

Meetings
Outlook 2017
PAGE 14

When Event Planning
Meets Marketing
PAGE 10

Travel & Hospitality
Outlook 2017
PAGE 12

Exploring the
Mid-Atlantic Region
PAGE 26

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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



Entertainment by Design

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**Find the Right Strategic Fit
PAGE 20**

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for today's trends in out-of-
the-box entertainment.



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Attendees of the Natural Products Expo West welcomed the warm Southern California morning with a sun salutation during a yoga class on March 11, 2016, in the Grand Plaza in front of the Anaheim Convention Center.

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Contents

VOLUME 34 NO. 12

DECEMBER 2016

FEATURES

14 Outlook 2017

From Travel Costs to the Trump Presidency, What Planners Are Predicting for Next Year

By Patrick Simms

20 Entertainment by Design

Deliver a Personal, Interactive Experience That's the Right Fit for Your Demographics and Event Theme

By Patrick Simms

DESTINATION

26 The Mid-Atlantic Region

Diversity Is the Name of the Game

By Mark Rowh

DEPARTMENTS

4 Publisher's Message

6 News & Notes

9 Snapshots

10 Perspective When Event Planning Meets Marketing

By Kate Vasiloff

12 Perspective 2017 Travel and Hospitality Outlook

By Susan Magrino and
Allyn Magrino

34 People on the Move

34 Reader Services



Meeting pros share their predictions for 2017. **PAGE 14**



Credit: PARTNERS User Group

Entertainment by OneRepublic at a PARTNERS Conference Gala held in AT&T Stadium, home of the Dallas Cowboys. **PAGE 20**



Credit: Meet AC

The Boardwalk in Atlantic City is a favorite place for mid-Atlantic region meeting-goers to enjoy a sunny day. **PAGE 26**

Publisher's Message

Playing to Your Audience

No matter what your opinion is or whether or not you voted for him, President-elect Donald J. Trump has an enviable attribute. One that may have helped catapult him to the top office in the land. Trump the entertainer reigns supreme. He knows how to play to his audience and engage his fans and supporters. His rallies around the country, which continue to this day as part of his "USA Thank You" Tour, give him a stage to try out his material much like a comedian might



do on late-night television. When Trump connects with his audience, he drives home the message and simply repeats the winning material time after time. Event pros are always on the lookout for a celebrity, a larger-than-life personality, an amusing master showman who entertains, motivates and inspires.

What's more, the entertainment must appeal to all segments of the audience. Event pros should develop a strategic, comprehensive plan and consider the savvy advice from planners in our cover story "Entertainment by Design: Deliver a Personal, Interactive Experience That's the Right Fit for Your Demographics and Event Theme," on page 20.

For example, Brad Bronenkamp, senior director of events for Dayton, Ohio-based Teradata, suggests corporate audiences are looking for more interaction with the performers such as a "meet and greet" before and/or after a performance. He had Grammy Award winner Keith Urban in Paris for an incentive program recently and described him as "a down-to-earth, great guy. He was really interested in everybody that came in, talked to them for a few minutes about where they were from, what they liked and so on." Moreover, these kinds of memorable experiences can be used to promote the next incentive. "We want to show it off and say, 'Look what you missed,'" adds Bronenkamp.

When you can't go to Paris, try an act that's ahead of the times. Nicole Gallub, CEO of Washington, DC-based talent booking agency Pelonkey Inc., says, "People are really going more avant-garde today; they're not afraid to push the envelope. ...Performers are getting a lot more creative; they want to stand out and be different." Which brings us to one of the first groups to think outside the box. Blue Man Group, shown on our cover, fully engages audiences with innovative and interactive performances — a style they pioneered in 1991. And because Blue Man Group is performed with no spoken words, it works for all ages, languages and cultures.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

MGM National Harbor Hosts Monumental East Coast Grand Opening Festivities



(L to r) Maryland Senate President Mike Miller, Prince George's County Executive Rushern L. Baker III, MGM Resorts International Chairman and CEO Jim Murren, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, MGM National Harbor GM Bill Boasberg and MGM National Harbor President Lorenzo Creighton pose at the MGM National Harbor Grand Opening Celebration.

NATIONAL HARBOR, MD — MGM National Harbor made its historic debut December 8 during a series of official grand opening festivities. Delivering incredible views of Washington, DC's iconic monuments and unrivaled room, spa, entertainment, shopping and dining offerings, the \$1.4 billion resort introduced an experience unlike anything on the East Coast. As the sun set over the Potomac River, 5,000 guests flooded the resort to enjoy an elegant evening of surprises. A host of prominent food and beverage personalities joined attendees and mingled with guests throughout the evening. Guests were treated to Las Vegas acts by some of the city's top performers. Cirque du Soleil took over The Theater at MGM National Harbor with surprise performances from its award-winning shows.

The world-famous Jabbawockeez dazzled guests with a special pop-up performance on the casino floor. Following a high-energy employee parade led by the Redskins' cheerleaders and marching band, fan favorites Blue Man Group pumped up the crowd. www.mgmnationalharbor.com

Royal Caribbean International Opens Sailings to Cuba

MIAMI, FL — Royal Caribbean International's newly revitalized Empress of the Seas will make history for the cruise line with its first visit to Cuba during a five-night sailing departing Miami on April 19, 2017. The ship will then reposition to Tampa offering two itineraries with calls to Havana on April 30 (seven-night sailing) and May 20 (five-night sailing). Empress of the Seas will homeport in Tampa for

the 2017 summer season offering a series of four- and five-night sailings, including port calls to destinations in Cuba. While in Cuba, guests will explore Old Havana — a UNESCO World Heritage site — some of the city's most notable squares, historic neighborhoods, a local artisan market, Havana's rum museum as well as Hemingway's former residence and favorite haunts. www.royalcaribbean.com/cuba

United Sets Course to Be Best Airline for Employees, Customers and Investors

CHICAGO, IL — United Airlines presented to its investors November 15 plans for long-term earnings growth through a number of strategic initiatives across the airline. These initiatives include improving network connectivity and revenue management, broadening product segmentation and introducing additional customer enhancements. Along with maintaining disciplined cost control, this strategy is expected to generate \$4.8 billion in earnings improvement by 2020.

To further meet customers' needs and provide more options to price-sensitive travelers, the company announced the introduction of Basic Economy fares. This new offering provides customers the option of paying the lowest fares to their destinations, while still receiving the same standard economy experience, including food, beverage, Wi-Fi and personal device entertainment, with a few key differences. Customers who choose Basic Economy will be assigned seats on the day of departure, be assigned to boarding group five and be permitted only one personal carry-on item that must fit under the seat. The new offering provides the added benefit for customers and employees of simplifying the boarding process, as fewer customers will bring overhead bags on board. Complete details on Basic Economy can be found at www.united.com/basicconomy.

In addition to Basic Economy, United will continue to offer economy, Economy Plus and domestic first class, and introduced its reimagined international premium travel experience, United Polaris, on December 1. The company is evaluating a new premium economy experience for domestic and international markets. www.unitedairlines.com

Meetings Yield Healthy Return on Investment for Small Business Owners

WASHINGTON, DC — Small business owners report that in-person meetings facilitate and enhance their ability to innovate, engage and collaborate, according to a new survey released by the national coalition Meetings Mean Business (MMB). As a result, 91 percent of small business owners plan to spend as much or more on travel for meetings in 2017 as they did in 2016.

"The small business owner community is a critical contributor to our economy, and in-person meetings help this community make the most out of their investments," said Richard Harper, executive vice president at HelmsBriscoe and co-chair of Meetings Mean Business. "MMB's survey illustrates that small business owners who connect with current and potential customers face-to-face build stronger partnerships that ultimately grow their bottom line."

The survey shows that small busi-



HARPER



DOMINGUEZ

ness owners believe their most important business activities are more effective face-to-face, and they say professional development and productivity are improved by in-person meetings. Seven in 10 consider offsite meetings a high priority, and more than half consider in-person trainings and continued education classes a priority as well."

Small business owners in the technology sector place an even higher value on connecting face-to-face. Seventy-five percent of tech small business owners place a high priority on attending networking events, and 81

percent prioritize participation in industry conferences and trade shows.

"In-person meetings help organizations build connections, create business opportunities and engage with their communities," says Michael Dominguez, senior vice president and chief sales officer for MGM Resorts International and co-chair of Meetings Mean Business. "Small business owners want to know their investments are creating value and recognize that in-person meetings add that value in crucial ways that remote meetings simply cannot. Small business owners are careful about spending their dollars, so this continued investment in face-to-face meetings illustrates just how crucial they are."

It's no surprise that 85 percent of small business owners and 98 percent of tech owners say in-person meetings and face-to-face events are important to the health of their businesses.

www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com



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News & Notes

Caesars Entertainment and Rewards Network Partner to Launch Total Rewards Dining

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Entertainment and Rewards Network, the leading operator of dining rewards programs, launch Total Rewards Dining for loyalty members. By dining at more than 11,000 participating restaurants, bars and clubs nationwide, Total Rewards Dining members earn Reward Credits that are redeemable at Caesars Entertainment-owned resorts, retail outlets, restaurants and spas.

Individuals can learn more and enroll in Total Rewards Dining by visiting www.totalrewardsdining.com. For a limited time, Total Rewards Dining members will earn three Reward Credits — an increase of two points — for every dollar they spend at participating restaurants, bars and clubs. Members simply register their credit or debit cards and pay for their meals at program restaurants and instantly begin earning points. The process is simple and seamless, with no additional loyalty cards to remember.

In addition, Total Rewards Dining members who also are Total Rewards Visa cardholders have extra incentive to dine. Every dollar spent at participating restaurants will earn them five Reward Credits — up from the standard three — for an introductory period.

“Rewards Network offers something no other company can provide — rewards for dining at a nationwide network of leading restaurants,” said Bob Morse, president of hospitality for Caesars Entertainment. “We are thrilled to offer our loyalty members such unparalleled restaurant offerings through Total Rewards Dining, in addition to all the other benefits and opportunities they enjoy at our resorts every day.” www.caesars.com

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort Transforms Dolphin Resort Lobby



A rendering of the new lobby.

ORLANDO, FL — The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort’s Dolphin lobby will undergo a \$12 million redesign as the final stage of the largest makeover in the Orlando resort’s history. When finished in the fall of 2017, the new lobby will be completely transformed into a sleek contemporary space and feature new dining and beverage options.

The \$140 million project also includes the transformation of all 2,267 guest rooms, along with upgrades to the hotel’s meeting space. Other new features will include a new geometric ceiling, increased lighting, all new contemporary décor and furnishings and more than double the amount of seating. Two new food and beverage options will be incorporated into the lobby, including a bar and lounge space seating up to 150 guests.

The Dolphin Resort lobby will remain open throughout the renovation with minimal impact to resort guests. The project is currently scheduled to begin in spring 2017 for completion by fall 2017. www.swandolphin.com

Growth Predicted for Global MICE Industry in 2017

BARCELONA — The Trends Watch report by ibtm events’ annual ibtm world predicts growth for the global MICE industry in 2017, despite the turbulent geopolitical and economic environment. The 12th edition of the report, authored by Dr. Rob Davidson, managing director of MICE Knowledge, makes forecasts for the industry’s performance in 2017. Davidson said, “Given this year’s political roller coaster, with the result of the EU referendum and the U.S. election, there is a strong probability that in 2017 our industry will be once more obliged to show that it is capable of prospering in the face of new challenges, some of them as yet

unknown. We are much better placed to respond to these challenges now than at any other time in our history, as our industry is now robustly underpinned by widespread professionalism and a sound education and training system that supports the industry’s existing and future professionals.”

Pointing to a quiet optimism towards global economic performance, Davidson’s analysis predicts that cost per attendee per day, as well as group sizes will increase in almost all world regions. In the U.S., there is growing expectation that 2017 will bring a change in the balance of power from sellers to buyers. www.ibtmworld.com

Snapshots



Credit: One Happy Photographer sponsored by Eco Destination Management Services, Aruba/Curacao

SITE Global Conference — More than 300 attendees from 31 countries discussed important issues, traded best practices and took a deep dive into the culture during the SITE Global Conference in Panama. “Connecting Worlds” took place in November in the colorful and richly historic country of Panama at The Westin Playa Bonita in Panama City. For more information about 2017 events, please visit www.siteglobal.com.



By Kate Vasiloff

When Event Planning Meets Marketing

One-half (49 percent) of event planners report the marketing departments at their respective companies are always or often involved in the planning and execution of events, and an overwhelming majority find value in this type of partnership. This comes from new research from the GBTA Foundation, the education and research arm of the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), in partnership with Cvent.

The new research report explores the prevalence and types of collaboration between event planners and marketing departments in the planning and execution of company events. Where such collaboration exists, the study explores the origins, structure, benefits and best practices for this relationship. Where it does not exist, the research investigates reasons for not pursuing such a collaboration.

The study is based on 10 one-on-one, in-depth, phone interviews with individuals with large-scale event-planning responsibilities who reside and work in North America. In addition, a supplemental online survey of 157 travel buyers in

ated or the amount of educational content delivered. It is the event planner's goal to deliver an experience that satisfies all objectives, which takes careful planning and prioritization.

More than half (53 percent) of event planners feel setting objectives to support overall business goals is the most important factor to consider when planning a meeting or event. About one in five (19 percent) feel planning logistics or thinking about the ROI or event's objectives is the most important aspect. Looking beyond logistics, only six percent of event planners feel the design and content of a meeting or event is the most important part of planning, but that does not make it any less vital to the success of an event. It is possible this area is less familiar to event planners, its value is not as readily understood or reported, leading them to look beyond themselves and their department to help close this gap.

Event planners and marketers have very specialized, but very different skill sets. While event planners excel at arranging logistics and many other areas of meetings and events,

“Collaboration across departments... can help companies enhance the **success** of their meetings and events.”

North America who have some level of involvement in planning or overseeing meetings or events for their organization was fielded in February.

Wearing Many Hats

Many organizations across all industries host large-scale events or meetings requiring hours of planning and coordination. While these responsibilities can fall on the shoulders of full-time event planners within a company, more often than not, an employee who wears many hats, such as a travel manager, may take this on. Because event planning is usually not a primary responsibility, stepping into such a role can be challenging and event planners are often forced to come up with creative solutions to close skill or knowledge gaps in order to plan and execute successful events.

Meetings and events usually have a number of objectives set by multiple people or departments within an organization, such as attendee or revenue goals, the number of leads gener-

they may not be the best equipped to design email templates, registration pages and the like. Marketing team members may have a better handle on what messaging will attract attendee targets or what look and feel will support or perpetuate a company's image and brand consistency. Grabbing the attention of potential attendees and ultimately converting that interest into registered attendees is a vital part of any event's success. This is where collaboration across departments comes into play and can help companies enhance the success of their meetings and events.

Cross-Company Collaboration

Among those currently collaborating within their companies, event planning and marketing teams do so throughout the lifecycle of an event's planning, execution and debrief. When you look at the opportunities for collaboration, currently the highest level of collaboration (59 percent) is around email communication. During the planning stages of the event, mar-

keting teams and event planners frequently work together to determine the event's theme (49 percent), logo (49 percent) and color scheme (37 percent). A majority continue to work together onsite with signage (54 percent), but collaboration drops off when it comes to post-event communications (41 percent) and the event debrief (33 percent), showing opportunities to continue collaboration to determine event success.

Like any cross-company collaboration, getting to a good working relationship often comes with challenges along the way including lack of communication, control issues, budget constraints, timeline delays and lack of alignment on marketing event goals with meetings program guidelines.

Communication issues can be resolved by identifying a person from each department to be the main point of contact to avoid any confusion. Securing buy-in from company leadership and formalizing partnerships can help avoid control issues. Tracking meeting and event spend, including marketing materials, allows for greater understanding of the volume of resources used in an event and can set a company up for more

strategic budgeting in the future. Setting realistic timelines is vital to successful collaboration, and communicating the needs and expectations of the event early in the conceptualization phase of the event can maximize the use of each team's expertise, as well as secure buy-in from all parties involved. If both teams do not fully understand the purpose and goals of the event from the start, timelines and communication — as well as the overall event — will suffer.

While there is no single roadmap to successful collaboration between marketing and event planning teams, establishing clear lines of communication, demonstrating an openness to fresh ideas and accounting for time and money spent is a good place to start. By having constant alignment across SMM (Strategic Meetings Management) programs, marketing and communications teams, companies can deliver consistent messaging and maintain the integrity of their brand across all platforms. Above all, team members should respect each other for their strengths and unique talents each brings to the collaboration table.

C&IT



Kate Vasiloff

is Research Manager at the GBTA Foundation, the research and education arm of the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA). As such, Kate is responsible for developing and managing partner research studies on a variety of business travel-related topics. Prior to working for GBTA, Kate conducted public opinion polling for political, non-profit organizations. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia and is currently pursuing a master's degree in Survey Methodology from the University of Connecticut.



By Susan Magrino and Allyn Magrino

2017 Travel and Hospitality Outlook

Leading industry experts gathered in mid-November at the Travel Trends Summit to discuss 2017 trends. Held at NeueHouse Madison Square in New York City and hosted by the Magrino Agency — a lifestyle public relations agency for brands in hospitality, consumer and luxury goods, and food, wine and spirits — the inaugural Travel Trends Summit issued its forecast for 2017 trends in luxury travel and hospitality.

The summit was moderated by Susan Magrino, chairman and CEO of Magrino Agency, and Allyn Magrino, president and COO of Magrino Agency. The event brought together the industry's top leaders to discuss the factors that are shaping travel trends for the coming year, including millennial preferences, technology integration, social media and the luxury customer. The panels of experts included:

- Nikheel Advani, cofounder, COO and principal, Grace Bay Resorts
- Jack Ezon, president and partner, Ovation Travel
- Alex Glasscock, CEO and cofounder, The Ranch
- Matthew Kenney, chef and founder, Matthew Kenney Cuisine
- Peter Jon Lindberg, director of inspiration, Conrad Hotels & Resorts
- Judy Stein, co-president, Ovation Vacations
- Kat Tanita, blogger, With Love from Kat
- Charlotte Voisey, director of brand advocacy and portfolio mixologist, William Grant & Sons
- Alexandra Walterspiel, CEO and cofounder, Imprint Hospitality (management company for El San Juan Hotel)
- Brian Young, managing director, Castle Hill Inn

"This event came together in an effort to create an environment that invites influential leaders to engage in thought-provoking conversations," says Allyn Magrino. "We wanted to fill a void by sourcing input on today's trends from the experts in the industry who are actually on the front lines."

The Millennial Mindset

According to Jack Ezon, head of the global travel agency Ovation in New York City, millennials can no longer be looked upon as young travelers between the ages of 18 and 24. In fact, he says, being a millennial is a much more diverse mindset. "We define that group by their behaviors," Ezon

adds. "For the first time, we're seeing parents trying to act like kids rather than kids trying to act like their parents." He says once businesses can move beyond the misconception of age, they will find a wide demographic of travelers who share similar interests and needs.

Wi-Fi Is King

In the world of ever-evolving technology, there is one belief that holds true, according to the panelists:

"Wi-Fi and bandwidth are like hot water and plumbing," states Brian Young, managing director of the boutique Castle Hill Inn in Newport, Rhode Island. "Wi-Fi is a utility, and it's basic to the guest experience."

Beyond Wi-Fi, experts also note that simplicity is key when exploring new technologies. "If it's just technology for technology's sake it becomes a distraction," says Alexandra Walterspiel, CEO and cofounder of the hotel management firm Imprint Hospitality, with offices in Denver and Chicago. To explain further, the panelists note the rise of certain off-brand options for luxury guests. "We are reading and hearing so much about the keyless entry. In the luxury segment, I think it's a miss," Ezon explains. "You need to make your staff more efficient to connect with guests."

Young supported this sentiment, noting "remote check-in or mobile kiosks miss the basic human connection that anyone who is a traveling guest needs to have — and it's just not luxury."

Airbnb Is Here to Stay

Airbnb, the online house sharing network valued at \$30 billion, is a hot topic within the travel industry and one that is not likely to fade away. For Nikheel Advani, COO of the luxury Grace Bay Resorts in Turks & Caicos, the competition from home rentals is a challenge hoteliers must embrace.

Noting that the company has filled an obvious void in the industry, Advani stresses that businesses need to study the behavior patterns of their guests to make themselves stronger. "We need to listen to our customers, and if we cannot satisfy them, someone else will."

Food and Beverage Is Guiding Travel Plans

When choosing a destination that meets their needs, ex-

perts say food is the motivating factor. Guests are constantly researching notable restaurants, award-winning vineyards and trendsetting bars to experience during their travels.

"Food and beverage is the No. 1 priority in terms of every type of trip planned," said Judy Stein, co-president of Ovation Vacations.

There also is an interactive, culturally immersive element to the food experience. Young says restaurants are flipping the table on the "farm-to-table" trend bringing guests directly to the farm, whether it is truffle hunting in Tuscany or catching your own clams off the coast of Newport.

Peter Jon Lindberg, an award-winning travel writer who has explored culinary destinations around the world, notes there also is a return to fine dining after years of casualization. "There's a certain specialness that's coming back." This manifests equally in the storied hotel bar, which has seen a renaissance alongside the continued rise of cocktail culture. "The hotel bar is the pinnacle of our industry," says Charlotte Voisey, director of brand advocacy and portfolio mixologist for William Grant & Sons. "There is a sense of occasion about them, which inspires the new generation." The hotel mini-

The Impact of Social Media

Experts agree word of mouth is one of the strongest promotional tools with social media networks giving a voice to the consumer, while also allowing brands to connect directly with their guests

"It's a tremendous way of storytelling and sharing a brand ethos," says Kenney. "Before companies could only rely on media to tell their story."

But in the golden age of information, Lindberg stresses guests can sometimes become overwhelmed sifting through sites such as Yelp and TripAdvisor to find the best recommendations. They struggle to find sources they can trust.

"There's a part of me that misses this expert that was the conduit to your knowledge," he says. "It's mindboggling how much information we have to sort through."

In regards to negative reviews, Alex Glasscock, who co-founded The Ranch, a healthy lifestyle brand, says social media allows companies to showcase their brand's integrity in a genuine manner.

"Occasionally we have someone who writes something

"There is a megatrend with diners being more conscious of the ingredients on the menu. We now have a **responsibility to nourish** — not just feed — our guests."

— Chef Matthew Kenney

bar is another place where innovation is seen, containing a more discerning collection of offerings, since people are becoming more aware of what they are consuming.

To that end, wellness also has played a part in people's culinary decisions. Today, guests are more informed than ever about the food they eat.

"There is a megatrend with diners being more conscious of the ingredients on the menu," says chef Matthew Kenney, founder of Matthew Kenney Cuisine. "We now have a responsibility to nourish — not just feed — our guests."

that is not favorable. We address those people by being authentic, and we are consistent in how we respond to those comments."

But the industry also has had to adapt to a tech-savvy generation of travelers. Voisey notes a demand has been placed on the hospitality industry to provide products that are Instagram-ready. "It used to be favorable to have a drink consumed while it's still live — meaning seconds after it's freshly prepared — whereas now, we're tasked with making sure it can withstand a full minute of perennial Instagramming." **C&IT**



Susan and Allyn Magrino

Susan Magrino (l), chairman and CEO of Magrino Agency, and Allyn Magrino, president and COO of Magrino Agency. Magrino Agency, New York, NY, is an award-winning, pre-eminent lifestyle public relations and marketing agency with more than 20 years of experience and success. The agency specializes in public relations, marketing, and communications for luxury brands in travel, real estate, food, wine & spirits, and consumer goods. www.smapr.com



From Travel Costs to the Trump Presidency, What Planners Are Predicting for Next Year

By PATRICK SIMMS

It remains to be seen whether the incoming Trump administration will succeed in creating significantly more jobs and keeping the U.S. economy on the upswing in the coming years. But for 2017, one vertical in that economy will likely stay quite healthy: the hotel industry. According to STR and Tourism Economics projections released in September, the U.S. hotel industry next year will experience a slight decrease in occupancy (-0.3 percent to 65.2 percent) but a 3.1 percent increase in ADR to \$127.99 and a 2.8 percent increase in RevPAR to \$83.51. Flat to increased

RevPAR growth is expected in all of the Top 25 markets except Houston.

The continued strength of the hotel industry means that planners will have to contend with an ongoing seller's market. "Even though hotels are experiencing similar occupancy percentages for 2017, I think the rates are still going to go up," notes Jennifer C. Squeglia, CMP, owner of RLC Events Inc., based in Warwick, Rhode Island. "I think it will be a seller's market for quite a while. It'll swing back some time, just not terribly soon."

Squeglia reports no decrease in

budgets among her clients, and indeed there is evidence that many corporations are increasing their meeting budgets: MPI's Fall 2016 Meetings Outlook shows 57 percent of respondents predicting "favorable budget/spend," and 25 percent predicting budgets will remain flat. But the increased spend, at least in part, may well indicate a necessary allocation due to higher costs.

"Our meeting budgets have had to increase with the rising prices of F&B and sleeping rooms," observes Maggie Johnston, CMP, vice president, meetings, with Assurex Global. "I attend

numerous industry events, and I have been hearing from many other planners that investment in meetings is increasing in almost every company." Johnston says she expects the seller's market to continue past 2017. "I am now negotiating and signing contracts for 2018, and I have not seen any changes in the rising sleeping room rates or availability at the hotels. If anything, it has been more difficult to find available hotels in the price range that I need for my groups."

The challenge is not automatically removed by selecting a second-tier city, as a strong seller's market is in effect at some of those destinations as well, with Austin and Nashville being prime examples.

Contending With the Ongoing Seller's Market

On the positive side, there are well-known strategies that give planners leverage, and which will continue to be critical next year. "The more flexibility with dates you can bring to your hotel partner, the better your chances of negotiating a better deal," says Squeglia. "For example, if it's a short-term window and you're filling a hole (in the hotel's schedule), I think the planner is in a very good position." She also recommends negotiating other line items, such as discounted internet in the meeting space or suite upgrades. "That's one thing the hotel can do without losing a ton of revenue. However, the 1-per-40 comp is becoming more like 1 per 45 or 1 per 50," Squeglia adds.

Sharon L. Schenk, CMP, is the director of conventions and event management at CCA Global Partners Inc., the umbrella company for 13 different businesses, the largest being Carpet One Floor & Home. Schenk cites the approach of signing multiyear contracts with the same hotel company or property when possible to increase leverage. "That's been our practice for years, and we've been in situations where because of that relationship, we've been able to lessen the pain of attrition issues."

Increased room rates are not the

only rising costs affecting meetings. "They're increasing the F&B service charges; it used to be 14-18 percent, now they're 22-26 percent for the same level of service," Schenk notes. "Sales taxes are going up as well. It seems that whenever they build a new stadium, whether the citizens of that community want it or not, the taxes rise, and visitors and tourists bear the brunt. Depending on what city you're in, you may have three or four different taxes: convention center tax, city tax, sales tax and occupancy tax. Those creep up 1 percent or a half percent a year, and it impacts our bottom line." On the transportation side, fares are increasing, but thankfully, ground transportation is expected to remain flat due to greatly diminished fuel prices over the past few years.

Investing in Security

Due diligence calls for planners to allot more budget to crisis preparedness, particularly in view of the persistent threat of terrorism. MPI's Fall 2016 Meetings Outlook indicates that safety



Maggie Johnston, CMP
Vice President, Meetings
Assurex Global
Columbus, OH

"I attend numerous industry events, and I have been hearing from many other planners that investment in meetings is increasing in almost every company."

and security is the "top budget request for 2017," with 15 percent of respondents saying they had increased threat awareness and response preparedness. That includes elements such as improving contingency plans and enhancing safety and security training for employees. Incentive travel also has been affected by the unstable climate that the threat of terrorism has created. According to the SITE Index 2017, the

"tightening of border security and the threat of terror groups has had a significant increased negative impact on incentive travel decisions for both sellers and buyers since 2015." Specifically, "almost 8 out of 10 buyers see a negative impact of terrorism on their ability to plan and implement incentive travel programs."

Yet the "negative impact" has far from shut down the incentive travel industry. Kevin Hinton, CIS, chief excellence officer for the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE), says, "In spite of people's concerns about potential risks related to safety and security, and the threat of terrorism being so top of mind, more companies are going to be doing incentive programs next year. Corporations around the world are both planning to increase budgets and increase their eligible participants. We had 60 percent of the buyers planning to increase the eligibility, and then 49 percent are trying to increase their incentive travel budgets for 2017."

Thus, companies are pushing ahead with incentive travel programs that are coupled with an emphasis on risk and crisis management. "They're shifting some of their destination selection and looking to their corporate safety and security teams to do more contingency planning," he says. "It's made (the planner's) job more complex for sure, as the crisis management component of their job is taking more of their time."

Managing travel and lodging costs also is a "primary area of concern for incentive travel buyers," says Hinton. Fortunately, some international destinations are both more affordable and more intriguing to the well-traveled incentive qualifier. Hinton cites Panama, Costa Rica and Eastern European countries such as Croatia and Slovenia as up-and-coming destinations for incentive travel.

SMM More Valuable Than Ever

In a market with rising costs, strategic meetings management programs (SMMPs) are especially useful. They provide centralized control over a company's meetings spend, informing decisions about where to cut costs as well as which suppliers to drive volume toward, thereby gaining leverage. "One of the obvious advantages of deploying SMM is the visibility of what you're spending your travel and meetings dollars on," says Kari Wendel, SMMC, senior director, global SMM strategy and solutions, Carlson Wagonlit Travel Meetings & Events. "We're definitely seeing a more intense focus on strategies to mitigate the realities of a seller's market, and interest in SMM from clients of every size."

While it takes time and effort to bring an SMMP to full maturity, where all of a company's offices and departments are on board with the program, benefits can certainly be derived with each step in implementation. "One of the most common starting points is venue sourcing and contracting, which drives 60+ percent of the savings opportunity and starts to get you some pretty meaningful data," Wendel notes. Getting buy-in on these programs continues to be a challenge at some companies, she adds. "As a consultant I've come into companies where they've got that champion (of the SMMP) identified, but their ability to get the champion to action is still a challenge," she says. "It's about business case development and being able to speak the language of the C-suite."

CSR on the Rise

When planners merge corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities with meetings, they're speaking the language of millennials. Giving back to the community is especially important to this demographic, even in the context of an incentive program. "In our study,

seven out of 10 incentive programs include some kind of a CSR activity," says Hinton. The survey also revealed that CSR was an "essential element" of 15 percent of respondents' programs.

DMCs will continue to be key resources in identi-

"In spite of people's concerns about potential risks related to safety and security...more companies are going to be doing incentive programs next year."



Kevin Hinton, CIS
Chief Excellence Officer
SITE
Chicago, IL

fying the most meaningful CSR opportunities at a destination. "We don't want to go in and paint the same school one more time, so it's important to find those unique projects that can be at the crossroads between the company's mission and culture, and something in that des-



Kari Wendel, SMMC
Senior Director
Global SMM Strategy & Solutions
Carlson Wagonlit Travel M&E
Minnetonka, MN

ination that's particularly unique," says Hinton. "And the DMC ought to be your best partner in finding that."

Wellness as a Best Practice

Just as the well-being of the local community is important to meeting attendees, so is their own. Wellness will continue to be emphasized by the

meetings industry in 2017 and beyond, both by hoteliers and planners. On the hotel side, standout examples include MGM Resorts International and Hyatt Hotels Corp. MGM's Stay Well Meetings program includes healthy work environment features such as air purification, circadian lighting, ergonomic seating, aromatherapy and activity breaks that revitalize the body and mind. This summer, Hyatt partnered with Be Well by Dr. Frank Lipman to offer guests healthy refreshments at arrival, wellness-oriented guest room amenities, expanded healthy menu options and nutritious to-go meals.

"Attendees are so much more knowledgeable about food now with multiple TV channels dedicated to it," Squegilia observes. "They are more interested in food that's local, that hasn't been frozen, cage-free eggs, etc. Tapping into (cuisine that's) indicative of the destination is also important." According to Johnston, "During our annual wellness meeting I work with the chef at the hotel to provide healthy meals such as a salad bar and fruit smoothies. We also offer an early morning yoga session."

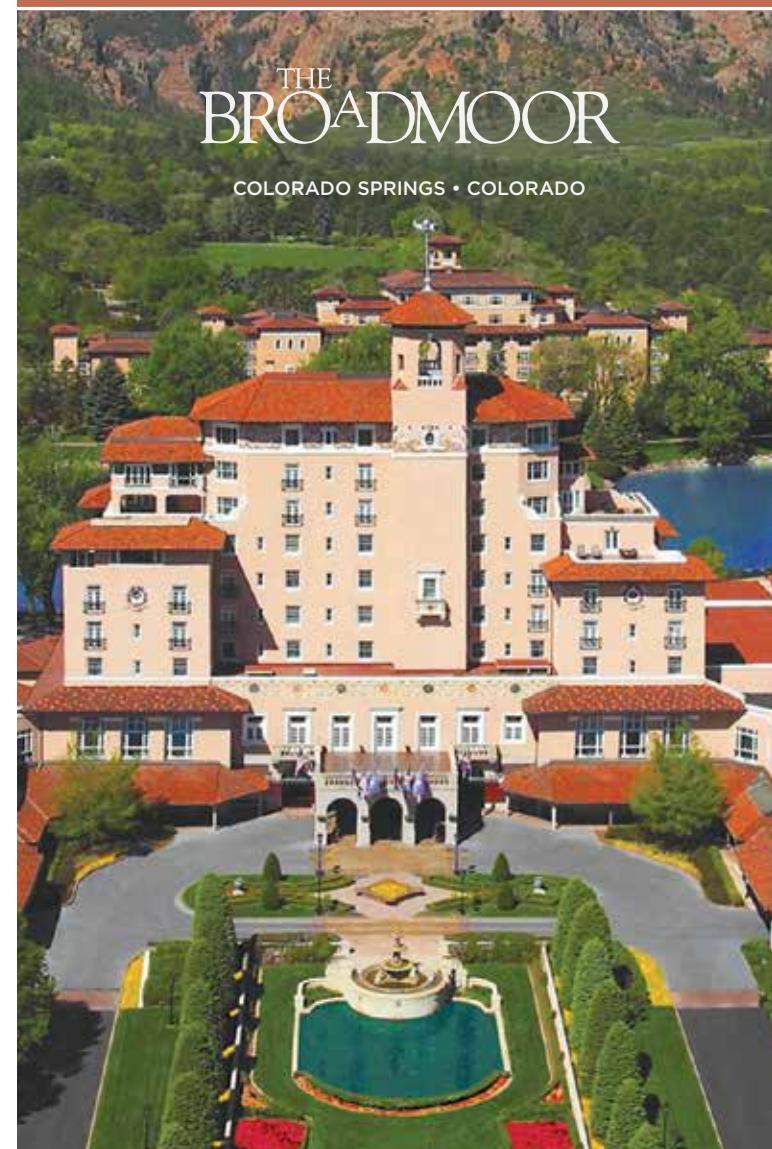
Squegilia adds, "Sometimes it's not incorporating wellness specifically, but just giving people time to take a walk or get a workout in. I'm always including information about the fitness center and have actually not picked hotels because their fitness center was too small or inadequate."

Engaging Millennials

While CSR and wellness activities are increasingly important complements to meetings, business sessions remain at the core of these events. And the quality of the presentations is what delivers ROI for the sessions. Presenters have come to understand that in order to really engage their audience, particularly the Gen Y set, they need to be as interactive as possible, and avoid "death by PowerPoint."

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"Presenters now know that they can't sit up there an hour and a half with a bunch of slides; people aren't engaged in that," says Squeglia. "I'm also finding the presentations are shorter, sometimes as short as 10 minutes. TED Talks have had a huge influence on how people are programming their agendas now: briefer and more interactive presentations with lots of video."

The interactivity is often facilitated by mobile apps. Just one example is Poll Everywhere, an app that allows audience members to reply to the presenter's questions in real time using mobile phones, Twitter or web browsers. The results are then displayed in PowerPoint. "We have been using Poll Everywhere for the past two years," says Johnston. "I have found it to enhance presentations and engage the audience."

Raising the Planner's Profile

Most of the trends cited above were not in place 10 years ago, and just as the meetings industry has evolved, so has meeting planning as a profession. Education has been one key to that progress. Schenk transitioned from an executive secretary position to meeting planner jobs, and earning her CMP in 2001 helped to distinguish her skillset. "The CMP kind of emphasizes the fact that just because you can plan your wedding or a family get-together doesn't mean you can do conferences and conventions, negotiate contracts and understand what's going on in a general session in terms of production and technology," she explains. Her participation in MPI member events was another source of "great education" and helped her grow in the profession, she says.

"I think that MPI and Meetings Mean Business and many other industry organizations have shined a light on the profession. It's a profession, not just a

job, and more executives are coming to understand that as well," Schenk says. "One of my best practices after every meeting has always been to provide my supervisor a list of the money that I saved. For 10 years



Jennifer C. Squeglia, CMP
Owner
RLC Events Inc.
Warwick, RI

"TED Talks have had a huge influence on how people are programming their agendas now: briefer and more interactive presentations with lots of video."

I worked at a financial services company, and the money that I saved in negotiations effectively paid my salary."

In contrast to the more general CMP and CMM, planner certification programs in recent times have been developed to target specific skillsets, such as MPI's Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate (HMCC) and Sustainable Meeting Professional Certificate (SMPC). That trend will likely

continue. In late 2017, SITE expects to roll

"I would hope that as a hotelier, Trump would be sensitive to how important meetings and conventions are in domestic and international relations."



Sharon L. Schenk, CMP
Director of Conventions and Event Management
CCA Global Partners Inc.
Manchester, NH

out a certification program aimed at mid-level incentive travel professionals. "We completed the job analysis earlier this year, and it gave us a vali-

dation of the 14 competencies that incentive travel professionals need to be able to become experts at," says Hinton. "As part of that we recognized there is a need for some kind of mid-level certification program, so we're in the process of developing a program aimed at the manager or director level incentive professional."

The Impact of the Trump Presidency

Corporate America has come to appreciate the professional meeting planner, but will the American economy and political climate continue to support a healthy investment in offsite meetings and group travel? While it is too early to predict with confidence the effect the new administration will have on the industry, planners can certainly express their hopes that the outcome will be positive. "What I would carefully say is that I am hopeful that Trump's business acumen will shine through and come to fruition for the economy in general, which can only help the meetings industry," says Wendel. And the fact that Trump's business is largely the hotel business suggests that he understands the economic value of meetings and events. Says Hinton, "Trump has an international hotel brand, and they have plans to be a 30-hotel brand in a couple years. They certainly are targeting the meeting and incentive sector."

Of course, perceiving meetings as a valuable source of clientele and seeing them as important to large-scale economies are separate things. But ideally, the first perspective will engender the second. "I would hope that as a hotelier, which he is, Trump would be sensitive to how important meetings and conventions are in domestic and international relations," Schenk adds. "And that he would continue to support trade and international access and just making things as easy as possible for people to continue to meet face to face."

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AN ALL-NEW PERSPECTIVE ON MEETINGS AND EVENTS

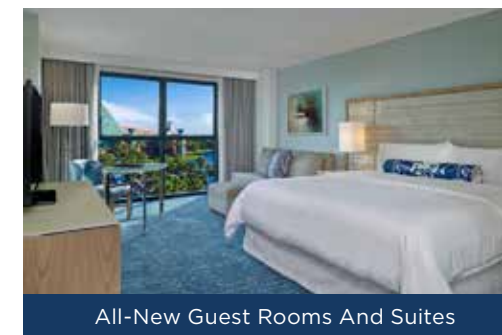


All-New Walt Disney World Dolphin Lobby Concept - Scheduled for completion in September 2017

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby will undergo a \$12 million re-design, the final stage of a \$140 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort's history. It will be completely transformed into a sleek, contemporary space featuring new food and beverage options and offer an inviting area for guests to relax or network. A recipient of the prestigious Meetings & Conventions Hall of Fame Award, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 329,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 84 meeting rooms, and 2,267 guest rooms and suites which feature the Westin Heavenly® Bed. Attendees can also relax in the luxurious Mandara Spa, indulge in one of our 17 world-class restaurants and lounges or enjoy our unique Disney Differences.



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Event Planning



Blue Man Group fully engages audiences with innovative and interactive performances — a style they pioneered in 1991.

Credit: Blue Man Group

Entertainment

by Design

Deliver a Personal, Interactive Experience That's the Right Fit for Your Demographics and Event Theme

By Patrick Simms

Many are the strategic elements to meeting planning, from site selection to budgeting to negotiation to marketing. But sourcing entertainment isn't typically thought of as among those elements: Book a generally appealing musical act to complement your reception or closing night, no strategic thinking required. However, if a planner wants every facet of the program to be engaging and achieve the highest possible overall ROI, "entertainment should not be an afterthought," as Jen Chauvin, CMP, puts it. "The success of entertainment has to come from a design perspective."

Chauvin, senior director, marketing strategy and event management with Interstate Hotels & Resorts, plans conferences for the company's hotel leaders that feature experiential atmospheres showcasing the latest trends in the meetings market. Entertainment acts are carefully selected to complement differently themed settings within the conference venue. "Even for something as simple as a reception, we're always going to have some kind of atmospheric element, so it may be a small-stage piece of entertainment, and there are some events that have a networking or coffee hour

afterward with entertainment," she explains. For instance, a recent conference in Orlando featured a high-tech sensory area complemented by an avant-garde pairing of a DJ and a live percussionist. Thought also goes into the pacing of the entertainment. "I work to crescendo the entertainment throughout the night," says Chauvin. "From a multi-stimuli perspective, you're engaging different physical senses throughout different areas of the event, so that way it's an evolving event."

A different kind of strategic approach expresses the local destination via the

entertainment, as opposed to a theme of the meeting. That's especially appropriate if the attendees have limited free time to explore the culture outside of the hotel walls. "I try to incorporate the culture of the destination in the entertainment," says Miriam Davis, partner with Los Angeles, California-based EventPro Productions, a company she founded in 2000. "So if the corporate event is the South Pacific, for example, I'll bring in a group that will sing, dance and do fire dances and get people up to do the dancing. That spans the generations; everybody likes it."

Audience Demographics

Entertainment also should be selected with audience demographics in mind, particularly the varying musical tastes of different generations. When the event includes several entertainment components, as Chauvin's programs do, "multiple generations can be represented in the entertainment," she says. But when there is one main act, it can be difficult to please a multigenerational or multicultural audience. It's often wise to select generic entertainment that will not alienate any segment. Things are different

when the demographics are more homogenous. "If I have an audience that's mostly in their 50s and 80 percent male, I'll bring in a Foreigner, Styx, Boston or some rock band from the '80s, and they're going to tear it up," says Brad Bronenkamp, senior director of events for Dayton, Ohio-based Teradata. And while country is a hot genre today, Bronenkamp has found that with attendees over 50, "many times country is not going to resonate with them unless they grew up in the South."

Bronenkamp has had success with acts such as Keith Urban and Imagine Dragons at Teradata's incentive programs, and OneRepublic, The Band Perry, Denis DeYoung (founding vocalist of Styx) and Foreigner at the annual convention. "We're always looking for the big-ticket items, someone who can possibly make a difference in our attendance," he explains.

More Interaction

But corporate audiences, especially in more recent times with the onset of the Rock and Roll Fantasy Camp, are



"We're always looking for the big-ticket items, someone who can possibly make a difference in our attendance."

Brad Bronenkamp
Senior Director of Events
Teradata
Dayton, OH

looking for more than just a passive concertgoer's experience. They want more interaction with the performers. A "meet and greet" before and/or after the performance is ideal, especially with big-name acts. "Some are really great about it," says Bronenkamp. "We had Keith Urban in Paris for our incentive program this past year, and you talk about a down-to-earth, great guy. He was really interested in everybody that came in, talked to them for a few minutes about where they were from, what they liked and so on."

The personal interaction even can happen during the performance. "At our partners conference we have sponsors for the band so they might get to do the

Interstate Hotels & Resorts' annual awards ceremony featured William Close's Earth Harp, whose strings extend throughout the performance venue, involving audiences in a physically immersive musical experience.



Credit: Interstate Hotels & Resorts



"I work to crescendo the entertainment throughout the night. From a multi-stimuli perspective, you're engaging different physical senses throughout different areas of the event, so that way it's an evolving event."

Jen Chauvin, CMP, Senior Director, Marketing Strategy & Event Management, Interstate Hotels & Resorts, Washington, DC



Credits: Interstate Hotels & Resorts



Entertainment for Interstate Hotels' events have included the Earth Harp, Orlando's University High School Band, Collision Crew Dancer Performers and The Spazmatics.

introduction. Imagine Dragons brought many people from the audience up on stage — so you're even worried about the weight on the stage," Bronenkamp quips.

Of course, some corporate groups can afford to go far beyond these experiences for select attendees. Davis relates, "For one of my recent incentive clients, a star of a very large rock group met the top 10 salespeople in the group for dinner and then they flew on his private jet with another one of the band members cross country, where they did singing on the plane, etc. And then we got to the second city on the East Coast where they had a big party with the company executives, the rest of the sales teams and invited guests, and they played at the event."

Being Part of the Act

A different kind of interaction has audience members involved in the performance itself. Circus acts, jugglers and magicians often are adept at using attendee volunteers, but the practice is less common with musicians.

One example is William Close, creator of the Earth Harp, an instrument whose strings extend throughout the performance venue. Interstate Hotels & Resorts featured Close at the company's annual awards ceremony as part of a "futuristic farm-to-table event." The theme was the future of locally sourced food, and "in that atmosphere, I needed to complement music that was divided among our courses of meals," Chauvin explains. "In the ballroom, our attendees actually sat among the Earth Harp. It was performed from the base of the stage, but the strings went back 300 feet across the room. Each of our attendees was a part of that physical entertain-

ment; the room wouldn't sound the same without each of their contributions in the vibration of that music."

Out-of-the-box acts like Close's Earth Harp Collective are becoming more common in the corporate market these days, with highly innovative acts such as Cirque du Soleil and the Blue Man Group leading the way. Nicole Gallub, CEO of Washington, DC-based talent booking agency Pelonkey Inc., has provided her services to Interstate in the past. She observes, "People are really going more avant-garde today; they're not afraid to push the envelope. There are so many different types of acts out there. Whereas a human lamp (a performer functioning as a lamp) may not have gotten any work in the past, they can now have it on their resume. Performers are getting a lot more creative; they want to stand out and be different."

Among the acts on Pelonkey's roster

are several DJs, including Gallub herself, who performs as DJ Neekola. She shares some thoughts on how to decide between a live band and a DJ: "It can be better to have that personal touch with a band playing a specific genre, such as blues, jazz or 1930s orchestra, instead of having a DJ playing that genre. Of course, nothing is more flexible than a DJ if you have a wide (audience) demographic, whereas a band has a limited amount of music they can perform. A DJ can also include video mixing with videos of the guests, corporate logo, etc. And a DJ is less expensive than a band. So depending on what the client is looking for, booking a DJ may be better than spending \$5,000 or more on a band."

Keeping the Budget in Mind

A disc jockey is just one option for planners on tighter entertainment budgets. "In the corporate entertainment

space there certainly are a lot of great resources," Chauvin says. "For instance, I've hired talented bands that within an hour can take on two completely different looks," thus delivering more bang for the buck. And sometimes the audience is aware it was the same group they saw and sometimes not. I've also worked in some markets with schools, bringing in a high school band that wants the exposure, for example. It's an opportunity to give back to that market and also make a contribution to the school."

For planners who need a good deal on a name act, there are several approaches to consider. One is to try to book an up-and-coming act while their price is still reasonable; a good booking agent can help to find these opportunities. Once the band hits the big time and starts winning awards, attendees will be pleased to have experienced the act when their star was still rising.

Many of Teradata's meeting attendees had that experience with Imagine Dragons, One Republic and the Band Perry, all of whom now command much higher prices for corporate gigs, Bronenkamp notes. "Another key — and this is where your agent comes in — is if you can find a band that's touring and is going to be in your event's immediate vicinity. You can often get a better deal than what they usually offer because they're there on a dark night anyway," he explains. "When we had the Band Perry we were in Nashville, and they just happened to be home and did it for half of what they would charge anybody else." Bronenkamp also suggests booking a band that a particular venue wants to promote "so they can do a public event one night and a private

event the next, where your production costs are minimized."

Establishing Expectations

Getting value from an entertainer isn't just about bringing the price down, of course. It's also about ensuring, to the greatest extent possible, that the act delivers on expectations. And so it's crucial to clarify those expectations before contracting, particularly with acts that are

"If I get a brand-new client that asks me to get a comedian, I'll discuss what they like and don't like and who they're bringing to the event."

Miriam Davis
Partner
EventPro Productions
Los Angeles, CA

first timers with the group. "I give a very detailed description of my audience and what my goals for the event are," says Chauvin. "Because of the way I complement the theme of the night with the entertainment, I work diligently to tell them about that and let them creatively play on the theme to see what ideas they have to contribute to it. Then I'm very specific from a production standpoint. We're very locked into timing and into exactly what they're going to look like. So I approve attire before we go on by way of pictures and playlist long before the event."

An act that is practiced in the corporate market should ask plenty of ques-

tions, in addition to being interviewed by the planner. "Definitely we ask, what are you trying to achieve with this event? What kind of atmosphere are you looking to create?" says Gallub. "Do you just want people to dance and have fun, or interact (with the performer) as well? Questions like that help us get a better understanding of what would work well for them."

Comedians are especially important to "prep" as their material may or may not be appropriate for the audience, and if it isn't, the results will be unpleasant at best. "You have to know your crowd and what they'll tolerate and what they won't tolerate," says Davis. "You have your 'clean' comedians and your off-color comedians. If I get a brand-new client that asks me to get a comedian, I'll discuss what they like and don't like and who they're bringing to the event. For example, I wouldn't have Andrew Dice Clay at a family event or a religious event, but I might at some of my 'all boys clubs.'"

When the Act Is a Mismatch

Bronenkamp prefers to steer clear of comedians in general. "I had a situation when I did events for Anheuser Busch where my people had to pull off stage a comedian that was too colorful," he relates. "However, the past few years we have used what I would call a carpet MC that is also a comedian." Such an individual is a known quantity, and certainly comedians who are a good match for a group can be found.

It also bears noting that musical acts can be off color, not just comedians. Bronenkamp had an unfortunate experience with such an act when a senior executive wanted the rock band Blink-182



A different approach to entertainment and engagement is to incorporate the culture of the destination, as in this experience in the South Pacific by EventPro.

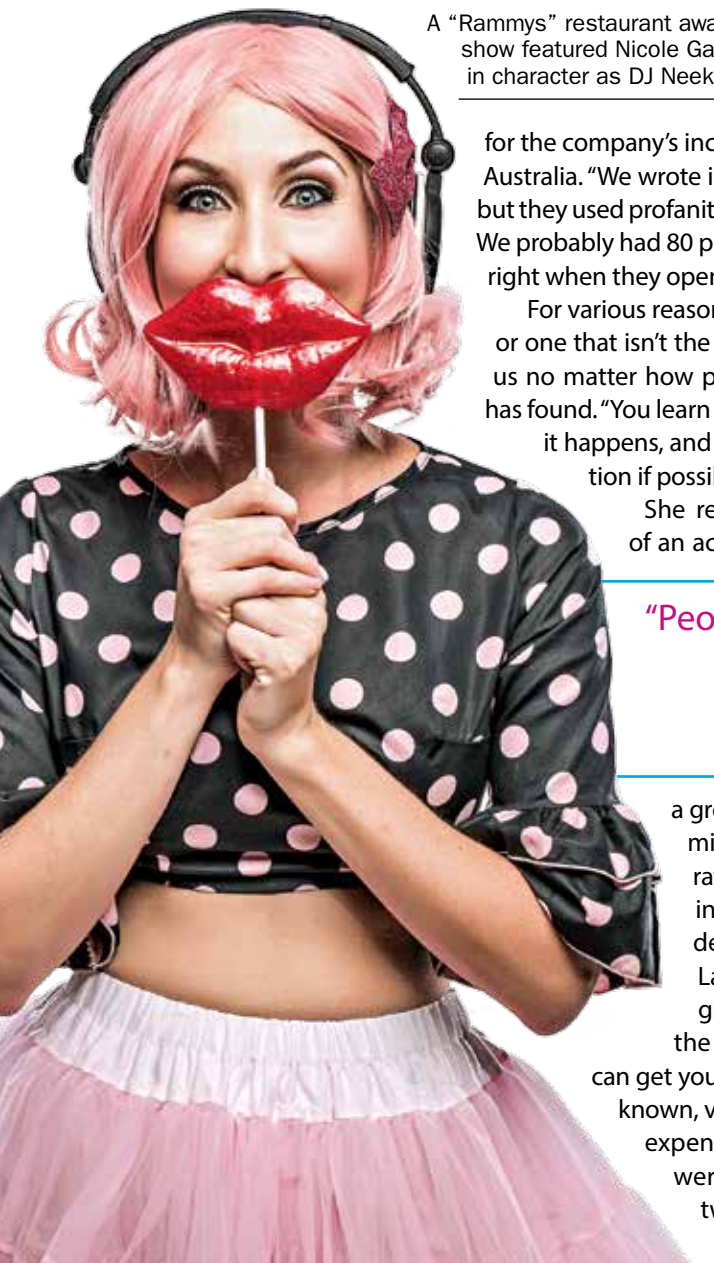
Credit: EventPro Productions



Credits: Pelonkey Photographer Alexander Morozov



A "Rammys" restaurant awards show featured Nicole Gallub in character as DJ Neekola.



for the company's incentive program in Sydney, Australia. "We wrote in the contract a 'PG event,' but they used profanity and it didn't go over well. We probably had 80 percent of the people leave right when they opened up."

For various reasons, booking the wrong act, or one that isn't the best fit, "happens to all of us no matter how professional we are," Davis has found. "You learn and you deal with it when it happens, and you make it a better situation if possible."

She relates an instructive case of an act that didn't go over with

ceremony and then we introduced the Rat Pack, beginning with Sammy Davis Jr." Davis notes that when she overheard one of the guests commenting to another, "Who's that?" she thought, "We're in trouble." Sure enough, she relates, "It did not go over well, because a lot of these young people had no idea who the performers were supposed to be."

Davis addressed the situation by first being up front with the performers. "I feel honesty is the best policy. I said, 'Guys, I'm sorry but half the kids here don't know who you are,' and they completely understood. 'The senior executives know who you are, why don't you go mingle with them in character?' So they mingled and took

pictures; they didn't stay the whole time."

She then had the DJ who was playing background music take over the entertainment, and the attendees ended up enjoying themselves. "So if you are leery of how an act will be received, have a backup in place, have a plan B," Davis advises.

With a strategic approach to booking entertainment, a planner will seldom need to resort to a plan B. Occasionally a senior executive may call for an act that does not end up being appropriate, but

"People are really going more avant-garde today; they're not afraid to push the envelope."

Nicole Gallub
CEO, Pelonkey Inc., Washington, DC

a group due to a generational mismatch. "I had one corporate client that held an event in Las Vegas and the president said, 'Miriam, we're in Las Vegas, I want a Rat Pack group.' I said, 'I will find you the best Rat Pack imitators I can get you.' This group was very well known, very hard to book and very expensive. The audience they were playing for were between the ages of 21 and 65. So we did the award

apart from such scenarios, a planner can take confidence in an entertainer who has been matched to carefully considered audience demographics and event theme, and who delivers a personalized, interactive experience. The experience may well be memorable enough to market to potential attendees with photography or video. "We want to show it off and say, 'Look what you missed,'" says Bronenkamp. "When they see an incentive trip where you have a Keith Urban and you're in Paris, that's a pretty good sell."

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The Mid-Atlantic Region

Diversity Is the Name of the Game

By Mark Rowh

Diversity is the name of the game within the mid-Atlantic region. Along with a wealth of properties well-suited for events of all sizes, the region has much to offer meeting participants. Not only does it include some of the nation's major population centers with their attendant cultural attractions, but it also features everything from popular oceanside casino resorts to historic sites going back to the Civil War, colonial times and more.

Atlantic City

Once known primarily for its gambling, Atlantic City now

offers a more diversified profile. Today it boasts an attractive combination of casino hotels and non-gaming hotels, with an inventory of well more than 15,000 rooms.

"Atlantic City, with its world-famous boardwalk, gaming, fine dining and world-class entertainment has become one of the most popular destinations of the entire mid-Atlantic region," says Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC. "There is something here for just about everyone."

For Judy Fishman, who plans conferences for owners and managers of dental laboratories in her capacity as president of LMT Communications, Atlantic City has proven itself a great

option. She recently held a highly successful conference in Atlantic City for more than 900 people with connections to the dental lab industry. Having held previous meetings in New York City, she was pleasantly surprised with the new location.

"I was really reluctant to leave New York City, but when we got there I saw how nice it was," she says. "It wasn't as much of a gambling town as it has been, and there weren't too many distractions from the conference. It's an attractive seaside location with a nice kind of ambience."

The purpose was to provide an opportunity for people to come to a trade show to see, touch and play with new dental

equipment and materials that have been introduced. Educational seminars also were offered.

Fishman says that the goals for the meeting were fully met. Events were held at the conference center, and guests stayed at the Sheraton Atlantic City Convention Center Hotel.

"Everybody at the convention center was super professional," she says. "They were attentive to our needs and diligent with follow-up — that's rare."

She adds that Meet AC contributed door prizes for attendees to add to those offered by her team. "They also provided staff with food while we were stuck in registration all day," she says. "We didn't have to close down or lose setup time to go find food."

Fishman says other details, most notably costs, also were positive.



"Atlantic City...has become one of the most popular destinations of the entire mid-Atlantic region. There is something here for...everyone."

Jim Wood, President and CEO
Meet AC, Atlantic City, NJ

"Pricing in Atlantic City is quite attractive and competitive," she says. "It makes the whole experience a win-win."

Of course, gaming is still a strong attraction for many, and properties such as the Resorts Casino Hotel offer exciting meeting options. The first Atlantic City resort to include gaming among its offerings almost 40 years ago, Resorts was updated in 2013 with the opening of Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville casino and entertainment complex.

Resorts has 64,000 sf of meeting space with 24 meeting and function rooms, and a 13,000-sf ballroom. There are two hotel towers with 942 guest rooms and suites, two theaters and an 80,000-sf casino.

Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center turned out to be the right choice for the 2016 TSNN (Trade Show News Network) Awards Gala Celebration, which attracted trade show organizers from the country's largest shows.

"The event celebrates the largest and fastest-growing trade shows in the U.S., and the attendees hold their own high-profile events and have a very discerning eye," says Rachel Wimberly, president. "Harrah's met all of our expectations of wowing this elite crowd."

She recalls that during her site visit, Harrah's reps readily understood the need for a high-end event desired for this particular audience.

"They pulled out all the stops, including an amazing four-course meal from their very talented executive chef, as well as a stunning awards production," she says. "The entire team was extremely easy to work with."

Harrah's Atlantic City offers more than 2,500 guest rooms and 63 meeting rooms ranging from 506 sf to 13,475 sf. A total of 150,000 sf of event space includes two 50,000-sf ballrooms.

Among other hotel options, the 24 meeting rooms at Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa range from 550 to 4,500 sf, with capacities ranging from 10 to 3,500. Caesar's Atlantic City has more than 1,100 guest rooms and 28,000 sf of meeting space. Its 12 meeting rooms include a 17,135-sf ballroom and 10 individual meeting rooms with 490 sf to 1,262 sf of space. At Bally's Atlantic City, some 1,200 guest rooms are complemented by 28 meeting rooms and 80,000 sf of meeting space.

New York

Things are popping as usual in New York, which attracted a record 6.1 million meeting and convention delegates in 2015, according to NYC & Company, the city's destination marketing organization. New York City not only boasts more than 110,000 hotel rooms, but the total is expected to grow to 135,000 by the end of 2019. In fact at least 17 hotels have opened in the past year, adding more than 4,100 guest rooms.



Credit: Kate Glicksberg

The skyline of Lower Manhattan, New York City.

Also in the works is an expansion of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, expected to bring an additional 1.2 million sf of event space and a 60,000-sf ballroom. The facility already has more than 100 function rooms for seminars and hospitality areas, and 65,000 sf of dedicated registration space.

Alexandra Murphy, director of site selection for Meeting Expectations in Atlanta, Georgia, coordinated a highly successful event in New York City in September. Held at the Conrad New York, the event attracted more than 300 people including customers, partners, industry analysts, media and financial analysts. The hotel is located in Manhattan's Battery Park City, close to some of the city's most well-known landmark neighborhoods. And The National September 11 Memorial & Museum is located within a 10-minute walk.

"We get wonderful feedback about New York City, specifically from our corporate events," she says. "It's the perfect city

for a high-profile meeting or a product launch." She says New York builds attendance and notes that its location is attractive due to close proximity to many first-tier cities via train or plane.

"Attendees are excited about New York," she says. "It's where life happens and great events are created." Murphy also lauds the city's CVB.

"NYC and Company has done a fantastic job marketing its city," she says. "Our contact has gone above and beyond from the RFP process to putting a fantastic site experience together to providing helpful feedback."

Recalling the September meeting, Murphy cites being in the Financial District as a plus. "It's a quieter spot in New York City but still filled with plenty of restaurants, bars, shops and attractions in the area," she says. "We also hosted offsite events at some nearby restaurants/venues that were a big hit."

She says other planners might do well to consider the New York option.

"Count on great attendance, service and food but come with a healthy budget," she says. "Be prepared to spend more than usual across the board — this is the Big Apple after all!"

One new offering is the Hyatt Centric Times Square New York, a 54-story Manhattan property previously known as Hyatt Times Square New York. The rebranded hotel has 487 guest rooms and more than 7,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space accommodating up to 200 guests.

Another large hotel, the New York Marriott Marquis, offers 124,755 sf of event space, 48 meeting rooms and more than 1,900 guest rooms. For its part, the Grand Hyatt New York has 60,000 sf of meeting space. One ballroom accommodates 1,500–2,000 guests and another handles up to 500.

The Hilton New York Midtown has 1,929 guest rooms, and the 150,000 sf of exhibit and meeting space includes a 24,000-sf ballroom and 18 small venues.

At the classic Waldorf Astoria New York, major renovations are in the offing. As a result, the hotel has announced that no large groups are being accepted for March 2017 and beyond.

Richmond

Within a day's drive of half of the U.S. population, Richmond offers an attractive combination of history and contemporary design.

"Richmond is a beautiful city," says Michele Jacobson, CMP, senior meeting planner for Richmond-based Altria Client Services, the parent company of Philip Morris USA. "There is plenty to keep people entertained and happy as they experience another region of the country."

She says the region's rich history is a plus, along with assets ranging from great restaurants and wineries to nearby Busch Gardens.

"There's also a really interesting arts scene," she adds. And there is a nice urban feel along with attractions in the nearby countryside.

The premier venue for meetings is the Greater Richmond Convention Center. The state's largest such facility, it has more than 200,000 sf of convention and ballroom space with 36

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The James River and the skyline of Richmond, Virginia, rimmed with winter holiday lights.

meeting and banquet rooms and a 258-seat lecture hall. Others include the Richmond Coliseum with 70,000 sf of space, the Richmond Raceway Complex with five buildings totaling more than 150,000 sf of space, and the Stuart C. Siegel Center at Virginia Commonwealth University with seating for up to 7,500 participants.

Several major projects are bringing enhancements to the region's attractiveness for corporate events. Completion of a \$92 million renovation of Main Street Station is slated for the summer of 2017. The historic downtown train station, origi-

"Pricing in Atlantic City is quite attractive and competitive. It makes the whole experience a win-win."

Judy Fishman, President
LMT Communications, Newton, CT



nally constructed in 1901, has been upgraded through three phases initially begun in 1991, with the newest phase the restoration of a 100,000-sf train shed. The station currently has four Amtrak trains running daily and a Megabus station, and with the new space will have additional trains, incorporation of the Virginia Capital Trail, a bus rapid transit downtown hub and state/regional welcome center.

The station also boasts several event spaces. The Main Street Station train shed has 47,000 sf of event space with a capacity of more than 2,220 attendees and outstanding views of the city. Another section featuring a balcony and grand hall offers 10,000 sf of event space with capacities of 395 for seated dinners and 740 for receptions. And an outdoor space will open in fall 2017.

New event venues on the horizon include the Institute for Contemporary Art. Planned for an October 2017 opening, it will be a 41,000-sf non-collecting museum with exhibitions, performances, film and special programs, and including as yet unspecified event space. The recently re-opened

Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia offers 12,000 sf of interactive exhibits and other space.

On the hotel front, early 2017 will see construction begin on a Marriott-branded Moxy Hotel, and The Graduate Hotel will open in summer 2017.

Four Points by Sheraton Richmond recently completed renovations of the hotel's 194 guest rooms, ballrooms and 10,000 sf of meeting space. Homewood Suites by Hilton Richmond-Chester will be renovating the décor of the lobby, which has 2,300 sf of meeting space including three rooms that open into one and can hold up to 200 people. In addition, the Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown is currently being renovated and will be reflagged as a Delta Hotel by Marriott. And the historic Jefferson Hotel is undergoing changes that include transforming what had been 262 guest rooms into 181 more spacious rooms and suites.

For a more rural Virginia experience, Primland combines the beauty of a mountaintop location in the Blue Ridge Mountains with meeting facilities accommodating up to 200 guests. The resort's lodge features a 2,000-sf ballroom, breakout rooms, a private dining room, theater and executive boardroom.

Baltimore

Baltimore offers an especially convenient location, with the downtown area only a 20-minute ride from Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport and its more than 600 flights per day to 75 cities. Amtrak's Penn Station is a major stop on the Northeast corridor service, and the city is within easy driving distance of much of the Eastern U.S.

Headlining the city's varied meeting locations is the Baltimore Convention Center, offering 300,000 sf of exhibit space, 85,000 sf of meeting space with 50 meeting rooms and a 36,672-sf ballroom. Recent upgrades include completion of an outdoor terrace and updates to Wi-Fi and audio systems.

More than 9,000 hotel rooms are located within walking distance of the convention center. What locals have dubbed the "convention campus" includes the well-known Inner Har-



Tall ships regularly visit Inner Harbor in Baltimore, Maryland.

Credit: ©2012 Ken Stanek/kenstane.com



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Credit: © Jeffrey Greenberg@aol.com

An aerial view of Virginia Beach, Virginia.

bor, which features not only hotels, but also a variety of restaurants, museums and shopping options.

A popular food destination, which premiered in 2015, is Mount Vernon Marketplace. The indoor market features 14 purveyors of local offerings.

A number of hotels are benefiting from renovations.

The Hyatt Regency Baltimore at the Inner Harbor has new escalators, furniture, flooring and lighting, along with other improvements including upgrades to the hotel's 488 guest rooms. It offers 20-plus meeting rooms totaling 35,000 sf.

The Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel, also located at the Inner Harbor, recently updated its 31,000 sf of meeting and event space, along with its harbor view restaurant, with an investment of \$3.5 million.

The former Wyndham Baltimore Mt. Vernon Hotel is expected to reopen in early 2017 under a new name, Joie de Vivre.

On the horizon is Harbor Point, a downtown waterfront site that will have 3 million sf of office, retail, residential and hotel space on 27 acres. The development will include a 156-room boutique hotel from Hilton Worldwide slated for a 2018 opening.

The 32-story Baltimore Marriott Waterfront features 750 guest rooms and 80,000 sf of event space, with the largest room handling up to 1,600 guests.

Along with 757 guest rooms, the Hilton Baltimore offers 62,000 sf of meeting space and 34 meeting rooms.

Others recently opened or opening soon include a Delta Hotel, Sagamore Pendry Baltimore, Canopy Baltimore Harbor Point, Ivy Hotel and Hotel Indigo Baltimore.

Virginia Beach

One of the East Coast's most popular destinations, Virginia Beach has more than 10,000 hotel rooms, about 2,500 of them within a three-mile radius of the Virginia Beach Convention Center. Along with its long-standing beachfront identity, Virginia Beach also offers the advantages of a diverse metropolitan region. The immediate area also includes Norfolk and Portsmouth, and Richmond is only two hours away.

The Virginia Beach Convention Center has more than 500,000 sf of total space. There is a 150,000-sf exhibit area, a 31,029-sf ballroom and a variety of meeting rooms totaling 28,929 sf. Smaller facilities include a boardroom, VIP lounge and observation deck. It's less than a 20-minute drive from Norfolk International Airport, which services 200 flights daily.

Hotel options include the Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, with 289 guest rooms and 12,000 sf of meeting space. Several smaller meeting rooms are complemented by a 7,100-sf oceanfront ballroom. Opened in 2014, Hilton Garden Inn Virginia Beach Oceanfront features 167 rooms and suites and 5,000 sf of oceanview meeting space.

Other hotels include the Best Western Plus Oceanfront, with 214 guest rooms, four meeting rooms and 4,110 sf of meeting space; and the Wyndham Virginia Beach Oceanfront, with 16,000 sf of meeting space, 11 meeting rooms and 244 guest rooms.

The Crowne Plaza Virginia Beach has 149 guest rooms and nine meeting rooms totaling 12,000 sf. The DoubleTree by Hilton Virginia Beach offers 292 guest rooms and 12,000 sf of event space, including a 5,000-sf ballroom and nine meeting rooms.

The Sheraton Virginia Beach Oceanfront has 214 guest rooms and 10 meeting rooms with 12,000 sf of space. And the Founders Inn and Spa offers 25,000 sf of meeting space with



"We were very surprised to find that such a popular city (DC) with must-see attractions was so competitively priced."

Ami Mayfield, CMP, Senior Events Manager, Keller Williams, Austin, TX

18 meeting rooms, a ballroom and a 78-seat amphitheater.

The Cavalier hotel, which was built in 1927, will reopen in spring 2017 as a member of Marriott's distinguished Autograph Collection. The Cavalier Oceanfront tower will be demolished and replaced with a full-service upscale Marriott hotel featuring a host of amenities and world-class dining. The Cavalier Beach Club also will be reinvented to once again become the most desired event venue in the state of Virginia and beyond with stellar amenities, panoramic views and outstanding food and beverage offerings.

Washington, DC

Washington may be world famous as our nation's capital, but it offers much more than political happenings. Meeting planners will find its many attractions an asset in holding memorable events.

Ami Mayfield, CMP, senior events manager with Austin, Texas-based real estate firm Keller Williams, sees the nation's capital as an exciting destination.



Credit: Destination DC, Courtesy of Washington.org

The Washington, DC, skyline in autumn.

"The convention center is one of the most modern and energy-efficient facilities we have seen," she says. "We love that the city and its signature attractions are easily accessible from the facility. It will create an immersive destination experience for our participants."

Mayfield notes that beyond meeting the goal of offering convention participants a meeting destination they have not yet experienced, DC is appealing for many reasons.

"The city's package is very competitive," she says. "They have fantastic domestic and international airlift, and an unrivaled selection of special event venues. And we were very surprised to find that such a popular city with must-see attractions was so competitively priced."

The district's many attractions have been enhanced with several new or recently opened hotels. Undoubtedly the biggest attention-getter is the Trump International Hotel, with 262 guest rooms and suites and 39,000-sf of event and meeting event space. Among other features, it boasts one of the largest ballrooms at a DC luxury hotel with more than 13,000 sf of space.

The Kimpton Mason & Rook Hotel offers 4,000 sf of meeting space including a 1,700-sf ballroom with two skylights. Located in the 14th Street corridor, it has 178 guest rooms and suites. A sister hotel, the Kimpton Glover Park, is a 154-room boutique hotel located outside of Georgetown. A ballroom on the main level offers 1,860 sf of meeting space.

Recently re-opened after a \$125 million renovation, the well-known Watergate Hotel offers 337 luxury guest rooms and 27,000 sf of meeting space. Event space includes a 7,000-sf grand ballroom.

Long a fixture in the city, the Mayflower Hotel now features updated ballrooms and event spaces. Nearly 43,000 sf

of event space is available, including 27 meeting rooms. Some 581 guest rooms include 64 suites.

Headlining the city's new cultural attractions and meeting spaces is the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in September. Located on the National Mall, the already popular museum features 12 exhibitions across 400,000 sf documenting African American life, art, history and culture. Meeting space includes the 300-seat Oprah Winfrey Theater and an education and technology center.

Also at the Smithsonian, the Air & Space Museum's recently reopened Boeing Milestones of Flight Hall has displays from early airplanes to space travel. The space can accommodate 350 seated guests or 700 for receptions.

After a three-year renovation, the East Building of the National Gallery of Art is now opened with more than 12,000 sf of additional exhibition space. A new rooftop sculpture garden holds up to 350 people, and several auditoriums are available. And the Renwick Gallery has more than 4,000 sf of event space for receptions or dinners.

The Salamander Resort and Spa, located in Middleburg, Virginia, has a variety of meeting facilities, many of which open to outdoor terraces. Indoor settings include meeting space within a world-class equestrian center, a century-old stone building and a cooking studio available for private events. A 5,000-sf ballroom, divisible into three sections, accommodates up to 280 guests with a dance floor and 320 guests for dinner. A smaller (1,800-sf) ballroom is suitable for up to 80 guests, and a foyer accommodates 60 for a dinner and 120 for a ceremony. Other facilities include a library, a private dining room and a meeting room for 60.

C&IT

On The Move



DIAZ

Yolanda Cardiff was named director of sales and marketing for the Hyatt Centric Waikiki Beach, Honolulu. She previously served as the global account executive for American Express Global Business Travel.

The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa in South Carolina has named **Vita Canizaro** as sales manager. She previously was sales manager for The Westin Maui Resort & Spa.

Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach, Florida, has named **Miguel Diaz** as director of sales and marketing for the new luxury resort slated to open in 2017. He previously was director of sales and marketing for The Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa in Savannah, Georgia.

Hotel Irvine in Irvine, California, has named **Joe Martino** as director of sales and marketing, and **John Cullinane** as director of sales. Martino most recently served as director of sales and marketing for The Laguna Cliffs Marriott Resort & Spa in Dana Point, California. Cullinane was the associate director of sales for the Hyatt Regency in Jersey City, New Jersey.



CABAN

Benjamin Caban was promoted to area director of sales and marketing for both the Beachwalk Resort, a Benchmark Resorts & Hotels property in Hallandale, Florida, and Marenas Beach Resort, a Gemstone Collection property in Sunny Isles Beach, Florida. He most recently served as Beachwalk's director of sales and marketing.

W Las Vegas has named **Christopher Adam Baran** as vice president of sales and marketing. He was sales manager for Caesars Palace Las Vegas.

Leigh Harris-Henderson was promoted to group sales manager for One Ocean Resort & Spa in Atlantic Beach, Florida. She most recently served as the resort's catering sales manager.

Allison Kneubuhl was named senior vice president of marketing and sales for Noble House Hotels & Resorts Ltd. She most recently was the president and founder of her own company, Allimar Marketing, a luxury hotel marketing services firm.



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