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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

Q&A With Paul Van Deventer

The President and CEO of Meeting Professionals International reflects on a range of topics from meeting planner certifications and budgets to politics and terrorism.

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Paul Van Deventer

Are You Upping Your Game?

What Planners Are Saying
About the Broadening Options
in Professional Certifications
and Certificates PAGE 12



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Information security threats are rising at a faster rate for offsite meetings than for any other sector. **PAGE 18**



Keeping up with meeting technology, what works and what doesn't, can prove to be overwhelming. **PAGE 30**



Credit: M Resort Spa Casino

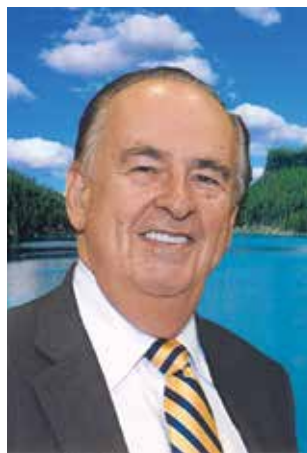
M Resort Spa Casino has 92,000 sf of meeting space. **PAGE 42**

Publisher's Message

Van Deventer Guides MPI to New Heights

Paul Van Deventer, the president and CEO of Meeting Professionals International who graces our cover this issue, reflected on a range of topics from meeting planner certifications and budgets to politics and terrorism in a special Q&A.

Just back from leading a highly successful World Education Congress (WEC), held for the first time ever in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Van Deventer led more than 2,000 registered WEC attendees who complied with the resurgent city's slogan of



"Do AC" and reveled at the huge beach party favored by typical Jersey Shore weather, traveled the historic Boardwalk, marveled at the new Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center and took in all that the city by the sea has to offer meeting groups.

President of MPI since April 2013, Van Deventer offered his take on serious questions facing the meeting planning community here and throughout the world.

For example, many of *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazine's loyal subscribers want to know how MPI and other associations can help them be better prepared to deal with terrorism threats. Van Deventer declares, "MPI is currently in the process of developing resources and education to address the needs of meeting professionals as it relates to security and risk management. We will be taking planners behind the scenes of the Democratic National Convention as part of our Experiential Event Series, for an in-depth look at how the DNC manages their own security elements." For more substantive, informative answers, see Paul's perspective on page 10.

MPI wants to "be the first choice for professional career development." In the feature "Are You Upping Your Game?" on page 12, planners will learn from fellow professional meeting planners the latest in certification trends. Moreover, MPI, for the sixth year, will present the daily keynotes this fall at IMEX America in Las Vegas as well as power the Smart Monday program, which will feature nearly 30 education sessions covering topics such as crisis planning, medical meetings, contracts, Wi-Fi, strategic communications and the sharing economy.

"Over the past few years, MPI has consistently received high satisfaction scores — 90 percent and higher — on education we deliver at our signature events and IMEX America, and our goal is to keep that momentum going," Van Deventer asserts.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

In Memorium: Dick Boehning August 18, 1934 – July 14, 2016

TAMPA BAY, FL — Hospitality veteran Richard Boehning, who served as executive vice president and general manager



BOEHNING

at Saddlebrook Resort in Tampa Bay, Florida, passed away July 14, 2016. "Each of us not only grieves at the passing of a tremendous individual but also for the loss his family suffers," commented S. Mark Marker, CHME, CMP, director of national accounts at Saddlebrook Resort.

Mr. Boehning began his long hotel career at the Hotel New Yorker in New

York City, then worked at the Bancroft Hotel in Michigan. He moved on to Miami where he served for 25 years at the Doral Resort & Country Club, first as the vice president of sales and marketing and then as vice president and general manager.

His career continued for the next 27 years at Saddlebrook Resort until his retirement.

Colleagues remembered, "He was a great mentor, one of a kind, first class all the way and always remained a gentleman, incredible man, great boss, class act and reflected the qualities of great leadership."

Considered an industry giant among his peers, Mr. Boehning will be greatly missed by his family and friends.

Radisson Opens New Hotel in Downtown Baltimore

BALTIMORE, MD — Radisson announced the opening of the Radisson Hotel Baltimore Downtown-Inner Harbor in Baltimore, Maryland. The hotel offers 323 guest rooms and is situated in the heart of downtown and just a half mile from Inner Harbor providing guests with easy access to all downtown Baltimore has to offer. In close proximity, the arts and entertainment district is filled with local destinations including Oriole Park at Camden Yards, the National Aquarium, the Baltimore Convention Center and Royal Farms Arena. The hotel's 323 modern guest rooms offer spacious accommodations and pillow-top mattress-



The Radisson Hotel Baltimore Downtown.

es. The hotel also features Business Class by Radisson, which provides guests with upgraded amenities specifically designed with the business traveler in mind. www.radisson.com

Mohegan Sun Announces \$50 Million Hotel Renovation

UNCASVILLE, CT — As construction progresses on Mohegan Sun's 400-room, \$130 million Earth Tower opening in fall 2016, the company announced a two-year \$50 million renovation project for the Sky Tower, the existing 1,200-room hotel that was introduced in 2002. Part of this initiative includes a multimillion-dollar revamp and rebranding of the property's existing spa, combined with a completely new Mandara Spa build-out as part of the new Earth Tower. And Mohegan Sun has announced the introduction of Victoria's Secret to The Shops at Mohegan Sun, three new dining offerings and exclusive hybrid fusion games.

The Sky Renovation project, estimated at \$50 million overall once completed, will encompass standard and junior suite room renovations including new carpeting, wall covers, casework furniture and fabrics. The rooms also will feature a brand new e-tray arrangement in lieu of a mini-bar, refrigerators, as well as an iPad, providing a multitude of services for guests including a compendium, thermostat adjustments, room service ordering and TV control. For guests' convenience, a motion detecting light will be installed under the end tables, and will turn on automatically once guests step out of bed. The hotel corridors and lobby furniture also will be updated as part of the project.

www.mohegansun.com

MPI to Deliver Educational Programming at IMEX America in Las Vegas

DALLAS, TX — Meeting Professionals International (MPI) will return to Las Vegas this fall to deliver educational programming during IMEX America. As the strategic partner and premier education provider for the show, MPI will present the daily keynotes as well as power the Smart Monday program on October 17, 2016. In addition, the MPI Foundation will present its largest fundraising and networking event of the year — Rendezvous, the IMEX America Night.

Smart Monday powered by MPI will feature nearly 30 education sessions covering topics such as crisis planning, medical meetings, contracts, Wi-Fi, strategic communications and the sharing economy. Education designed for senior-level meeting professionals include the Senior Meeting Executive Group Therapy, Hotel Contracts Boot Camp for Experienced Planners, and Legal Tips and Practical Guidelines for Meeting Professionals sessions.

"Our Smart Monday program will have a variety of education sessions designed for meeting professionals at all levels, and this year we added more sessions for mid- to senior-level planners," said Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of MPI. "Over the past few years, MPI has consistently received high satisfaction scores — 90 percent and higher — on education we deliver at our signature events and IMEX America, and our goal is to keep that momentum going."

In addition, the MPI Foundation will present Rendezvous, the IMEX America Night on October 19 at Drai's, a lavish indoor and outdoor club located on the rooftop of The Cromwell hotel, which is a Caesars Entertainment property. Funds raised from the signature event are invested in scholarships, grants and pan-industry research — all of which help secure the future success of the meeting and event industry.

To learn more, visit www.mpiweb.org/Events/imex-2016/.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel to Redesign Meeting Space



The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel.

ORLANDO, FL — The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel will begin a \$5 million renovation of its 329,000 sf meeting space this summer to refresh all the meeting rooms at both the Swan and Dolphin hotels. The renovation will include updated carpet and paint, along with the installation of new technology in the meeting space. The work will occur in phases with no impact to group programs and is scheduled to be completed in December.

The meeting space refresh is part of the hotel's multiphase, multiyear \$140 million redesign project. The project also includes the transformation of all 2,267 guest rooms at the hotel. In 2015, the Swan guest rooms were completed, and the Dolphin Hotel guest rooms are scheduled for completion by the end of 2017.

Located in the heart of Walt Disney World Resort, the 2,267-room Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel's 329,000 sf of meeting space includes 84 meeting rooms, including two executive boardrooms, four ballroom options, 110,500 sf of contiguous convention/exhibit space and outdoor function areas. There also are two business centers and complimentary transportation throughout the Walt Disney World Resort. www.swandolphin.com

MGM National Harbor Unveils Suite Collection

NATIONAL HARBOR, MD — MGM National Harbor has revealed the designs for its premier suite offerings at the \$1.3 billion resort, which is set to open in late 2016. The suite designs draw inspiration from the forest and water elements native to the Maryland area and feature stunning views of the surrounding landscape. The collection of 74 suites at MGM National Harbor will provide guests with an elevated experience at the luxury 308-room resort.

Reflecting the resort's commitment to sustainability and conservation, building materials will be primarily locally sourced, with particular emphasis on the beautiful, light-colored wood that is utilized significantly throughout all rooms and suites. Additionally, suites will be equipped with auto-adjusting temperature and lighting capabilities to save energy when guests are not present. Advanced technology will enable guests' temperature and lighting preferences to be saved and activated as they enter and exit the room. Bathrooms will include custom, polished-chrome water-saving fixtures as well as LED lighting in the mirrors.

Wi-Fi and Bluetooth technology will be standard throughout all rooms and suites. www.mgmnationalharbor.com

Jeff Homad Named V.P. of Convention Sales and Services for Memphis CVB

MEMPHIS, TN — The Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau has hired resort hotel executive Jeff Homad to lead efforts to grow convention and meeting business. As vice president of convention sales and services, Homad will assume convention- and meeting-related duties for the CVB and the Memphis Cook Convention Center. Homad has more than 18 years of experience in luxury and upscale destination resorts, hotels and vacation rental properties, most recently as executive director of sales at the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Florida. He headed sales and marketing for hotels and resorts in California, Georgia, South Carolina and Washington, DC. www.memphistravel.com

News & Notes

Marriott Expands Offerings to Meeting Groups and Business Travelers

BETHESDA, MD — Marriott International Inc. continues to expand its offerings to business travel professionals, according to Brian King, the company's global officer, brand management and global sales, in a speech recently at the Global Business Travel Association's annual convention in Denver, Colorado.

"Marriott International is in the midst of one of its most exciting periods ever for business travel professionals," King said. "In the coming year, we'll be unveiling scores of new luxury and lifestyle properties and significant new ballrooms worldwide, but also new guest experiences for valued, tech-savvy road warriors across our portfolio of brands."

Currently, Marriott is innovating across its system with:

Mobile check-in and checkout: Marriott International now offers guests this high-tech check-in/checkout option across 4,200 hotels globally.

Netflix in-room entertainment: An industry first, Marriott Hotels now provides guests with the ability to log onto their Netflix accounts or start a new one on in-room TV screens in more than 300 hotels globally.

MeetingsImagined.com: Marriott International's visual, social and collaborative website unites meeting planners with more than 750 of its hotels.

Beta hotel: When Marriott unveils a hotel designed to test new ideas and technology, planners will be able to see Marriott's vision for next-generation meeting space and experiences such as an interactive prefunction space that resembles a high-end residential kitchen and a next-generation boardroom and cutting-edge touchscreen monitors. www.marriott.com

Meetings Industry Advocates Announce Date for Global Meetings Industry Day 2017

WASHINGTON, DC — On April 6, 2017, leaders from across the meetings and events industry will come together to support the second annual Global Meetings Industry Day (GMID). Led by the industry advocacy coalition Meetings Mean Business (MMB), GMID 2017 will continue to showcase the real impact that business meetings, conferences, conventions, incentive travel, trade shows and exhibitions have on people, business and communities.

GMID 2017 follows the first-ever international day of advocacy, held earlier this year in more than 30 countries and across five continents. GMID 2016 included 115 events in more than 80 locations as well as significant conversations online with more than 40 million social media impressions. The governors of Maryland and Kentucky, along with the mayors of Ottawa, Edmonton, Phoenix, Baltimore, Buffalo and Mobile, Alabama, all signed proclamations declaring Global Meetings Industry Day in their respective locations. The Empire State Building and Niagara Falls were both illuminated in blue for GMID. Organizations across North America, South America, Europe, Africa and Australia held educational events, panels with industry professionals, rallies, strategic sessions and more.

Several resources are available to aid 2017 GMID planning, including talking points, FAQs, 2017 logo and more. MMB will continue to roll out new digital assets and ads, local PR templates and more.

www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com/GMID

The Walt Disney Company Celebrates Historic Grand Opening of Shanghai Disney Resort

SHANGHAI, CHINA — The Walt Disney Company is celebrating the opening of Shanghai Disney Resort, the first Disney resort in Mainland China and the sixth Disney resort worldwide. A three-day grand opening celebration commemorates the culmination of one of the largest foreign investment projects in China's history, and Disney's largest investment to date outside of the United States. The resort's opening is the result of a long collaborative relationship with the Shanghai Municipal Government and joint venture partner Shanghai Shendi Group, and offers a new world-class tourism destination for guests from China and around the world. At opening, the first phase of the resort is within a land area of 963 acres with additional land available to accommodate future expansion, including additional theme park and other related resort development.

Shanghai Disney Resort is a first-of-its-kind resort that combines the very best of Disney in a way that is distinctly Chinese. It features a newly designed Magic Kingdom-style theme park, Shanghai Disneyland, with six themed lands filled with immersive attractions, including Adventure Isle, Gardens of Imagination, Mickey Avenue, Tomorrowland, Treasure Cove and Fantasyland. These lands are located around the iconic Enchanted Storybook Castle, the tallest, largest and most interactive castle at any Disney park. The resort also features world-class live entertainment, two exquisite hotels, a shopping, dining and entertainment district called Disneytown and a 98-acre recreational area called Wishing Star Park.

The resort is the result of years of collaboration and innovation, with contributions from Disney cast members and Imagineers, as well as thousands of artists, designers, construction workers and suppliers from across China and around the world. www.shanghaidisneyresort.com

Snapshots



Credits: 1 GBTA, 2 ALHI, 3,4 Oscar & Associates, 5-7 Nicholas & Partners

1 Attendees enjoy the GBTA Foundation Partner Reception at the Grand Hyatt Denver's Pinnacle Club during the GBTA Convention in Denver, Colorado, held July 16–20 at the Colorado Convention Center. The event attracted roughly 7,000 attendees from 50+ countries and 40+ business travel exhibitors. Boston will play host July 15–19 to the GBTA Convention 2017. **2** Seven meeting professionals recently enjoyed an amazing "Discovery Tour of Beijing and Shanghai, China" that was sponsored by Associated Luxury Hotels International, Kempinski Hotels and Delta Air Lines. **3** Roger Dow, president and CEO of U.S. Travel, owner/operator of IPW, which convened in New Orleans at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center June 18–22, cuts the ribbon at the official opening of the IPW Marketplace Hall. Dow is joined by Stephen Perry, president/CEO of the New Orleans CVB (red tie), United States Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell (far right) and other industry leaders. **4** IPW delegates enjoy the "Tastes and Tunes of Louisiana" on the banks of the Mississippi. U.S. Travel's IPW 2017 will be held June 3–7 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in DC. **5** Meet AC CEO Jim Wood (l) and Michael Massari, senior V.P. for national meetings and events at Caesars Entertainment, address a session at MPI's 2016 World Education Congress held in Atlantic City at the new Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center. **6, 7** More than 2,000 attendees enjoyed all the fun AC has to offer meeting groups. WEC 2017 will be held in Las Vegas, July 9–12.

Q&A With MPI President & CEO Paul Van Deventer

Editor's note: Fresh off an overwhelmingly successful World Education Congress in Atlantic City last month, Meeting Professionals International President and CEO Paul Van Deventer reflected on a range of topics from meeting planner certifications and budgets to politics and terrorism.

Q Explain how and why this year's World Education Congress (WEC) was different. Why did you select Atlantic City for this event?

A We took more risks this year with the design and program. In the general session space, we had mixed seating, five stages and a live band — which were all new components. We also introduced the Innovation Showcase to provide a platform for innovative technology solutions, reshaped our hosted buyer program, offered more senior-level education and leveraged social media more.

We were initially planning to hold WEC 2016 in Philadelphia, but were displaced by the Democratic National Convention. Unfortunately, the alternative dates and spaces that were available did not meet the expanding needs of WEC. Given that, we determined Atlantic City stepped up with a very attractive package, featuring the spectacular new Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center, great city infrastructure, world-class facilities, unique venue options, well-priced hotel offerings and easy access to a large portion of our membership on the East Coast.

Q What are your expectations for the upcoming IMEX America in Las Vegas where you'll be the premier education provider?

A IMEX America provides MPI with a great platform to showcase to a broad global community MPI's educational and networking opportunities and the value of engaging with MPI as a member and volunteer leader. The MPI Global Team is excited to work closely with our strategic partner IMEX on developing an inspirational lineup of keynote speakers and great education for Smart Monday. We are also gearing up for another fantastic Rendezvous event at Drai's, which raises money for MPI Foundation grants and scholarships.

Q MPI recently added a new meeting planner designation for the "non-titled corporate meeting planner" segment. This move sparked some criticism from some CMPs and CMMs. How do you respond, and do you think the designation will prove successful?

A We launched our new Meeting Fundamentals course because there is a need for it within our community. MPI's role as an association is to raise the overall professionalism, understanding and awareness of the meeting and event industry. The fact is there are many professionals in our industry who have been organizing meetings and events as part of their jobs for years, but do not carry the title of "planner." It benefits everyone in our industry to provide access to training and networking for those individuals. This course covers the basics of meeting planning, and participants receive a "certificate of completion" afterwards. It is not a certification or designation program.

Q MPI has more new certifications in health care, etc. Are there any other specific certifications on the drawing board?

A The MPI Academy is currently developing new educational webinars and online courses, but we do not have any new certificate programs in the pipeline at this time. Also, for clarification, MPI has two certificate programs with designations: the HMCC and CMM programs. We also have several other certificate programs that do not have an associated designation, such as Meeting Fundamentals and Meeting Essentials, and most of our education offers clock hours needed for obtaining or renewing one's CMP, which is a certification. (See more in "Certification: Are You Upping Your Game?" on page 12.)

Q Since you became president and CEO of MPI, how has technology most changed the meetings industry?

A Today the industry is more reliant on technology than ever. Wireless internet access has become a must-have for meetings, and mobile apps have gained significant traction over printed meeting materials. The adoption of virtual and hybrid meetings also has increased over the last several years.

Q What are the major concerns for planners, and what encouraging signs do you see ahead for the U.S. and global meetings industry?

A Planners have become more concerned with hotel pricing and availability as we are still currently in a seller's market with low hotel inventory in certain markets. While

this becomes difficult for planners managing tight budgets and resource constraints, it is a good sign for the economy and global meeting and event industry. And sadly, an omnipresent concern is the ever-increasing threat of global terrorism and the obligation planners have in providing for a safe event environment, contingency planning and disaster recovery.

Q According to your spring Meetings Outlook, meeting costs are outpacing budgets. How do planners cope with this reduction in buying power?

A Planners have become masters at doing more with less. MPI's signature live events such as WEC and Smart Monday at IMEX America feature education that speaks to additional ways in which planners can work through these exact challenges.

Q How is the approach to risk management in the meetings industry changing in the face of increasing threats of terrorism?

A In today's environment, the meeting and event industry must be at the forefront of risk management as it relates to global threats of terrorism. MPI is currently in the process of developing resources and education to address the needs of meeting professionals as it relates to security and risk management. In July, we will be taking planners behind the scenes of the Democratic National Convention as part of our Experiential Event Series, for an in-depth look at how the DNC manages their own security elements.

Q How will the presidential election affect the meetings industry overall?

A It is always my hope that elected officials will support our industry and through efforts led by the Meetings Mean Business Coalition (MMBC) and U.S. Travel Association. MPI will continue to promote the importance and value of meetings. Recently, the MMBC launched the Worth Meeting About campaign targeting elected officials and policymakers. The coalition will leverage election milestones to remind them about how they, too, use the power of face-to-face to engage with constituents and persuade voters.

Q As MPI is becoming more global in scope, where do you envision the organization in the next 10 years?

A I envision expanded reach both globally and across the meeting and event community as we continue to expand our market offerings and enable our platform for special industry groups.

Q What in your opinion are the biggest areas of change meeting planners and the meetings industry will face in the coming year?

A Due to the current geopolitical climate, meeting planners will continue to face more unknown variables leading up to the planning of their events. Because of this, planners will have to continue to be flexible and stay abreast of the latest trends and education in the industry. MPI continues to focus on developing the tools and resources needed to help planners address those unexpected challenges. *C&IT*



Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of Meeting Professionals International, addresses MPI's 2016 World Education Congress in Atlantic City.

Credit: Orange Photography



What Planners Are Saying About the Broadening Options in Professional Certifications and Certificates

By Patrick Simms

Higher ed" is alive and well in the meeting planning field as Meeting Professionals International (MPI) has renewed its education agreement with the University of Virginia Darden School Foundation to offer the Certificate in Meeting Management (CMM) program. With the 39 meeting and travel professionals who earned their CMM

"I came away from the (CMM) class with a lot of abas and 'why aren't we already doing this?' It was great information that I could really use in my day-to-day job."

Shana Hoy, CMP, CMM
Event Manager
Husch Blackwell LLP
Kansas City, MO

from the class held last November in Anaheim, California, the total number of holders comes to 1,128 worldwide.

Among those 39 professionals is Megan Tate, CMM, senior manager, finance and events with Petco Animal Supplies Inc. Like all busy meeting planners, Tate had to reconcile her commitment to education with the day-to-day commitments of her job. While she intended to obtain the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) certification and had been accepted to the program three times, she ultimately decided to pursue the CMM instead. "I found more flexibility in the CMM program, as you're not studying for a standardized test. You can make it work around your life and work schedule, and that is an easier scenario for me," she explains. In addition, "I've

always viewed the CMM as the top-tier designation for the industry. And I think I was right in that after going through the program and experiencing the education, it's top notch. You can't get any better than that."

Nevertheless, the CMP remains the more popular designation, as this certification has the broadest industry recognition and can serve as a precursor to the CMM, a certificate program with designation. PCMA has recently made it easier for planners to find study time for the CMP with the new CMP exam prep app, an add-on to the recently updated CMP Online Prep Course.

"A full online course is the right tool to prepare you for the exam, but when you are traveling, or even on your commute, and have a few

"We did a whole module on financial statements. ...That's not something you generally learn in our industry, but it makes you stand out in your role if you understand those types of analytics."



Megan Tate, CMM
Senior Manager, Finance and Events
Petco Animal Supplies Inc.
San Diego, CA

moments to reinforce your learning, an app is the way to go," said Deborah Sexton, PCMA president and CEO, in a statement. According to PCMA, the app allows users to access 500 quiz-type questions to test knowledge, organized by domain and as a scramble, and domain resources including chapter summaries



Tanya Zuckerman
CMM, CMP
Senior Manager
Communications
Live Events
Bayer
Crop Science Division
Triangle Park, NC

“The irony is that as soon as I got back from taking the CMM, I had to reorganize my department. It gave me the business sense, and I would say the courage, to take it on.”

from *Professional Meeting Management*, one of the recommended texts for the CMP exam. Users also have the ability to connect with other CMP exam-takers via the in-app messaging and message board.

“You study six months or a year, take the test and you’re done,” says Shana Hoy, CMP, CMM, event manager, Husch Blackwell LLP. “But for me to continue my education and stay current in the industry, the CMM was the obvious next step.”

CMM: Advanced Knowledge

Hoy, who also was part of the November CMM class in Anaheim, found a practical value in the advanced education the program affords. Topics include risk mitigation, business analytics and compliance, and strategic negotiation. “What interested me was that it was a higher-level analysis of what I do day to day,” she says. “I came away from the class with a lot of ahas and ‘why aren’t we already doing this?’ It was great information that I could really use in my day-to-day job.” A particularly valuable component of the course was leadership development and evaluation, “Leadership 360.” “They had professionals do an assessment of us beforehand, and we could take a look at (the results). That was really powerful,” says Hoy.

Participants also gain a “big picture” perspective on company financial performance. “We did a whole module on financial statements, how to read through that and glean insights out of the numbers that we were seeing and understand the health of the business,” says Tate. “That’s not something you generally learn in our industry, but it makes you stand out in your role if you understand those types of analytics.” Hoy adds, “You really understand what the C-suite is looking for and how to bring ideas to the table on improving the bottom line.”

Combined, the leadership training and education in company financials serve to prepare a planner to promote changes at the organizational level. “The irony is that as soon as I got

back from taking the CMM, I had to reorganize my department. It gave me the business sense, and I would say the courage, to take it on,” remarks Tanya Zuckerman, CMM, CMP, senior manager, communications, live events for Bayer Crop Science Division.

Zuckerman wanted more planning support for better control over the organization’s 80–120 meetings per year that fall under its SMMP (those with 35 or more participants). Currently, Zuckerman is the only full-time planner and oversees a considerable budget. “That alone should shock an organization into making sure their leaders in the meetings area are educated and have business sense,” says Zuckerman, who obtained her CMP in 1996 and CMM in 2012.

Like Zuckerman, Tate also had been seeking to implement a change in her company’s meetings operations. She wanted to incorporate a “robust platform” for virtual and hybrid meetings, something that Petco had only “dabbled in.” Fortunately, in the final project for her CMM, she was able to create a plan for how the company would offer hybrid/virtual events for meeting requests as a formal option. “You have to pick a topic that’s a real-life scenario, not just something you’re dreaming up. And you have to prove why it’s a need in your current role and how you individually are going to be able to implement that,” Tate explains.

Both Tate and Hoy rave about the CMM’s professors, as does Beth Quinn, CMP, GTP, CMM, global travel and meeting professional with FLIR Systems Inc., who was part of the same class. The program “was not necessarily event specific, it was business specific, and so you were learning the financial side and honing your P&L skills. The woman who taught the finance side (Luann J. Lynch, professor of business administration, University of Virginia, Darden School of Business) was amazing,” says Quinn. “She made finance/accounting so interesting.”

Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate

On the student side, the CMM’s participants were very diverse, including corporate, association and independent planners, as well as business travel professionals. A newer certificate with designation from MPI is designed for a more specialized crowd: health care meeting professionals. The Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate (HMCC) is earned after a four-hour training that also affords four clock hours toward certification or recertification of the

Convention Industry Council’s CMP-HC subspecialty. MPI acquired the HMCC program about two years ago, and has since expanded its offerings to include health care webinars, the HMCC Refresher course, the CMP-HC Prep course, and now MPI-MD, a membership community for the health care meetings sector, noted Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of MPI, in a statement this past April. “We anticipate the MPI-MD advisory council and community will be instrumental in shaping our health care meeting education for years to come.” (Also see page 10.)

Kathy Donovan, CMP, HMCC, associate director, global meetings management at Bristol-Myers Squibb, sits on the MPI-MD advisory council. She earned her HMCC in January. “It’s really relevant to working in the pharma industry and understanding the health care laws and compliance regulations,” she comments. “I’ve been working in pharma for about 12 years now, so I did have a very good understanding of it, but I think it was good to hear from other people in the room about how they’re managing it within their own organization.

“We work very closely with the transparency team in our organization, and I think it’s helped me better understand what they have to do when they go and report (under the Physician Payment Sunshine Act). When I’m in conversations with executives, I’m definitely more knowledgeable about the process and criteria than I was before.”

Donovan notes that it also was very helpful to hear from the suppliers in the class and that it’s easier to negotiate with hoteliers who understand compliance. However, there were quite a lot of suppliers taking the course, she says: “I would have liked to have seen the ratio of planners to suppliers be a little more equal. I would have liked to talk to the planners more about how they’re working in their companies and what type of reporting they have to do.”

MPI Academy

MPI’s new MPI Academy, which encompasses all of the organization’s learning and professional development opportunities, began offering CMP-Healthcare Certification Boot Camp last fall, and will launch the Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate Refresher in October. The latter is a webinar designed to keep HMCC recipients abreast of constantly changing health care meeting compliance regulations, cross-border compliance and other health care trends. Endorsed by Saint Louis University, the

refresher is required every two years to maintain the HMCC and related seal of endorsement.

Toward helping planners prepare for the CMP Exam, the academy offers a Meeting Essentials program designed for novice and mid-level professionals.

In addition, the MPI Academy has expanded the menu of certificate programs well beyond the CMM and HMCC, to include the following:

- **Sustainable Meeting Professional Certificate.** The SMPC is built around learning and using the Sustainable Meeting Planning Program (SMPP), the only sustainable meeting planning tool independently certified by iCompli Sustainability, a division of BPA Worldwide, the premier sustainable meeting planning audit firm in the U.S. for ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM compliance.
- **Sustainable Practitioner Certificate.** The SPC Program is an interactive training session that covers the basics of sustainable meetings, how to create a sustainability policy, measurement, reporting and more.
- **Meetings and Events at Sea Certificate.** Presented in partnership with the Cruise Lines International Association, this certificate course is an interactive session that “explores the advantages of hosting events on

“More and more I’m seeing companies asking for the CMP at a minimum, and now I’m seeing more asking for the CMM if it’s a more senior person. You used to never see that requirement.”

cruise ships compared to traditional venues,” according to MPI.

- **Meeting Fundamentals.** Granting six clock hours toward CMP certification credit, this certificate course covers basics such as how to create meeting blueprints, develop meeting budgets, prepare requests for proposals (RFPs) and conduct site inspections. Planners’ opinions on this “proliferation of certifications” vary. Some feel it dilutes the value of having certifications. “I think it diminishes the status of having just your CMP when you can be certified in every area,” Donovan says. “When I first got my CMP, I was (part of one of the earliest classes) and I thought it was really special. You really had to study and



Beth Quinn
CMP, GTP, CMM
Global Travel and
Meeting Professional
FLIR Systems Inc.
Wilsonville, OR

go sit for this exam, and it meant something when you got it.”

Similarly, Tate observes, “There used to be a time when having these professional designations held a lot of weight, that you had a long tenure in your profession, that you had invested the time and effort to achieve these certifications. And now there are so many of them that you can achieve in such a short period of time without a lot of effort that it can be hard to (distinguish) the ones that are really valuable from the ones you can get in a day.”

Other planners are less troubled by the proliferation of certifications and certificates, and see the value in the varied, targeted education that’s being offered by MPI. “I would say that any way that we can share information and educate is a positive thing,” says Hoy. “There’s a large gamut in our industry, from administra-

stand what everyone else is doing (on the team), I think would be a benefit.”

While Hoy and Tate agree that a relatively quick survey of the basics of planning can be helpful in some cases, they both question the conferring of a certificate for that level of education. “We talk so much in the industry about how we elevate our profession, and when you offer a certification that any admin or anyone who dabbles in meetings can accomplish and then you liken what they have achieved to what we do on a daily basis, it doesn’t help anybody,” Tate holds.

Whether the new certificate programs pan out in the long-term remains to be seen. GBTA’s Strategic Meetings Management Certificate (SMMC), for example, appeared quite useful and responsive to an industry trend, yet has been discontinued. “It was very purchasing-specific,” Quinn observes. “If you didn’t sit in a purchasing department and run your meetings program, that certification did you no good.” She believes that MPI’s CMM program also was struggling to draw registrants, and so it was consolidated with GBTA to also draw travel managers.

Travel Managers

Interestingly, it is much more common for travel managers to oversee both a company’s meetings and business travel than it is for a meeting planner to be in that dual role, Quinn adds. Perhaps that’s why travel managers tend to receive more respect in corporate America than do meeting planners.

“A lot of people think that if you can plan a 3-year-old’s birthday party you can handle a 200-person international sales meeting, and unfortunately in talking to people in other locations and other companies, (I see) that’s kind of proliferated across the board,” says Quinn.

However, the growing awareness of the CMP and CMM among hiring managers reflects an understanding of the profound skillset that meeting planning encompasses. “I review profiles on LinkedIn to see if I’m missing some education that companies are looking for. More and more I’m seeing companies asking for the CMP at a minimum, and now I’m seeing more asking for the CMM if it’s a more senior person,” she notes. “You used to never see that requirement, and I would say in the last eight years I’ve started seeing it more and more.”

That’s an encouraging trend for planners who hold CMMs, and for those who aspire to it.

C&IT



Kathleen Donovan
CMP, HMCC
Associate Director
Global Meetings
Management
Bristol-Myers Squibb
Tampa, FL

“When I’m in conversations with executives, I’m definitely more knowledgeable about the process and criteria than I was before.”

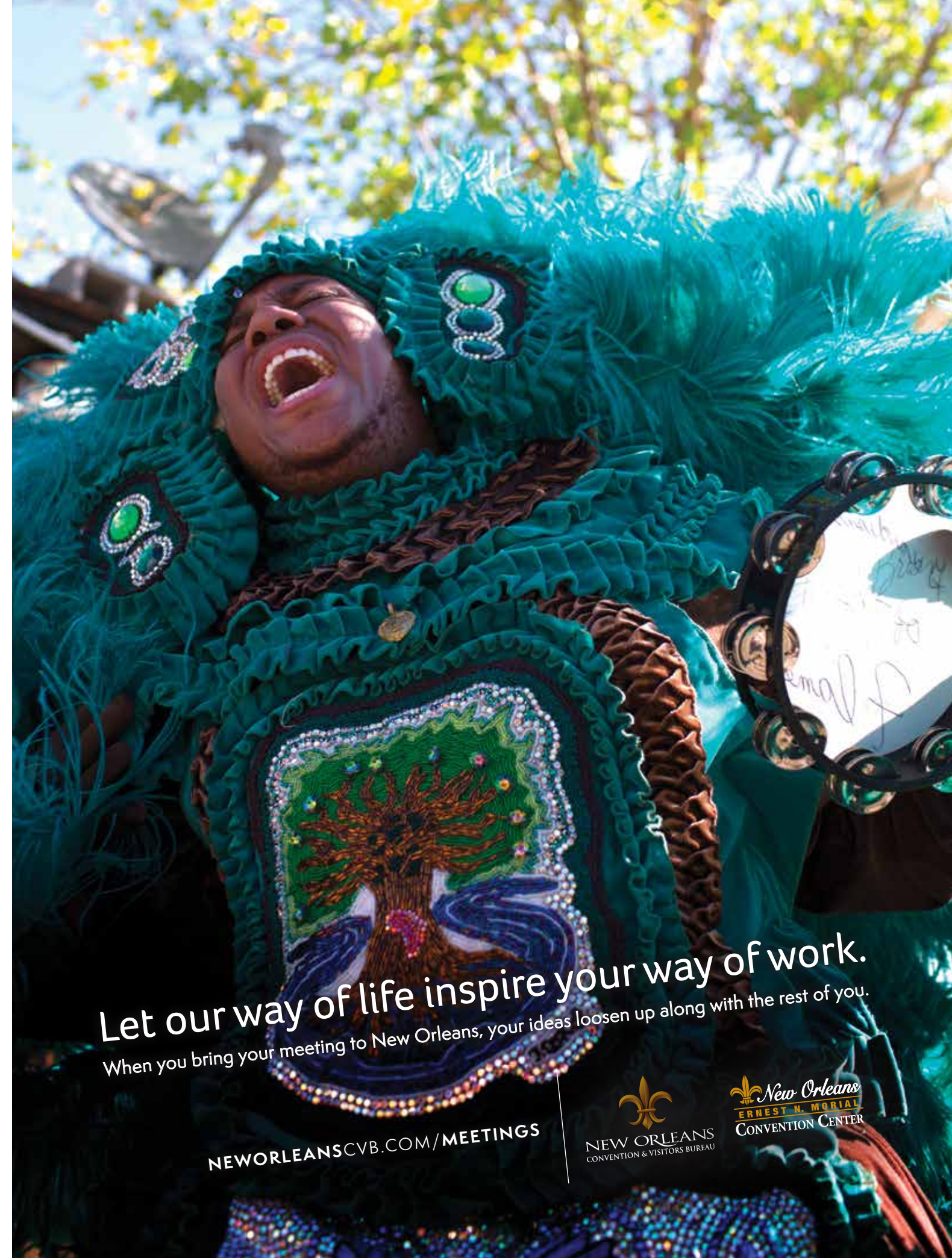
tive assistants to full-time planners. So I think providing an opportunity for education is never a negative thing.”

Zuckerman adds, “If you have a need in a specific area, I think anything they can offer to help educate and grow people in their positions is beneficial. I don’t think it takes away from the CMP or the CMM.”

Meeting Fundamentals Debate

Zuckerman also sees a valuable niche for Meeting Fundamentals, which is the most controversial new certificate program in that it is essentially a general certificate in meeting planning after a mere six hours of education. While she handles all meetings of 35 attendees or more, there are many employees in the Bayer Crop Science Division organization who plan smaller meetings, and Meeting Fundamentals might be useful for them, she suggests, as long as there is no pretense that it is on the level of the CMP.

Similarly, Donovan says that she can see some of her team members finding value in Meeting Fundamentals, “because they’re in more of an administrative role, and to under-



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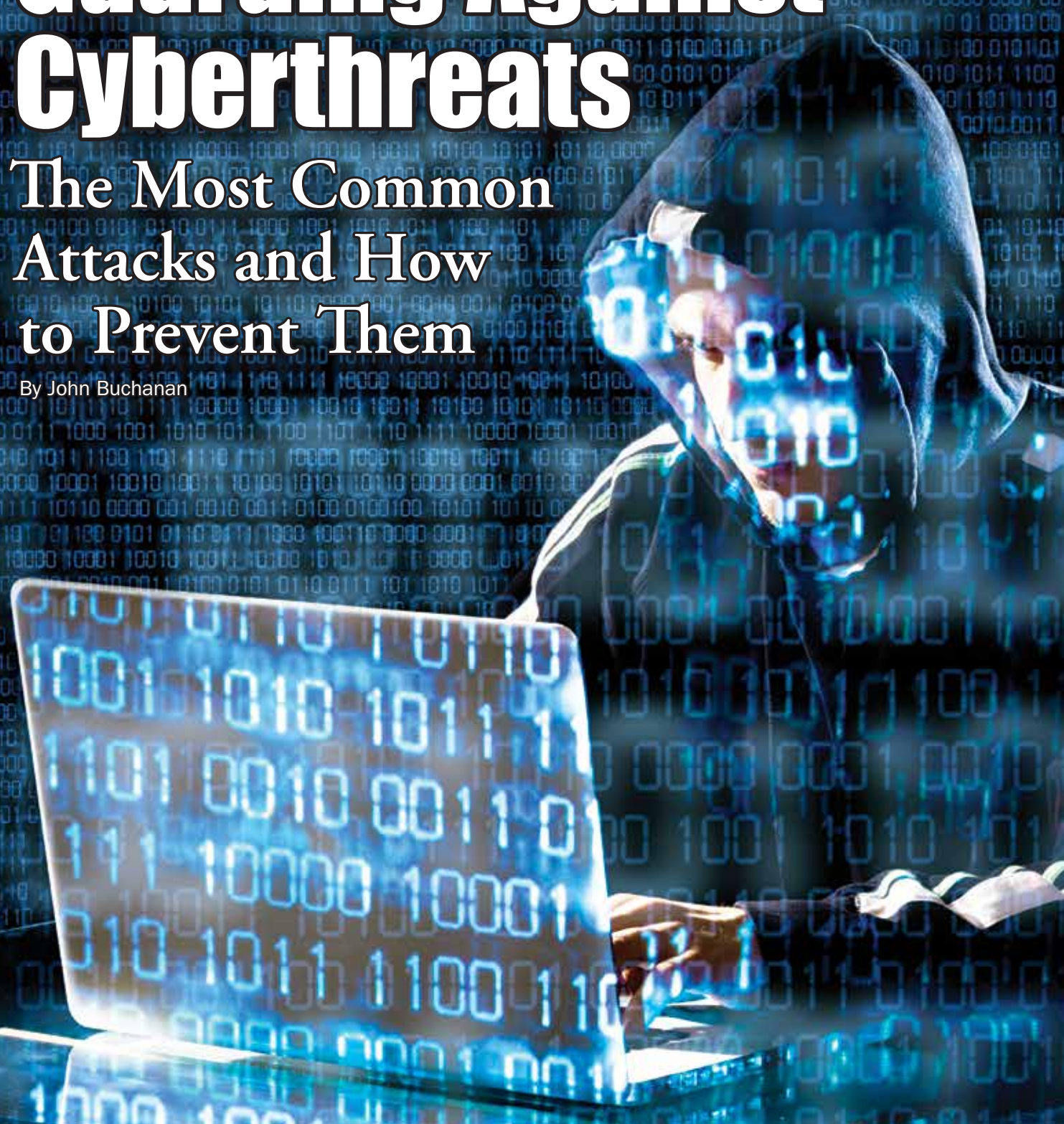

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Guarding Against Cyberthreats

The Most Common Attacks and How to Prevent Them

By John Buchanan



For any meeting planner or attendee who watches the evening news or reads a major newspaper, it's well known that cybersecurity breaches have become a regular occurrence, often carrying with them severe consequences. So it's surprising, experts say, that planners and attendees do not fully comprehend the unique vulnerabilities they face at an offsite event.

And given the constantly rising level of the threat, the experts say, they become more aware and better prepared.

"What we've seen in the last few years," says Alan Brill, the Secaucus, New Jersey-based senior managing director at global security firm Kroll, "is that hacking of personal and financial information has gone from being shocking and unusual to the point where even a hack that gets the information of hundreds of thousands of people (is almost) not even newsworthy simply because it is so common now. Today, hacking is just a fact of life."

Beyond that, Brill says, "The risks involved in meetings and conventions — and traveling in general — have actually grown at a faster rate than any other sector."

Wi-Fi Networks

At the center of the issue for meet-

ing planners and hosts is the simple fact that hotel Wi-Fi networks are infamously vulnerable. "If you're logging into a hotel's Wi-Fi network, that really opens you up for something to happen," says Vivian Marinelli, senior director of crisis management services at consulting and research firm FEI Behavioral Health in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Her expert advice: Never



Alan Brill, Senior Managing Director Kroll, Secaucus, NJ

use a hotel's free Wi-Fi network for a meeting or event. "Most people believe it is secure," she says. "And it is not."

The irony, of course, is that free Wi-Fi has been among the most in-demand amenities requested by budget-conscious meeting planners ever since the recession of 2008–09. And today, free Wi-Fi is increasingly available — and risky.

Hotel Information Systems

Last year, security firm Cylance discovered and exposed the serious vulnerability in some models of the commonly used ANTLabs InnGate Internet router found in hotels around the world. In some cases, Cylance found that the

router was integrated with the hotel's property management system (PMS), meaning a hacker could strike gold with all data in the hotel's information system, including credit card numbers and the property's door-locking system.

ANTLabs released a security patch soon after Cylance released its report.

But, says Cylance's Irvine, California-based security researcher Brian Wallace, "We did not receive a copy of the



"The risks involved in meetings and conventions — and traveling in general — have actually grown at a faster rate than any other sector."

patch from ANTLabs to verify that it's actually valid."

Of course, such a revelation raises an obvious question: Why can hotels not eradicate the risks of hacking? And the answer is disappointing, if not surprising. "In general," Marinelli says, "the hackers are always going to be smarter."

Brill is even more direct. "The honest answer to why the hotel chains cannot eliminate the risk is that the problem is not one that can be solved," he says. "The bad guys are just too good at what they do. And they always find a way to stay ahead of the technologies that hotels and other venues like convention centers are using. That's why an understanding of the level of risk and doing your





Physical Security

Although cybersecurity gets almost all of the media attention these days, physical security — and the efforts required to ensure it in meetings and events — remains an important issue.

“Because of the terrorist threat around the world now, the climate has changed when it comes to physical security,” says Dean Mazzoli, director of complex security at Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort in Orlando. “So the big issue now, when it comes to working with meeting clients, is intelligence and communication. And that intelligence can be corporate intelligence or from law enforcement agencies.”

The key for planners, Mazzoli says, is to be more aware of and more attuned to the nature of the event and what could potentially happen. “And a lot of times, that is just not what meeting planners are thinking about,” Mazzoli says. “They’re thinking about their event. They’re not always thinking about what their event could bring with it.”

Fortunately, he says, he has seen a shift over the last year or so where planners are starting to pay more attention to physical security. “But part of that is also because we, at the property level, are doing a better job at reaching out to our clients to discuss these issues.”

The most basic exercise or best practice is to make sure a security plan, including an evacuation plan, is in place — and in writing. And the larger the company, the greater the awareness of the issue should be and the more comprehensive the security planning.

The most obvious rule, Mazzoli says, is to anticipate anything that could possibly happen — such as, for example, action by a disgruntled former employee or an organization that opposes something the company is doing or stands for — and be prepared for any eventuality based on such analysis.

“And that plan, which should be in writing and reviewed with the hotel’s security department, should be as detailed as possible in terms of what the risks are for the meeting and what is being done to mitigate those risks,” Mazzoli says. And every security plan also should include evacuation protocols for a natural disaster, such as a hurricane, flood or tornado.

For Mazzoli, the key issue is awareness among the meeting planning team. “But there are just some who don’t really think about security,” he says. “And for them, it’s our job to think about security. The most important thing, however, is for the planner to have a real partnership with the security department at your hotel. We’re the experts and we want to make sure your event is safe and secure. And the only way we can do that is to communicate with you.”

— JB



due diligence is more critical than ever for meeting planners and attendees.”

Risks and Vulnerabilities

For meeting planners, there are three basic levels of risk involved in holding a meeting in a hotel. The first, oddly enough, is simply the fact that you are in a hotel.

“Hotel companies have been the subject of a huge number of data breaches in the recent past,” Brill notes. “The series of incidents at companies like Wyndham

or Hyatt or any of the other major brands are well known now. And hotel chains get hit because they are great targets; they tend to have so many customers and as a result, so much information available. And beyond that, there is also the perception that hotel customers, especially for meetings and events, are more affluent and therefore the information that can be stolen is more valuable.”

The second risk category is the property Wi-Fi network. “It has become so

easy to set up a phony Wi-Fi hot spot and make it look legitimate that it’s almost expected at this point that if you use free Wi-Fi, you’re going to get hit at some point,” Brill says.

But instead of most people being aware of that reality, Brill says, their perception and attitude are the exact opposite. “So many people just say, ‘Oh, I know all about those scams and the risks of Wi-Fi. I’m not going to fall victim to them because I’m either going to do my brows-

ing on my phone, or I’m going to use my personal phone as a hotspot and the only thing I’m going to allow myself to connect to is my own network.’ The problem with that is that the bad guys have the same technology that the good guys do.”

The best-practice solution Brill recommends to meeting planners is to use their own encryption for their events. Do not rely on the assumption that the encryption provided by your technology vendor is secure and safe, he stresses. “Unless you have your own encryption,” he warns, “you are likely to get in trouble at some point.”

Marinelli and Wallace wholeheartedly concur with that assessment.

Virtual Private Networks

The good news is that a readily available, easy to use and inexpensive solution is available — a virtual private network (VPN) that is set up and managed only for your event and your people.

However, Brill adds, it’s important to not only arrange for a VPN, but it’s also vital to instruct attendees before the meeting on its availability and how to use it.

“When the meeting planner sends out information about the meeting — about the hotel or the agenda or things to do in the destination — he or she should also inform attendees that there is a risk and tell them that as soon as they connect to the internet onsite, they must immediately initiate their VPN. And (the

planner) should also inform attendees of how to do that and who the company’s vendor is for the event.” Brill adds that planners also can easily provide a link to an article that tells attendees how to set up their VPN and use it properly.

Given the ever-increasing cybersecurity threats at meetings, Brill says he is surprised that so few meeting planners set up a VPN and clearly instruct attendees what it is and how to use it. That is one area of planner due diligence that must be dramatically improved, he says.

Wallace goes even further and says that if highly sensitive information is being presented and reviewed at the meeting, a planner should skip wireless technology altogether and use an old-fashioned, hard-wired system for internet access. That is much more secure, he

points out. “Essentially a hard-wired, dedicated internet connection decreases the attack surface to the maximum extent possible,” he says. “It’s

“If you are traveling to certain parts of the world, such as Asia, there is now a suggestion that you take temporary devices issued to you just for that trip.”

Vivian Marinelli, Senior Director, Crisis Management Services
FEI Behavioral Health, Milwaukee, WI

a physical connection. And that is a lot harder to compromise.”

For her part, Marinelli stresses the issue of geography. “If you are traveling to certain parts of the world, such as Asia, there is now a suggestion that you take temporary devices issued to you just for that trip and not the devices you use every day,” she says. “And that recommendation is made because the risk of malware and other cybersecurity threats is even worse in some parts of the world than it is in the U.S.”

Her other caution is to attendees at meetings anywhere, including the U.S. “Be careful of what you do online,” she says. “For example, never do your online

banking while you’re sitting in your hotel room, even in the U.S. If you do that, you are definitely opening yourself up to serious vulnerability.”

Temporary Credit Card Numbers

The third and final level of specific risks that Brill invokes is credit cards — and especially those being used for a meeting or event. Their unique vulnerability should be universally comprehended by

now, he says. But again, he says, the solution is simple.

“Some credit card vendors allow you to generate a one-time card number,” Brill says. “So, you can have a card you only use when you’re traveling to pay for your hotel. And now several banks, including Bank of America, offer that kind of more secure credit card technology. But unfortunately, most people have never heard of it, even though the technology has been around for years. But that kind of solution is something that more meeting planners and the companies they work for should become familiar with.”

How it works: When it’s time to check out of your hotel, you contact your bank



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and have them generate a one-time credit card number specifically related to the payment of one transaction in a specific amount. “The card number is only usable for that one transaction,” Brill says. “And that means that even if that card number

“Essentially a hard-wired, dedicated internet connection decreases the attack surface to the maximum extent possible. It’s a physical connection. And that is a lot harder to compromise.”



Brian Wallace, Security Researcher
Cylance, Irvine, CA

is somehow stolen after that transaction, it’s useless because the card number is no longer any good.”

The Next Frontiers of Risk

As hackers get better at their work and identify more areas of onsite vulnerabilities at meetings, the risk level for planners and attendees will continue to rise, the experts say.

An emerging threat, as a result of their increasing use, is kiosks that assist with functions such as registration. They carry a high level of inherent risk, Wallace says. Like gas pumps, which are easily compromised with a small device, kiosks are uniquely vulnerable.

“They are computers that are essentially left out in the open,” Wallace says. “So that means someone could just walk up with a USB stick that can insert code into

the computer and get access to what’s in the machine.”

An issue Brill finds both interesting and concerning is the fact that technology providers now work more closely with hotels to provide solutions that enhance “the guest experience.” At the same time, however, they are sometimes potentially putting guests more at risk.

One example: keyless entry via your smartphone. “That kind of new technology means that data security becomes even more important, because that data security issue now includes physical access to your hotel room,” Brill says.

In effect, he says, such innovative technology represents a sort of Pandora’s box that has not been opened yet. And the

sume that someday, hackers will gain access to all of the rooms on an entire floor — or floors — of a hotel. Few planners have likely ever pondered the possibility of attendees returning to their rooms at the end of the day to find them looted.

Such potential scenarios require ever more due diligence from planners, Brill says.

His advice: “Ask your hotel what their security protocols are when it comes to access to guest rooms and meeting rooms. But if they give you that too quickly and easily, that could be a bad sign, because it could mean they recently gave it to a bad guy who claimed he was interested in setting up a meeting in the hotel.”

Planners Paying More Attention

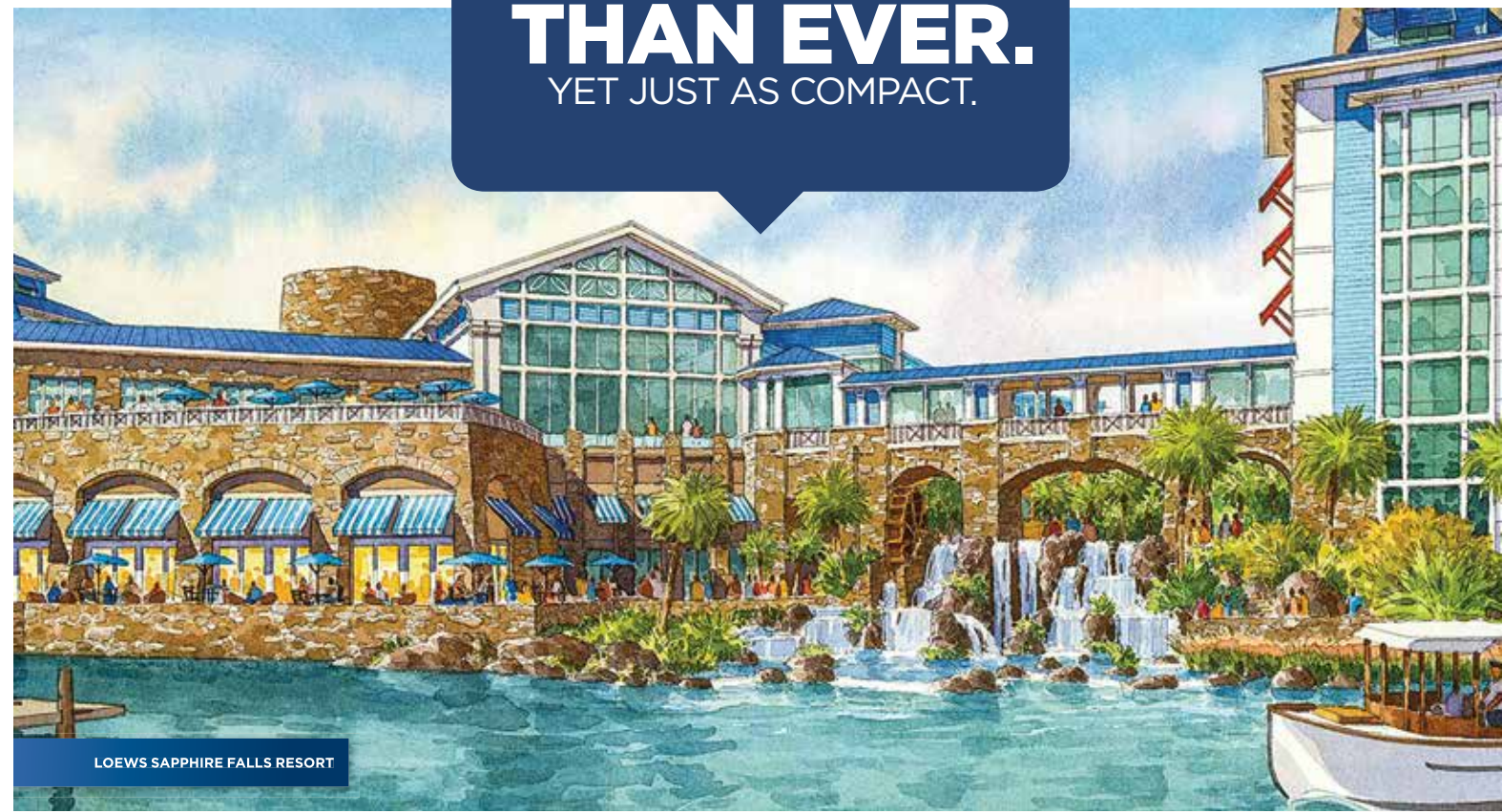
The most fundamental challenge facing meeting planners, Marinelli says, is that solutions to security vulnerabilities are not available. “The problem,” she says, “is that not enough people who go to meetings think about them often enough.”

Put simply, she believes — and Brill agrees — that many meeting planners are unaware of the risks they face. “It doesn’t surprise me though,” Marinelli says. “The reason is that although there is more media coverage of cyberattacks, most people feel relatively safe. But the reason most people feel safe is just because they are not aware of how serious the risk of a breach actually is.” **C&IT**

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New and Renovated

The Upside and Downside of Being First in Line

By Maura Keller

Meeting planners are drawn to new and renovated hotels for a myriad of reasons. “New space offers an exclusivity factor to the attendees by allowing the group to be the first to experience the hotel,” says Susan Abbate, owner and event planner at Abbate & Associates in Oak Park, Illinois. “There is sometimes a cost benefit associated with being the first group at a hotel. The newness of a new hotel or renovated space enhances the guest experience through hotel rooms and amenities. From a meeting perspective, having new or renovated meeting space helps in the selection process when looking at multiple options. Knowing a space has been renovated can give it an edge.”



A rendering of the Austin Taco Project, one of the two new restaurants opening at the newly renovated Hilton Austin.

Credit: Hilton Austin



The living room of the Presidential Suite and the lavish pool (inset) at the new Hilton West Palm Beach.

Credit: Hilton West Palm Beach

Christina Taylor, president and CEO at TaylorMade Experience in Silver Spring, Maryland, says new spaces are a draw for the guests and a way to add some cachet to the event. “If you are in a renovated space that guests have seen before, they also might be interested in seeing how things have changed and been upgraded,” Taylor says.

Every new or renovated hotel may have a few issues arise at the onset of their opening or reopening, so it is important that corporate meeting planners do a walk-through so they are familiar with the space.

“The rules are important,” Taylor says. “Know if you can use an outside caterer or if you have to use the in-house company, know the time you can get into the space for setup, know where the coat check and restrooms are located. Being an expert on the space is key.” At a recent corporate event that Taylor organized at a renovated venue, they said that they could not serve dark beverages on the reception floor — no red wine or dark soft drinks because the tile of the floor would stain if something spilled.

“Knowing that and managing client expectations is key,” Taylor says.

Indeed, Karen Shackman, president of Shackman Associates in New York City, adds that there are key advan-

tages to hosting an event in upgraded facilities. These include advanced technology capabilities, healthful and mindful amenities, and new approaches to food and beverage menus.

“For example, many of the new hotels in New York City are focused on providing healthy farm-to-table options and unique craft cocktail menus that millennial destination meeting attendees are seeking,” Shackman says. “Millennial attendees don’t want traditional touristy activities after hours, and many of New York City’s new hotels are opening in hot neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, Tribeca and Brooklyn. Attendees are closer to more after-hours venues that provide them the opportunity to experience the city like a local.”

Florida Gems

Brenda Randolph, event specialist at MarketSource Inc. in Alpharetta, Georgia, also understands the inherent benefits of orchestrating a meeting at a renovated hotel. Hammock Beach Resort in Palm Coast, Florida, has been her company’s leadership meeting location for the past eight years. “The value, commitment and partnership that stems from the superior team they have onsite from the sales team right

down to the banquets team for implementation of our vision has always brought us back to this great resort.”

The hotel has partnered with MarketSource to host executive meetings for the company’s clients — from groups as small as 15 people up to their 225-person leadership meeting.

Hammock Beach Resort, managed by Salamander Hotels & Resorts, is undergoing significant improvements, which include the renovation of

its lobby, remodeling of its one-bedroom villas and also meeting facility enhancements. The Hammock House, the popular half-way stop on the resort’s famed Ocean Golf Course, is

also being expanded. The renovation will be completed in stages and finished in its entirety by Labor Day 2016.

Opening in mid-2016 on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast is another Salamander property: the Henderson Beach Resort, situated in Destin along one of America’s top beaches and also adjacent to the 208-acre Henderson Beach State Park. Guests of the luxurious hotel will enjoy nearly two miles of beach renowned for its white powdery sand and emerald-green water. The property features a grand seaside hotel called The Henderson, which has 170 guest rooms and suites, a nature-inspired spa, Gulf-to-table cuisine and 10,000 sf of meeting space.

In 2017, Starwood Hotels & Resorts will open its latest Le Méridien in Dania Beach, Fort Lauderdale, following an expansive \$30 million renovation and conversion of the hotel. This most recent opening follows on the heels of other recent openings in Charlotte, Chicago, Columbus, New Orleans, Tampa and Indianapolis. Le Méridien Fort Lauderdale will offer an expanded fitness center, a renovated outdoor pool and 20,000 sf of state-of-the-art flexible meeting space.

The new Hilton in West Palm Beach,



The new Loews Sapphire Falls Resort opened in mid-July.

Florida, is teeming with opportunities for productivity and relaxation. Directly accessible to the adjacent Palm Beach County Convention Center, Hilton West Palm Beach offers the perfect setting for conventions, trade shows, meetings and social events. State-of-the-art amenities include an expansive fitness center, curated art program, and poolside bar and grill, along with a wealth of dedicated function space. The Palm Beach County Convention Center features a 100,000-sf exhibit hall, a 22,000-sf ballroom and 21,000 sf of flexible breakout space divisible into 19 rooms.

Meeting and event guests visiting the new Loews Sapphire Falls Resort this summer at Universal Orlando will walk into a colorful Caribbean hideaway built around a lush, tropical lagoon and towering waterfall. The new Caribbean-themed resort will offer 1,000 rooms and 115,000 sf of meeting space, including a 41,000-sf ballroom divisible into 12 sections, a 31,000-sf hall, 16 breakout rooms and 27,000 sf of prefunction space. Planners also can utilize 11,000 sf of beautifully landscaped outdoor function space.

Need even more space? Loews Sapphire Falls Resort will connect to Loews Royal Pacific Resort by a walkway creating a massive meeting complex with

a total of 2,000 rooms and more than 247,000 sf of meeting space between both properties.

Southern Charm

The remodeled Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville, Tennessee, features freshly remodeled guest rooms and suites, a completely redesigned Cascades lobby with VIP check-in area, a convention center and a 20,000-sf spa and fitness center. In addition to the 600,000 sf of meeting and



A rendering of the Gaylord Rockies Resort and Convention Center, which is opening in 2018 and is located in Aurora, Colorado.

convention space, attendees can explore nine acres of shopping, entertainment, dining, indoor gardens, cascading waterfalls and an indoor river on a charming Delta flatboat.

Another Southern gem, the 30-story, luxurious Omni Louisville Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky, will embrace the Southern charm and hospitality of Louisville while celebrating the city's historic delights.

Set to open in early 2018, the Omni Louisville will be the tallest hotel in Louisville and will be located one block from the Kentucky International Convention Center. As the cornerstone of the area's eclectic retail, entertainment and office district, the hotel will boast luxury guest rooms and expansive apartments. In addition, the hotel will offer approximately 70,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space. Meeting and convention attendees will have access to an additional 300,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space at the Kentucky International Convention Center.

A Southwest Feel

In Austin, Texas, the Hilton Austin, located directly across the street from the Austin Convention Center, announced the beginning of a multimillion-dollar transformation initiative that will include a full renovation of the



New spaces are a draw for the guests and a way to add some cachet to the event. "If you are in a renovated space that guests have seen before, they also might be interested in seeing how things have changed and been upgraded."

Christina Taylor, President and CEO, TaylorMade Experience, Silver Spring, MD

hotel's lobby, public areas and meeting space, as well as the launch of two new restaurant concepts, and a flexible event venue — to be completed by the end of the year.

With 801 guest rooms, including 81 concierge-level rooms and 25 suites, the Hilton Austin is the largest hotel in the city and features the largest ballroom in Austin. The hotel offers a total of 80,000 sf of meeting and event space. The Governor's Ballroom and the Austin Grand Ballroom are each divisible into five different rooms to accommodate individual group needs, and both ballrooms flow into ample prefunction space and breakout rooms. The property's wraparound prefunction space offers floor-to-ceiling windows and views of downtown.

The Reverber, which opens in the Hilton Austin in late summer, offers an "Austin-cool" recording studio vibe, with flexible indoor and outdoor space and specially designed food and drink menus. The Austin Taco Project — a craft beer and fusion taco bar — opens late fall and features a streetfront patio just off Austin's music "Main Street." Also opening late fall will be a 3,000-sf Starbucks, one of the first in Texas to offer Starbucks Evenings menu. All the renovations come on the heels of a \$23 million upgrade to the hotel's 801 guest rooms, suites and executive lounge that was completed in 2014.

Scheduled to open in 2017, the Omni Frisco Hotel in Frisco, Texas, will be a full-service upscale hotel and serve as a cornerstone of the mixed-use development, which will be anchored by the Dallas Cowboys World Headquarters and the Ford Center. The publicly owned, 12,000-seat multipurpose event center will be used to host various activities

and special events. The Dallas Cowboys also will use the event center as its training facility.

Starwood Hotels & Resorts recently announced that it is expanding its ever-popular Aloft brand and has opened its first hotel in Scottsdale, Arizona. Conveniently located in the heart of downtown Scottsdale's vibrant entertainment district, Aloft Scottsdale features 126 spacious rooms, state-of-the-art technology for meetings and events and an energetic social scene.

Offering sweeping views of Camel-

The hotel also will feature 9,000 sf of meeting facilities, a unique fine dining restaurant and lobby bar.

With more than 15,000 sf of multi-purpose space, the new Hyatt Regency Bloomington-Minneapolis accommodates a variety of meeting and event needs. From the stylish grand ballroom to smaller breakout rooms, to high-tech executive boardrooms, all spaces are equipped with the latest state-of-the-art technology. Designed to foster connections and act as an energizing, dynamic space, the hotel has 303 guest rooms,



A rendering of the Omni Frisco Hotel — a cornerstone of the mixed-use development anchored by the Dallas Cowboys World Headquarters and the Ford Center.

back Mountain, Aloft Scottsdale boasts an ideal location and offers easy access to nearby art galleries, boutiques, a wide variety of restaurants and the Scottsdale Waterfront.

Midwest Meetings

In the heart of downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Starwood Hotels & Resorts will introduce The Westin Milwaukee in August 2017 with 220 guest rooms and stunning views overlooking Lake Michigan and the downtown skyline.

14 expansive suites, and is located close to the world-renowned attractions of Mall of America.

Denver Delights

Opening in 2018, the Gaylord Rockies Resort and Convention Center is located minutes from Denver's airport in the rapidly developing city of Aurora. In addition to offering more than 1,500 guest rooms, the resort will boast 485,000 sf of extraordinary meeting and convention space, as well

“Many of New York City’s new hotels are opening in hot neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, Tribeca and Brooklyn. Attendees are closer to more after-hours venues that provide them the opportunity to experience the city like a local.”

Karen Shackman, President, Shackman Associates, New York City



as 20,000 sf of outdoor covered space. Teeming with rustic alpine charm, the resort also will feature first-class restaurants, a luxurious spa and salon, diverse shops, winding waterways and access to the Rocky Mountains, making this retreat an adventurous option for meetings and events.

as LED lighting, solar shades and biodegradable bath amenities.

Another MGM Resorts International property, Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino is a unique destination resort set on 120 lush acres on the Las Vegas Strip. Its recent renovation included the redesign of more than 3,000 guest rooms

suite Delano Las Vegas. Earlier this year, Mandalay Bay completed an expansion of its convention center, which now boasts more than 2 million sf of meeting and exhibit space.

Likewise, Caesars Entertainment recently announced plans to upgrade more than 4,800 hotel rooms at four of its Las Vegas resorts, and more than 900 rooms at three regional casinos totaling more than 5,700 owned or managed rooms across the enterprise.

These resort upgrades include the transformation of the original tower at Caesars Palace to create the Julius Tower as well as the refurbishment of the resort’s Augustus Tower. Additional room upgrades will include Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino, Paris Las Vegas and Harrah’s Las Vegas. Regionally, Harrah’s Gulf Coast, Caesars Atlantic City and Horseshoe Tunica also will complete room upgrades.



A rendering of the Hyatt Regency Aurora-Denver Conference Center.

Also located in Aurora is the new Hyatt Regency Aurora-Denver Conference Center. This IACC-accredited hotel features 249 guest rooms and suite accommodations, and more than 36,000 sf of meeting and event space including 15 meeting rooms, 20,000 sf of traditional meeting space, an 11,750-sf Grand Ballroom as well as approximately 4,000 sf of outdoor terrace space.

Las Vegas Developments

One of the most sweeping recent renovations on the Las Vegas Strip took place at MGM Grand, which spent \$160 million on a full remodel. Its 3,570 grand king and queen guest rooms have been updated in bright, contemporary designs. All of the MGM Grand remodels include environmentally friendly updates, such



A newly renovated Elite Suite at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino, Las Vegas.

East Coast Events

Set to open in September 2016, the Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC, will offer a total of 38,000 sf of meeting and event space, including an opulent 13,200-sf grand ballroom. The company’s \$200 million redevelopment

ment of the Old Post Office will feature 263 richly furnished guest rooms and suites, among the largest luxury rooms in Washington, DC, with lofty ceilings, soaring windows, beautifully restored historic millwork, and glittering crystal sconces and chandeliers. The three extraordinary Presidential Suites at 2,500 sf, 3,500 sf and 6,300 sf will be among the largest in the country. The awe-inspiring grand ballroom will capture the Trump brand’s elegance and detailing, with European influences, and be ideal for meetings, conferences and events.

Hawaii Bound

To meet the unique needs of its guests, the DoubleTree by Hilton Alana Waikiki recently completed a renovation of its meeting space to accommodate 200 guests for meetings or catered affairs.

The remodeling project of the function space includes the newly redesigned 3,500-sf Pikake Room, which features floor-to-ceiling glass windows



The luxurious lobby of Trump International Hotel Washington, DC, opening in September.

with sweeping views. The venue can accommodate 200 guests for sit-down dinners or receptions, 200 guests in theater-style seating and 120 people for meetings. Upgraded lighting, carpeting and wall coverings also are a part of

the project, which resulted in a modern event space with a Waikiki touch. With this new space, the DoubleTree by Hilton Alana Waikiki now features 10 private function rooms, including intimate meeting rooms for four. **C&IT**

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The Tech Conundrum

There's Always a New App for That, But Is the Newest Always the Best?

By John Buchanan

Over the past decade, step by step and tool by tool, technology has come to dominate the meeting industry. Not only is there now “an app for that” for every conceivable meeting-related function, but tech providers face relentless competition almost daily from new entries into the market that claim to be better, faster or cheaper at performing a particular function.

And on balance, no one would deny that is a good thing.

At the same time, however, there are quite a few planners — especially those who have been in the industry for decades and are not particularly tech savvy — that find the obvious reality overwhelming.

“In our personal lives, as well as our professional lives, all of us are just bombarded by technology,” says Cori Dossett, CMP, CEM, president of Dallas-based meeting planning firm Conferences Designed. “As meeting planners, we constantly get pitches for new products. So how do you know what products you should actually take a look at? That’s the real challenge, I think, because we are so busy with the events we do. So we have to be careful in terms of how we use our time. And for many of us, there is just not enough time in the day to keep up with all the new technology that’s out there. And the other thing I always keep in mind is that the newest is not always the best.”

Lauren Cramer, owner/principal of planning firm Turn-Key Events in North Andover, Massachusetts, says she can “completely relate” to the increasing demands the use of technology make on her time and the time of all planners.

“And it’s especially true of me as an independent planner, because my clients are looking to me to have information on what is the best app for a particular thing,” Cramer says. “Like so many planners, even inside their companies, I’m expected to know who the players are and what they do. And sometimes it almost feels like it’s

impossible to be able to stay up on all that. I do think a lot of the technology vendors do a good job with things like webinars to teach us about their products. But what I don't like is the sales pitch they give you. I just want to learn what a tool does so I can know whether it's something I should recommend to my clients."

For Cramer, the ubiquitous role of technology in every aspect of the meeting industry has become overwhelming in two ways that are distinctly related. "One is the question of what I should turn to" for a particular function, she says. "And the other is how I use it properly."

And the actual use of a technology is not what she finds most daunting, she says. "That's not what I feel challenged or overwhelmed by. The issue for me is the incredible number of choices that are out there now and how you keep up with them, or how you know which one is right for your event. That's what I find overwhelming. I wish I could pay more attention to it. But for me and for most meeting planners, it's just a matter of time management. And unfortunately, most meeting planners don't have enough time to become experts on all the technology that's available."

Adherence to the Basics

One of the supreme ironies of the current climate is that so many veteran planners have stuck with a tried-and-true way of doing things that flies in the face of innovation — spreadsheets.

Dossett is among those who still use simple Excel spreadsheets rather than invest the time required to learn and then master the latest technology platform. "I definitely fall into that group," Dossett says. "And I really don't see any reason to change my mind." She uses spreadsheets for three simple reasons: They're free. They're easy to use. And they work.

Furthermore, she says, she has not encountered a specific planning need that cannot be met by her long-standing and comfortable use of spreadsheets. And from what she hears anecdotally, including at meeting industry events,

a surprising number of experienced planners agree with that assessment — while tech-savvy, young planners just beginning their careers embrace the trendiest new technology with genuine enthusiasm.

For planners such as Dossett, her more tech savvy peers might ask an obvious question: Why not take the time to master technology?

She has a clear response to the query. "To me, of the thousands of products out there, the few — and

I stress the few — I might be interested in don't actually serve my needs,"



Cori Dossett, CMP, CEM
President
Conferences Designed
Dallas, TX

she says. "For example, you either have to buy a pre-set package that doesn't service all of your individual needs, or you get something free that is either low-end or the 'free' part turns out to be a way to get you to upgrade to a paid service." So based on those two essential perceptions, she remains resistant to the idea that technology is the holy grail of the meeting industry it is often made out to be by providers.

A further complication for her, as an independent planner, is the need for seamless integration into a client's technology platform. "For the customization you need for a particular meeting, you generally need to get buy-in from the company's information technology (IT) department — which could be a challenge because, among other things, it costs money," she says. And with meeting budgets remaining tight and resources stretched thin, that fac-

tor just makes the aggressive deployment of the latest technology even more daunting, she believes.

And finally, like many planners, she is aware that although most meeting technology providers boast that their tools are easy to use, the opposite is often the case. "And that is a common source of frustration for me and many other planners," Dossett says.

Cramer also can relate to that assertion, she says. "My issue with that is really instructions that aren't very clear, or the fact that it takes a lot more clicks or a lot more effort to get it to do the things it's supposed to do," she says. "Sometimes I find myself saying, 'Wait. I already did that. Now you want me to do it again?' And I agree that sometimes these tools are not as easy to use as the vendor says they are. And that translates to more demands on my time."

As Cramer noted earlier, nearly all of her clients expect her to be aware of and conversant about the ever-widening range of new technologies in existence and which one is best for a precise purpose.

"All of them expect me to know the latest technology so I can make recommendations," she says. "None of them expect me to also be an expert on using them or to be able to teach them how to use it. But it's a challenge just to be able to know enough to tell a client about the pros and cons of a particular tool they might ask about."

On some fundamental functions such as registration, she says she feels confident. On others, such as the ever-expanding universe of mobile apps, she is not so self-assured. "All I can really do," she says, "is say, 'Here are the players. I personally have not used the XYZ tool, but I hear good things about it. And I know people who use it I can refer you to.'"

In her role as a planner responsible for the success of her events, Cramer says one issue she often contemplates is "the question of how I make it easier for attendees to register or communicate

with one another, or how to make it easier for speakers to know what deadlines they have or what kind of information they need to include in their presentations. Those are the kinds of things I find really challenging, because there are so many different (options) you can look at to do those kinds of things. So I'm always asking myself, which one should I use? Which one is best?"

Finding the right answer to those kinds of questions can sometimes be quite fulfilling, and enlightening, Cramer says.

One recent example: exploring the world of social media, in terms of truly understanding it and deciding how to best use it.

She cites an app called Slack that is currently gaining wide popularity. Among its clients: NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

"It was originally launched as an

internal tool for companies to use so people could communicate with one another," Cramer says. "For example, you can create groups of people who are working on the same project. So last year, I wondered what would happen if we used that in a conference environment. I thought it would be an opportunity for attendees to engage and communicate with one another. I thought it could be an alternative to Twitter because not every company wants to use Twitter. And I thought people could use it to communicate with each other or with speakers, or plan evening activities. The thing to understand is that this was not a particularly tech-savvy group. But Slack worked well. And that's an example, I think, of using a social media tool within the specific environment of a meeting and not 'the whole world,' like you get with Twitter or Facebook. We used Slack for clear purposes related

directly to the event, not as a social media tool that everyone uses every day in their broader lives."

An Eye-Opening Revelation

Although some fundamental concerns about the practical use of technology impact is adoption, there are more substantial and important issues that are just now coming to the fore.

One of them is that the most widely used meeting management platforms may not be the universal solutions they purport to be. And related to that is the business relationships between some of these companies and vendors such as hotels and restaurants and why some are more heavily promoted than others as "best options" — a practice Dossett says some meeting planners call "pay to play."

She tells the story of a revelation she made at a Convention Industry Coun-





cil (CIC) CMP conclave meeting. "I was at a round-table discussion with about 20 other industry colleagues — half planners and half hoteliers — and that topic came up," she says. "And I made the point that I was really frustrated because I don't use the major meeting technology platforms...because they don't meet my needs, and they don't allow for the many intricacies in planning meetings. And about half the people at the table said, 'We don't use them either.' I was really surprised. And it also gave me a little comfort that I was not alone."

She adds that her concern is the "pay to play" aspect. In other words, the hotels or other vendors that spend the most on advertising or other promotional fees with these companies are the ones that get recommended, but they are not necessarily the ones that actually best fit the needs of a particular meeting.

"My problem with that is that when you submit an RFP, what you get back — let's say hotels ranked number one through five — is based on who spent the most money advertising, not the best hotel for your meeting," Dossett says.

She objects specifically to the failure to disclose that fact with genuine transparency.

"I didn't even know for a long time that was the case," Dossett says.

Hotel Wi-Fi

Although a surprising number of

planners have their own concerns about technology, there also is an 800-pound gorilla in the room when it comes to the concerns hotels have.

The big one for them is the growing demand for and generally limited supply of bandwidth. And that's an issue that can lead to serious onsite problems such as the crash of a general session or virtual meeting.

Making matters worse is the fact that many planners do not have a clear understanding of the issue or how to prevent meltdowns.

Chris Bunton, the Bethesda, Maryland-based senior director of event management, the Americas, for Marriott International, is acutely aware of that issue.

He works closely with all Marriott properties, including those in the company's Convention & Resort Network, which includes the properties that host the brand's largest corporate meeting clients.

Because of spiking bandwidth demands and the issues related to them, Marriott rolled out a "Wi-Fi Simplified" program that focuses on training meeting sales and event management per-

sonnel to understand the issues with bandwidth "and to ask meeting planners the right questions before they ever get onsite," Bunton says.

The initiative also means that Marriott can give bandwidth use information to planners during and after a meeting, so they can use it to help do a better job of planning their next meeting by knowing exactly how much bandwidth they used and what the peak times were.

For Marriott and Bunton, no technology issue is more important than dealing with the unprecedented and increasing demand for state-of-the-art bandwidth and wireless services that are related to the success of major meetings.

Into the Future

Despite the concerns some planners have about the challenges of technology and its ever more dominant role in the meeting industry, one thing is for certain: it is not going away.

For planners such as Dossett, that means the challenges related to mastering it will become even bigger.

"I think technology is going to become more challenging before it becomes less challenging, mainly because there is just so much of it out there," she says. "But I also think that in the future, 15 or 20 years from now when the kids just now getting out of college are at the midpoints of their careers,

these technologies will be much more accepted and less challenging than they are today for those of us who are older and used to doing things the way we've always done them."

Until then, Dossett says, the basics — like spreadsheets or picking up the phone to communicate something important — are the basics for a reason.

And they never get old or fail to deliver as expected. **C&IT**

"The issue for me is the incredible number of choices that are out there now and how you keep up with them, or how you know which one is right for your event."

Lauren Cramer
Owner
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How Planners Are Navigating the Changing Landscape of Ground Transportation

By Patrick Simms

The choices are many for mobilizing attendees to and from the airport, and between their hotel and other sites at the destination. Mass transit, cabs, car rentals and the numerous companies that offer private shuttles and buses are the traditional pieces to the puzzle of ensuring logistical convenience while respecting the meeting budget. The latest “piece” is the ride-hailing phenomenon, mainly represented by Uber and Lyft. The use of these services in lieu of cabs from the airport is on the rise, planners have observed.

Ride-Hailing Services

“I’ve definitely seen more people using Uber versus a cab, especially younger attendees,” says Jennifer Squeglia, CMP, owner of Warwick, Rhode Island-based RLC Events. And surprisingly, sometimes attendees will even prefer Uber and Lyft to company-arranged transportation. Sue Klick, meeting manager at Medtronic in Santa Rosa, California, noted that at the company’s recent physician-attended meetings, sales representatives

have been forgoing car service in favor of Uber. “It just happened recently for a program I was working on that the salesperson said, ‘Don’t worry about that I’m traveling with doctor so- and-so and I’ll just call Uber.’ It actually surprised me that they would turn down the car service,” says Klick.

“It actually surprised me that they would turn down the car service (in favor of Uber).”

Sue Klick, Meeting Manager, Medtronic, Santa Rosa, CA



Not only meeting attendees, but also the hospitality industry is welcoming the sharing-economy approach to ground transportation. Hilton Hotels, for example, recently integrated Uber service with its HHonors app, allowing guests to order an Uber directly via the app and view their hotel stay information on the app en route to the hotel. The app is the next development of a partnership with Uber that began last September

UBER

with the Local Scene and Ride Reminder feature on the HHonors app.

Companies that set up a corporate account with Uber can accrue savings in comparison to cabs and private cars; Uber indicates that its rides are “up to 40 percent cheaper than a taxi.” From another perspective, however, the service quality of Uber and Lyft compared to private cars and shuttles, especially when VIPs and clients will be the passengers, can be a source of concern.

Pre-Arranged Transfers

Moreover, some attendees will expect pre-arranged transportation once they arrive at the airport. “Our attendees are at the level where they typically expect that when they arrive at the airport and get their bags that they should immediately be transferred,” says Teri Abram, president of Dallas,

Money also can be saved by restricting the pre-arranged service to core hours. “For our conferences, we provide transportation for our attendees, but it gets quite expensive so



what we’ve done is taken the manifest (the flight schedule for the group), and we only provide transportation for the core hours,” says Judy Anderson, CMP, director, meetings and travel for Grapevine, Texas-based GameStop. “We’ll do shuttles for those core hours, and then if you ride outside of those core hours, we allow people to use Uber or taxicabs.”

An alternate approach that may be workable for some meetings is to offer attendees the option of purchasing car service from the company’s preferred provider to and/or from the

“My first point of contact is my hotel conference service manager. I ask them if they have an alliance with a preferred transportation company.”

Jennifer Squeglia, CMP, Owner
RLC Events, Warwick, RI



Texas-based EventLink International. “So in order to make sure there are enough transfers available at a set cost we typically have to pre-arrange versus (letting them use) Uber and Lyft.”

Coordinating those transfers can be a matter of weighing optimal convenience versus cost. Ideally, one shuttle per arriving flight is assigned, even if two flights are arriving at the same time. “I do tend to get two vehicles in that situation, in case one of the flights is coming in early or late, just so nobody has to wait,” Squeglia says. “So most of the time, I work with the clients that will support that, because it is just a better guest experience.”

airport, as real estate company Keller Williams has recently started doing for its annual convention, the “Family Reunion,” which brings in about 10,000 associates.

“We have partnered with a transportation company to sell tickets online that attendees can purchase round trip or airport transfer, \$20 each way,” says Mindy Grubb, executive director of events for Keller Williams. “It’s been a slow takeoff, but we’ve been advertising it with our marketing materials. The arrivals aren’t as popular but the departures are very popular. We try to compare it to a super shuttle, and it is a cost savings for them compared to that.”

Partnering With Suppliers

Whatever the strategy in providing pre-arranged transportation, partnering with the right company helps to ensure success. Resources for sourcing these suppliers including hotels, CVBs, colleague planners and even transportation companies used in other cities. “They will often have opinions on who they would recommend in a different city,” Abram notes. “We really try to reach out to our whole network, and oftentimes the same names start coming back to us. So we would weigh heavily if we get referrals from several people for the same company and they’re very cost competitive.”

For Squeglia, the hotel is an especially good resource in cases where her client does not already have a preferred transportation provider. “My first point of contact is my hotel conference service manager. I ask them if they have an alliance with a preferred transportation company,” she explains. “Because I find that when you hire a transportation company that is preferred by the hotel, the company is very familiar with the hotel (in terms of) where they stage, depart from, drop off, etc. Some of them will also have agreements with the hotel so your transportation charges can go on a master account, which for some clients is great because then all the billing is in one place versus having all these different costs.”

Managing Costs

Facilitating budget management is a big plus for any provider, and Anderson has utilized CMAC Transportation for seven years in part due to this quality. “I think the most important thing is relationship and trust. I know I can trust CMAC to get us quality transportation when and where we need it, and I also trust in the quote that they provide upfront,” she says. “Normally when you get the quote from the transportation company it’s going to vary so much from when you get the actual bill that it could even be double. They also make suggestions on how to minimize



GameStop has some of its buses custom wrapped either with its own logo and content or with vendors’ images, which “will cover the cost of the wrap as well as some of the transportation,” says Director of Meetings and Travel Judy Anderson, CMP.

my costs, such as using them on core hours and then having Lyft and taxis on the shoulders.”

Toward managing costs, Squeglia also suggests that planners be clear on when the billable time starts. “Does it start when the vehicle stages at your

Williams’ transportation needs, notes, “The first thing we look for is the vehicle cleanliness and that the drivers are well groomed, because that’s the first thing attendees see when they get out of the airport. That’s the first representation of Keller Williams for our events,

“In order to make sure there are enough (airport) transfers available at a set cost we typically have to pre-arrange versus (letting them use) Uber and Lyft.”

Teri Abram, President
EventLink International, Dallas, TX



event or when it leaves the depot? I find it used to be the depot, but most times these days companies will start the clock when they actually stage for the event,” she says.

One of Klick’s preferred companies is Savoya, whose billing practices are an especially good match with Medtronic’s reporting needs under the Physician Payments Sunshine Act, she indicates. “They give us the most fabulous spreadsheet and breakdown of all the numbers and all the attendees. They’re able to provide the level of detail that we need,” she says.

so I want to make sure (the transportation provider) represents the No. 1 real estate company in the best way.”

The same point applies to meet-and-greet staff. “Typically the ground transportation company will provide meet-and-greet staff, and they’re at the baggage claim area with our logo sign,” says Abram. “And when you’re arriving, that’s usually the first touch, so I think it makes a big difference if there’s a friendly face and a ‘come right



“We’ll do shuttles for those core hours, and then if you ride outside of those core hours, we allow people to use Uber or taxicabs.”

Judy Anderson, CMP, Director, Meetings and Travel
GameStop, Grapevine, TX

First Impressions

Another consideration is the kind of impression the company will make on the attendees, particularly when they arrive at the airport. Well-maintained vehicles and friendly, timely drivers reflect well on the host company that hired the service.

Grubb, who works with Atlanta, Georgia-based destination management company Scout Local for Keller

this way’ etc. It sets expectations for the conference.”

Offsite Events

Apart from airport commutes, the other major area of ground transportation is of course offsite events, and here a little strategy is called for in vehicle

usage. For short distances of about 5–10 minutes, multiple runs with town-cars, vans or minibuses work well, while buses are typically used for longer trips. But a combination of the two sometimes can be advantageous. “A common type of motorcoach holds about 55 passengers, and (even if that accommodates the entire group), you do not want to hold up one bus for maybe two people who are running late,” Squeglia explains. “So I like to have a larger vehicle and then maybe a van, just so that I have that flexibility. For example, if a guest at the event is not feeling well or they have to get back (to the hotel), then it is nice to have that smaller vehicle.” Thus, if 200 attendees need to be transported, for example, three 55-passenger vehicles and two 30-passenger ones would offer more flexibility than four of the larger ones.

Buses do not usually evoke luxury, but in fact “most of these companies have very plush and luxurious buses in all different size ranges,” Klick observes.

“They’re well appointed, and the seats are very comfortable.”

A step up is the double-decker bus, which really gives attendees a sense of the city as they head to and from their offsite event. For a client meeting in Chicago, Abram is considering that option. “The venue is at a location where

we'll be going by a lot of landmarks in Chicago, so we can highlight the city along the way," she says. "They are more expensive, so it depends on the budget."

Shrink-Wrapped Buses

A potential way to offset some of the transportation cost is to use buses as a sellable sponsorship opportunity for vendors. GameStop has some of its buses custom wrapped either with its own logo and content or with vendors' images, which "will cover the cost of the wrap as well as some of the transportation," says Anderson. "We'll give our vendors the specs, and they'll drop in their imagery. Then we'll give it to CMAC, they'll have it produced, wash the bus and the whole wrap shrinks to the bus. And we'll use the wrapped bus as often as possible." She adds, "I don't think that a lot of companies know that they can do this; it's a minimal cost compared to what we'll get out of it for the sponsorship because the vendors are getting exposure not only at the event but also to and from the airport."

Onboard Presentations

Long motorcoach trips are also opportunities to show attendees videos and make presentations. "We make sure all of our buses have video player and audio. And instead of having someone speak on every bus and have inconsistent messages, what we do is create videos," says Anderson. "Some of them might be created by the vendors (e.g. PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo, Activision). If the vendor sponsored that bus, we'll give them the opportunity to give us a video to put on the bus as well as corporate messaging." It is advisable to avoid videos or presentations with heavy business content on the ride to the hotel, as participants may not be in the most lucid frame of mind after a long flight and navigating the airport. "We show engaging, fun videos, something that pumps them up and gets them excited and ready for when they arrive at registration," says Anderson.



Credit: Anaheim Regional Transportation

In May, Anaheim, California's Anaheim Resort Transportation (ART) unveiled a new and original design for its fleet of 82 electric and natural gas vehicles.

Public Transit

It should be noted that public buses are improving in many cities where the tourism industry is strong. In May, Anaheim, California's Anaheim Resort Transportation (ART) unveiled a new and original design for its bus fleet. The colorful bus wraps express the theme "The ART of Connecting the Dots," and have been introduced

corporate planners will oftentimes still need to "connect the dots" when it comes to arranging ground transportation with suppliers. And for that, partnering with the right supplier makes all the difference. The criteria are many, including their ability to deliver value and cost-saving strategies; the professionalism and demeanor of their drivers; the condition and vari-

"Typically the ground transportation company will provide meet-and-greet staff. ...I think it makes a big difference if there's a friendly face and a 'come right this way' etc. It sets expectations for the conference."



Mindy Grubb, Executive Director of Events
Keller Williams, Austin, TX

ety of their vehicles; and the quality of their referrals. ART's fleet of 82 electric and natural-gas vehicles traverse 21 routes and have reduced congestion in the city's resort area, stopping at popular locales such as the Disneyland Resort, Knott's Berry Farm, Angel Stadium and Honda Center.

Connecting the Dots

Uber and Lyft are certainly game changers as attendees now have a particularly convenient way of handling their own transportation. But

ety of their vehicles; and the quality of their referrals.

"Once you find a vendor that you like, and you continue to have that relationship, do a multiyear agreement so that you can perhaps get a discount," Grubb suggests, or at least concessions such as complimentary airport transfers for staff or VIPs. In addition, "we still go out for RFP every three to five years to make sure we're getting the best bang for our buck. You want to make sure you keep your preferred vendors on their toes, too."

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Destination

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Las Vegas. What other destination features gondola rides on the Grand Canal, a bird's-eye view from the top of the world's largest observations wheel and a stroll alongside a white tiger habitat — all within walking distance of one another? Adhering to its founding principle, “spare no expense,” this is a town where beyond-the-imagination attractions continually exceed the imagination. Add to this mix an ever-present pledge to up the ante with enticement

By Cynthia Dial

after enticement — from top-of-the-line exhibition enhancements to top-of-their-game entertainment headliners — and the city becomes a magnet for meetings.

“Las Vegas is a destination that can serve up anything you can dream,” says Cathy Kusuma, senior director of training and strategic partnerships for Coral Springs, Florida-based Cruise Planners (American Express travel representative), a privately owned company of 1,500

Donny Osmond (r) kicked off the Adobe Summit with song and dance along with John Mellor, Adobe V.P., Strategy, Business Development and Marketing.



The iconic Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas.

Credit: Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas

home-based travel franchisees. As the nation's largest corporation of its kind, the success of its annual event Cruise Planners on the Road (a 2½-day boot camp with the dual goal of networking and product knowledge) is key to remaining on top — with its location no small part of the decision-making process. As first-timers to the city, the verdict of its March meeting with more than 100 attending travel agents at Caesars Palace Las Vegas is “mission accomplished.”

Why Vegas? “Because we have franchise owners in all 50 states, we’re always on the lookout for a destination that is easily reached by everyone,” explains Kusuma. Detailing her multifaceted thought process, the planner continues, “Las Vegas is a good drive market for those on the West Coast; our travel agents sell a lot of Vegas, so they get to experience it, and many of those who flew in decided to stay for the weekend. Because who doesn’t love Vegas, right?”

As home to 17 of the nation's 20 largest hotels, however, the selection of Las Vegas is only one part of the decision. “We did a ton of site inspections, and because of Caesars’ great prices, central location and its other offerings, we were able to tick off all the boxes on our checklist — making Caesars the best fit.”

Of increasing interest to Cruise Planners, as it is to many groups, is a corporate social responsibility component. Caesars addressed this desire with the debut of its “Meetings for Good” program. Offering a “menu” of such CSR opportunities as assisting seniors, promoting environmental sustainability and acknowledging deployed soldiers and veterans, the philanthropic program gives meeting planners their choice of volunteer opportunities.

Cruise Planners’ welcome kick-off was a cocktail reception of agents, destination partners and corporate staff near The

Credit: Jeff Bottari/AP Images for Adobe



Actor George Clooney's scintillating interview with Adobe CMO Ann Lewnes at the Adobe Summit 2016 at the The Venetian drew huge numbers of attendees.

Linq's High Roller, concluding with a sunset ride on the big wheel. “It's nice to have that face time with our agents and really get to know them,” says Kusuma. “After all, we’ve been on the High Roller with them.”

Acknowledging the reluctance of some to host a meeting here, the Cruise Planners’ meetings specialist gives insight: “Some meeting planners shy away from Las Vegas and I’ve wondered why. Perhaps it's that in years past the city's reputation was that it was just for gambling, and for that reason some may have thought it wasn't a match for their group. But Vegas has done amazing things to change this viewpoint.”

Factors contributing to this meeting planner's assessment are many — the proximity of the airport, the quantity of meeting space, the number of hotel choices, the amount of entertainment options and the ease of getting from one fun place to another. Kusuma's assessment: “Today's Las Vegas is a number-one meetings destination.”

Las Vegas' ease in accommodating a group of any size, from 100 to 10,000, is considered as big an attraction to meeting planners as Celine Dion is to music lovers. A premier example is this year's first-time-in-the-city Adobe Summit, Adobe's Annual Digital Marketing Conference of more than 10,000 attendees, held in March at The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino, The Palazzo Resort Hotel Casino and the Sands Expo Convention Center.

Las Vegas Has Room for Everyone

Julie Martin, senior director of corporate events for San Jose, California-based Adobe Systems Inc., explains her group's move to Las Vegas. Held for several years in Salt Lake City, it was necessary to make a change in 2016 because of the event's expansion. “We were maxed out in Salt Lake City because Adobe's business has grown and Adobe Summit has experienced growth as well — attendance was up 40 percent from last year.”

Martin details that the primary venue draw was its vast



Credit: Las Vegas Sands Corp.



Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

The Margaux at Wynn Las Vegas is an outdoor group dining spot.

number of meeting rooms, sleeping rooms and exhibit space — all under the same roof. Offering more than 2.25 million sf of convention space, The Venetian Palazzo Congress Center has one of the world's largest pillar-less ballrooms (85,000 sf), plus 298 meeting, conference and boardrooms, in addition to the 1.9 million sf of meeting and show space within the adjacent Sands Expo. Plus, the all-suite 4,028-room Venetian and more than 3,000-room Palazzo are known for the size of their suites (nearly double that of the average hotel room on The Strip). "All of this was a huge factor," says the meeting planner.

Of additional appeal to Martin is the resorts' food and beverage portfolio, which serves up such celebrity-chef restaurants as Emeril Lagasse's Delmonico Steakhouse, Wolfgang Puck's Cutchock, Mario Batali's B&B Ristorante and Thomas Keller's Bouchon.

"Our attendees are hungry to learn and to take new tips and tricks back to the office," explains the Adobe planner. Details of this five-day conference (including two pre-conference days) are impressively comprehensive. Offering three days of more than 200 sessions and 56 hands-on labs (eight computer-outfitted rooms) and 100-plus exhibitors on the show floor premiering the industry's latest and greatest, the event is designed for the collection of knowledge as well as for networking — presenting the opportunity to meet peers, industry leaders, Adobe staffers and partners.

"The challenge in Las Vegas is how to keep attendees excited

about your event because there are so many distractions," says Martin of the city with 24/7 entertainment. "The key is a tight agenda with lots of activities. We spend a great deal of time surveying what our attendees like, so we know what appeals to them and how to maintain their attention. It is with this knowledge that we make choices regarding content, speakers and the keynote."

Chock-full of A-listers, Adobe's conference lineup was electromagnetic. Its Summit Bash party, which always features a headliner, was anchored by the rock band Weezer, and the fun was further enhanced with an assortment of food trucks. Again, as it was held in The Linq lot, the meeting planner considered its walkable distance from the hotels a time-saving and cost-saving bonus.

Without a doubt, the event's most enticing elements were the keynote speakers. Donny Osmond, one of Las Vegas' most popular entertainers, kicked it off with song and dance, followed by U.S. soccer star Abby Wambach. However, it was the sit-down interview by Adobe CMO Ann Lewnes with actor George Clooney that was the conference's off-the-charts hit. Speaking humorously about his career and sharing insight into inspiration and creativity, the popularity of the actor's appearance enabled Martin to harness most of the summit's 10,000 attendees to the second-day event.

"It was a good match," says Martin of the city and her company. "Las Vegas and Adobe have the same synergy. Both have similar goals — to create a great customer experience." Her final verdict is supported by numbers: "Every year we try to raise the bar. Even though post-convention surveys show that 90 percent of attendees consistently rate the summit from very good to excellent, 2016 measured even better."

Amid these results, it's not surprisingly that next year's Adobe annual conference will again be here. "At this point," concludes Martin, "it looks like Las Vegas is where we want to stay."

"It was a good match. Las Vegas and Adobe have the same synergy. Both have similar goals — to create a great customer experience."



Julie Martin, Senior Director of Corporate Events
Adobe Systems Inc., San Jose, CA

Vegas for more than 15 years, and from observation, she concludes that although the destination continually changes, it continues to be a big draw for conference and event attendees — typically increasing an event's numbers by 8 percent.

In the business of being a global provider of risk modeling software and consulting services that help organizations prepare for the financial impacts of catastrophes in more than 90 countries, Air Worldwide is intuitively proactive. This characteristic may have factored into its selection of Las Vegas and Encore at Wynn Las Vegas as the site of Envision 2017. Held

A Big-Time Attendance Builder

Corie Rand, CMP, CTSM, senior manager, events marketing for Boston, Massachusetts-based Air Worldwide, has managed events in Las Vegas for more than 15 years, and from observation, she concludes that although the destination continually changes, it continues to be a big draw for conference and event attendees — typically increasing an event's numbers by 8 percent.



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in April, it's the annual user conference that brings together 350–400 risk management professionals from around the world to discuss recent trends, emerging challenges and innovative solutions for the company's software products.

"A few things about Las Vegas are a draw for us," says Rand. "The first is weather. As we hold our conference in early April, it's the perfect time to be in Las Vegas — especially after being

"Las Vegas attracts both attendees that are making return visits and first-timers. As our clients like to go to resorts and urban locations, we have achieved both by choosing Encore Las Vegas for 2017."



Corie Rand, CMP, CTSM, Senior Manager Events Marketing, Air Worldwide, Boston, MA

in Boston in 2015 and Philadelphia in 2016." Secondly, she hopes to take advantage of that 8 percent upturn and increase Envision's numbers. "Las Vegas attracts both attendees that are making return visits and first-timers. As our clients like to go to resorts and urban locations, we have achieved both by choosing Encore Las Vegas for 2017."

A prime perk of the 48-story, 2,034-room Encore at Wynn Las Vegas is that it also offers the many attractions of its connected property, Wynn Las Vegas (example: the two resorts collectively have 260,000 sf of meeting space). Of additional appeal to Rand are its aesthetics. "The property is very tasteful and the perfect mix of a modern five-star hotel in a major city with a refined Las Vegas flare. The resorts' decor is spectacular. The fine art, floral displays and water elements are world-renowned." From the time Air's meeting planner spent at the properties during site inspections, she deems the operation "a

well-oiled machine," with specific kudos to the staff, whom she describes as "friendly and attentive."

"The meeting space meets our needs — it's all on one level and a distance from any gaming," explains the meetings pro. Due to the group's large percentage of vegetarians, an additional appeal is Wynn's commitment to flavorful, non-typical food and beverage choices, with gourmet-quality vegetarian and vegetarian options served in every one of its restaurants.

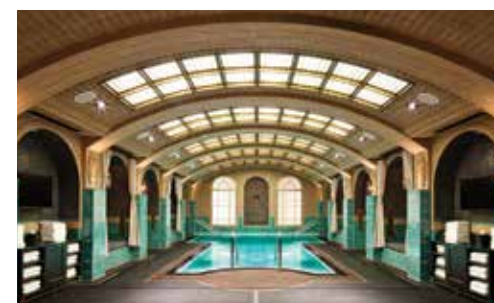
Though Envision's off-property excursions are not yet planned, Rand hopes to take advantage of the southern Nevada location with potential outings to the Hoover Dam, Red Rock Canyon or perhaps Mount Charleston (only 35 miles from Las Vegas, it's the state's eighth highest mountain).

Although Rand sought meeting space a distance from the casino, she's adding a gaming element to the conference through a point system. In explanation: "The more evaluations attendees do, the more points they receive to be entered into a contest for the chance to win great prizes. A live leaderboard will continually update and display the stats." On the social media front, Twitter is incentivized as well. Envision will have a live Twitter feed running in the prefunction space, and if attendees tweet using its hashtag, they will be entered to win yet another prize.

In summation and in anticipation, Rand is clear: "Encore is the perfect fit for my size group — we will be the 'big fish' on property during our stay."

New and Noteworthy

The popular tagline, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas," has inspired the entertainment capital's limited edition beer named **#WHHSH** ("What Happens Here, Stays Here"). Unveiled in Palm Springs during this year's Coachella Valley Music Festival, this beer is so exclusive it will only be available at select Las Vegas sponsored events.



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Air Worldwide selected Las Vegas as the site of Envision 2017 to be held in April at the 2,034-room Encore at Wynn Las Vegas.

An event at **Speedvegas**, a \$30 million, 100-acre motorsports complex, is a meeting planner's fastest way to immerse a group into Las Vegas' exciting environment. Inspired by Formula One race tracks, it gives participants the opportunity to drive such high-performance vehicles as Porsche, Ferrari and Lamborghini, among others, and at speeds up to 120 mph.

In December 2016, **Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas** is adding 2,000 sf of prefunction space for registration and possible exhibit use, with an additional 17, 607 sf of pillar-less meeting space added to the existing 10,200 sf for a grand total of 27,807 sf of usable meeting, exhibit, event and/or food and beverage space. The hotel also offers 16 studio breakout rooms that vary in size from 450 sf to 850 sf.

Replacing **Aria Resort and Casino's** Haze Nightclub is **Jewel**. Able to accommodate approximately 2,000 guests, the 24,000-sf, multilevel nightclub venue features a main club, an over-looking mezzanine level and five secluded suites with a private entrance.

Aria's technology scene is deemed equally as innovative with the unveiling of its collaboration with Crave Interactive (a cutting-edge guest service software company) to create the largest-ever installation of in-room hotel tablets — giving guests the ability for digital in-room dining orders, one-touch spa service requests, access to a news stream in multiple languages and more.

Recent enticements at **Caesars Palace** range from cigar

“Las Vegas is a good drive market for those on the West Coast...many of those who flew in decided to stay for the weekend. Because who doesn't love Vegas, right?”



Cathy Kusuma, Senior Director of Training and Strategic Partnerships, Cruise Planners, Coral Springs, FL

bars to check-ins. **The Montecristo Cigar Bar** — an exclusive 4,000-sf lounge environment, including a 400-sf climate-controlled humidor that can store up to 1,000 cigars — is a unique away-from-the-crowd option. Pairing notable cigar choices with fine whiskeys and great food, its most intimate space is **The Vault**, which seats 10.

The hotel's self-check-in kiosk program was designed to streamline an attendee's arrival to a single step, with no lines and no wait time.

Topgolf's state-of-the-art flagship location opened in May at the **MGM Grand Hotel & Casino**. Located on an eight-acre,



A sunset ride on two pods of the Linq's High Roller provided great networking opportunities for Cruise Planners attendees and the management team including (l to r) Brian Shultz, CIO; Cathy Kusuma, senior director of training and strategic partnerships; Michelle Fee, CEO and co-owner; Laura Blanco, director of sales; and Olaf Olen, IT support services manager.

105,000-sf lot with views of The Strip, the four-level facility features two pools, five bars, 102 hitting bays on three levels and a fourth level dedicated to VIP experiences. Designed to cater to groups from 10 to 2,000, it offers 3,000 sf of private meeting space and a live musical performance venue able to accommodate up to 900.

When the talent of James Beard Award-winning chef Shawn McClain meets the creativity of Modern Mixologist, Tony Abou-Ganim, the result is **Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino's** summer-debuted bar restaurant, **Libertine Social**.

Described as the “next-generation gastropub,” the chef's promise is a variety of atmospheres that will meet diners' (and meeting planners') expectations for a new kind of fun.

Reflective of the recently completed \$200 million transformation of the **Tropicana Las Vegas** and its South Beach flair, the city's newest pool club, the **Sky Beach Club**, raises the bar for an only-in-Vegas experience every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. At 37,603 sf of space (2,000 capacity), among the venue's A-list amenities are two luxury pools, two bars, 29 poolside daybeds and 18 private cabanas, in addition to celebrity hosts, live performances and a DJ booth. For the ultimate VIP experience, the Cabana Party Patio (its prime location is adjacent to the stage and DJ booth) may be reserved.

“The Beatles Love” by Cirque du Soleil at The Mirage Hotel & Casino is evolving to deliver a more dynamic and engaging version of the musical experience that has already captured the hearts of music and theater fans worldwide.

The first wave of new acts, costumes, choreography, technology and music, designed to bring the vibrant and culture-shifting sounds and settings of The Beatles' musical revolution to renewed life, are in place now. The show will continue to evolve with a culmination tied to its 10th anniversary this summer.

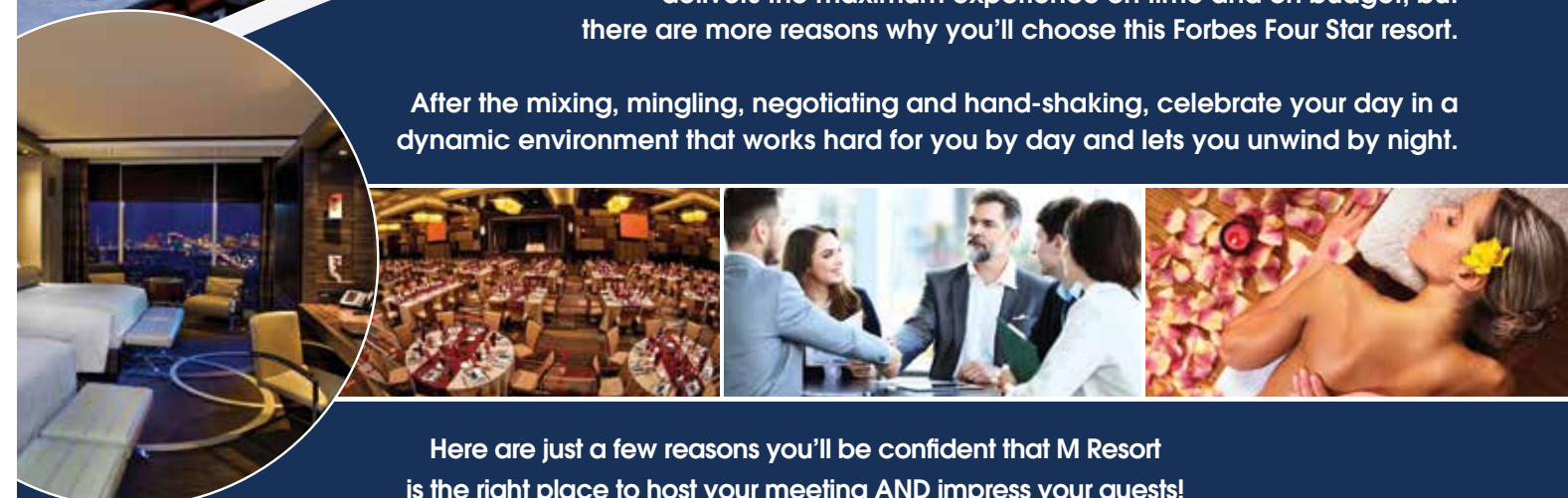
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David Sneider was named director of group sales for the We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center in Scottsdale, Arizona. He was a senior sales manager at the Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs Resort in Phoenix.

Hilton San Francisco has appointed Deborah Josue to the position of complex senior sales manager. She was most recently a national sales manager at Caesars Entertainment with the in-market Western region.

Gregg Herning was named vice president of sales at Bellagio in Las Vegas. Bringing 30 years of experience to the role, he was most recently vice president of sales for MGM Grand.

Tony Aslanian was named director of sales and marketing for The Grove Resort

& Spa in Orlando, Florida. He formerly served as director of sales, marketing and revenue strategy at Nickelodeon Suites Resort in Orlando.

Loews Regency New York Hotel in Midtown Manhattan has named Daniel Ben-Efraim as director of sales and marketing. He was most recently director of sales and marketing at The London New York.

The Marriott Napa Valley Hotel & Spa in Napa, California, has named Angela Cava as director of sales and marketing. She was V.P. of sales for destination management company RMC.

Westin Grand Cayman Seven Mile Beach Resort & Spa in the

Cayman Islands has promoted Marti Trieschmann to area director of sales and marketing. She formerly was director of sales and marketing.

The Claremont Club & Spa, a Fairmont Hotel in Oakland Hills, California, has appointed Nichole Dupre as director of sales and marketing. She was director of sales at Park Central Hotel in San Francisco.

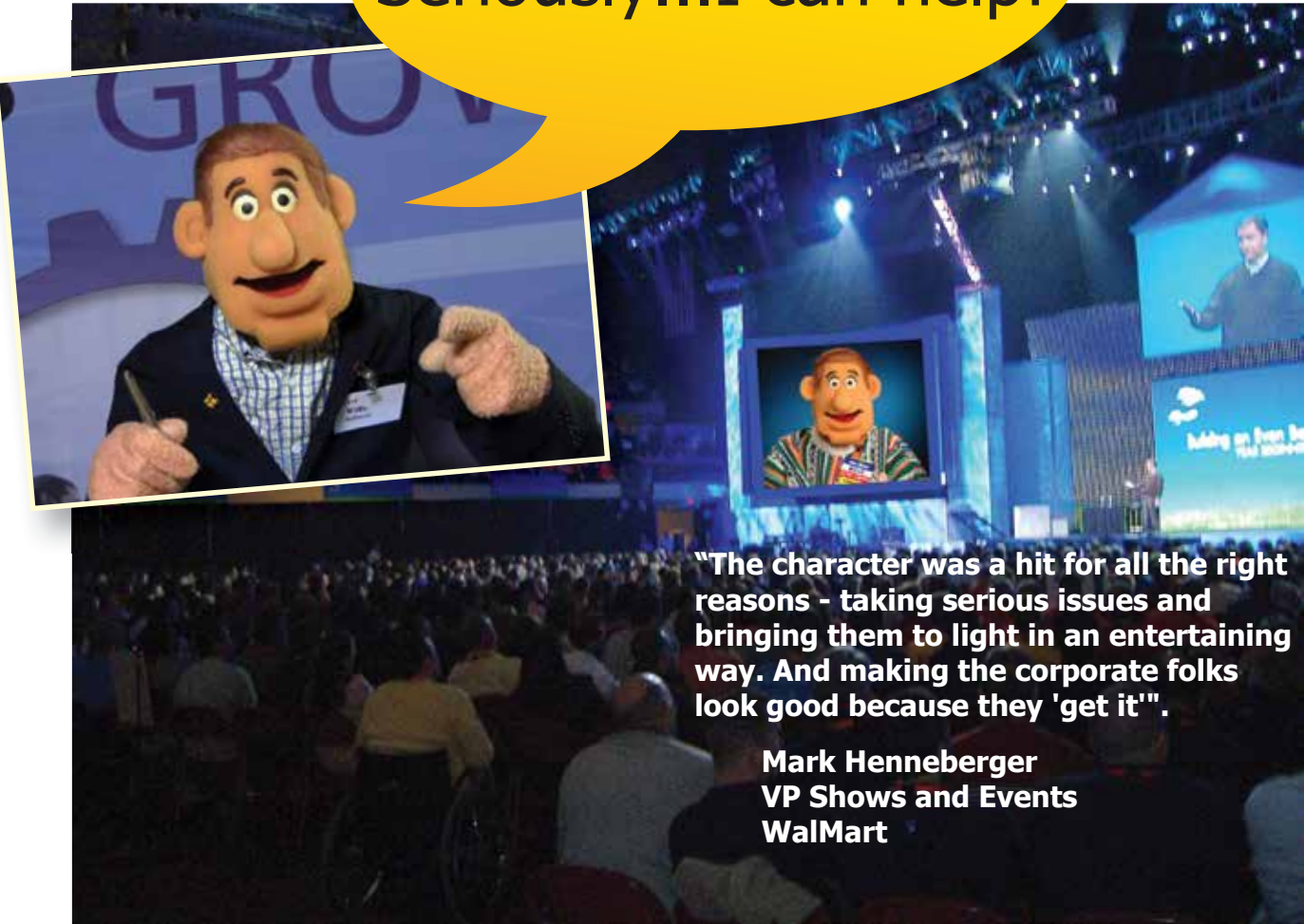
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