

Revitalize Mind,
Body, Spirit
PAGE 14

What Global CVBs
Want You to Know
PAGE 26

The Three R's of
Meeting Metrics
PAGE 32

Negotiating Hotel
Contracts
PAGE 38

Orlando
Your Way
PAGE 44

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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



WOW!

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**How Tech Is Evolving
to Increase Meeting
Engagement**

PAGE 20

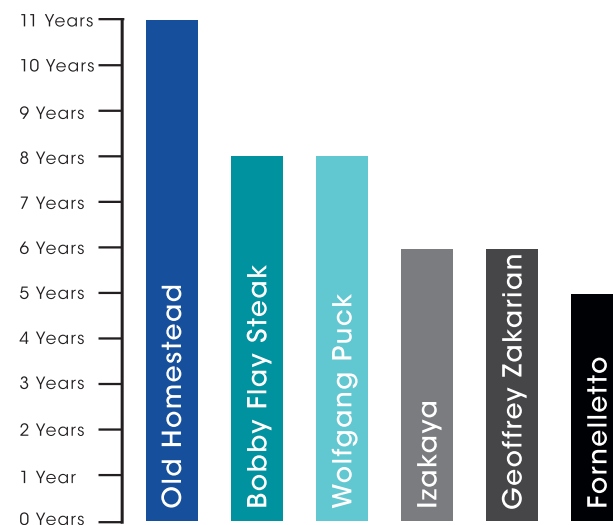
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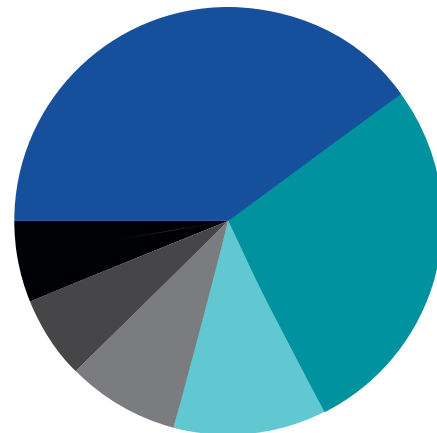
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Contents

VOLUME 34 NO. 10

OCTOBER 2016

FEATURES

14 Healthy Rewards

Meeting Planners Add Wellness Activities to Revitalize Mind, Body, Spirit — and ROI

By Patrick Simms

20 WOW!

How Tech Is Evolving to Increase Meeting Engagement, Motivation and Connections

By John Buchanan

26 What International Convention Bureaus Want U.S. Planners to Know

It's Not Business as Usual — in a Good Way

By Christine Loomis

32 The Three R's of Meeting Metrics

Why ROO, ROI and ROE Are Important Tools for Success

By John Buchanan

38 Contracts: Strive for Mutual Success

Arrange for 'Dummy Rooms' but Don't Be a Dummy When It Comes to Negotiating

By Maura Keller

DESTINATION

44 Orlando Your Way

Whether Theme Park or Business Focused, Orlando Is Your Go-To for Meetings

By Christine Loomis

DEPARTMENTS

4 **Publisher's Message** 6 **News & Notes** 9 **Snapshots**

10 Perspective

How to Navigate Security Challenges and Pull Off Successful High-Profile Events

By Heidi Foels

12 Perspective

The Occasional Need to Unplug and Unwind

By Niki Jorgensen

50 **People on the Move** 50 **Reader Services**



Rohde & Schwarz National Sales Meeting participants compete in their Strive Fitness Fresh Air Festival. **PAGE 14**



Kayakers glide past the arch of Cabo San Lucas at the southern end of Mexico's Baja California Peninsula. **PAGE 26**



Hotel contract negotiation can be a planner's biggest headache, especially in the current seller's market. **PAGE 38**

Publisher's Message

The WOW Factor

Invariably, creating the wow factor is the ultimate goal of meeting planners the world over. No matter what type or size of meeting, event and incentive program you are charged with, if the wow is missing — woe is you.

Today, we are equipped with many more tools at our disposal due to the rapid technological advances that will help you meet your company's objectives and, at the same time, create fun, lasting memories and happy, engaged attendees.



In our cover story this month, "WOW — How Tech Is Evolving to Increase Meeting Engagement, Motivation and Connections," we talk to the experts who show us how various forms of technology are bringing us closer to transforming those fantastical "Star Trek" gadgets into real devices. (Reportedly, there are a dozen of these gadgets that exist today in some form.)

Ryan Rutan at Jive Software in California describes a key challenge: "When you talk about using technology to create the wow factor at meetings, the first thing you need to talk about is how high the bar is now. Over the last three or four years, the ways that technology affects people in their personal lives has leaked into the enterprise. And that has created a

very high bar in terms of getting people's attention and getting them excited. The expectations that people have in their personal lives have carried over into their business lives. And when you look at the things that are out there now, in their personal lives, that creates a very high expectation in terms of how technology is used to impact them at meetings."

For great impact and more, planners like Chris Soto, president of CTC Events and Productions in Virginia, turn to live action games combined with teambuilding like The Go Game (see our cover). Soto exclaims, "If you're looking for a team bonding experience that breaks down barriers and delivers an amazing experience for meeting attendees by combining technology with creativity, Go Game is a fantastic tool."

Finally, tech guru Corbin Ball suggests, "There are just so many new ideas bubbling up now. And there are new ways to use mobile technology at meetings. Or to improve learning. And all of those things, if they're used well, will create the wow factor. But to me, no matter what the technology is, it's about engagement. If attendees are engaged and motivated and involved, that's really where the wow comes from."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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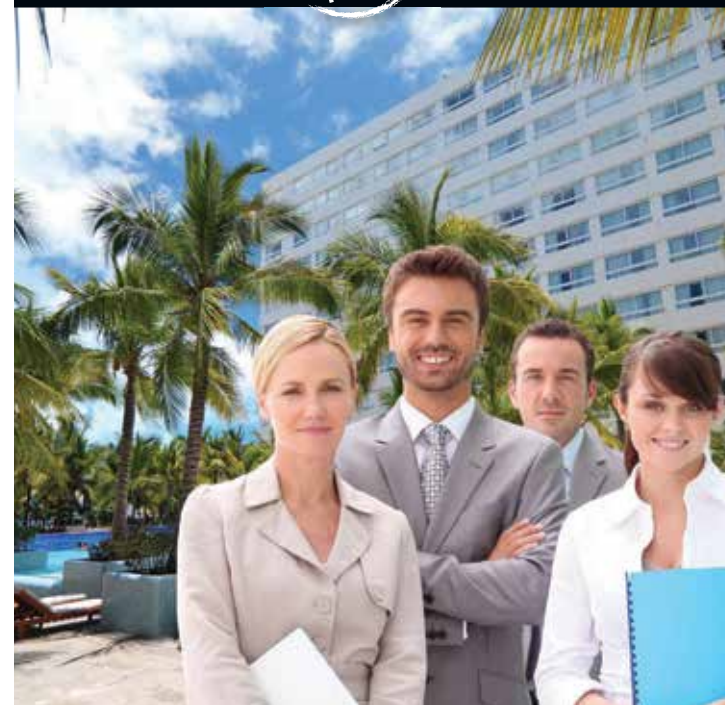
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News & Notes

NCL Holdings Awarded MICE Cruise Line Partner of the Year

MIAMI, FL — The inspiration for Landry & Kling's first-ever "MICE Cruise Line Partner of the Year" award came when the company realized they had for the first time booked charters totaling 62 days in one year with all three brands of Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd. — Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Oceania Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line.

Landry & Kling's CEO Joyce Landry observed: "It's a ship charter trifecta — successful charters with all three of the Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings' brands! So we just had to acknowledge NCLH as our MICE Partner of the Year." She added: "Their professional services, flexible policies and the variety of ships in their fleet helped us meet the specialized needs of our MICE market."

To honor their first "MICE Cruise Line Partner of the Year," Landry & Kling co-founders Joyce Landry and Jo Kling presented a commemorative award to Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings' V.P. Charters, Meetings and Incentives Katina Athanasiou and Director of Sales Operations and Services, Charters, Meetings and Incentives Lisette Martinez.

"Landry and Kling pioneered the



Landry & Kling's founders Jo Kling (l) and Joyce Landry (r) presented a commemorative award to Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings' (second from right) Katina Athanasiou, V.P. charters, meetings and incentives along with NCLH's Lisette Martinez, director of sales operations and services, charters, meetings and incentives.

corporate ship charter business and has been a valued partner and friend of ours for decades" said Athanasiou. "Their focus on events at sea, coupled with their knowledge and experience

makes each and every program we operate together not only seamless, but extremely successful. They are masters at creating elegant solutions for all!" www.landrykling.com

Wyndham Grand Orlando Adds Meeting Space

ORLANDO, FL — Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek announced the completion of its \$5 million renovation including the new 3,500-sf Bonnet Creek Ballroom accommodating up to 360 people and the 2,155-sf Expedition meeting room.

The renovation also includes a new wraparound balcony and terrace overlooking the 10-acre lake, a state-of-the-art lighting system capable of producing any color on the color wheel, and updates to three restaurants within the hotel offering options for every type of business traveler.

Bar 1521 was upgraded with iron dividers and elegant Spanish tiles, giving it an intimate look and feel of a Spanish tapas bar. Also added was the Bar 1521 sushi

bar with fresh sushi and other Japanese-inspired options. Additionally, Tesoro Cove was completely reimaged to evoke the Mediterranean countryside and complement the restaurant's Italian-inspired cuisine.

The Wyndham Grand features 32,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor meeting and event space designed for groups large and small — from the Bonnet Creek Boardroom for up to 10 attendees to the Ponce de Leon Ballroom for a meeting of up to 450 attendees. Wyndham Grand Orlando Bonnet Creek promises to deliver exceptional event and meeting spaces designed with stylish décor, natural beauty and cutting-edge technology. www.wyndham.com

Al Hutchinson to Lead Visit Baltimore

BALTIMORE, MD — Al Hutchinson is the new Visit Baltimore president and CEO, effective November 14.



HUTCHINSON

Hutchinson brings more than 24 years of experience in the hospitality and destination marketing industry to Baltimore, most recently serving as president and CEO of Visit Mobile, where he was recognized as the 2016 Alabama Restaurant and Hospitality Alliance's "Tourism Promoter of the Year." Under Hutchinson's leadership, Visit Mobile launched a new brand campaign, "Born to Celebrate"; saw record visitor attendance; a large increase in visitor inquiries; and an increase in

the city's hotel occupancy rate and revenue collection.

As president and CEO of Visit Baltimore, Hutchinson will be responsible for leading the growth of the convention and tourism industry in Baltimore, overseeing the day-to-day management of all sales and marketing programs, and serving as the hospi-

tility industry's liaison to the business, civic and local community, while demonstrating the impact of tourism on the city and state.

Prior to joining Visit Mobile, Hutchinson served as the vice president of convention sales and services at the Virginia Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. www.baltimore.org

W Hotels to Debut on the Las Vegas Strip

LAS VEGAS, NV — Now taking reservations for its December 1 opening, W Las Vegas will take over a 289-room tower of the SLS Las Vegas, transforming it into an elevated hotel-within-a hotel concept. The hotel will offer signature W brand amenities, including lively social venues and The Living Room, where guests can mingle, imbibe and lounge. The hotel will feature a multimillion-dollar new build tower by Gensler Architects, with 15,000 sf of meeting and event space.

The hotel will boast the 24-hour FIT, Away spa, W's signature Whatever/Whenever service, and the most meeting space of any W property yet. World-class dining options include Bazaar Meat by José Andrés, Katsuya, Cleo, Umami Burger, 800 Degrees Neopolitan Pizza, Northside Café, Chinese Kitchen, The Perq and additional nightlife venues. Guest rooms will range from 322 sf for the Wonderful Room to the indulgent 2,382-sf EWOW Suite. www.wlasvegas.com

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News & Notes

Norwegian Cruise Line to Debut New Ship Designed for Alaska Cruising

SEATTLE, WA — Norwegian Cruise Line will pioneer a new era of Alaska cruising beginning June 2018, as its new vessel Norwegian Bliss will be the first cruise ship custom-built with features and amenities for an Alaska cruise experience. Norwegian Bliss will cruise from Seattle and will be the first Norwegian Cruise Line ship to make its debut in the Emerald City. The third ship in the line's Breakaway-Plus class, Norwegian Bliss accommodates 4,000 guests. The ship will be constructed in Germany and scheduled for delivery in spring 2018. After a transatlantic cruise and a Panama Canal transit through the new locks, the ship will sail north along the West Coast, reaching Seattle for the start of the summer cruising season. Norwegian Bliss will sail weekly seven-day Alaska cruises



featuring calls in Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway and Victoria, British Columbia, along with scenic glacier cruising.

Norwegian Bliss will be available for reservations in January 2017. www.bliss.ncl.com, www.ncl.com

Hosts Global Alliance And Luxpality Announce Partnership

LAS VEGAS, NV — Luxpality and Hosts Global Alliance (HGA) have partnered to create a premier global solution for the group and MICE industry.



PATINO

Luxpality's focus is to connect clients with exceptional luxury hotels and resorts through its international network of brand ambassadors. With more than 20 offices worldwide, Luxpality utilizes their local expertise and strong relationships to provide corporate direct groups, incentive houses, third-party meeting planning companies and travel agencies with unique group experiences.

Hosts Global Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Patino commented on the partnership: "Hosts Global Alliance (HGA) and Luxpality have a shared affinity for exceptional quality and extraordinary service. The alignment of these two companies, possessing a passion for the finest group experience, provides a singular solution for MICE and group business. HGA is honored to be the DMC partner worldwide serving Luxpality clients. The speed at which Luxpality built an exclusive luxury hotel portfolio is something we at Hosts Global understand, having experienced the same rapid build of premier DMCs globally, serving over 300 destinations today. This is going to be a fun journey together." www.hosts-global.com

Westin Nashville Hotel Opens Its Doors

NASHVILLE, TN — The Westin Nashville recently opened its doors. Conveniently located near Nashville's entertainment district and adjacent to the Music City Center, The Westin Nashville is specifically created to be a reflection of the city's vibrant energy and Southern sophistication. Each of the hotel's 453 guest rooms features custom artwork and design details inspired by the city and region. Included are three penthouse-style entertainment suites, three hospital-ity suites and eight executive suites, each distinctly designed with its own motif.

The Westin Nashville boasts 20,000 sf of adaptable event space, including prefunction areas and 12 dynamic meeting venues. The Vanderbilt Ballroom offers reception seating for up to 500 guests. www.westinnashville.com

Snapshots



1-5 The 2016 SITE Classic was held at the La Quinta Resort & Club in La Quinta, California. **1** John J. Iannini, CIS, CTC, SITE Foundation vice president of fundraising and V.P. Melia Hotels International, and Denise Dornfeld, CIS, SITE Foundation president, and chairperson, AlliedPRA, along with **2** guests at the sold-out cooking experience sponsored by AlliedPRA. **3** Attendees appreciated playing like the pros at the golf tournament. **4** More than \$125,000 was raised via raffle and live auction to enable the SITE Foundation to continue to invest in research and education programs. **5** SITE Classic Cochair Madelyn Marusa, DMCP, vice president industry relations, AlliedPRA, and Caren Bigelow, director of travel, USMotivation, flank a celebrity look-a-like at the event. **6,7** Attendees enjoyed a great conference in Austin, at the fourth ILEA Live, produced by the International Live Events Association (formerly The International Special Events Society). Next up is The Special Event (TSE), the industry's largest trade show and conference for event professionals, January 10-12, 2017 in Long Beach, California.



By Heidi Foels

How to Navigate Security Challenges and Pull Off Successful High-Profile Events

In event planning, bigger is better when it comes to clients, productions and celebrity speakers, but “big” can result in a whole new level of logistics, security, registration, bodyguards and more. How can a planning company navigate these challenges and pull off a successful, high-profile event? The keys: a good contract with talent that complements your program, and plenty of preparation!

What separates a high-profile event from any other? It usually is defined as such by the client, whose attendees, guests or speakers may include well-known celebrities, entertainers, political leaders, popular keynote speakers or other VIPs representing the client. These big names attract much more attention and publicity than a standard event.

It's easy to be star-struck by the thought of hiring a famous figure as a speaker, but it's important to determine if they are an appropriate fit based on the program objectives. Is leadership the

own. This information often can be found in the rider, but it's important to clarify if you are unsure of any details.

If you hire an elected official or former president, be aware that the Secret Service is an additional audience you will need to cater to. They will have their own requirements, including a full review of the space and the sight lines of the room where the presentation is held. Consider allocating an assigned staff person to meet and direct your high-profile presenter through the venue, making sure that they and their security detail get from point A to point B smoothly and effectively. Be sure to provide a route that avoids the general public; crowds can slow things down substantially and provide a security risk.

A big-name speaker or entertainer can have an impact on the registration process, and oftentimes registration and hotel reservations are handled as a stand-alone project to ensure all elements of housing and conference information are shared with your

“These **big names** attract much **more attention** and publicity than a standard event.”

theme of the event? You might want to skip on that reality TV star. Just as there are endless purposes and themes for events, there are endless celebrity options that would make an appropriate choice. When developing content for a particular program, be sure to ask how the speaker, celebrity or VIP contributes to the overall message and objectives.

How to Get Started

The first step in arranging for a high-caliber speaker is contacting their agent or assistant who manages the communication related to their schedules, needs and expectations. Often, they will provide a “rider,” which is a document that has special provisions not generally included in an original contract. A rider may contain specific expectations or requirements relating to the staging or AV, or perhaps required items such as specific food and beverage, lodging expectations, hair and makeup needs and green room requirements, which will provide them a space to relax and prepare when they aren't onstage.

The more popular a speaker or entertainer is, the more likely they will need security — either provided or they may bring their

high-profile guest. This is a particularly important element of the planning process, as they may have certain housing requirements. Managing the transportation is another big project, potentially involving charter flight schedules and private drop-off and pick-up of the talent and their associates.

Determine the logistics of your presenter's schedule and how it fits into the conference or meeting agenda. Are they leaving immediately following their presentation or entertainment, or do they want to stay and network with your attendees? If you plan a meet-and-greet space, that may involve setting up what the industry refers to as a “step and repeat,” a banner wall or publicity backdrop that is used primary for event photography printed with a repeat pattern such as branded logos. Step-and-repeats are very popular at fashion events, galas or on the red carpet where photos are an important part of the overall event; plus, they keep things moving in an organized manner.

Negotiating the Contract

With these aspects in mind — expectations and requirements, security, registration, transportation and scheduling logistics —



Thorough preparation is the key to staging a successful event that features a big-name speaker.

the next step is signing the actual contract. If possible, it's best to try and negotiate the overall contract, including any rider elements. The more information that is spelled out in the contract, such as rehearsal dates and times, security check reviews and walkthroughs, the better for all parties involved. A general rule for contracts: Do not make assumptions and be sure to have clear communication, outlining all needs and costs so that everyone has a specific, straightforward understanding of the contract.

Now that you have your talent signed, how do you ensure that their brand doesn't compete with your own? Ideally, you have arranged for a speaker or performer that enhances, rather than detracts from your company brand. You can have them help you further cement your brand and message with a little preparation: providing key taglines in advance, helping them understand the objective of your program and asking for their advice on how they can support your message are some great ways to ensure that neither side is taking away from the other.

Additionally, depending on the type of conference, keynotes and celebrities may allow you to leverage their status to generate excitement and boost overall attendance. Using their photos and experiences in marketing materials as well as social media is generally considered acceptable, but ask for permission beforehand.

On the other hand, photography and video are typically banned from most keynote, celebrity and high-profile presentations or entertainment, as most talent understandably wants to protect their

brand. However, it never hurts to ask, and if you gain permission, it's best to outline the guidelines in the mutual contract agreement.

Preparation Is Key

As with any presenter, preparation is key. However, a high-profile speaker or entertainer may not have the time in their schedule to do much in terms of preparing. Working through their agent, arrange a time to meet onsite, if possible, to go over the basics: where they can relax or warm up prior to their appearance, the routes they will be taking to and from the stage, and a rundown of the conference or meeting theme, the brand, logo and company history. If you are unable to rehearse with them prior to the big day, be sure to work with their agent on any briefing notes. Once your VIP arrives, be sure to take a few minutes to inform them of the must-know items: stage direction, time allotment, panel member attendance, talking points, camera angles and any backup plans for technology failure.

Generally, celebrity and keynote speakers are quite comfortable onstage, but it's best to treat them all as if it's their very first time. Be knowledgeable about who they are and what their subject is, provide compliments and suggestions (if asked), and ensure that all their requirements have been met. If all goes according to plan, your talent will be happy, your audience will be engaged, your message will come across loud and clear, and you can consider the program a success!

C&IT



Heidi Foels

has been with metroConnections since 2013. Since being hired as a Production Coordinator in the Production Service division, Foels has been promoted and is now serving as Producer. In her role, she engages in several facets of the business and manages clients, executes corporate events and performs detailed project management. Foels graduated from St. Cloud State University in Minnesota with a degree in marketing. With offices in Minnesota and Florida, metroConnections translates business goals and key messages into informative and memorable events that engage, inspire and move attendees.

www.metroConnections.com

By Niki Jorgensen

The Occasional Need to Unplug and Unwind

Do you remember how smart-phones, text messages and tablets were supposed to make our lives easier?

In many ways they have. We can now respond to emails from 40,000 feet. Instant notifications allow us to become immediately aware of an email from an important company leader or client. And thanks to mobile technology, many of us can do almost 100 percent of our jobs while out of the office, even while on summer vacation.

However, there's an obvious downside to all of this convenience. Years ago, we had well-defined borders between our work time and our personal time. Now that line has been blurred — if not erased entirely.

A few months ago, French lawmakers decided to launch a counteroffensive to halt the encroachment of work on employees' personal lives. They did so by approving measures that would force some companies to establish official hours when workers are not supposed to receive or send office emails.

It is difficult to believe such a measure could pass in the United States. And for many occupations, including travel and meeting planning, the thought of unplugging daily may sound like a career-defining decision. However, France's recent effort to improve work-life balance serves as a good reminder that the unwillingness to disconnect, decompress and de-stress will likely become a major health issue if we fail to react.

Here is the reality: Employees who fail to disconnect from work often pay a large price. Long periods of stress



can cause sleeplessness. Work-related anxiety also has been linked to heart disease and obesity. Over a period of months and years, work-induced stress often leads to burnout, low morale and depression.

Following are a few tips to achieve a better work-life balance and help reduce stress while maintaining a reputation as a dedicated employee.

Create a Healthy Culture Through Communication

An unhealthy form of peer pressure can develop within companies, which may lead employees to believe that they are required to respond to work items at all hours of the day. Worse yet, a culture of shame sometimes emerges when employees are slow to respond to after-hours communications. Companies

of the job. However, everyone needs a break. Consider an on-call system so that each employee has time away from the electronic leash of cell phones or pagers.

Managers also should recognize they can be part of the problem. When the boss sends out an after-hours email or text message, many employees assume it requires immediate action, even when the topic is not inherently urgent. This is why setting some ground rules is crucial. Managers should inform employees that unless otherwise noted, after-hours emails do not require immediate attention.

Software and Other Solutions

One way to reduce the flow of after-hours emails is through purchasing or encouraging the use of software solutions. Many

“Employees who fail to **disconnect** from work often **pay** a large **price**.”

should communicate to staff that encroaching on colleagues' personal lives is not the badge of a hard worker. Businesses should consider guidelines to ensure mobile communications remain effective by proactively confronting the unnecessary use of immediate communication in non-immediate situations.

The Critical Role of Managers

Individual employees are certainly responsible for their own behavior. However, managers also bear some responsibility in combating stress and burnout. Company supervisors should make sure all employees know what is expected of them when it comes to responding to after-hours calls, texts and emails. In some companies, being available for emergencies is simply part

email programs allow employees and managers to delay the delivery of non-urgent items until business hours resume. Another idea is to develop a system — such as common email subject line phrases — that clearly expresses the level of importance of after-hours communications. These types of solutions help remove any confusion about the urgency of an email sent during off-hours.

It is unlikely that cell phones and instant notifications will go away anytime soon. It also is fair to say that workplace email legislation will not likely receive wide support across the United States. This is why companies must act now to recognize and respond to the need for employees to unplug and unwind. We should all make disconnecting a daily habit.

C&IT



Niki Jorgensen

is a manager of HR Services for Insperity — a trusted advisor to America's best businesses for more than 30 years. The company provides an array of human resources and business solutions designed to help improve business performance. Insperity Business Performance Advisors offer one of the most comprehensive suite of products and services available in the marketplace. Insperity delivers administrative relief, better benefits, reduced liabilities and a systematic way to improve productivity through its premier Workforce Optimization solution and much more. Insperity operates in 60 offices throughout the United States. www.insperity.com



Group yoga on standup paddleboards at Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort.

Healthy Rewards

Meeting Planners Add Wellness Activities to Revitalize Mind, Body, Spirit — and ROI

By Patrick Simms



Scott McKibben
President
McKibben & Associates
Carmel, CA

"I think that HR has increasingly made it clear that productivity is increased and turnover minimized by healthy employees, and that if you can manifest a bit of that at your meetings and events, you will see the benefits."

Business considerations aside, maintaining a healthy work force is a worthy goal in and of itself. But it so happens that there are significant business benefits to a company wellness initiative, from increasing productivity, to reducing employee health insurance costs, to creating an attractive corporate culture. And while the initiative is usually pursued at company offices (e.g., the corporate gym), there is no reason why it can't be extended to offsite meetings. That's where the meeting planner fits into the picture. Helping to integrate wellness activities and nutrition into an event's busy agenda is among the more recent additions to a planner's skillset. Meeting owners are often calling for it.

A global health care company pro-

vides one example of prioritizing wellness. "Wellness has definitely become a more important part of our sales training meeting than it was in the past," notes Jodi Bradley, meeting manager, U.S. meeting services, Maritz Travel and contractor providing services to the health care client. "The leaders of the group strongly feel that adding the wellness component to the meeting really strengthens attendees' ability to learn and concentrate, as well as allowing them to feel really good about themselves, which in turn helps their mind, body and spirit."

Striving for Success

The natural temptation from a business perspective is to fill the day with

sessions, but that approach can ultimately deplete mind, body and spirit. ROI may be better served by allotting some time to revitalization. Accordingly, Rohde & Schwarz, a Munich, Germany-based electronics group, has infused its National Sales Meeting (NASM) with fitness activities in recent years.

"Five to six years ago, we realized that when you have meetings all day long, you lose retention and people aren't happy. They tend to compensate by overdrinking in the evenings," observes Scott McKibben of McKibben & Associates Inc., who provides event planning services to Rohde & Schwarz. "I think that HR has increasingly made it clear that productivity is increased and turnover minimized by healthy employees, and that if you can

manifest a bit of that at your meetings and events, you will see the benefits."

Rohde & Schwarz Director of Human Resources Anne Cowper is also the main project manager for NASM. She describes the company's wellness and CSR program, "Strive," as "my labor of love for the last five years." She relates, "At first there was a fair amount of skepticism, like why would I be doing this, exercising at corporate events? But it's really taken off." Gamification has helped drive Strive's popularity. Via a mobile app, the program awards points for attendees' participation in wellness activities, both nutritional and fitness oriented, and compiles a leaderboard to engender a little competition. The prizes for the winners, according to Cowper, have become less extravagant as attend-

ees have become more motivated by the health rewards themselves.

Rohde & Schwarz also sees the program as a way to express its corporate culture at the one moment during the year when its sales representatives are gathered together. "Most of our people work remotely, and it's really hard to communicate and create corporate culture on a regular basis when people are working out of their home offices or they're always at customer sites," Cowper explains. "So Strive (at NASM) is a way for us to infuse our employees with our culture, which is very collaborative and employee-centric. It's a very visual representation of what we believe to be really important. You can only do so much with emails, phone calls and Skype."

Partnering With Properties

Fortunately, hoteliers are becoming more adept at helping group clients implement wellness initiatives. Two examples are MGM Resorts and Hyatt Hotels Corp.

In 2014, MGM Grand Hotel & Casino partnered with Delos, the pioneer of Wellness Real Estate, to introduce wellness meeting experiences. Stay Well Meetings includes healthful work environment features such as air purification, circadian lighting (which imitates natural light), ergonomic seating, aromatherapy and more.

In addition, the program offers Wellness Moment Programming, which consists of a selection of short mental and physical activities designed to engage the body and mind. Examples include



The Stay Well Meetings program at MGM Grand in Las Vegas incorporates healthful work environments and food options.



Credits: MGM Resorts

brainteasers, guided meditation, “Digital Detox” (helping attendees to periodically disconnect from technology) and physical activity breaks. According to Michael Dominguez, senior vice president and chief sales officer at MGM Resorts International, MGM Resorts is looking to be able to expand Stay Well Meetings to other properties within the company’s portfolio.

In June, Hyatt partnered with Be Well by Dr. Frank Lipman to support overall guest wellness. Starting with Park Hyatt hotels in New York, Chicago and Washington, DC, the initiative will include healthful refreshments at arrival, wellness-oriented guest room amenities (e.g., yoga mats), additional fitness offerings, expanded healthful menu options and nutritious to-go meals. Guest retreats centered on nutrition, fitness and mindfulness also are being designed.

But a hotel does not need to have a specific wellness program to be a capable partner in assisting a group to fulfill its wellness goals. This past August, Martiz’s health care client successfully partnered with the Hilton Orlando to coordinate wellness activities for the 850 attendees of its six-day sales meeting. “We worked with the (Hilton’s) spa and a local DMC to assist in picking certain classes and setting these activities up for us,” says Bradley. “The hotel was very involved in helping us achieve our goals.”

At the Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii, outdoor fitness activities are a natural fit with the property’s surroundings. “We’re very lucky at the Hilton

to have Duke Kahanamoku beach, rated one of the top beaches in the world, as well as our own lagoon right here on property,” notes Mike Murray, CMM, CMP, CASE, senior V.P. and director of events, Waikiki Beach Activities. “Rather than offering a spa day or providing a rental car, I’m seeing an increase of groups taking full advantage of onsite offerings, from sunrise yoga to a mini Iron Man competition. There’s something for everyone.”

Indeed, most hotels and resorts have the resources for fitness activities beyond the hotel gym — something more distinctive and memorable. “At every destination and resort we go to, we try to incorporate whatever local elements we can (into wellness program),” says McKibben. For instance, “We were at Disneyland last year, and we had dance classes in the morning. We actually had choreographers come in before the park opened.”

At the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, Rohde & Schwarz had available Well & Being, a luxury spa concept featuring fully customized wellness experiences including fitness, nutrition, integrative medicine, mind-body therapies and advanced skincare. Well & Being is currently available at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas and Red Rock Casino, Resort and Spa. Specific services include sleep programming with a So Sound Acoustic Resonance Room, DIY aromatherapy blending bar with recommendations from an in-house “alchemist,” and customized “spa’arty’s” for groups.

For outdoor fitness, Rohde & Schwarz was able to utilize a recently opened field at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, which offers 21 unique outdoor function areas. “It was really cool to see 95 percent participation in our group fitness events, so when we look at resorts now, we look at their physical attributes as it relates to morning fitness activities,” says McKibben. “We worked with the Fairmont team to create our Strive Fitness Fresh Air Festival, which we strategically placed about midway through the meeting.”

Nutritious F&B

The MGM Grand’s Stay Well Meetings also includes menu options approved by nutritionists at Cleveland Clinic Wellness and designated by the clinic’s “Go! Healthy” seal. Such options are increasingly receiving planners’ seals of approval as well.

“We do everything that we can to do away with food that is not heart healthy,” remarks Cecilia Daddio, CMP, senior manager, events and incentives at Richardson, Texas-based Lennox Industries Inc. “You always have those people that like to go to a sales conference, and it’s a mini vacation so they do want that hamburger and beefsteak. We don’t deny that, but more often than not we’re doing the salad, beans, etc. I think hotels are very open

to (healthful cuisine), even down to the meeting breaks: No longer is it cookies and donuts; it’s more your protein shakes, protein bars, yogurt, etc.”

Bradley found the culinary team at the Hilton Orlando more than willing to “see our vision come to life,” she says. “All the foods we chose were served in small plates and were fresh and healthy but also tasty. In addition, we had the food cooked to serve so it was guaranteed to be fresh.” For even more personalization, “we had the chef on our broadcast each morning to do a ‘Chef’s Corner,’ where he spoke about the food they were going to get for the day. Attendees really enjoyed that added touch.”

Getting attendees enthused about healthful cuisine isn’t always easy. Rohde & Schwarz’s sales meeting at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess took a humorous approach to that end. McKibben designed what was called a “Fear Factor Buffet,”

which featured “intimidating” health items such as kale salad, quinoa and eggplant. Attendees could gain Strive points by eating from the buffet. The theme was “overcoming your fear of healthy food,” Cowper explains. “Scott had these billboards making foods to look like scary monsters.” McKibben adds, “We work with resorts and their chefs in developing these special buffets, and they really get excited and challenged.”

Fitness

For most attendees, getting in a workout around meetings at the hotel is nothing new, whether that’s a gym session, a swim or morning jog. But today’s emphasis on wellness has led to a variety of far less mundane fitness activities and, increasingly, group fitness events such as 5K and 10K races. These have the added benefit of promoting teambuilding. “Teambuilding is always part of it,”

says Daddio. For example, “when we partner with a DMC, we’ll do beach Olympics, tag football, etc. It’s becoming expected from our guests.”

When offering a variety of fitness options, it’s important to cater to the spectrum of fitness levels and interests. “Some activities we offer, including surfing in the ocean and SUP (standup paddleboard) yoga in the lagoon, you need athletic ability for,” Murray notes. “Our mini Iron Man competition can be customized, but normally consists of a run, bike and swim, which should only be done by those who are able, to ensure safety. For those with less athletic ability or who just simply don’t prefer competition, there are offerings like sand sculpting, aqua-bikes, horseshoes, Hawaiian bowling, hula lessons and much more.”

Murray draws special attention to canoeing, “a big historic sport in Hawaii” and an example of representing the local



Photo by Mary Knopp/Randall Photography, courtesy Rohde & Schwarz



An important component of the Rohde & Schwarz National Sales Meeting is the Strive Fitness Fresh Air Festival in which participants compete in activities such as this boat race and cliff jump.





Cecilia Daddio, CMP
Senior Manager, Events & Incentives
Lennox Industries
Richardson, TX

"Teambuilding is always part of it. For example, when we partner with a DMC, we'll do beach Olympics, tag football, etc. It's becoming expected from our guests."

culture through a wellness activity. "Hilton Hawaiian Village offers canoe races for groups of up to 30 people. They are led by licensed canoe captains (there are only eight licensed canoe captains on the whole island of Oahu) and it builds camaraderie and trust. The groups meet on Duke Kahanamoku Beach where the races start with storytelling about Duke and his achievements (Kahanamoku was a Hawaiian competition swimmer who popularized surfing as a sport). After going over basic techniques and a 10-minute lesson in the water, groups split into teams and race," Murray explains.

The Strive Fresh Air Fitness Festival also includes teambuilding events, such as a "tough mudder" featuring eight to 10 teams navigating obstacles that mimic the game show "Wipeout." Rohde & Schwarz also offers events that are tied to the meeting destination. At next year's NASM at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio Riverwalk, for example, "I think in lieu of



Lennox Industries employees take part in a beach olympics competition at The Ritz-Carlton, Fort Lauderdale.
Credit: Jim Woods Photography, Dallas, TX

the Fitness Festival we'll probably do another 5K/10K along the Riverwalk and may end up somewhere along Riverwalk to have a fitness expo," says Cowper.

Whether or not the meeting schedule can accommodate an elaborate group fitness event, the time between breakouts shouldn't be overlooked as an opportunity for exercise. "We put a fun spin on it," says Daddio. "When they're rotating in a breakout session, we have them do jumping jacks down the hall to get their heart rate up, as they've been sitting for 45 minutes. We've also done skateboarding, where someone has to hold on to the other and run them down to the break area. It's like back in grade school when you have recess; it re-stimulates your mind. Part of their curriculum is that if they want to get to that mid-morning break and have that coffee, this is what they have to do to get there. And we'll have something right there at the hotel for them to do."

Weather permitting, Lennox also is holding more outdoor meetings, she adds, where the fresh air and natural light contribute to a lucid mindset. Indeed, there's no reason that a casual brainstorming session among a small group can't be held while walking hotel grounds, for example. And at cocktail receptions, the company is incorporating fitness in creative ways. Participants will be tasked with finding their "partner" who has a matching symbol on his or her name badge, and the symbol

might indicate they have to do 10 jumping jacks. Here, fitness is given a surprising role as an icebreaker.

Balancing Priorities

Several components of wellness do not consume time from a meeting's schedule, such as healthful F&B, utilizing facilities with wellness features (e.g., air purification), and the brief fitness activities reserved for breaks.

More elaborate group fitness programs, however, do require a significant time commitment, and oftentimes added expense. But it's these kinds of events that really showcase a company's commitment to employee wellness, and ultimately build the most enthusiasm about fitness.

Allotting time for these programs, and how much time exactly, is thus something worthy of consideration for any major offsite meeting. "Obviously our focus is the training aspect, so we make sure there's the time available for classes, and then we build the Strive activities around it," says Cowper. She estimates that about 70 percent of the time at NASM is devoted to meetings, 15 percent to Strive (including the Fitness Festival and Strive Anytime Fitness, which includes all individual fitness activities), and 15 percent to meal functions and networking. This "balancing act" is not unlike time management for everyday life, when wellness is among the priorities.

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Technology



The first task when playing the Go Game is to name your team and take a team selfie.

Credits: The Go Game



Another Go Game challenge: How many cookies can you stack on your forehead?



This team ultimatum stipulates that you use fingers only as characters to reenact a movie scene through your phone.

How Tech Is Evolving to Increase Meeting Engagement, Motivation and Connections

By John Buchanan



As technology has taken an ever bigger role in the execution of meetings, the time-honored notion of the wow factor as a key ingredient in a successful meeting has evolved. Today, it's not just about creating something that is memorable. It's also about understanding how meetings themselves have evolved — and what matters most.

"From my perspective, when you talk about the wow factor, you're really talking about how much you can engage attendees," says Bellingham, Washington-based meeting industry technology

guru Corbin Ball, CMP, CSP, DES, MS. "You're talking about how much you can get them excited and involved in or emotionally committed to the meeting."

Ryan Rutan, director of developer evangelism and partner innovation at Jive Software in Palo Alto, California, agrees with Ball's assessment. But he also notes the essential challenge planners face today.

"When you talk about using technology to create the wow factor at meetings, the first thing you need to talk about is how high the bar is now," Rutan says. "Over the last three or four years, the ways

that technology affects people in their personal lives has leaked into the enterprise. And that has created a very high bar in terms of getting people's attention and getting them excited. The expectations that people have in their personal lives have carried over into their business lives. And when you look at the things that are out there now, in their personal lives, that creates a very high expectation in terms of how technology is used to impact them at meetings."

Rutan also points out that the very definition of the wow factor at meetings has shifted from creat-



Ryan Rutan
Director
Jive Software
Palo Alto, CA

// **The real definition of the wow factor is the after-event impression attendees have of the experience. ...It's the takeaway from the meeting and how you connect attendees with that.** //

ing a unique form of excitement or novelty to addressing the individual identities of attendees in a way that powerfully engages and motivates them. "Today, attendees expect you to know all about them and also to give them what they need to know and tell them why they need to know it," he says. "In turn, you have to take all of that information and then provide it to people in the best possible way, in a way that motivates them and gets them excited about the meeting. But it also has to be informative and strategic. That's the challenge now."

From the perspective of most meeting attendees, the wow factor is now determined by how well the execution of the meeting delivers "what they really need and want," Rutan says. "And to accomplish that, you have to show that you know a lot about your attendees, in terms of what they want and need. Then along with that, you have to show people you know the kinds of people they want to connect with at the meeting and help them do that. So that's a big part of it now, too. You have to do quite a few different things that are all related to each other to really deliver the wow factor."

As a result, Rutan says, the expectations of how technology will excite and inform at meetings is growing and evolving, which means a moving target that is sometimes hard to hit. And success can only truly be judged after the fact, he says. "To me, the real definition of the wow factor is the after-event impression attendees have of the experience they had at the meeting. In other words, it's the takeaway from the meeting and how you connect attendees with that. It's no longer about, 'Wow, we had a great band at our opening night party.' Or, 'Wow, we got some really cool trinkets.' Today, for most attendees, I think the wow factor is based on the utility of the meeting and how easy it was to attain the knowledge and information that was needed to make the meeting successful for people."

The Holy Grail of the Moment: Gamification

Although the use of technology to engage and motivate attendees is limited only by the imaginations of meeting hosts and planners, and innovation and creativity drive the process, gamification has become the gold standard when it comes to using technology to create the wow factor and also accomplish the practical goals cited by Ball and Rutan.

"Just about all of the Fortune 1000 companies are using gamification now," Ball says. "And the rea-

son is that it allows you to motivate people to do what you want them to do — and do that in a creative way that also brings fun to the meeting with prizes and recognition. The important thing about it is to set the right goals in terms of what you want people to do. But when it's done well, it certainly delivers the wow factor. And it does that by satisfying people's desires for things like rewards, recognition and status."

For the last three years, Rutan has used mobile apps from QuickMobile as his gamification platform for Jive Software's annual user conference, known as Jive World.

"The way we use it is to show people all of the things they should know about the conference, starting before people ever get there," Rutan says. "We show them everything they need to know about our products. And in order to get them paying attention and excited, we offer cool prizes like iPads."

In order to be able to promote and drive downloading of the mobile app, they make it available a month before the conference. "We also create a blog series that promotes participation in the gamification at the event," Rutan says. "And the blog posts talk about the game, the prizes you can win, the people you can connect with, and the things you can accomplish by playing the game. And the call to action is to download the app before the conference."

Jive Software also promotes the success of the game after the event, as a way of reinforcing the perception of wow factor having been delivered in a way that is highly relevant and meaningful to attendees. Their entire focus, before and after the conference, is on the needs of their customers, Rutan says.

He adds that the fundamental reason why gamification has become such a popular tool at meetings is that it delivers very precise practical benefits. "If you do it right," he says, "gamification is all about incentivizing the behavior that you want. And part of that behavior is how attendees absorb and remember the most important information that is being presented at the meeting. That's where gamification is revolutionary. And very effective. It focuses on what's important and tells attendees why they should remember it. It also makes it easy for them."

Next Generation Innovation: the Go Game

While mobile app-based gamification has risen to ubiquity, a San Francisco company The Go Game has taken the basic concept to an entirely



new level of execution and participation by turning it into a full-blown Hollywood-style production.

The Go Game, founded in 2001 and whose clients include Google, Facebook and Uber, designs interactive adventure games that have now been deployed in 25 countries. The games can be tailored to both iPhone and Android phones.

The Go Game sends teams on a mission that takes place in a "game zone," which can be a building such as a hotel or resort, a neighborhood or an entire city. Game options include a secret agent game or a movie game. The Go Game also can be matched with virtually any kind of group activity, such as a team-based dance competition.

The underlying technology platform creates and directs the onsite logistics of the game, which in turn can be built around virtually any kind of objective. A large group also can be broken down into smaller groups, so that for example, if it's a secret agent game, different teams can have different missions that are unique to each group.

In turn, the real time physical results of the games are captured on video by "game runners" who create the "show" that results from participation in the games. That "after effect" makes the game even more memorable.

In effect, The Go Game combines a sophisticated form of interactive live action game playing with teambuilding.

Chris Soto, president of CTC Events and Productions in Fairfax, Virginia, is a devoted user of The Go Game. He has used it repeatedly for different kinds of clients, and both large and small groups. Most recently, he used it for a medical device client that hosted a major meeting in Orlando.

"The purpose of the event was to create bonding among attendees, many of whom were new to the company and who work remotely, so we

created a 'dance off' event that worked really well," Soto says. "It was a tremendous success. And the reason is that it drew different kinds of talents out of people, whether that was creativity or physical talent, and that meant that everybody — all different kinds of people that all made different kinds of contributions — played a role in the success of their team. And all of that got recorded on video so people would remember the experience."

The reason The Go Game works so well, Soto says, is that it gets attendees out of their comfort zones. "And by doing that, it gets them to interact and network," he says. "The bonds that come from doing all the exciting and fun stuff

the games involve just makes it a fantastic networking or teambuilding tool. It works every time. It really unites people in a very unique way. Clients rave about it and say it helps them do the best meetings they've ever had. And most important, they usually say they've never had as much fun or gotten as much positive feedback on a team-building exercise."

As a planner, Soto also notes how much he enjoys working behind the scenes with The Go Game's staff to create and manage events. In other words, the company creates a wow factor for him, as well.

"They are always a joy to work with, and they always know what a client expects or wants," he says. At the participant level, the support you get from the company also means you get a lot of attention, so I know they are going to do a great job of kicking it off and making sure it works. And that means combining technology with creativity and an understanding of why it works so well for groups. And then all of that comes together in the production itself, in the way they stage the whole thing, they way the game is run on location. They just do an amazing job. And they're very good at adapting it to each group individually, which is another reason why it works so well for so many different kinds of groups."

Soto says he cannot recommend The Go Game highly enough to planners seeking a tech-based wow factor experience for their attendees. "If you're looking for a team bonding experience that breaks down barriers and delivers an amazing experience for meeting attendees by combining technology with creativity, Go Game is a fantastic tool," he says. "I always do my best to sell my clients on it. I tell them if they want a powerful and innovative teambuilding experience, The Go



Chris Soto
President
CTC Events and Productions
Fairfax, VA

// **If you're looking for a team bonding experience that...delivers an amazing experience by combining technology with creativity, Go Game is a fantastic tool.** //

Game is the way to go. I say that because every single time I've used it for one of my clients, it has been a home run."

Other Horizons

Although gamification and highly creative options such as The Go Game get most of the attention these days, Ball points out that traditional forms of meeting technology, such as audio-visual, can be used to create the wow factor. And nothing, he says, is more directly related to the success of a meeting than the important presentations made in its major sessions.

One recent example he cites is the screen used at PCMA's last "Convening Leaders" conference. "It was something like 45 feet high and 140 feet wide — in HD," Ball says. "So that's an example of the fact you can use your audio-visual presentation to create the wow factor if you're willing to do something like that. Then you can talk about things like lighting and audio and the other elements that can make AV truly spectacular now, thanks to the newest technologies. So for me, that's a very good example of using technology to create the wow factor in a very organic way."

Virtually all companies use AV at their meetings. And no one would dispute its value in engaging attendees. Yet a relatively small minority of companies go the extra mile to make it truly exceptional — and memorable — like PCMA did.

"The ability to do exciting AV has been around for quite a while," Ball says. "But because of the advances in things like super high-definition video projectors and audio and lighting, it's just amazing what can be done now if you want that kind of quality. And the cost has come down, so you're seeing that level of quality now at more and more major meetings, especially for organizations like PCMA and MPI. But that means the technology is available for any company that wants to do it at that level of quality. And the presentations you're making at your meeting are the most important thing you're going to be doing. So that's where you need the wow factor."

As for the foreseeable future and what comes next, Rutan is intrigued by and interested in augmented reality. "We're looking at that now, just to try it out," he says. His colleague, Iain Goodridge, has proposed using the technology to make sessions more interactive by offering new ways to present, and prompt interaction with, information. And by definition, Rutan says, the dramatically evolving technology delivers a big dose of wow factor.

Ball says augmented and virtual reality will soon begin to assume highly innovative roles in



Meeting tech experts say it won't be long before meeting and event participants find themselves in a holodeck like this one from "Star Trek."

the meeting industry. "Both of them are things that companies like Facebook, Google, Samsung and Microsoft are paying a lot of attention to now," he says. "They're making big investments in the technology. They have invested billions of dollars. And we're starting to see those investments start to come to fruition now with things like augmented reality. When those new tools start to really come out, they'll become the closest approximation ever to the holodeck from "Star Trek." And that means wow factor and new ways to engage people. The potential for using those kinds of technology is almost unlimited. And it's very cool."

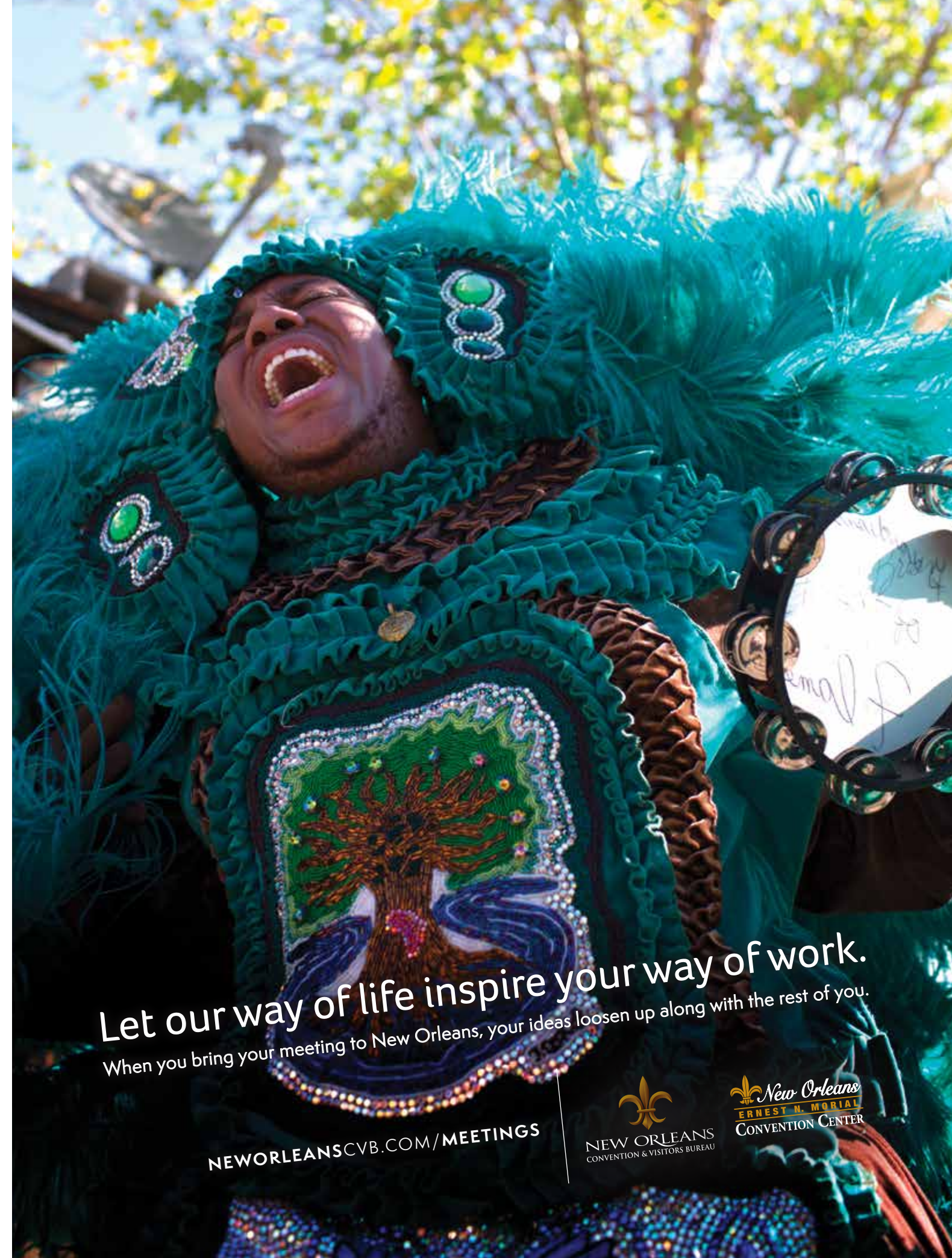
In the meantime, wearable technology such as Google Glass, second-screen technology and beacon technology are beginning to emerge as genuine options for the generation of wow factor.

"There are just so many new ideas bubbling up now," he says. "And there are new ways to use mobile technology at meetings. Or to improve learning. And all of those things, if they're used well, will create the wow factor. But to me, no matter what the technology is, it's about engagement. If attendees are engaged and motivated and involved, that's really where the wow comes from." **C&IT**



Corbin Ball, CMP, CSP
Speaker, Consultant and
Writer
Bellingham, WA

// **The presentations you're making at your meeting are the most important thing you're going to be doing. So that's where you need the wow factor.** //



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What International Convention Bureaus Want U.S. Planners to Know

International meetings are increasingly important as global companies are on the rise, whether that's U.S. corporations with outposts and employees in multiple countries or those with clients across the globe. And as the ante is continually upped for incentive programs, planners frequently turn to foreign destinations to deliver extraordinary experiences.

Whatever the goal, when planning meetings beyond U.S. borders, it's best to get advice from tourism offices, convention bureaus and DMCs in order to ensure meeting success. Here's what some of the top international experts have to say.

EUROPE

Switzerland

Caroline Pidroni, director of sales and marketing for the Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau, calls her country "Europe in a nutshell." Despite its small size,

it offers meeting planners "many options, including the opportunity to experience the language, traditions and gastronomy of four distinct cultures in one place."

Pidroni wants planners to know that Switzerland is a year-round destination with four distinct seasons and something for everyone, and that it's not as expensive as many think.

"Backed by a rock-solid economy and the Swiss franc (CHF) instead of the euro, travel and entertainment is competitively priced," she says. "For starters, breakfast

nationwide and public transportation in select cities are included in the room rate. Hard to beat, too, is the VAT, or Value Added Tax. At just 3.8 percent on accommodation and breakfast, 8 percent for most goods and services and 2.5 percent on sports and cultural events, Swiss VAT rates are the lowest in Europe. Plus, qualifying foreign companies are eligible for VAT refunds."

Pidroni adds, "Planners are often unaware that published rates in Switzerland include all service charges, taxes, tips and gratuities, and Swiss hotels don't charge resort fees. Thus, when they're comparing Switzerland to other countries, they're not really comparing 'apples with apples.'"

The Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau, says Pidroni, is a one-stop



(Background) The Gelmer funicular, the steepest cable railroad in the world with its 106 percent gradient, takes guests up to the picturesque Lake Gelmer in the Bernese Oberland region in Switzerland. (Above) Snow games on the Rotenboden above Zermatt.

It's Not Business as Usual — in a Good Way

By Christine Loomis

shop for planners. "We assist with RFPs, including researching destinations and venues, arranging site inspections and helping with presentations. Educating prospective clients on all available MICE options is another major focus. From connecting planners with local CVBs, DMCs, hotels, transportation companies and other suppliers to providing maps, brochures, giveaway ideas and access to our photo and video gallery, we're here to make your life easier — all free of charge."

Switzerland's reputation and national pride also make it a stellar meetings destination. "Reliability" is a byword for neutral, stable Switzerland, where adherence to order and efficiency is as accurate as the country's legendary timepieces," Pidroni

says. "Swiss workers pride themselves on striving for perfection. The result for visiting groups is a meetings experience that's worry-free."

Switzerland, Pidroni adds, "may be small, but mixing precise predictability with delightful surprises, this ancient land in the heart of Europe offers a powerful package for groups."

Scotland

Current exchange rates favor U.S. companies meeting in Scotland. Richard Knight, director of marketing, the Americas for VisitScotland Business Events, says, "The North American market is currently enjoying a very attractive exchange rate, which can be combined with the possibility of VAT reclaim."

In addition, Knight says, "Scotland offers meeting planners a backdrop of beauty and history that will inspire delegates, as well as deep-seated history in many



The Royal Yacht Britannia, former royal yacht of Queen Elizabeth II, is now a major tourist attraction and event venue permanently docked in Edinburgh, Scotland.



Credit: © Meeting Incentive Experts

Vallarta Adventures offers offroad tours in Mexico's outback via all-terrain vehicles.

of the world's biggest industries such as pharmaceuticals, finance and life sciences." Add ease of moving around the country, friendly, hospitable service and English as the first language, and "Scotland is an ideal meeting place."

Knight also emphasizes accessibility. "Direct flights from New York and Toronto are available at only six hours and 45 minutes, and other direct flights operate regularly from Chicago, Philadelphia and Montreal." Knight also points out that traveling to Scotland is very convenient as there are "seven direct flights daily from the U.S. servicing Edinburgh and Glasgow."

Another bonus: There are no visa requirements for U.S. citizens.

And contracts should be easy. "The United States accounts for the largest international market for Scotland," Knight says. "Contracts and engagement with facilities, venues, hotels and service providers throughout Scotland are easy, with many of the larger organizations even accepting payment and contracting in U.S. dollars. Any issues or challenges that arise are easily alleviated with the assistance of the Business Events team."

The biggest challenge for U.S. planners is choosing among the many options. The most effective way to overcome this, Knight says, is to work with the VisitScotland Business Events team, which has personnel based all over Scotland, in Toronto and in London, servicing North and South American markets. "This free, impartial service is available to all planners and makes delivering programs and proposing ideas to clients easy."

As for incentives, Knight says, "Scotland punches way above its weight in this arena due to its status as the 'Home of Golf' with more than 600 golf courses, more than 125 whisky distilleries, 800-plus castles and the many unique and historic

venues located across the country that are perfect for any event."

And because of Scotland's compact size, time isn't wasted traveling between events and destinations.

Scotland delivers in terms of meeting facilities, too. "Scotland offers state-of-the-art conference centres, including the EICC, SECC and Hydro Arena, as well as facilities in Aberdeen, which are at this very moment being expanded and redeveloped with a brand new conferencing and hotel complex. There are also numerous unique venues and world-class hotels capable of hosting both large and small meetings. The world-famous Gleneagles Hotel, for instance, has a 2,000-capacity conference centre."

Whether the meeting is big or small, whether the questions relate to security and safety or whisky and golf, Knight says the VisitScotland Business Events team can help.

CENTRAL AMERICA

Mexico

Our neighbor to the south offers much for groups, including multiple flights and relatively short flight times. Amanda Nemeth, president of Meeting Incentive Experts (MIE), a destination management company, works closely with the Mexico Tourism Board and points out that, "Mexico is easily accessible, offers a large variety of hotels and excursions for every budget, and has the warmth and hospitality-driven attitude of the Mexican people."

Mexico Tourism, MIE and other organizations provide extensive help for planners. "We educate planners about the benefits selecting Mexico can bring to their companies and how to increase their ROI," Nemeth says. "With an expert DMC, they have a valued partner that unites international and regional resources to help them accomplish their meeting goals. Our local Mexican knowledge and preferred partnerships provide for innovative experiences that are custom-made while utilizing economics that make sense."

For example, Nemeth says, "There is normally no fee for meeting space contracted on-property, and there is a tax exemption for meetings equal to 16 percent." Additionally, pricing is typically

based on the U.S. dollar so there's no currency confusion.

Planners should understand how the 16 percent meetings exemption has to be quantified, how attendees have to be registered and documented, what kind of payment method is allowed and how the meeting must be set up (almost everything must be done through the meeting hotel).

Beyond economics, Nemeth points to Mexico's rich, diverse cultural experiences as a draw for attendees. She notes that one misconception about Mexico is that it's not upscale enough. While there are hotels for every budget, among them are upscale properties from well-known luxury brands.

As planners consider Mexico, Nemeth offers the following: "Clarify fact from fiction; use resources such as the local destination CVBs and the Mexico Tourism Board. Consider the value of all-inclusive properties compared to EP (European Plan) properties. And remember that some U.S. laws and regulations don't apply in Mexico."

Overall, Nemeth says, there are many reasons to bring a meeting to Mexico, including "the 0 percent VAT tax exemption, accessibility, destination variety and unsurpassed hospitality."

ASIA & THE PACIFIC

Singapore

Singapore is now even easier to reach. Singapore Airlines has expanded its U.S. operations, and in June United Airlines launched direct flights between San Francisco and Singapore.

But planners will find that it's their time after arrival in the city that makes the real difference.

Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau (SECB) wants planners to know that it's a one-stop resource. "Our key value to meeting planners is our ability to connect them to local stakeholders most relevant to them, their groups and their businesses, including government agencies, private-sector stakeholders and key contacts in their respective industries, allowing them to develop and grow their business interests in Singapore with ease. We are able to support meeting planners through financial and non-financial means. Our 'whole of government' approach allows

the SECB to work closely with our fellow government agencies, making Singapore compact not just in size but also in how we seamlessly function as a transparent, well-oiled organization to support meetings and businesses."

To that end, SECB can open doors and connect planners with like-minded communities, partners and sources of support; help planners understand and navigate Singapore's business landscape; and help facilitate behind-the-scenes tours in various industries and sectors that are not typically accessible to the public.

Moreover, SECB notes, "Doing business in Singapore is completely transparent; processes and regulations are transparent, there are no hidden costs."

Singapore also continually improves its infrastructure to support meetings and business, including providing enhanced connectivity, an extensive array of convention and exhibition facilities and diverse accommodations, notes SEBC, adding, "Singapore values efficiency, convenience and cleanliness" — positive elements for any meeting.

As for facilities, "Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre, Marina Bay Sands Expo & Convention Centre and the Singapore Expo with its MAX Atria wing are all suitable for large-scale international exhibitions and conferences," according to SEBC. "Together with Raffles City Convention Centre and Resorts World Sentosa among others, these venues offer world-class conference and meeting facilities, as well as nearby accommodations and dining."

New Zealand

New Zealand is safe, politically stable,

and English is the primary language. No visa is required, and, no, it doesn't take two days to get there. The Business Events arm of Tourism New Zealand notes that from the U.S. West Coast, New Zealand is a 12-hour, nonstop flight.

Once a group arrives, it's easy to get around New Zealand. For those who want to experience both the North and South islands, it's a quick 1½-hour flight between the two.

New Zealand is a premier incentive destination, and Tourism New Zealand offers solid assistance to incentive planners, including customized presentations and DVDs so planners can sell their vision of the trip, and itinerary suggestions tailored to groups of all sizes and tastes. "Our work to promote New Zealand as an incentive destination is delivering results, accounting for more than \$94 million (NZD) in estimated converted value last year," says Bjoern Spreitzer, Tourism New Zealand general manager Americas and Europe.

One of the country's greatest assets and biggest enticement for incentive groups is the stunning scenery (think "Lord of the Rings" films) and the array of adventures the country offers. From globally celebrated treks to plunging off the top of Auckland's Sky Tower to kayaking pristine waters and tasting acclaimed wine, there's no end of possibilities.

New Zealand offers a Conference Assistance Programme to help planners in every way. "The programme can evaluate the financial feasibility of your conference and assist with customized bid documents and strategic marketing support to enhance your bid's chances," Tourism New Zealand says.



Credit: Tourism New Zealand

From the elevated vantage point of Queenstown Hill, visitors enjoy a 360-degree view of the surrounding mountains and Lake Wakatipu in Queenstown, New Zealand.

Also available to planners is Tourism New Zealand's comprehensive image library, booklets and fact sheets, recommendations for local DMCs and tailored pre- and post-conference suggestions.

New Zealand currently offers excellent events infrastructure, but when the New Zealand International Convention Centre opens in 2019 in Auckland, it will up the ante, accommodating up to 4,000 for events and up to 3,150 for conferences.

For planners considering New Zealand, the tourism bureau recommends sourcing well in advance of program dates to ensure availability and working with a local DMC — in part to offset problems created by the time difference. "Working with a New Zealand-based DMC means your program is being worked on while you sleep, in addition to the benefit of tapping into the creativity of local providers."

Australia

It's no secret that Australia offers remarkable landscapes and marine environments, multicultural experiences, stellar teambuilding opportunities and sophisticated, engaging cities.

It's also a dream business destination for North American groups, thanks in part to Business Events Australia. Penny Lion, executive general manager events, Tourism Australia, notes that Business Events Australia has a dedicated team in North America — Paul Griffin based in Boston and Chris Ingram in Los Angeles — that can provide planners with a wealth of information and support as well as expert guidance. "In addition to this," she says, "we have a range of tools available, including images, videos and inspirational fact sheets with sample programs that really help bring the destination to life when pitching to clients. We also host qualified buyers on educational trips to Australia, so that North American planners can truly experience our incredible product for themselves."

Planners will find that organizing a conference in Australia is not markedly different than in the United States, even negotiating contracts. "Our business events industry, including hotels, will often take a tailored approach, recognizing that there's no such thing as one-size-fits-all," Lion says. "They will discuss your requirements with you to ensure your needs are met." It's also

worth noting, she adds, "We don't charge or expect gratuity, and the price you're provided includes all costs, so no 'plus-plus.'"

Anyone who has been to Australia is keenly aware of the country's powerful effect on visitors, just one asset that makes it so compelling. But for those who have not visited, Lion says there are a couple of challenges. "Our friendly people, spectacular landscapes and fresh, innovative food and wine combine to provide a truly inspirational and unique experience, and that's often a challenge to get across if people have never been to Australia. To help planners, we've created a series of short films that show Australia's effect on actual planners and their thoughts on our experiences." Planners can visit the video gallery on www.australia.com/businessesevents to access all the films, which also can be provided as download links for presentations.

Australia may seem far away, but in fact, Lion points out, the approximate 15-hour flight from Los Angeles is shorter than flights to many other popular meeting destinations in the Middle East and Asia. "It's simply a meal, two movies and a sleep away," she says.

It's not an overstatement to say that Australia has it all, whether for business conferences or incentive awards. "While we are fun-loving by nature, we take business seriously, and the aim is always to help convert business to the satisfaction of both parties," Lion says. "Our business-events industry is very easy to work with, efficient, and we have a wealth of experience in hosting events of every size and scale. Add to this Australia's world-class food and wine offering and pristine environments, and you have a winning combination for a business event."

THE MIDDLE EAST

Dubai

Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism) has a lofty goal: to make Dubai the leading destination for global travel, business and events by 2020. Issam Kazim, CEO of Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing, which is part of Dubai Tourism, makes clear why that goal is within range. "Global connectivity, great hospitality, state-of-the-art facilities and



Snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef out of Cairns, Australia.

world-class infrastructure are historically the reasons behind the city's robust business events offering. Today, Dubai is adding to these traditional values by focusing on establishing Dubai as a knowledge hub, which will be another key driver to attract more business events."

Part of United Arab Emirates (UAE), Dubai faces some challenges in marketing to U.S. planners related to cost, safety and gender equality. Easily answered is the luxury label. High-end experiences are available here, Kazim says, however, the city's offerings also include "a substantial variety of value-for-money alternatives. Everything from transport options and a growing mid-market hotel sector, to restaurants and meeting venues offer pricing that's competitive with other global hubs in Europe, Asia and North America."

As for safety, Kazim says, "The UAE is one of the safest places in the world, ranked in the top three for safety and security according to the World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitive Report 2015, with a stable government and a department of Dubai Police dedicated solely to visitors. As one of the most cosmopolitan and multicultural cities in the world, Dubai is an advocate for peace and stability, and proud to be a connecting hub between East and West."

U.S. planners may not know how much work UAE has done related to gender equality. "The constitution of the UAE stipulates that all people are equal before the law, and the government enacts both federal and local laws to preserve and maintain the dignity of every individual," Kazim says. He notes that Dubai's ruler, His

Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, "has been at the forefront of encouraging women's empowerment in the UAE. Last year, during the Government Summit in Dubai, he announced the formation of the Emirates Council for Gender Balance, conceived to boost the UAE's efforts in helping bolster women's roles as the nation continues to evolve."

Kazim says there are no marked differences in planning a meeting in Dubai versus other destinations. He recommends connecting with the Dubai Business Events team, which has staff in the United States and which attends many industry events, including IMEX America, where planners can make contact.

Few countries match Dubai for incentive enticements. "Visitors can discover the essence of the region through desert safaris, falconry and camel riding," Kazim says, "while adrenaline junkies can choose from options that include sky-diving over Palm Jumeirah, diving with sharks at Dubai Aquarium and skiing at one of the world's largest indoor snow parks."

The attractions keep coming. In August,



A desert safari experience in Dubai.

the city launched IMG Worlds of Adventure, the world's largest indoor themed destination, and Dubai Opera opened its doors. "Later this year," Kazim adds, "Dubai Parks & Resorts, built by dXb Entertainments, will open its three linked theme parks — Motiongate Dubai, bringing to life the biggest characters in Hollywood; Bollywood Parks Dubai; and Legoland Dubai, which also includes a Lego-themed waterpark."

Luxury, value, adventure, fantasy, a strategic location between Asia and Africa — Dubai delivers what planners need. "Dubai," Kazim says, "is a unique and dynamic business-event destination that prides itself on legacy creation and its inherent spirit of possibility."

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The Three R's of Meeting Metrics

ROO { Objective Investment Event

Why ROO, ROI and ROE Are Important Tools for Success

By John Buchanan

For almost as long as there have been meetings, the question of what return on their investments companies actually achieved has hung over executives and meeting planners like a stormy sky that threatens rain.

And since the discipline of strategic meetings management began to loom over the meeting industry a decade ago, those questions often have threatened severe thunderstorms, especially over the careers of planners who are under steadily increasing pressure to demonstrate the business success of their events.

To really understand the issue, says Michael Dominguez, chief sales officer at MGM Resorts International in Las Vegas, one must understand its context. In the wake of the recession circa 2008–2010, measuring the success of meetings with metrics such as ROI and ROE helped reinforce the notion that face-to-face meetings are critical to all industries and all companies. “And that’s one of the things we learned with the Meetings Mean Business coalition,” says Dominguez, who has played a key role in that initiative since its inception. “And the message that face-to-face meetings remain critical to business is another reason why success metrics are so important.”

Michael Massari, senior vice president at Las Vegas-based Caesars Entertainment, and like Dominguez a driving force in the success of Meetings Mean Business, notes that ROI and ROE “are on the radar of almost all our customers now. One of the really nice benefits of a terrible situation like the recession and turndown in the meeting industry a few years ago is that meeting sponsors and planners — and even top executives — have become thoughtful and measured in the way they think about why they have meetings, what they spend, who attends and what the benefits to the company are of those meetings. And that kind of thinking is what ROI and ROE are all about.”

Return on Objective (ROO)

Although ROI and ROE get more attention, as a practical matter, the concept of return on objective (ROO), is actually the easiest to grasp and implement. It also addresses directly the most foundational element of any meeting, particularly in the era of strategic meetings management — the purpose of the meeting.

“For me, ROO is the real starting point in trying to assess the return, in a broader sense, you are getting from your meetings and events,” Dominguez says. “And the reason I say ROO should be the starting point is that it goes directly to the reason the meeting is being held. What’s the goal of the meeting? What is going to be accomplished as a result of the meeting? Why are people attending and

ROO, ROI and ROE Defined

Ira Kerns, founder and managing director of MeetingMetrics in New York City, defines the three R’s for us.

ROO (Return on Objective)

ROO, a basic management approach that has been around for nearly 50 years, focuses on defining and achieving specific, measurable (numeric) meeting objectives and a meeting plan that addresses the needs of the key segments of meeting owners and meeting customers.

Objectives, for example, may include, “Pre-meeting promotions will increase attendance of X percentage.” Interviews, focus groups and surveys as well as anecdotal evidence may be used to determine outcomes.

ROI (Return on Investment)

ROI is a standard business KPI (key performance indicator) that is used to define the financial return from a business activity, usually a project, program or even an entire business operation in which a financial investment is made. The ROI is arrived at by adding up the associated costs, monetizing (i.e., converting into financial terms) the accumulated benefits, and subtracting the costs from the benefits to arrive at the ROI. This is expressed as a percentage of the costs. So an ROI of 100 percent would be break-even as your return would equal your costs. A more desirable ROI would be something greater than 100 percent; for example, 125 percent, which would be an ROI of 25 percent after subtracting all your costs.

ROE (Return on Event)

ROE was developed a decade ago by Kerns to measure:

- Business Results/Impacts
- Behaviors
- Abilities/Skills
- Intentions/Commitment
- Feelings/Attitudes
- Opinions/Perceptions/Beliefs
- Knowledge/Understanding

A post-meeting evaluation survey (“Benchmark”) is conducted within a week or so after the meeting. The summary report includes a comparison of pre-meeting and post-meeting benchmark question results detailing the ROE findings that explain the impact of the meeting on the attendees overall. A follow-up post-meeting survey (“Tracking”) is recommended a month or two after the meeting for tracking attendees’ post-meeting views, actual behaviors and actions, business impacts and accomplishments specifically related to the meeting objectives.

For more information, email kerns@meetingmetrics.com.

what will they get out of it? And it makes sense to use those questions as the foundation for everything else.”

Ira Kerns, founder and managing director of MeetingMetrics in New York City, explains that another aspect of the

appeal of ROO to management executives is that it is a concept that has existed in business for decades.

“ROO is a specific sort of metric that many management consultants have been using in business for many years,”



“ROE is more accessible to more people by definition, especially people who are not research specialists. They can be more comfortable with it.”

Ira Kerns
Founder, Managing Director
MeetingMetrics
New York, NY

Kerns says. “And there is nothing particularly new or different about the way it’s used in the meeting industry. The only thing it has to do is properly follow the disciplines of how you write an objective and measure the result.”

Objectives can be defined and quantified from a number of perspectives, such as educational, conceptual, motivational or behavioral. “And all of those kinds of elements can end up being placed into a specific kind of objective that relates to the meeting,” Kerns explains. “But you have to do some work to properly define an objective.”

In fact, for ROO to be a truly measurable and reliable metric, Kerns says, precise and measurable objectives must be defined and written for every desired outcome of a meeting, well in advance of the event, and then approved by the meeting owner and key stakeholders. Then, meeting content, an agenda and activities are designed to accomplish the specific objectives.”

Unfortunately, Kerns says, only a minority of companies and meeting planners satisfy those requirements. Why so few?

“Because when you’re talking about ROO, you’re talking about a very precise, almost pedagogical way of defining your objectives,” he says. “And unfortunately, that kind of expertise and discipline is not something very many meeting planners realize and understand.”

A related and important reality, he says, is that historically, very few meetings actually had a genuine objective.

“It was just a matter of, ‘We’re going to Chicago again this year for our big annual meeting.’” But, he says, in the era of SMM, precise objectives are more mandatory than ever before. And more planners need to master the skills and disciplines required to meet the increasingly rigorous demands of SMM for a clear and achievable business objective for every meeting.

Return on Investment (ROI)

Although “ROI” is the meeting metric most tossed around by a company’s executives and meeting planners, Kerns notes, it carries with it a basic challenge that immediately presents an obstacle for most companies — and especially its meeting planners.

“In order to have a financial measure, first you have something to measure — and something that can be measured,” he says. “So when it comes to ROI and meetings, usually you don’t have the ability to measure something, like sales, until one or three or six months after an event, because it’s only after the event that people start to perform in order to achieve the financial goals and objectives. Good examples of that would be a sales meeting or a meeting designed to launch a new product. You can’t start measuring ROI until after the meeting is over and people start to sell. That’s when the clock starts running. And in many cases, it might take as long as six months, or even longer, before you have results that are measurable financially.”

And faced with such an obvious re-

ality, in the case of ROI even a smaller minority of companies rightly and accurately measure it. “You’re talking about very few companies,” Kerns says, “even though all of them talk about ROI from their meetings.”

The good news is that any company that aspires to a more scientific and detailed understanding of the bottom line financial returns from its meetings can satisfy that aspiration. The tools and methodology are well-established. The practical issue, Kerns says, is doing it right — and with a real commitment.

“It’s a very demanding process to complete correctly,” he says. “And people in the meeting industry — planners, primarily — are just not trained in the disciplines you have to be good at to do it right.”

In order to do it right, at a minimum, a three- to five-day training workshop from The ROI Institute, with whom Kerns often collaborates on projects, is required. “Then, after you get the training, you have to get everyone to agree — your management and all of your stakeholders — to participate in a real ROI study,” Kerns says. “And for most companies, that is not easy to do. Most companies just move on from this month’s meeting to next month’s meeting.”

Talking the Talk, Not Walking the Walk

The expert observations Kerns make raise an obvious question. Why do so many meeting planners talk about ROI, but so few actually do it at even the minimum standard required for credibility and accuracy?

“Number one, ROI is a big buzzword,” Kerns says. “Very few people actually know what they’re talking about, but they say, ‘Oh, we should measure the ROI of our meetings.’ But most of them don’t even understand what ROI analysis actually is or what it requires. And when they do understand it, they realize that doing it right is a very rigorous process that is complex. It demands a commitment and resources. And because of all that, it’s a daunting task even if you do want to do it right. But if you do it right, it’s a science. It works. But there

are no shortcuts. There’s no easy or simple way to do it.”

What most companies who profess their commitment to determining the ROI from their meeting are actually doing, Kerns says, is just practicing corporate cheerleading that is ultimately fairly meaningless. “For example, the company will have their big sales meeting and the salespeople will come away saying, ‘Wow, we really hit it out of the park with that meeting,’” he says. “And everybody feels good about the meeting. So they think they got a good ROI from the meeting. Well, they can’t say that, because they haven’t actually proven that. It’s just a rah-rah kind of thing. And that’s the typical way that companies and meeting planners think of ROI.”

Dominguez takes a slightly different, and certainly more realistic view. He agrees with Kerns that there is now a genuinely scientific basis for measuring ROI for meetings. But he is not convinced that the findings can be as detailed and granular as Kerns and The ROI Institute suggest. “The financial success of meetings can be quantified,” Dominguez says. “But I don’t think the process is so precise that you could ever say, ‘We spent X dollars on the meeting and we got Y dollars back as a result of it.’ I think a much better methodology, in terms of calculating the ROI, is first defining what the specific objectives of the meeting were and then measuring how well those objectives were met.”

For example, he says, if the objective was to increase sales in the third quarter by 25 percent and sales went up 28 percent, it can be stated clearly that the meeting was a success and that it delivered in terms of genuine ROI.

“And that’s also why I think ROO is actually a more reliable metric than traditional ROI,” he says, partly because ROI is very hard, if not impossible, to calculate.”

Massari agrees with Dominguez that an assessment of meeting ROI, by definition, is more subjective than a mathematical calculation. “To me and the meeting customers I talk to,” he says, “the real issues involved with ROI are questions. What’s the benefit on the backend of the teamwork that was built at the

“The message that face-to-face meetings remain critical to business is another reason why success metrics are so important.”

Michael Dominguez
Chief Sales Officer
MGM Resorts International
Las Vegas, NV



meeting? What’s the benefit of the relationships that were built at the meeting? What is the business value of the education or sales tools that were presented at the meeting? Those are the typical kinds of things most companies look at when they talk about ROI or ROE.”

He does acknowledge that the companies that try to set a higher standard do try to get a more scientific measurement of real bottom-line business impact. But in reality, most companies are much more subjective in their assessments. And not all companies or industries define ROI or ROE the same way.

Return on Event (ROE)

Of the three R’s of meeting metrics, ROE is much more commonly used than ROI or ROO, Kerns says.

Why? “It’s a much less formal process than ROI or ROO,” he says. “So it’s more accessible to more people by definition, especially people who are not research specialists. For them, ROE is just something they can be more comfortable with.”

The purpose of ROE if it is done properly, Kerns explains, “is to surface and define the needs of your meeting attendees and meeting owners. Then it can be determined how effectively the meeting

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“I think that the market overall is now much healthier because there is more scrutiny. To me, that means everybody is better off.”

Michael Massari
Senior Vice President
Caesars Entertainment
Las Vegas, NV

met those needs. You can determine exactly how successful the meeting was.”

As an example, Kerns says, imagine a meeting that has eight general sessions and 24 breakouts on specific topics. And there are social events, such as receptions and banquets.

“In an ROE study,” Kerns says, “you’d want to ask two or three questions about each one of those components, including questions about each and every general session, breakout or social activity. And the questions should be built around whether or not those specific experiences had the actual impact that the meeting intended them to have. Did people learn X? Did people feel Y about the company or the new product? Did people perceive Z as a direct result of the meeting? By asking those kinds of clear, precise questions, you then can truly understand what your return on the event was. But you have to be specific in defining first what the needs are that will be the focus of the meeting, and then whether those needs were met.”

If done properly, he adds, ROE research can be used to define which things worked and which did not at a particular meeting. Those findings then empower the company to further investigate why certain initiatives failed and what can be done to improve the next meeting.

The Brave New World of Meeting Research

No veteran meeting planner with more than 10–15 years of experience

would deny that the demands by management for demonstrable results from their events has increased exponentially since the end of the recession. And the arena planners must perform in today is much more challenging than it was a decade ago.

“If you go back to 2005 or 2006, you had a whole bunch of meeting planners who just had meetings because they always did,” Massari says. “They were inviting the people they were inviting just because they always had. And the expenses were just based on what was budgeted or what was available. And that was not a healthy business model. I’m much happier today to see a much better understanding of why a meeting is happening, why the people who are going are going, and what exactly will define whether the meeting was a success or not.”

That is a relatively new and sustainable model for a dynamic and robust meeting industry, Massari says. “And even though the total meeting spend may be down from the heyday before the recession, I think that the market overall is now much healthier because there is more scrutiny,” he says. “To me, that means everybody is better off.”

Dominguez concurs with that assessment. And he points out that in the new world of meeting accountability, planners must be informed and at the center of the process from the first moment a meeting is conceived.

“The issue that has become such an important fact in the industry is that for years now, we’ve talked about the fact

that to be effective in their roles, meeting planners have to have a seat at the table,” Dominguez says. “They have to play a role in the process from the time the meeting is first being discussed and the objective is being determined. And based on that, what I hear more and more today is that planners are very much involved in the process from the beginning. And that no longer means just producing or planning the meeting. It means helping to define the goal and strategy and then figuring out how their role as the planner plays into creating the meeting. That is a tremendous step forward for the industry. And it also means we’re farther down the road in being able to measure the success of meetings because everything is now so clear to everyone, right from the start. And that has changed and improved how the entire process works.”

In the end, Dominguez says, all companies and all planners will have to be certain that they have gotten a return on their meetings that can be measured and reported.

“You have to have the ROI so you know the meeting made business sense,” he says. “You have to have ROE to know people got the message and knew why they were there and what is expected of them. And you have to have the ROO so you know the business purpose of the meeting was met. In today’s world, you need all three of them, really, to be able to say you truly had a successful meeting.”

For Massari, a central question is one of definition. Is measuring the success of meetings more science than art? Or is it the other way around?

“If I’d been asked five years ago, I’d have predicted that today we’d be seeing a lot more science and less art when it comes to creating and measuring a successful meeting,” he says. “But we’re not. And looking back, with the benefit of hindsight, it makes sense that we’re not. And that’s because the process is so subjective. And because there’s so much assumption involved. So, because of that, for the companies that really do it well, I think that determining ROI, ROE or ROO will always be more about art than science. That’s just the way it is.” **C&IT**



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Strive for Mutual Success

Arrange for 'Dummy Rooms' but Don't Be a Dummy When It Comes to Negotiating

By Maura Keller

Hotel contracts and contentious clauses. They are the classic sticky wicket. If you manage them right, your event can thrive. If not, there's a price to pay. And for many meeting planners, negotiating hotel contracts can be one of their biggest headaches. The good news? Using the right mix of your own creative negotiating power and understanding the nuances of specific contract clauses can help you manage hotel contracts well and improve your event's success ratio.

Key Issues

The hotel industry is in a constant state of flux. The pendulum swings back and forth from a buyer's market to a strong seller's market, which is where we are today. When it comes to negotiating hotel contracts, the strategic planner must be aware of trends and take advantage of education and data offered by industry associations, hotel partners and trusted advisors.

According to Sue Heley, CMP, CMM, national account manager with Experient, a Maritz Global Events Company, the most important sections of a hotel contract are those that mitigate the organization's financial risk — the cancellation, indemnification and attrition clauses.

"Watch out for liquidated damages charges that do not take into account the actual occupancy of the hotel and the actual number of rooms available for sale on the dates of the program," Heley says. "Be sure there is a detailed force majeure clause."

Force majeure allows either/both parties to cancel due to acts of God, war, terrorism, health risks, strikes, etc. that make it impractical or impossible to hold the event. This is especially important now with current world events and weather-related super storms.

As Caytie Pohlen-LaClare, owner and president of Minnetonka, Minnesota-based The LaClare Group, a third-party professional meeting planning company, explains, many event planners are focused on the cost savings including reduced room rates, lower food and beverage costs, concessions, etc.

"Those are important, but the often overlooked issues of attrition, cancellation, and force majeure are just as important and can have a greater impact on the finances of the group," she says.

As Pohlen-LaClare explains, attrition is important for event planners who are using sleeping rooms in addition to meeting space. Attrition is meant to protect the hotel if a



Caytie Pohlen-LaClare
Owner, President
The LaClare Group
Minnetonka, MN

"A clause should also be included to protect the group in the event that the host hotel or facility cancels on them and they are forced to find a new location."

group does not use as many hotel rooms as they initially anticipated.

"I suggest including verbiage that takes into account the hotel's actual occupancy rate on the nights in question. For example, if the hotel was 80 percent full, then the group should only be paying for the amount of rooms that are equal to the remaining 20 percent of unsold rooms," Pohlen-LaClare says. "Or, if the hotel is 100 percent full on any given night, then the group should not be liable for any attrition penalty on those nights because there were no empty rooms.

"Also, you can save thousands of dollars in potential attrition fees by dropping rooms before the deadline. That said, remember that if you release too many rooms, but later find that you need rooms again, you may not get them back — or they will be at a much higher rate. So consider holding onto some 'dummy rooms' for attendees who register later," she says.

According to Pohlen-LaClare, cancellation policies should match the attrition policy. If a group is allowed 15 percent attrition with no penalties, then the cancellation policy should be based on 85 percent of the anticipated revenue, not 100 percent.

"A clause should also be included to protect the group in the event that the host hotel or facility cancels on them and they are forced to find a new location for their event," Pohlen-LaClare says. "We have a client that is based in Europe and travels to the U.S. for meetings. Back in 2010, the Icelandic volcano ash cloud disrupted travel between Europe and the United States for several days, and our client's employees were unable to travel. This was a great example of how incidents that happen in other parts of the world can affect our meetings and events here — thousands of miles away."

Beware of Hidden Costs

Janeen Zook, chief executive officer and president of Las Vegas-based Tratativa Meeting & Event Solutions International, believes it's always the hidden costs that are a concern.

"The pricing that is contained within a contract does not always spell out the additional costs that may apply," Zook says. "Meeting and event planners must ask very detailed, specific and intentional questions during the sales and contract phase in order to identify and uncover costs that are not provided prior to contracting."

Zook advises planners to obtain full information on the offer, contractual terms and conditions, and the property. And it also is important to anticipate the customer's needs and to provide solutions even if the customer does not know it is yet a need or a concern.

"If a meeting and event planner does not have a relationship established equally with their customer and the property, there will be aspects of the program that are not identified early enough in the process to make sure the contract is comprehensive," Zook says. "Attrition, minimums and cancellations are all areas that must be understood and in alignment with the customer's ability to sign. Additionally,

questioning any clause or terminology that is either ambiguous, one-sided or unclear is essential."

Negotiating Know-How

Most contracts are issued by the venue (hotel, event space) and therefore are skewed to their advantage. Experts agree that the best thing planners can do is get educated on the key issues and be willing to stand up for their group or company and negotiate what is in their best interest. Almost everything in a contract is negotiable.

"It is imperative for meeting and event planners to have experience in contracts, and, if they do not, to seek and take courses accordingly," Zook says. "Otherwise, it can be very detrimental to their customer in the long run."

So how can meeting planners best negotiate hotel contracts while protect-



Sue Heley, CMP, CMM
National Account Manager
Experient
Fenton, MO

"Planners can protect their interests by providing open and transparent communication as they detail the 'must-haves' and the 'would-be-nice-to-haves' for the event."

Understanding Contract Terms and Definitions

These days, just about every structured meeting or event is facing some kind of economic challenge. From cancelled meetings to lowered spending, businesses are working hard to make today's meeting and events effective for all involved. Like any enterprise, the meetings and events industry must be willing to make changes and be fluid in their thinking — it's simply no longer business as usual.

Here's why: The meetings and event environment has

become extremely competitive, especially as businesses continue to watch their bottom line as it pertains to meeting and event spending.

In fact, many companies use the utmost creativity and innovation in meeting and event planning and contractual negotiations. That's why it's imperative planners understand some of the basic terms associated with contracts and clauses, which are available at www.nolo.com.

- **Acceptance.** The unconditional agreement to an offer. This creates the contract. Before acceptance, any offer can be withdrawn, but once accepted the contract is binding on both sides.
- **Breach of contract.** Failure by one party to a contract to uphold their part of the deal. A breach of contract will make the whole contract void and can lead to damages being awarded against the party which is in breach.
- **Conditions.** Major terms in a contract. Conditions are the basis of any contract and if one of them fails or is broken, the contract is breached.
- **Exclusion clauses.** Clauses in a contract that are intended to exclude one party from liability if a stated circumstance happens. Exclusion causes are types of exemption clauses. The courts tend to interpret them strictly and, where possible, in favor of the party that did not write them.
- **Exemption clauses.** Clauses in a contract that try to restrict the liability of the party that writes them. These are split into exclusion clauses that try to exclude liability completely for specified outcomes, and limitation clauses that try to set a maximum on the amount of damages the party may have to pay if there is a failure of some part of the contract.
- **Force majeure.** A clause that lists events considered to be outside the control of the parties and for which the parties cannot be considered to be in breach.
- **Implied terms.** Terms and clauses that are implied in a contract by law or custom and practice without actually being mentioned by any party.
- **Indemnify.** To reimburse someone for the damage that he has suffered, a statement of liability to pay compensation for a loss or for a wrong in a transaction.
- **Repudiation.** Repudiation has two meanings in contract law. The first is where a party refuses to comply with a contract and this amounts to a breach of contract. The second is where a contract was made by a minor (person under the age of 18) who then repudiates it at or shortly after the age of 18. Then the repudiation voids the contract rather than causing a breach of contract.

ing their interests? The most successful negotiations begin with the understanding that both parties are working toward each other's mutual success and shared financial risk.

"Meeting planners can protect their interests by providing open and transparent communication as they detail the 'must-haves' and the 'would-be-nice-to-haves' for the event," Heley says. "Hotel sales managers appreciate the prioritization, can work through the list, and often spend quite a bit of time selling the program to the hotel's revenue management team."

Pohlen-LaClare stresses that planners should make sure that a hotel lists the proposed meeting space in the contract.

"It is important to verify the correct dates, times and amount of space being held based on the meeting/event agenda," Pohlen-LaClare says. "We include a clause that says meeting space cannot be moved or changed without our written approval."

Pohlen-LaClare says the best advice she ever heard was to approach contract negotiation from a place of, "how can we work together to create a contract that is mutually beneficial?" There are ways for both the venue and the event planner to win, and it means both parties will have to compromise on some items.

"Before starting the negotiating process, take time to think about what the biggest issues are for you or your company, and which issues are less impor-

tant," Pohlen-LaClare says. "I encourage my team to share with the hotel our list of the key issues and clauses before the first draft of the contract is written. We also keep a 'contract checklist' that each of our planners refers to when they begin the contract negotiating process."

Heley says it's also vital to remain open-minded and flexible. "Once, while in the final stages of negotiating a contract, the hotel asked if there was any chance we would consider adjusting the arrival pattern by one day," Heley says. "If we could, they would be able to accept another large piece of business immediately following our program. After examining the hotel's offer of a reduced room rate and other important concessions, it was

decided that we could reap the benefits without any challenge to our conference or organization."

Bryan Eaves, CMP, CPSM, a partner at the Knoxville, Tennessee-based consulting firm Sourcing Business Solutions, helps companies negotiate contracts. According to Eaves, when it comes to hotel contracts for large events, it is important to balance the risks, minimize your costs and ensure a productive meeting for your client. To allocate risks fairly between the parties, the following three items should be negotiated, says Eaves.

1. Cancellation penalties. These clauses can create unnecessary high risks for your company. Penalty clauses should be fair to both parties by including verbiage that if the hotel rebooks the property during the time frame previously held for your company, no penalties should exist. "A tiered approach that increases the penalty amount for cancellation the closer that you get to



Bryan Eaves, CPA, CPSM
Partner
Sourcing Business Solutions
Knoxville, TN

"A tiered approach that increases the penalty amount for cancellation the closer to the planned event date is fair to both the hotel and the buying company."

the planned event date is fair to both the hotel and the buying company," Eaves says.

2. Headcount estimates for food and beverage. Contract language should allow the planner to lower headcount estimates for food and lower your financial risk. "For example, if you estimate your headcount for dinner at 500 people but notify the hotel at least 48 hours in advance that your headcount will actually be 350, contract language should allow you to modify headcount for F&B with only small fees, if any," Eaves says. "Language allowing the hotel to charge you for 500 people in this example without flexibility to modify the headcount estimate should be avoided."

3. Estimating the headcount for paid room nights. Many hotel contracts will specify how many paid hotel nights will be needed per day, which is needed so that the hotel can block rooms for the event. Because the contract is created so many months in advance of the actual event, trying to estimate the precise number of hotel nights needed for each night is often difficult.

Eaves says a better way to minimize risk is by estimating total spending for the event. "Your contract language could have the rate per night and number of rooms to block per night, but instead of penalties being based upon these numbers, your contract language could be based upon total spending," Eaves says. For example, language could indicate the number of rooms estimated that are needed each night and the room rate but no hotel penalties would be incurred as long as your company spends at least \$500,000 in F&B and room rate combined over the entire event time period (not per day). If you spend slightly less than the \$500,000 estimate, the hotel will generally not charge the difference if you agree to plan your next big event there.

In the End

Often, the most challenging contract negotiations result in the most successful programs, and the human relation-



Janeen Zook
CEO and President
Trattativa Meeting & Event
Solutions International
Las Vegas, NV

"Planners must ask very detailed, specific and intentional questions during the sales and contract phase to identify and uncover costs that are not provided prior to contracting."

ships that develop during the process continue long after the last attendee departs for home.

"Do your homework," Pohlen-LaClare says. "Learn as much as you can about contracts and negotiating through articles, webinars, seminars, etc. You make yourself valuable when you bring your knowledge and skills to your company, your clients and your vendor partners."

And always seek to understand and ask as many questions as is required to fully grasp what is being offered and contracted. When in doubt, double fact check.

"Haste makes waste and not anticipating the outcome of any given decision or offer can cause unraveling of a deal or put your customers at risk," Zook says. "Meeting and event planners need to be detailed, experienced and willing to learn every day."

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Meeting groups at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel are minutes from both Disney and the boardroom.

Orlando Your Way



Whether Theme Park or Business Focused, Orlando Is Your Go-To for Meetings

By Christine Loomis

Two mega theme parks dominate most people's perceptions of Orlando. And to be fair, the parks' brilliantly delivered brand of magic, princesses, wizards and adrenaline-packed adventure draws thousands of visitors to the Central Florida city every year — many of them meeting attendees.

Yet Orlando is more than the sum of its theme parks, and even the theme parks are not what they appear to be at first glance. For all the technical wizardry and enduring character-driven attractions and shows, these parks are, like Orlando itself, driven by business. Planners have choices galore, and all of them ultimately support the goals and required ROI of a meeting. You can convene at a hotel within a theme park and never even step into the park, and your meeting will be highly successful. Or you can harness the magic of the parks and use that to enhance your business objectives.

No Theme Park Needed

Noelle Novak, director of events and marketing operations

for Bentley Mills, a California-based manufacturer of premier floor coverings, chose the Hard Rock Hotel Orlando, within Universal Orlando Resort, for the company's national sales meeting in February. The meeting was a huge success, and it did not include any official theme park functions. Novak says there was no need because the hotel had everything she wanted, including the fact that everything was in walking distance once the group arrived on property.

"As soon as we stepped on to the property at the Hard Rock Hotel, we knew that this was the ideal location for our national sales meeting," she says. "The grounds were well manicured and the pool area was gorgeous. The meeting space was the perfect size for our group of 96 attendees. We had all the meeting space reserved so it was just our group, and we didn't have to share with any other programs. The sleeping rooms were a nice size and appointed with double/double beds, which is a requirement for our company as our account executives share rooms. The staff was extremely friendly dur-

ing our first site visit prior to signing the contract, which sealed the deal for Bentley!"

Moreover, the hotel staff across every department stepped up to make the event successful. "Thyag Satgoor, the conference service director, was the most professional, hardworking, positive person that I have ever worked with in my 10 years of event management," Novak says. "He never overpromised but always overdelivered, and he was available night or day when I called or emailed. The PSAV team headed by Justin Odom was top-notch as well. His attitude was always professional, and he worked with us to craft the most beautiful stage design, lighting and AV package. He would respond to emails in a timely manner and would return phone calls immediately. The banquet team was excellent as well. The food was delicious and the staff was friendly, accommodating and respectful."

Novak says she didn't need to bring much in the way of additional décor because the hotel itself is so beautifully decorated, and guest rooms were very conveniently located to the meeting space so attendees did not have to walk far.

"Partnering with the Hard Rock Hotel was truly an amazing experience from the first site visit to the completion of the program to weeks after the event," she says. "I always felt that the conference service director and AV director had my company's best interest at heart. Both gentlemen were always offering wonderful tips and recommendations to make our national sales meeting even more memorable. Many of my attendees commented on how friendly the hotel staff was from the housekeeping team to the hotel manager."

If there was a downside, it's that the February weather didn't cooperate as expected. "We had planned for two outdoor events but the weather was rainy and windy so we had to move them indoors," Novak says. "The Hard Rock Hotel staff was amazing and handled the backup contingency plan like it was meant to be. True partners!"

"I have planned hundreds of meetings and events over the last 10 years and I must say that this meeting was the most incredible event of my career."

**Noelle Novak, Director of Events & Marketing Operations
Bentley Mills, City of Industry, CA**

The group did hold one event outside the hotel, at Hard Rock Live, the brand's live music and function venue on Universal CityWalk, the dining, entertainment and retail district adjacent to the theme park and a short walk from the hotel. "We had our Sales Awards Presentation at Hard Rock Live, and it was absolutely amazing," Novak says. "The venue was iconic, and you didn't need much additional décor because



Hard Rock Cafe and Hard Rock Live at Universal CityWalk both offer small to large event venues.



the ambience was built into the structure."

In the end, Novak says, "The experience was one in a million. I have planned hundreds of meetings and events over the last 10 years, and I must say that this meeting was the most incredible event of my career because I had the pleasure to partner with the best in the business. I would recommend the Hard Rock Hotel Orlando to any planners who want to look like a true rock star."

Rising to the Occasion

Stephanie Schmullian, event coordinator with The Masters Circle Inc., a leadership-coaching and practice-building company that serves chiropractors and other wellness professionals, chose B Resort & Spa in the Disney Springs area for the fall 2015 "SuperConference" with 250 attendees. Although she agrees that staging a function inside one of the Disney theme parks sounds great, "that option is way out of our budget," she says.

Not a problem. B Resort rose to the occasion. "We loved the look, concept and service, and that it fit within our budget," Schmullian says. As for what stood out, the unequivocal answer is "Everything, from the sales manager, Charlie Dye, who made sure our every need was met, to Nora and Caesar, who helped plan and execute the fine details. The staff at this hotel is truly first class. 'No' is not in their vocabulary, which was a big change from some of the other hotels where we've had our meetings. The food, ambience, sleeping rooms and overall experience were top-notch. We also love the location — right next to Disney Springs."

Schmullian notes that other pluses include the fact that the resort is not too big so the meeting rooms are very close to the guest rooms, and the Grand Ballroom is "gorgeous," thanks to a recent refresh. "It has all of the modern bells and whistles that someone would want in a grand ballroom, including amazing lighting," she adds. "There is also space located just off the ball-



B Resort & Spa, an official Walt Disney World Resort in the Disney Springs area, offers 25,000 sf of meeting space.



Credits: B Resort & Spa

room that can be divided into smaller rooms, as well as more space located in the same area of the ballroom for smaller break-outs/meals. I would suggest looking at the hotel's website for capacity and space charts. It is very useful and very well communicated on the website."

It also helps that the chef was able to make accommodations for the group. "Due to the size of our event, the chef was kind enough to make an express buffet available for our guests in the main restaurant so that lunch could be handled quickly. Our attendees don't always participate in group meals," Schmulian says, "so we needed to know that they would be handled in a timely manner in order to be back in their seats by the time classes started again. It was perfect. The chef is very flexible and makes things happen."

The group had one function outside the hotel and that went very well, too. "We had a function at Fulton's Crab House in Disney Springs," Schmulian says. "They hosted a dinner for about 80 of our guests. They did a phenomenal job. We were very happy with the service, food and experience overall." Fulton's is currently undergoing an extensive renovation and will reopen in December as Paddlefish.

And Orlando fit the bill as well. "Orlando is family friendly and offers many attractions for all age groups," Schmulian says. "It's a 'happy town,' which is the perfect setting for our seminars." Moreover, she notes, it's a destination that "definitely incentivizes people to make a vacation out of it," which is good for attendance.

In the end, there isn't anything Schmulian would have changed. "I have to say, everything about the hotel was so great and easy," she says.



Credits: Paddlefish



After a stem-to-stern renovation, Fulton's Crab House in Disney Springs will reopen in December as Paddlefish. The steamboat-themed venue will offer private event spaces.

"I don't know if I would have done anything differently as far as the hotel is concerned; the event went as smooth as possible. If you are looking for excellent service, a modern feel and an overall great experience, look into planning your event here. And don't be shy to ask for menu modifications as the staff works with every budget and menu specification."

Leveraging the Attractions

Of course, sometimes groups want to include the theme parks in their meeting itineraries, and for good reasons. "We've utilized the Universal Orlando theme parks for our last three meetings in Orlando," says Ken Brunnbauer, manager, strategic events management, with Milwaukee-based Rockwell Automation Inc., a maker of automation and information products, that met in Orlando in February. "It adds an excellent environment for our attendees to get off-property and enjoy some fun time with their fellow attendees. They're sitting in conference rooms all day, and having the ability to get outside, see a theme park and have some fun really helps break up the week. Providing something like this for our attendees is a big part of our overall event planning."

The group of 850, which was based at Loews Royal Pacific Resort within Universal Orlando, enjoyed an evening reception that included The Wizarding World of Harry Potter Diagon Alley, The Simpsons Ride and Men in Black Alien Attack.

For many planners, including Brunnbauer, it's Orlando's mix of business and entertainment, among other things, that makes it such a good meeting destination. "Orlando provides an atmosphere that is both professional and fun. Also, our attendees come from all over the world and find it easy to get there," he says.

Loews Royal Pacific Resort is a good match for Brunnbauer needs. "We have held this event at the Royal Pacific Re-

"The staff at (B Resort) is truly first class. 'No' is not in their vocabulary, which was a big change from some of the other hotels where we've had our meetings."

Stephanie Schmulian, Event Coordinator
The Masters Circle Inc., Miami, FL

sort for several years and enjoy this location. The staff is fantastic and really helps make our planning easy. When onsite, they will go out of their way to make sure everything is going well and that our attendees get the best service possible. If any issues arise, they handle them quickly and professionally.

"It starts with our overall CSM, Caroline Wilsey," Brunnbauer notes. "Her attention to detail and willingness to work with my team is second to none. She's responsive, professional and provides excellent feedback based on her knowledge of the facility and what they can do to make things perfect for our event. Onsite, Ray Coleman ensures that all of our attendee arrivals go smoothly and our executives are taken care of. The overall banquets and setup teams are easy to work with and willing to make adjustments as needed during the course of our event."

In terms of space, the hotel's meeting and breakout venues work well for this group and the Orlando weather adds to the positive mix. "The function space at the Royal Pacific is flexible and has a great layout for an agenda that includes breakout sessions," Brunnbauer says. "Having the ability to use indoor and outdoor spaces for meals provides a nice option for our attendees to get some fresh air during breakfast or lunch. The meeting space is not a very long walk, especially when compared to other venues I've been at. The food is always good and helps to enhance the overall positive experience for our attendees. The island theme of the resort offers a fun atmosphere for our events."

Brunnbauer calls the staff "one of the best you'll find to help you plan your event," and he encourages planners to take advantage of what Universal Orlando Resort offers, including those theme-park attractions. "Make sure you leverage all of the great attractions near the Royal Pacific," he advises. "Getting your attendees out to see these venues not only is fun, but it adds that something extra to make your attendees get the most out of their time at the event."

New & Noteworthy

There's always something new in Orlando. Like the city it-

self, it's often a mix of added value for business and fanciful new attractions.

Visit Orlando, the city's CVB, has a new mobile app that allows attendees and others to explore and earn savings during their stay in Orlando. The app utilizes artificial intelligence to understand conversational language from users and offer personalized recommendations of Orlando experiences that best fit an individual's needs and preferences. It's available to download through iTunes and Google Play. "This innovative technology is like having your own personal Orlando expert 24/7," says George Aguel, Visit Orlando president and CEO. "It analyzes numerous options, extensive data and insights from destination experts and fellow travelers to create a recommended experience that is just right for (each visitor)."

The **Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel** began a \$5 million renovation of its 329,000 sf of meeting space this summer to refresh all the meeting rooms at both the Swan and Dolphin hotels. The renovation includes updated carpet and



Credits: Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace



Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace recently completed an extensive renovation of guest rooms and public spaces.

paint, along with the installation of new technology in the meeting areas. The work will occur in phases with no impact to group programs, and completion is scheduled for December. The meeting space refresh is part of the hotel's multiphase, multiyear \$140 million redesign project, which also includes transformation of all 2,267 guest rooms. In 2015, the Swan guest rooms were completed; Dolphin Hotel guest room renovations will wrap up by the end of 2017.

The former Buena Vista Palace Resort & Spa was recently reflagged as the **Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace**, located in the Disney Springs area. The 1,011-room hotel completed a major makeover featuring newly designed guest rooms, a new outside terrace and refreshed meeting spaces totaling 92,000 sf. As the hotel is an official Walt Disney World Hotel, groups are offered entertainment and event production services through



The new Loews Sapphire Falls Resort (inset) is connected to Loews Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando.



Credits: Universal Orlando Resort

the Disney Event Group as well as the Disney Institute's educational programs.

Loews Sapphire Falls Resort opened at Universal Orlando in July. This fall, the hotel adds 115,000 sf of meeting space to

"We've utilized the Universal Orlando theme parks for our last three meetings. ...Providing something like this for our attendees is a big part of our overall event planning."

Ken Brunnbauer, Mgr., Strategic Events Management
Rockwell Automation, Milwaukee, WI

Universal Orlando, including a 41,000-sf ballroom and 30,000-sf hall. The space connects by air-conditioned bridge to Loews Royal Pacific Resort, providing a combined 247,000 sf of meeting space in the Loews Meeting Complex at Universal Orlando.

Planet Hollywood Orlando has announced that chef and television personality Guy Fieri will introduce new menu items as part of the venue's transformation. It's set to reopen this fall as the Planet Hollywood Observatory at Disney Springs. Fieri will create items such as a flavor-packed burger and sandwich menu for the restaurant.

In April, **Westgate Lakes Resort & Spa**, one of Orlando's centrally located destination resorts, expanded its meeting offerings with the opening of 20,000 sf of new meeting and banquet space. The 2,300-villa, luxury condominium resort now offers a total of 36,000 sf of meeting space. The new space is located on the top floor of the new seven-story, mixed-use development, which includes award-winning restaurant concepts, a parking ga-



Credits: Westgate River Ranch & Rodeo

rage, retail shops and entertainment venues. The first phase of this \$20 million project, including the new meeting space, is now complete. The restaurant and retail spaces will be completed this year.

The 170-room **Westgate River Ranch & Rodeo**, 90 miles south of Orlando, announced the expansion of its lodging accommodations with the addition of 10 luxury teepees, offering the next evolution in "glamping." The teepees are located in an exclusive area of the resort, making it ideal for group buyouts. The introduction of the luxury teepees builds on the success of the glamping tents and facilities already on the property. Located on 1,700 lush acres in the heart of Florida's cattle country, Westgate River Ranch Resort & Rodeo marries cowboy history and lifestyle with evocative accommodations and amenities for an ideal

group retreat. The ranch features more than 8,000 sf of flexible indoor meeting and banquet space, 4,500 sf of outdoor space and an outdoor teambuilding challenge course, as well as authentic cattle drives and other cowboy-themed teambuilding activities.

New at Orlando theme parks this year were Mako, a 200-foot shark-themed roller coaster at **SeaWorld**, reputed to be the tallest, longest and fastest coaster in Orlando, and Skull Island: Reign of Kong at **Universal Orlando Resort**, marking the celebrated return of King Kong. At **Disney World**, Pandora, the Land of Avatar is slated to open in 2017, and construction began on the new 14-acre expansion for Star Wars Land.

The fact is, there's no one way to meet in Orlando. For groups that must focus 100 percent on business, Orlando delivers professionalism and an expansive array of meeting venues and amenities. For those that want to combine meeting time with entertainment-driven group or free time, Orlando delivers that, too. No wonder the city earned the top spot in Cvent's 2016 Top 50 U.S. Meeting Destinations.

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A different world lies 90 miles south of Orlando at Westgate River Ranch & Rodeo, where groups can experience "glamping" in luxury teepees.



Elizabeth M

December 12 at 9:34pm • iOS

Greetings from Orlando! Luvvvv this conference...where do I begin? Got photo bombed by a dolphin. Kicked up some sand during a private beach party at SeaWorld's Discovery Cove. Even got a little sun while networking on the lawn outside the Orange County Convention Center. Best of all...#NoSnow #ThisMeetingRocks #OrlandoMeeting



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COMMERFORD

Shaun Coleman was named sales and marketing director for Colonial Williamsburg's hospitality division. He most recently served as area director of sales and marketing at Interstate Hotels & Resorts.

The Omni Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina, has appointed Christopher Levine as director of sales. He was most recently director of sales and marketing at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina in Cambridge, Maryland.

Christine Lawson was named senior vice president of the Loews Hotels Sales Organization. She formerly served as se-

nior vice president of sales and catering for Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants.

The AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center in Austin, Texas, has named Alison Berg as director of sales and marketing. She was director of sales and marketing at The Westin Austin Downtown.

Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland, appointed Brad Mettler as director of sales and marketing. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing for the Grand Hyatt New York in New York City.

Hilton Anaheim, Anaheim, California, has named Frost Williams as senior sales

manager responsible for the Midwest market. He most recently served as convention sales development manager at Visit Milwaukee.

Sagamore Pendry Baltimore has named Jon Chocklett as the director of sales and marketing. He most recently held the position of director of marketing at the Beverly Wilshire, a Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills, California.

Kelly Commerford has joined Kona Kai Resort & Spa in San Diego, California, as director of sales and marketing. He previously served as director of sales and marketing at The Commons Hotel in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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A man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a light blue button-down shirt, is smiling and clapping his hands. He is holding a folder under his left arm. In the background, other people are blurred, suggesting a large conference or event. A large, stylized white hexagon with a double border is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

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