cooperation with Las Vegas Events and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority will hold 122 days of tournaments at the facility through 2017. The partnership will bring tournaments, conventions and other events to Las Vegas, including the USBC Masters, USBC Queens, USBC Senior Masters and USBC Team USA Trials.

The **Omnia Nightclub** — the former Pure Nightclub — opened in 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 corporate event buyouts for groups of 200–4,000 people.

In December, a new show debuted on the Encore Theater Stage at **Wynn Las Vegas**, providing planners with a mem-



Credit: M Resort Spa Casino

VIP cabanas at M Resort Spa Casino's 12,000-sf adult DayDream Pool Club. The resort also boasts a 100,000-sf pool piazza, which accommodates private group events.

property should head to the Wynn Esplanade and the 6-foot-5-inch, \$28 million Jeff Koons statue of Popeye, installed in 2014 (bring your own spinach).

Encore is currently updating each room to include larger nightstands, 55-inch 4K televisions and pop-up tech consoles for easy access to plugs and USB ports for charging devices. Furnishings and floor coverings also will be updated. The upgrades will be complete in the fall of 2015.

Aria Resort & Casino was No. 1 on the list of Cvent's 2014 Top 100 Most Popular Meeting Resorts in North America and the Caribbean. Sky Suites at Aria recently unveiled the upscale Sky Pool — a luxury "secluded hide-away" with its own private entrance for Sky Suites guests only. Other MGM Resorts International properties also on the Cvent's list include **Bellagio**, **MGM Grand**, **Mandalay Bay** and **The Mirage**. In April of this year, Bellagio completed the remodeling of all 3,933 rooms and suites — a \$165 million project that started in 2011.

Last fall, the Forbes Five Star **Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas** introduced The Gallery, a meeting and event space. Located in the center of the property's porte-cochère, the loft-style venue offers 1,900 sf of space accommodating up to 80 guests for a seated dinner or 200 guests for a cocktail reception.

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Credit: Mandalay Bay Convention Center

Rendering of prefunction space at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center, which is undergoing a major expansion to be completed in 2016.

orable way to entertain and wow colleagues and clients. ShowStoppers brings to one stage some of the most celebrated and beloved musical numbers from Broadway shows, composers and lyricists. The production includes selections hand-picked by Steve Wynn, who conceived and wrote the production. Attendees searching for the best selfie spot on Wynn

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I-Drive 360, Orlando's new entertainment destination, is located on Orlando's popular International Drive. The Orlando Eye's 400-foot observation wheel is the centerpiece of the complex, which features attractions, restaurants, clubs and shops.

Groups Never Have to Settle for Business as Usual: There's Always Something New

By Maura Keller

Organizing a corporate retreat or offsite meeting this winter? From world-renowned Disney World to tropical sites teeming with splendor, Orlando presents a variety of meeting venues for professionals who are looking for unique locales. Cozy, awe-inspiring and monumental, these Orlando gems offer unique accommodations and amenities aplenty — all while providing ideal opportunities for your group to work some and play some.

Groups never have to settle for business as usual at Universal Orlando Resort. With two theme parks — Universal Studios Florida and Universal's Islands of Adventure — four (soon to be five) magnificently themed onsite Loews hotels and a dining and entertainment complex, Universal Orlando offers a wide variety of venues to accommodate events of all shapes and sizes — everything from corporate and association meetings to elaborately themed, customized experiences. According to a Universal Orlando spokesperson, "Meeting planners have

a team of experienced meeting specialists, entertainment and production consultants, culinary experts, Loews Four Diamond and more services to help shape a one-of-a-kind event."

In November 2014, Universal was the site of 1105 Media's annual event, Live 360, which is an educational training conference for nearly 1,000 developers and network and systems administrators.

"This was our third year hosting the meeting at Universal Orlando's Loews Royal Pacific Resort," says Sara Ross, CMP, senior director of event operations for the Dallas, Texas, office of 1105 Media. "The theming of Loews Royal Pacific Resort makes it feel like you're escaping to a tropical destination. Especially since our meeting was in November — when the weather is getting cold almost everywhere else — it provided an opportunity for our attendees to enjoy a tropical-themed event in the warm Orlando weather."

1105 Media always hosts a Wednesday night event for at-

tendees to network and enjoy the destination. At Loews Royal Pacific Resort, the island theming melded well with their planned luau with fire and hula dancers.

“I’ve done tons of events at different hotels in Orlando, and Loews Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando offers the most for attendees to do right on-property; there is so much to do at the destination that we don’t have to pay for transportation to take attendees offsite for functions,” Ross says. “With the Loews Royal Pacific Resort meeting space expansion and opening of the Loews Sapphire Falls Resort next year, we’re excited about the additional space to grow our meeting. We will be able to move our lunch inside — we previously used an outside tent for meals — and accommodate more attendees at the same location.”

Universal Orlando Resort is in the midst of a series of new, boldly creative experiences. It began with The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Hogsmeade in 2010 and quickly moved to Despicable Me Minion Mayhem; Springfield, hometown to America’s favorite animated family, The Simpsons; The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley; eight new venues at Universal CityWalk; and the retro Cabana Bay Beach Resort.

“The addition of Loews Sapphire Falls Resort in summer 2016, and the significant expansion of meeting space at Loews Royal Pacific Resort this fall, brings Universal Orlando Meetings and Events to an entirely new level, as our universe of options for meetings and events will be bigger and more convenient than ever before,” says the spokesperson.

Adding 115,000 sf of meeting space, Loews Sapphire Falls Resort will continue to establish Universal Orlando as a premier meeting and convention destination. The resort will be Universal Orlando’s fifth onsite hotel, bringing the total number of onsite hotel rooms to 5,200.

Upon opening, Loews Sapphire Falls Resort will connect to



Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

The Loews Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando Resort, which is currently expanding its meeting space.

the recently expanded meeting facilities at Loews Royal Pacific Resort, which will offer more than 131,000 sf of function space starting in fall 2015. Together, the two uniquely themed resorts will offer meeting and convention planners nearly 247,000 sf of contiguous meeting space and 2,000 guest rooms.

Adventures Aboard

The unique location of DoubleTree Suites by Hilton – Orlando Lake Buena Vista in the Downtown Disney Resort Area and the property’s strong reputation for highly personalized service makes the hotel attractive to meeting planners, and is a main factor in bringing groups back.

“Ranked No. 1 in the Event Planner Satisfaction & Event Planner Loyalty survey for three consecutive years, gives planners a level of confidence that their guests will be well cared for,” explains DoubleTree Suites by Hilton – Orlando Lake Buena Vista’s Area Director of Sales and Marketing Kevin Renzi. “Also, being a smaller hotel, we provide an intimate, distraction-free environment that has great appeal to planners who don’t want to be adjacent to a large convention-like event.”

Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando, the fifth onsite hotel at Universal Orlando Resort, is expected to open in 2016.



Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

The hotel hosts many sales meetings and incentive programs that often include an offsite activity or Disney component in their agenda. The hotel features modern, spacious one- and two-bedroom suites with sliding barn doors for privacy.

Being an official Walt Disney World hotel, they can offer access to private events in the Disney parks, teambuilding, character greetings and entertainment onsite and much more. Through Hilton's Meetings Simplified program, the hotel also offers a convenient all-day meeting package.

Groups at DoubleTree Suites by Hilton – Orlando Lake Buena Vista enjoy proximity to top Orlando attractions. They can walk to the Downtown Disney Area or board the complimentary shuttle to all Walt Disney World Theme Parks and Water Parks.

The DoubleTree Suites by Hilton completed extensive renovations in 2013 on all suites, meeting and public spaces. Additionally, they enhanced their infrastructure and now provide super high-speed Internet, up to 100mb/second, according to Renzi.

Vivian Alfonso, administrative assistant, global financial technology management for Miami-based Carnival Corporation, recently staged the company's annual global financial technology conference with more than 100 professionals from across Carnival Corporation's nine worldwide brands at the DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld.

"The two-week conference included beta-testing of our new financial systems as well as various presentations, seminars and breakout sessions," Alfonso says. "This was the third time hosting this conference at the property, and soon we will host our fourth conference there.

"It was really the ideal venue for our conference," Alfonso says. "Not only is the venue's management team extremely flexible and accommodating — providing additional conference space as needed, as well as extra bandwidth and seamless wireless connectivity — the entire staff was extremely helpful and professional, providing an exceptional level of service. That's the reason we keep coming back year after year."

"The entire staff (DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld) was extremely helpful and professional, providing an exceptional level of service."

Vivian Alfonso, Administrative Assistant
Global Financial Technology Management
Carnival Corporation, Miami, FL

The Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek is a well-appointed lakefront hotel, which is equipped to handle business functions from board meetings and large conferences to corporate fundraisers and trade shows. The contemporary 25,000 sf of meeting and event spaces feature high-tech audiovisual support, Internet access and business-center services, all enhanced by top-notch catering.

According to Mark Phillips, president of San Diego, Califor-

nia-based Map Your Events Inc., Wyndham Grand Orlando's location near Disney World offered attendees of his recent annual corporate conference ample opportunities for mixing business and pleasure.

"There were many activity options available, and the hotel is not so large that your group is lost like many of the mega hotels," Phillips says. "It felt like a private buyout of the property. Also, the staff is wonderful to work with in the preplanning stage and outstanding during the onsite operation of the program. The attendees felt very special and well taken care of during their stay. We have already rebooked for 2017."

For Scott Washburn, president and CEO of Las Vegas-based Event Consultants LLC, working with excellent staff at any chosen venue is paramount. He has held a myriad of events at Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek.



Credit: Hyatt Regency Orlando

The veranda at the Hyatt Regency Orlando is ideally suited for networking and meetings.

Designed for networking, Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, and its sister property, Waldorf Astoria Orlando, boast inviting environments that naturally bring people together. Waldorf Astoria Orlando offers a distinguished business setting replete with nearly 42,000 sf of multifunctional space including a 7,945-sf Grand Ballroom (divisible into two sections) featuring an additional 4,049-sf prefunction area with sweeping views of pool and golf course; and a new 8,712-sf Central Park with adjacent 5,544-sf Central Park Gardens scenic outdoor function space; 13 meeting rooms and two stately boardrooms.

"Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek always exceeds my expectations — great sleeping rooms, great meeting space, great recreational options, great food and fantastic staff," Washburn says. "With the two different hotels, you have great options for all guests. Plus, the location of the meeting space right between the two hotels makes it easy for everyone. If your meeting includes spouses and families, too, there is plenty to keep them busy while the attendees are in the meetings. Plus, the location is close enough, yet far enough away from the parks."

Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek features 132,000 sf of total



“The great folks at Grand Floridian Resort understood our willingness to amaze and were on board with all of our values.”

Erica Alatorre, Senior Meeting Planner
SocialMedia.org, Austin, TX



meeting and function space including a ballroom, pavilion with sweeping views of waterways and golf course, 26 high-tech breakout rooms and exquisite outdoor function venues.

“I can say that in my 35 years of event planning, both large and the small, this staff is by far, the best I have ever worked with,” Washburn says. “From the very beginning sales process, to the very end, every staff person, in every department ‘gets it’ and knows that the hotel guests are what pays their bills. Hearing a ‘welcome back’ from everyone puts a smile on my face as well as the attendees. This staff has an uncanny way of anticipating almost every need. This is why many of my groups are booked here through 2020.”

Meetings-Centered Venue

The combination of 315,000 sf of meeting space, 1,639 guest rooms with 200 suites, a distinctive collection of resort-style amenities and the convenient location across from and directly connected to the Orange County Convention Center make Hyatt Regency Orlando an unrivaled destination for meetings and events of all sizes.

As a spokesperson for Hyatt Regency Orlando explains, the hotel was built upon decades of meetings experience, and offers meeting planners flexibility to create success in any space.

“Whether you’re hosting an executive meeting or elaborate convention, our team is able to harness all of these strengths to ensure your attendees have access to all the action yet feel like they are in a world all their own,” he says.

Each year Hyatt Regency Orlando hosts more than 2,500 events with 1 million total attendees annually.

The Hyatt Regency recently hosted Symantec’s Worldwide Sales & Marketing event, which brought together 2,400 employees from around the globe.

“The Hyatt Orlando by far exceeded our expectations,” says Ashely King, senior global event manager for Mountain View, California-based Symantec. “The venue also has functional meeting space that is large enough to host a large group like Symantec yet provides an intimate feeling.”

In addition to fully customizable space, including 26 contiguous pillar-free ballrooms named from Regency A to Z, the hotel offers state-of-the-art technology and audio-visual services, and exceptional catering.

The spokesperson explains, “We’ve transformed our meeting space to host concerts featuring national acts, lively marketplaces and an extravagant circus-themed gala; and, we

utilize networking niches throughout the hotel to enhance events both large and intimate to create engagement opportunities for attendees that extend beyond the ballroom.”

Symantec traditionally has hosted their annual sales conference in Las Vegas due to its group size. But as King explains, the Hyatt Orlando provided an opportunity for change and was very well received by the attendees and executive management team.

“While we did not have all sleeping rooms at the Hyatt, the Hyatt sales staff was instrumental in coordinating with our overflow hotels to ensure a seamless planning and onsite experience,” King says. “Additionally, the Hyatt staff was extremely customer-oriented and went above and beyond to help us achieve our program goals. Our favorite part was two-fold: Working with the staff who had a true desire to deliver a customized event experience for Symantec, and working in a destination outside of Vegas, which opened up fresh options for off-property events.”

Exploring the World of Walt Disney

Walt Disney World Resort offers planners everything they need to create unforgettable events. Just ask Erica Alatorre, senior meeting planner at SocialMedia.org in Austin, Texas. Alatorre planned the company’s Brands-Only Summit held in October 2014 at Walt Disney World Resort.

“We like to look at this event as the conference, festival and family reunion for social media leaders at really big companies,” Alatorre says. “There are three things that distinguish this event from any other social media conference: it’s invite-only, brands-only and off-limits to vendors.”



Opening in summer 2016 at Universal’s Islands of Adventure, “Skull Island: Reign of Kong” will honor one of the most monumental figures in movie history, King Kong.

As Alatorre explains, when SocialMedia.org decided they wanted to have a big annual meeting, Disney World was the first place that came to mind.

“We already knew we wanted our Brands-Only Summit to be over-the-top amazing, so it was only fitting to have this event at a venue that was just that,” Alatorre says. “It’s not your standard hotel. There’s plenty of space for breakouts and keynote sessions without feeling like you’re stuck in a generic convention center. And most importantly, we pride ourselves on giv-

“Additionally, the Hyatt staff was extremely customer-oriented and went above and beyond to help us achieve our program goals.”

Ashely King, Senior Global Event Marketing Manager, Symantec, Mountain View, CA



we strive for. With this being our big annual meeting, we wanted it also to be somewhere that was family-friendly. And it also gives us the opportunity to make our members feel special. Where else can they say they rode Toy Story Mania with fellow SocialMedia.org members after the park closed? We go the extra mile when it comes to our members. We genuinely care for them. Disney has that same feeling toward their guests.”

New & Noteworthy

Universal Orlando Resort has announced a new groundbreaking attraction opening in summer 2016 at Universal’s Islands of Adventure. “Skull Island: Reign of Kong” will honor one of the most monumental figures in movie history, King Kong.

The 1,000-room **Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando** is scheduled to open in the summer of 2016 with more than 131,000 sf of meeting space. The property will be located near the Cabana Bay Beach Resort and Loews Royal Pacific Resort, which is set to complete expansion of its meeting space from 85,000 sf to about 140,000 sf this fall.

Universal Orlando Resort announced plans for a new water theme park called **Volcano Bay**, which will join Universal Studios Florida and Universal’s Islands of Adventure and in 2017 become the resort’s third immersive park. According to Universal Orlando, Volcano Bay will offer radically innovative, thrilling attractions, peaceful moments of relaxation and an inspired guest experience that will forever change the perception of water-theme parks. It will be set in a highly themed, completely immersive environment inspired by postcard-perfect tropical islands.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel is undergoing a \$125 million multiphased renovation, the largest makeover in its history. The project includes every guest room in the 758-room Swan Hotel and the 1,509-room Dolphin Hotel. The makeover will be completed by the end of 2017 and will not disrupt service or the availability of the majority of guest rooms and meeting rooms.

MyMagic+, which is taking the **Walt Disney World Resort** experience to an all-new level, makes it easier than ever for attendees to customize and personalize their time at the resort. An important part of MyMagic+ is the My Disney Experience website and app that lets attendees start planning before they even leave home. They can reserve access to select attractions and shows in advance with the enhanced Disney FastPass+ service, book dining reservations and more.

The innovative MagicBand links the entire MyMagic+ experience. This colorful wristband is actually an all-in-one device that effortlessly connects the attendee to all the choices made through My Disney Experience. The MagicBand lets guests travel lighter throughout their stay: It unlocks the hotel room, allows entrance to the theme parks, and buys food and merchandise. Plus, the MagicBand gives FastPass+ access to all the experiences already selected online, so guests can simply concentrate on enjoying the fun after meetings are over. **C&IT**

ing attendees a great experience by following some simple core values: We run on time, we offer the right food and beverage for everyone, attendees never wait in line, and attendees never see setup/teardown. These values cannot be met without the help and support of the venue. The great folks at Grand Floridian Resort and Spa understood our willingness to amaze and were on board with all of our values.”

A complete city in its own right, Walt Disney World covers more than 40 square miles. Here planners will find six convention resorts and another 10 resorts for overflow and more than 700,000 sf of flexible space.

“After meetings are over, there are four world-famous theme parks and two nighttime entertainment districts,” says a spokesperson for Walt Disney World Resort. Walt Disney World also is a sporting paradise with three championship golf courses, lakes for boating and fishing, and the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, which is home to professional and amateur sporting events.

“More than facilities, a meeting or event at Disney opens the door to an array of exclusive Disney Difference benefits, including private events in the Disney theme parks, powerful programs content by the Disney Institute and premier creative resources from the Disney Event Group,” says the spokesperson.

Personalization is key for many companies looking to host offsite events, and SocialMedia.org is no exception. “We are more than just a community, it’s a family,” Alatorre says. “By having everyone together at Disney spending their days and evenings together really embraces that family atmosphere



Credit: The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel is undergoing a renovation of every guest room in the 758-room Swan Hotel and the 1,509-room Dolphin Hotel.



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Alison Taylor was named senior vice president of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide's sales organization. A 25-year Starwood veteran, she replaced Christie Hicks, who retired in March of this year. Taylor previously developed the Starwood sales organization in Asia-Pacific.

Omni Barton Creek Resort & Spa near Austin, Texas, has named **Greg Schneider** as manager of sales for the Midwest market. He was director of group sales for Lakeway Resort in Austin.

Jeanne Bothwell was promoted to director of sales and marketing at One

Ocean Resort & Spa, Atlantic Beach, Florida. She most recently served as the associate director of sales at the resort.

The Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa, Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, has appointed **Dan McCarron** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as Northeast market account leader for the company.

The Curtis, a DoubleTree by Hilton in Denver, Colorado, has named **Zach Lybbert** to serve as director of sales and marketing. He joins the Curtis from the Embassy Suites DFW South Hotel in Irving Texas, where he was the director of sales and marketing.

Hyatt Regency St. Louis at The Arch has appointed **Carrie Stremsterfer** as associate director of sales, responsible for large convention business. She most recently opened the new Hilton Garden Inn Washington DC/Georgetown.

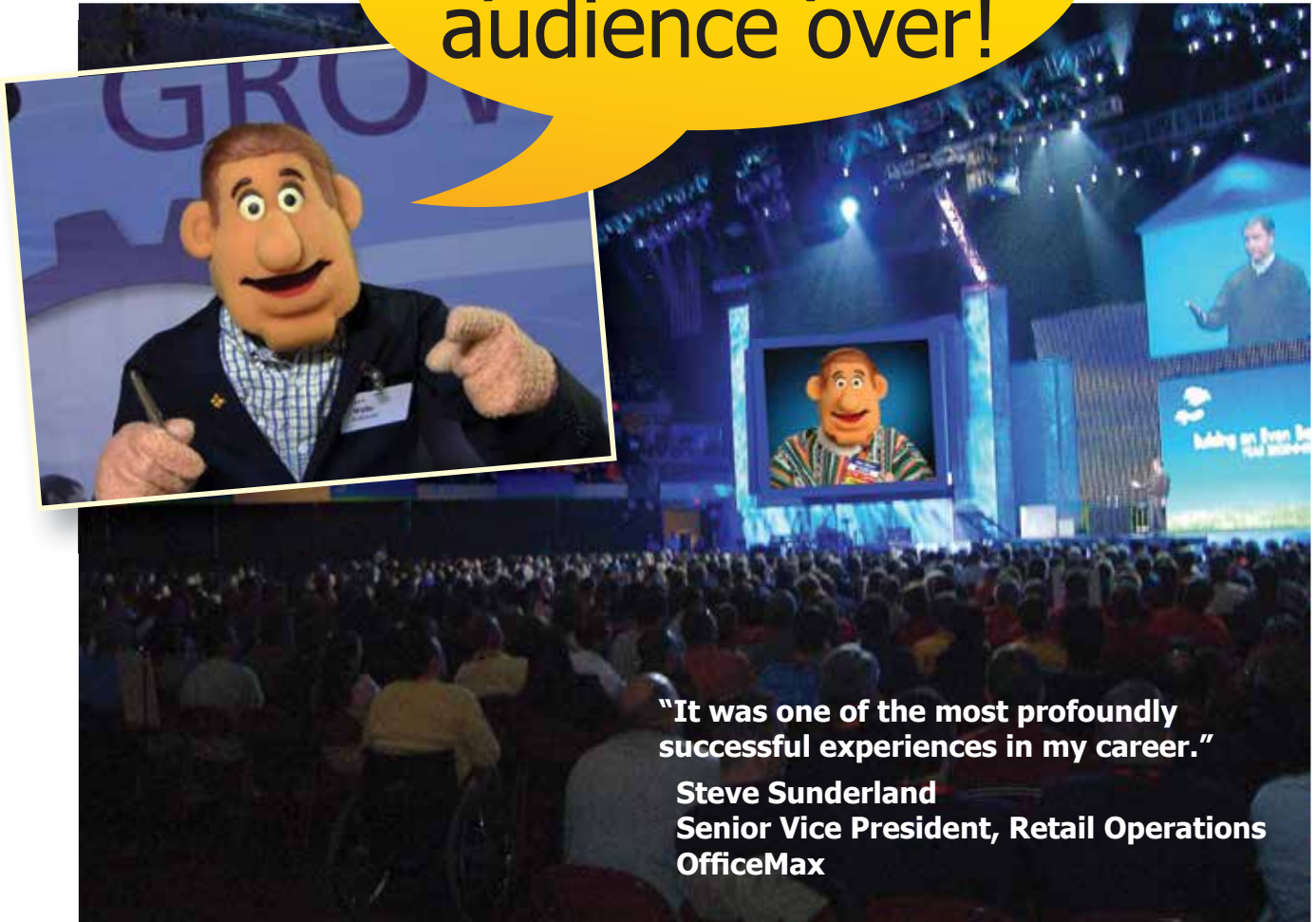
Mandarin Oriental, Washington, DC has named **David Walsh** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as director of sales at Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, DC.

Riverhouse Hotel & Convention Center in Bend, Oregon, has named **Erick Trachsel** as director of sales. He most recently was director of sales at the DoubleTree Hotel in Bend. **C&IT**

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