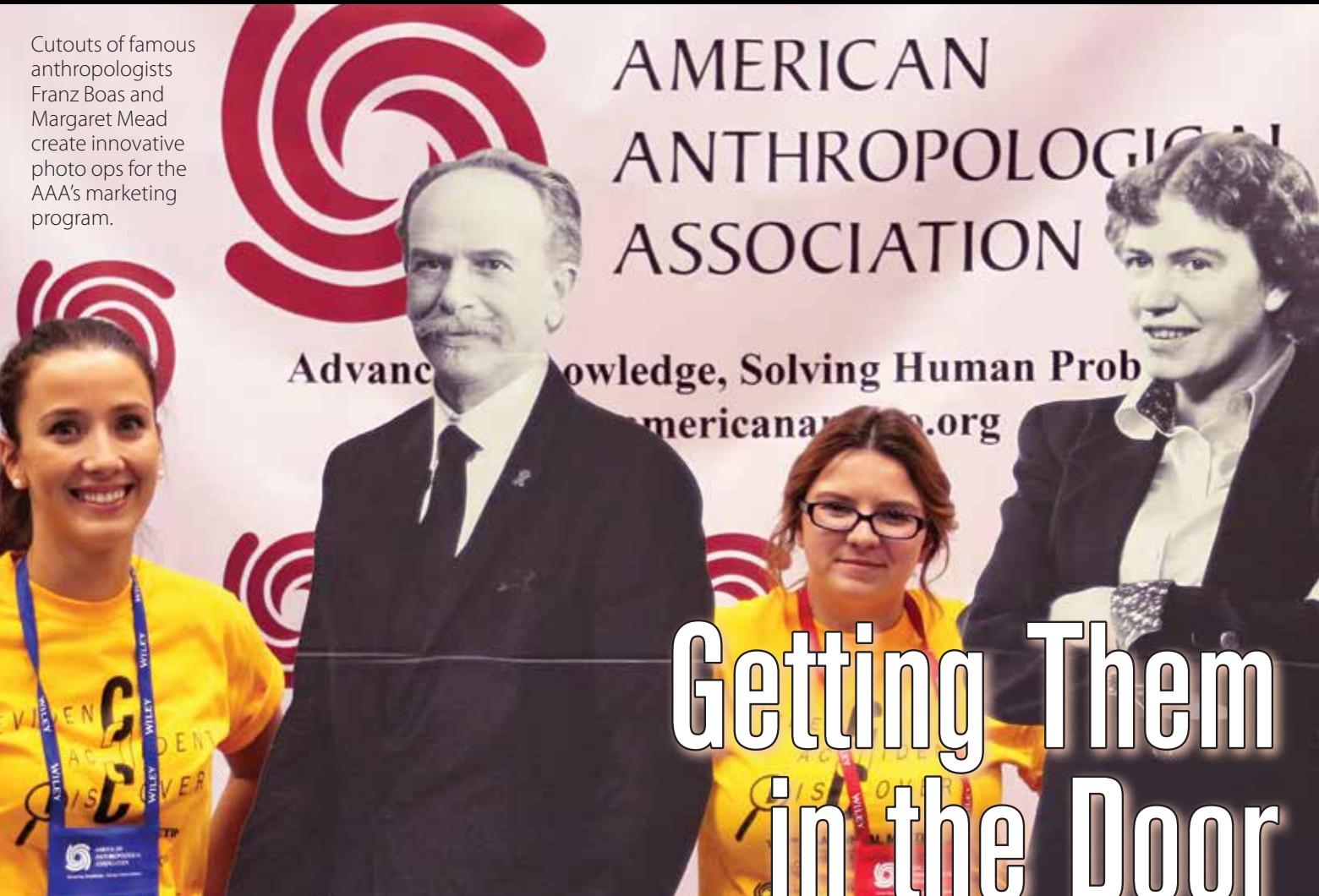


ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

APRIL/MAY
2017

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

Cutouts of famous anthropologists Franz Boas and Margaret Mead create innovative photo ops for the AAA's marketing program.



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TABLET VERSION**

Getting Them in the Door

Attendance-Boosting
Marketing Tactics

PAGE 30

Trade Show Trends

Boost Traffic and Build New Business

PAGE 18

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ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

April / May 2017

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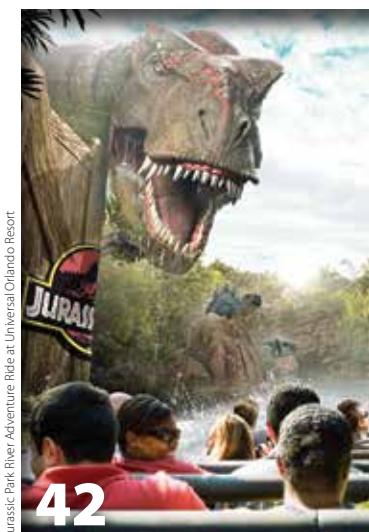
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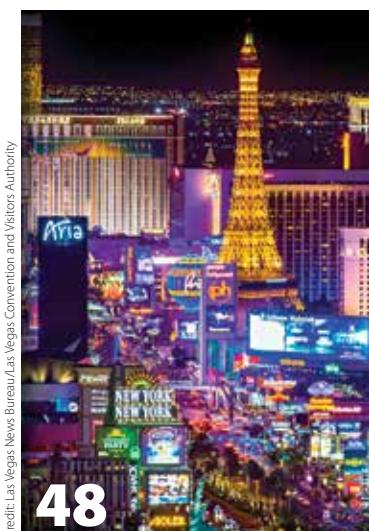
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Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association



Universal Orlando Resort



Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

Keeping 'Em Coming



Many of us spend a good chunk of our time posting on and checking personal social media accounts, so it's a natural extension for attendees to do the same thing at meetings. Planners are astutely leveraging this all-consuming pastime to market events from the bottom up. "We would be remiss to not use social media for marketing purposes," says Ushma Suvarnakar, MTA, CMP, director of meetings and conferences at the American Anthropological Association, whose attendees are featured on our cover. In "Attendance-Boosting Marketing" on page 30, Suvarnakar describes a social media competition that awarded a future free registration for the best photo with a hashtag. "We added a few social media walls throughout the venue that aggregated all the posts through various social media platforms," she says, a free promotion for the association.

In this era of personalization, recruitment tactics must effectively target all segments. "Most, if not all, industries are multigenerational, and there's no one-size-fits-all marketing approach to attracting everyone," Suvarnakar says, noting, "There is a social media platform out there for everyone, regardless of generation. Attendees want a customized experience. This can only be accomplished through promoting the meeting through all the various channels out there." Learn more techniques planners are using to entice attendance, such as those used by Kelly Ricker, E.V.P., events and education with the Computer Technology Industry Association, whose multifaceted exhibitor/attendee marketing approach "keeps our event in the 'must go' versus 'might go' column."

An attendance-boosting theme runs throughout this issue, showing all the ways personalization, interactivity and engagement will keep 'em coming. Learn the trends and tactics that will boost traffic and build new business in "Making Trade Shows Better" on page 18: "The people on the floor are demanding more. They want to engage more," says Phelps R. Hope, CMP, senior V.P. of meetings and expositions for Kellen. Phelps also penned an entertaining piece on page 10 "Bots and Drones and Holograms, Oh My!" which details new and highly engaging technologies that sound like science fiction but are here now, resulting in "meetings that better meet attendees' needs...and shows you and your organization to be ahead of the game."

To keep 'em coming, planners also need to be ahead of the game on sustainability (p. 24), speakers (p. 36) and site selection including the Silver State (p. 48), the Lone Star State (p. 60) and five family-friendly destinations that can give associations a "relative" boost in attendance (p. 42).

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

ASSOCIATION
CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

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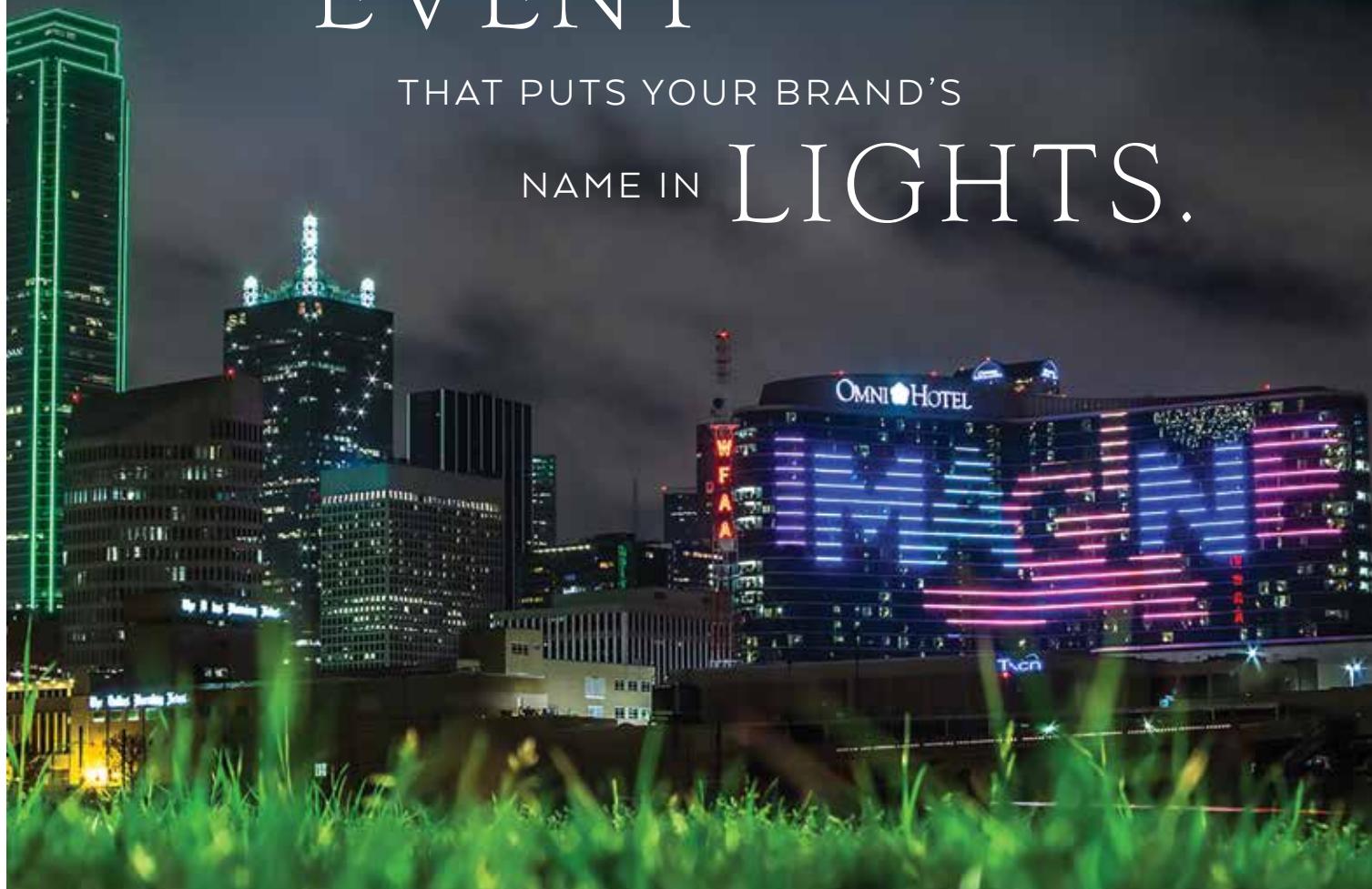
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HOST AN

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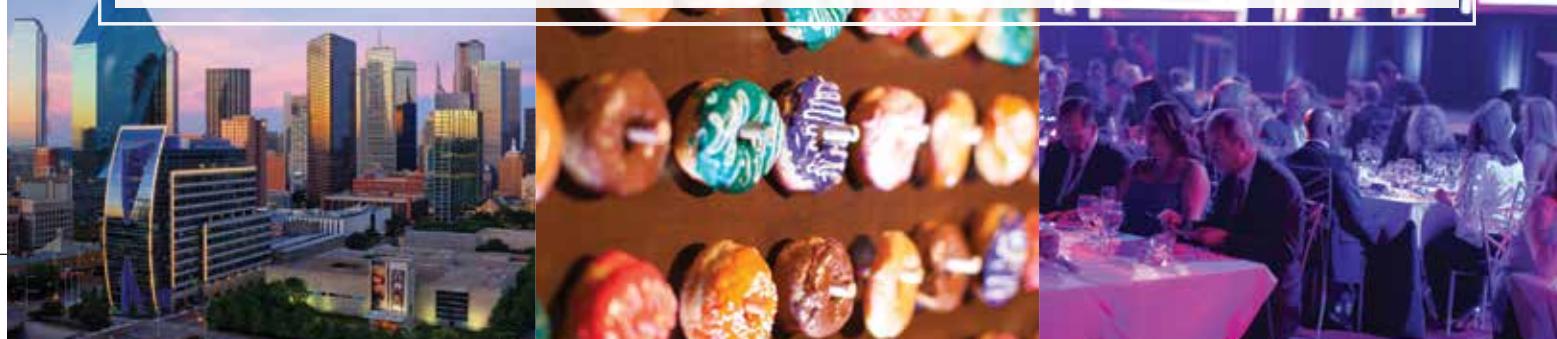
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Loews Announces \$150 Million Flagship Hotel at Texas Live!



Rendering of Live! by Loews – Arlington, TX.

ARLINGTON, TX — The Cordish Companies and the Texas Rangers recently announced their vision for the hotel and convention center at Texas Live!, the \$250 million world-class dining, entertainment and hospitality destination being developed in partnership among The Cordish Companies, Texas Rangers and City of Arlington, Texas.

The new \$150 million flagship hotel, Live! by Loews – Arlington, TX, will be the first of its kind in the country, providing guests an unprecedented upscale experience that blends sports and entertainment with first-class hospitality and superior amenities. Texas Live!, anchored by Live! by Loews, is a part of a \$4 billion vision for the Arlington Entertainment District that includes the Rangers' new \$1 billion ballpark and preservation of Globe Life Park. Ideally positioned between the Texas Rangers' Globe Life Park and the Dallas Cowboys' AT&T Stadium, the project will become a resort-style destination for sports fans, visitors and families, as well as a spectacular location for meetings, special events and conventions.

The dining and entertainment space in the district will open in 2018, with Live! by Loews scheduled to open in 2019. www.texas-live.com

DMAI Adds More Keynote Speakers for Annual Convention

WASHINGTON, DC — Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) Chairman Gary C. Sherwin, CDME, and president and CEO of Visit Newport Beach Inc. and DMAI President and CEO Don Welsh announced more keynote speaker details for the 2017 Annual Convention in Montréal, Canada, July 11–14.

"We are thrilled to have assembled such a diverse and respected group of speakers for the Annual Convention," said Welsh. "We look forward to inspiring and equipping our members with education sessions as well as giving them the unique opportunity to connect with industry peers in Montréal."

Evita Turquoise Robinson has been to more than 30 countries and has lived on three continents. In 2011, she created the Nomadness Travel Tribe, an online social community that now boasts more than 16,000 members worldwide, comprised 80 percent of black female travelers and the first of its kind targeting diverse millennial travelers. Robinson will share her mission that travel is not just a privilege for some but an experience for all.

Willie Geist is host of NBC News' "Sunday Today with Willie Geist," co-host of MSNBC's "Morning Joe" and a regular host and contributor to "Today," "NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt" and "Meet the Press." He hosted coverage of several Olympic Games, and is the author of three *New York Times* best-selling books. Geist's session will be an insightful and humorous breakdown and political analysis of current events. www.destinationmarketing.org/annual

Eight Large Conventions Choose Kansas City for Future Years

KANSAS CITY, MO — On the heels of the NCAA's recent award of six sports championships to KC totaling \$27 million, Visit KC announced seven major convention bookings for future years. These groups represent the sports, military, religious, agricultural, multicultural and nonprofit segments. Together, these events will generate a combined total of more than \$60 million into the local economy. Economic impact is based upon a combination of attendance and room nights.

The Volleyball NIT President's Day Weekend will be held in Kansas City for multiple years. Starting in 2019, this group brings an estimated 8,500 attendees annually pouring an estimated \$24.5 million over the course of five years.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. returns to KC in 2022 for its annual convention bringing nearly 10,000 veterans and generating an estimated \$10.3 million into the local economy. In 2013, KC secured this group for its July 2018 National Convention, which will coincide with the centennial anniversary of the end of World War I. The last time this group held its convention in KC was 2007.

Other conventions announcing their selection of KC for future years include USA Elite Select's 2017 World Fastpitch Championships July 10–16; National Main Street Center will hold its annual conference for the first time in Kansas City in March 2018; Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association brings its National Reunion to KC in May 2019; National Baptist Convention will hold its National Congress in June 2020; National Association of Sports Commissions will hold its Sports Event Symposium in April 2020; and the American Angus Association will bring its national convention to KC in November 2020 with an estimated 1,500 attendees. www.visitkc.com

Officials Celebrate the Future Omni Boston Hotel



A rendering of the Omni Boston Hotel.

BOSTON, MA — Omni Hotels & Resorts officials got a big Boston welcome May 15 from elected officials and community members at the future site of the Omni Boston Hotel, a 1,000-plus room hotel in South Boston's Waterfront District.

Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker, Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito, Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh, the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport), the owner of Omni Hotels & Resorts, New Boston Hospitality Group, elected officials and community representatives gathered to celebrate the project. Omni, along with their partners at New Boston Hospitality, are developing the fourth largest hotel in Boston in a prime location to serve the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center (BCEC).

The hotel is expected to open in early 2021 and will be a one-of-a-kind, luxury Omni property with two towers defining its spot in the South Boston skyline. The proposed hotel design will feature a variety of culinary options, world-class retail and amenities, including a luxury spa, elevated pool deck and fitness center. It also will offer more than 100,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, inclusive of a 25,000-sf ballroom, as well as an event terrace. www.omnihotels.com

Anaheim Breaks Visitor Volume Record Four Years in a Row

ANAHEIM, CA — Visit Anaheim, the official destination marketing organization of Anaheim, announced that Anaheim set a new visitor volume record in 2016. For the fourth year in a row, Anaheim broke the previous record, and welcomed more than 23 million visitors. Overall visitor growth in Anaheim is up 2.3 percent from 2015, leading to a nearly 33 percent growth since 2011.

"Anaheim is a magical destination that continues to inspire and delight domestic and international visitors year after year," said Jay Burress, president and CEO, Visit Anaheim. "2016 was a monumental year for our city as we saw renewed commitment from our greater tourism industry to invest in the destination. More hotels were proposed and built, theme park expansion was announced, number of breweries doubled — paving the way for us to welcome even more visitors to our awe-inspiring city." www.visitanaheim.org



Burress

Gaylord National Unveils Newest Waterfront Venue



The RiverView Ballroom at Gaylord National.

NATIONAL HARBOR, MD — Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center's highly anticipated waterfront venue, RiverView Ballroom, was recently unveiled in National Harbor, Maryland. The 16,000-sf ballroom is being dubbed the Washington, DC, area's first infinity ballroom, as guests will feel as if they are floating on top of the Potomac River. The venue also provides column-free, unobstructed panoramic views from its 270-degree floor-to-ceiling windows. On top of its 16,000 sf of meeting space, the ballroom also provides two outdoor terraces equaling more than 10,000 sf of space. These terraces offer even more versatility for guests interested in both indoor and outdoor functions with an equally stunning backdrop.

With the addition of RiverView Ballroom, Gaylord National now offers five ballrooms and more than 600,000 sf of indoor and outdoor flexible meeting space — keeping the hotel as the largest non-gaming resort and convention center on the East Coast. www.gaylordnationalriverviewballroom.com

Snapshots



1



2



3

1 Winners of the Gold Circle Awards at ASAE's 2017 Marketing, Membership & Communications Conference. **2** (L to r) Paula Gonzalez (Produce Marketing Association), Lee Wagner and Theresa Hill (American Society of Anesthesiologists); **3** KiKi L'Italien (Amplified Growth) and Suzanne Carrawan (HighRoad Solution).

Credits: Sabrina Kidwell ASAE



1



2



1



2



3

Meet Puerto Rico hosted a Travel Forum with **1** CBS Travel Editor Peter Greenberg **2** ASAE President/CEO John Graham **3** Meet Puerto Rico CEO Milton Segarra **5** DMAI President Don Welsh (r) and Monterey County CVB President Tammy Blount. The forum was moderated by National Public Radio host Jack Speer (second from l).

Credit: Meet Puerto Rico



4



5



1



2



3



4

Bots and Drones and Holograms Oh My!

Bringing Meetings Into the 21st Century

Before you turn the page — no, this isn't another trend piece on the latest "InstaFace" or "SnapBook." Those are fine and good, but what about actual hands-on technologies? Something that would make HAL from "2001: A Space Odyssey" say, "Whoa. That's pretty cool."

Attendees come to your show to make deals — but a cool story doesn't hurt. That's what this article is about. So stick around and let yourself be wowed knowing that this is not science fiction. These are actual technologies at actual meetings.

AUGMENTED AND VIRTUAL REALITY

If you thought PokemonGo was the beginning and end of that trend, you were wrong. Augmented reality blends an actual camera view with superimposed imagery (think Pikachu standing in your kitchen). It's fun, sure, but it's also an incredibly effective way to engage conference attendees. Already, programs like "Seek Rewards" combine Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and smartphone mobility for onsite scavenger hunts that can drive foot traffic across a trade show floor and into education sessions. Similarly, virtual reality offers immersive visual experiences that enhance the attendee experience — giving you a cool new platform for message delivery, sponsor recognition and calls to action.



TELEPRESENCE ROBOTS

On the other end of the virtual spectrum is the telepresence robot. Say an attendee has to cancel last-minute, but he still wants a glimpse of the show floor. A telepresence robot piloted by that person (like the ones made at Double Robotics) could be deployed to cruise the show, giving a real-life vantage point. The experience can be streamed so others can voyeuristically join in as a virtual audience. It's the next best thing to burning calories!

DRONES

These little guys can do more than survey the territory

and deliver packages. They also can help you collect a birds-eye view of your event as well as increase the visual experience for remote live reporting by your onsite emcee. Your meeting space soon could be buzzing with drones relaying footage for an enhanced onscreen visual experience for attendees, and it's great for capturing footage for next year's marketing.

WEARABLES

Wearable technology is an excellent way to collect attendee data while simplifying their meeting experience. Like a traditional name badge, a wristband like the Pixl can be remotely triggered to light up a certain color to better identify buyers, sellers, staff, speakers and more. iBeacon devices can help track the comings and goings of your attendees and help to remove the sometimes-annoying step of flashing a name badge to a scanner.

BIOMETRICS

Tom Cruise showed us the possibilities of mass eye scanning and facial recognition in "Minority Report." While it's not likely that Tom will be sprinting across your trade show floor any time soon, it is likely that your attendees soon will benefit from biometrics for more secure entrance into events. Biometrics, such as the

Tascent biometric identity platform, can be far more accurate than traditional identification. It's a great tool for protecting sensitive areas of the show floor or limiting access to restricted areas.

HOLOSCOPES

R2D2 once delivered galaxy-saving information via hologram. You could, too! Well, you might not save the galaxy, but you can definitely make your event a little more fun. Hologram technology can transform a tabletop or tablet into a stunning centerpiece for your conference.



Phelps R. Hope, CMP



FACIAL RECOGNITION SOFTWARE

Read the room — crucial advice in this industry. But how can you gauge the sentiment of hundreds of people at once? Facial recognition software is emerging as a way to gather massive amounts of data at a glance and report back to you in real time. Take CrowdStats, for example. CrowdStats technology uses cameras to scan crowds — either in motion or in an audience — and can pull incredible details ranging from gender and age to actual mood and attention. Not only can you use that data to improve your next event, but you can actually track that candid, anonymous feedback and tweak your meeting as it's in progress.

IN SUMMARY

Of course, with new technologies like these, it's important to keep attendee privacy in mind and be totally

It's an exciting time to be in this industry. The technology is flashy and getting flashier, and the result is meetings that better meet attendees' needs.

CHATBOTS

An attendee wants the public Wi-Fi password, but she doesn't want to stand in the registration line for 15 minutes to get it. Enter the chatbot, at your service. Chatbots are an amazing technology for events because their sole job is to dole out information on request. The Concierge Eventbot is an excellent example of chatbots developed specifically for events. It can be preloaded with all event details, scheduling, accommodations, local attractions and more — and attendees can converse with it from their phone. Chatbots in general can operate as simply as a question and answer database or as sophisticated as conversation-friendly artificial intelligence. This is a technology that never fails to impress attendees, and it frees up your onsite staff and can seriously reduce attendee frustration.

transparent. Thorough communications and attendee surveys can help gauge enthusiasm for any data tracking you might implement.

It's an exciting time to be in this industry. The technology is flashy and getting flashier, and the result is meetings that better meet attendees' needs. It pays to embrace exciting technologies early because it shows you and your organization to be ahead of the game. While your competitors are keeping their eyes glued to the screen trying to sniff out the next social media fad, take the opportunity to launch your event into the future.

AC&F

Phelps R. Hope, CMP, is senior vice president of meetings and expositions for Kellen, an association management company with offices and representation in the United States, Europe, China, the Middle East, India and Southeast Asia. He can be reached at phope@kellencompany.com or 678-303-2962.

Convention Center Update

The Nation's Venue Scene Is Varied, Versatile, Ever-Changing and Expanding

Today's modern meetings scene is an integral sum of its multiple parts — adequate meeting space, easily accessible location, beckoning city sights and the convention center — always the convention center.

So from "America's Finest City" and its San Diego Convention Center to the nation's powerhouse Chicago's McCormick Place, planners have a bountiful table from which to choose when crisscrossing the country in search of the best match for their association and the biggest bang for their buck.

"Every planner looks for a package — local draws like the beach and the water, great hotels with good rates, easy transportation getting in and out of a city, a good facility in which to hold the convention or meeting, and walkability (proximity of the convention center to downtown and the hotels). San Diego has all the parts of this package," says Clifford "Rip" Rip-

By Cynthia Dial

Rippetoe, CFE, president and CEO of the San Diego Convention Corporation.

Ron Olejko, senior director, meeting services, Atlanta, Georgia-based American College of Rheumatology, agrees with Rippetoe's assessment of San Diego and has paired his association with the city again and again and again (1998, 2005, 2013 with upcoming commitments in 2017 and 2023).

Typically rotating the annual meeting of approximately 16,500 among this Southern California city and Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington, DC, Orlando and periodically New Orleans, Olejko's reasoning is simple. "It's the location. Our annual meeting is held between mid-October and mid-November when San Diego's weather is generally beautiful. When you're walking from the convention center to your hotel, it's almost like you're in a resort. It's a city but you see so much water, you feel as if you're in a relaxed resort."



Credit: McCormick Place

In Chicago, McCormick Place's North Building is positioned to be used independently or with other buildings.

An additional perk, but of no less importance to this planner is the city's union work ethic. "Their reputation is one of the best (if not the best) in the industry. They know how important we are to their livelihood, and we know how important they are to the success of our meeting. It makes for a great two-way partnership."

Showcasing San Diego's one-of-a-kind sites, Olejko is hosting the association Presidents' Reception (an invitation-only, luxury-end event for 500), during its November 3–8, 2017, meeting on the aircraft carrier USS Midway Museum. "I always take advantage of what a city offers," he explains.

From the convention center perspective, Rippetoe cites his city's exclusive-to-San Diego attractions — from a vibrant art scene to a world-famous 100-year-old zoo. "All of this helps sell San Diego as a gathering place." Evidence is supported by the SDCC's impressive stats: 70 percent rotation rate, 74 percent occupancy rate and bookings as far out as summer 2035.

Any downside to San Diego's meetings scene? From a planner's point of view whose group has expanded from 2,500 in 1980 to 17,000 today, Olejko weighs in. "Of course, we think the SDCC is too small. Medical meeting planners are space hogs," explains the senior director of meeting services whose growing group returns again in 2023 to San Diego's convention center, which is currently addressing expansion.

BIGGER AND BIGGER

When it's about size, it's about the big three — Orlando, Las Vegas and Chicago. Chicago's McCormick Place is comprised of four state-of-the-art buildings, a combined total of 2.6 million sf of exhibit space (1.2 million sf on one level) and 173 meeting rooms (600,000 sf of flexible space) — the result is North America's largest convention center. Its culinary coup is the Midwest's largest farm-to-fork rooftop garden, which sprawls atop McCormick Place West and provides an annual 10,000 pounds of herbs and vegetables for use in the center's restaurants. When coupled with Midwestern hospitality, McCormick Place's 2016 results tell the tale: 2.5 million visitors, 193 events and 31 major meetings and conventions.

Lori Healey, CEO, Metropolitan Pier and Exhibition Authority (the owner and manager of McCormick Place), explains the popularity of the Chicago complex: "We are constantly improving the flexibility of our meeting-space assets to meet the demand for better technology, comfortable and appealing spaces and unique elements such as pop-up restaurants and even making our own beer, McCormick Place Every Day Ale (produced with hops from the rooftop garden)."

However, as this is not a facility satisfied with the status quo, McCormick's campus continues to transform. Scheduled for completion this year is a 10,387-seat facility that will host general sessions for large trade shows, as well as serve as De-

"Working at McCormick Place can be surprising if a planner is not used to working in a union facility. My advice is to work closely with your general contractor and convention center event manager to make sure you understand the rules and regulations in advance."



Stephanie D. Jones, CMP
Senior Director, Conferences and Events Management
Water Environment Federation
Alexandria, VA

Paul University's basketball arena. Linked by a skybridge to McCormick Place West is the planned Marriott Marquis (1,205 rooms). Further improving its appeal to the meeting planner is the full renovation of onsite Hyatt Regency McCormick Place's 25,000-sf conference center.

Competing in the union arena, Choose Chicago announced the results of a recent labor agreement: "The restoration of exhibitor rights at McCormick Place, without any future threat, ensures that our customers will not only realize significant savings, but also prosper as a result of exhibitors returning to customers' shows in full force."

Bigger is better for Stephanie D. Jones, CMP, senior director, conferences and events management with the Alexandria, Virginia-based Water Environment Federation. "With WEFTEC (Water Environment Federation Technical Exhibition & Conference) being the biggest meeting of its kind in North America, we are limited to few U.S. facilities that can accommodate the size of our trade show. Our exhibitors prefer contiguous exhibit space and McCormick Place offers us this," says the planner.

A group of approximately 25,000 water quality professionals from around the world, WEFTEC meets in Chicago every other year. The federation's upcoming September 30–October 4, 2017, conference at McCormick Place North and South uses 27 hotels throughout the city with Hilton Chicago as the headquarters.

Why Chicago and McCormick Place? "The support that we receive from the city is a major bonus. I firmly believe that for a citywide conference to be successful, there needs to be a partnership between show management and the city," says Jones. Giving a special shout-out to Choose Chicago, she mentions its assistance in marketing WEFTEC, making introductions to relevant business partners and recommending great venues for VIP events.

As 95 percent of the association's time is spent at McCormick Place, the center's "green" program is key for this

group whose policy is to use hotels and convention centers that have in-house energy and water recycling and conservation programs. The environmentally conscious association's general guidelines: caterers use reusable serving items (plates, utensils, napkins) when appropriate or compostable paper products, serve condiments in bulk containers versus individual packages and donate wrapped leftover food to local shelters.

Jones' final suggestion is a recommendation for planners new to Chicago's convention center scene. "Working at McCormick Place can be surprising if a planner is not used to



A reception at the Grand Plaza at the Anaheim Convention Center in California.

Credit: ©Robert Q. Fugate

working in a union facility. My advice is to work closely with your general contractor and convention center event manager to make sure you understand the rules and regulations in advance." Additional guidance: Be sure to use the McCormick Place meeting planners' guide.

GOING WEST

Celebrating its 50th anniversary on July 12, 2017, the Anaheim Convention Center (ACC) has over the years played host to presidential candidates, a professional basketball team, such musical luminaries as Jimi Hendrix and Elvis Presley — and conventions.

Among its conventions is the National Safety Council (NSC) Congress & Expo held October 15–21, 2016. As the country's largest annual safety, health and environmental show, it attracts more than 15,000 safety professionals from the U.S., Canada and 60-plus additional countries. In keeping with ACC's high-profile past, its opening session speaker was football legend Terry Bradshaw.

"We chose Anaheim based on the center's size, the number of potential safety and health professionals within driving distance and the number of affordable hotels within walking distance — allowing us to contain our shuttle costs," says Nancy Gavin, operations director at NSC, which is based in Itasca, Illinois.

Budget and safety are additional factors. The show rotates around the United States and hadn't been in Anaheim for eight years. "Misty Brewer, our event manager, gave great advice with respect to budgeting and guiding us to things unique to the convention center. And she pulled together the right people to discuss potential security concerns," shares the planner.

Working with the center, GES and exhibitors, the association implemented a waste diversion program (results: 99,638 pounds of total waste were gathered, and 38.9 percent of total show waste was diverted from a landfill).

Gavin details the association's history with Anaheim, beginning with 2005 when NSC committed to holding their annual event in Anaheim for two years. "We were looking for another West Coast city and were impressed with the convention center's new design, new hotels coming onboard within walking distance to the center and the expansion of the GardenWalk entertainment district. Our first show was in 2008, and in 2016 we saw a much-improved offering for our exhibitors and attendees."

The future of the ACC's next 50 years looks equally bright shares Jay Burress, president and CEO of Visit Anaheim. "In just a few short months, we will be debuting our much-anticipated Anaheim Convention Center expansion and joining the 'one-million-square-foot club.' We undertook this seventh expansion of the ACC because we understood the importance of providing a blank canvas that can be reinvented for every new group coming into Anaheim and using the Anaheim Convention Center," says the executive who has played a key role in the ACC's soon-to-be debuted expansion. With a completion date of fall 2017, the additional 200,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space vaults the ACC into the enviable position as the West Coast's largest convention center.

Keeping pace with the convention center's growth, trajectory of the Anaheim Resort district continues upward with seven brand hotels planned for Anaheim and in neighboring Garden Grove, adding 2,287 rooms by 2019 — including several four-diamond properties.

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

A continued tour of the country's meetings scene reveals an assortment of convention centers for an assortment of needs, with two constants apparent in all — expansion and expenditure.

Coming to the **Atlantic City Convention Center** via his role at the Owensboro Convention Center in Kentucky, Dean Dennis makes his entrance as the center's new general manager. Atlantic City's across-the-board additions — from a culinary scene that features restaurants of such

top chefs as Bobby Flay, Guy Fieri and Gordon Ramsay to a substantial conference center investment by several casinos — underscore the city's commitment to increasing its convention center traffic. Casinos' past and in-the-immediate-future development include the \$125 million Waterfront Conference Center at Harrah's Resort, Resorts Casino Hotel's \$5 million expenditure on its 15,000-sf convention space and Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa's \$11 million Central Conference Center (to open May 2017). Of additional interest is the Hard Rock International purchase of the Taj Mahal, which is expected to open in the spring of 2018.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and **Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board** (L.A. Tourism) President and CEO Ernest Wooden Jr. announced Los Angeles welcomed 47.3 million visitors in 2016, breaking visitation records for the sixth consecutive year. The new record is 1.7 million visitors higher than 2015's total. "Tourism is booming in Los Angeles, and it's helping to drive our whole city's economy forward," said Garcetti. "My goal is to welcome 50 million tourists to our city by 2020."

In other news, L.A. Tourism launched Virtual Discovery L.A., a new virtual reality travel platform that provides meeting professionals with immersive 360-degree viewing experiences of more than 50 only-in-L.A. venues and locations across Los Angeles — the most comprehensive virtual tour of any destination in the world.

Looking ahead, Oklahoma City has announced that after a seven-year effort, approval has been obtained for a new \$288 million downtown **Oklahoma City Convention Center**. Opening in 2020, the three-level center will be located on the south end of the city's downtown district and adjacent to the Chesapeake Energy Arena. It will feature 200,000 sf of exhibit space, 45,000 sf of meeting space with 27 meeting rooms and a 30,000-plus-sf ballroom.

"The vision of **Moscone Center**'s expansion becomes more of a reality every day. This has always been one of the most sought-after meeting venues in the country but with the additional space and amenities, it's going to be irresistible to planners and attendees," says Joe D'Alessandro, San Francisco Travel president and CEO.

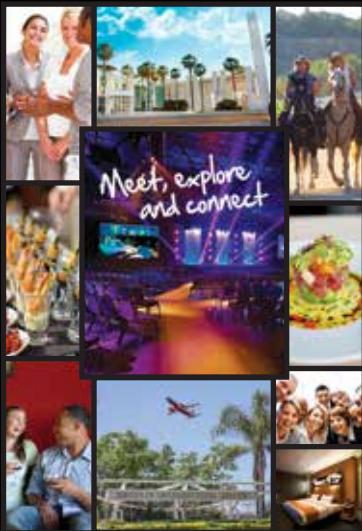


Credit: Meet AC

A banquet setup at the Atlantic City Convention Center in Atlantic City, NJ.

Included in the \$500 million expansion — scheduled for completion in late 2018 — Moscone North and South will offer more than 500,000 sf of contiguous space that can be used for exhibitions and meetings (almost double the space currently offered in its largest hall), a 50,000-sf column-free ballroom, more than 80 meeting rooms, 107,000 sf of light-filled prefunction lobbies framing city views and more than 20,000 sf of outdoor terraces. Designed to garner the highest LEED certification, the facility will feature less carbon emissions per delegate than any major convention center in North America, annual recovery of 15 million gal-

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A reception at the newly renovated San Jose Civic Courtyard in California.

Credit: John Medina

Ions of groundwater for reuse in the center and surrounding parks, San Francisco's largest rooftop photovoltaic solar panel and zero-emissions electricity. Though Moscone North and South will be closed April to September 7, 2017, West will remain open and is fully booked.

If seeking "expansion" with a capital "E," look no further than the \$1.4 billion enlargement and renovation of the 57-year-old **Las Vegas Convention Center**, scheduled to be completed in four phases. Currently underway, phase one is the acquisition and demolition of the Riviera, adding more than 26 acres to the LVCC campus (including a border on Las Vegas Boulevard). Phase two creates approximately 600,000 sf of exhibition space (note: the total size of the new building will be approximately 1.4 million sf). Phase three involves the renovation of the existing 3.2-million-sf facility, and phase four deals with future improvements (its schedule based on the completion of phases two and three) — its budget is to be determined.

Undergoing a \$615 million renovation and expansion, the **Miami Beach Convention Center** will unveil to the meeting planning community the results in 2018. Inclusions within the new 1.4-million-sf LEED-certified facility are a state-of-the-art 60,000-sf grand ballroom, additional meeting rooms with flexible arrangements, a 20,000-sf glass rooftop junior ballroom, 81 meeting rooms comprised of 190,000 sf and new-to-the-scene versatile indoor/outdoor public spaces. Though the first phase of the renovation began in December 2015, the center has continued to operate within half of the building (with exception of a complete closure from December 2016 to May 2017).

Matt Hollander, Spectra Venue Management's general manager at the Miami Beach Convention Center, succinctly summarizes the center's expansion, closure and reveal: "During this time, we have seen a sharp trend of new interest and new bookings for future years."

In **San Jose, California**, the City National Civic Courtyard and Montgomery Courtyard have been recently renovated into the perfect outdoor setting for all types of events. This picturesque location includes newly built custom benches, gas inline heaters, outdoor lighting and a fire pit perfect for

blissful evenings. The entire courtyard has been wired with sound and can be split into two courtyards or used as one with movable rustic gates. In the future, the courtyard will feature live video feed of the theater's interiors. The picturesque location is ideal for all outdoor events. It has a total of 5,407 sf and can fit up to 1,081 people.

Wanna be in the movies? The **Ontario Convention Center** in California is frequently used by filmmakers as an onsite location for movies and commercials. The contemporary venue is equipped with the latest in technology and boasts more than 225,000 sf of flexible exhibit, meeting and function space. The center provides a full range of technology services including Wi-Fi, internet, DS3 and videoconferencing capabilities.

The award-winning culinary team creates signature and custom-made menus featuring an eclectic range of international, regional and heart-healthy fare, which is prepared with the freshest ingredients, premium meats and seafood, as well as produce from local farms and growers.



The courtyards at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center in San Jose, California, were recently renovated.

Credit: San Jose McEnery Convention Center

The New Orleans Exhibition Hall Authority, the governing board of the **New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center**, has approved a resolution to begin construction on a linear park along Convention Center Boulevard. The Linear Park Construction Project is part of a comprehensive plan, known as The Convention Center District Development Project that will revitalize an important part of the city through new development on a 47-acre tract around Convention Center Boulevard.

In addition to the linear park, key elements of the project include a world-class anchor hotel, improved walkability, lighting and streetscaping, new premier retail shopping options, residential living, fine dining and casual restaurants and entertainment, and cultural and arts venues.

Bottom line for the future of the nation's convention centers: It's bigger and better than ever.

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Making Trade Shows Better

Trends and Tactics to Boost Traffic and Build New Business

By Sophia Bennett

What does the future hold for trade shows? According to these experts, some pretty exciting things. From new technology that allows for better data collection, to more opportunities for consumers and vendors to have meaningful interactions, trade show managers have many new tools and ideas for making shows even better.



Credit: Specialty Graphic Imaging Association

Trade show growth is trending solidly upward, meaning they're still a good investment for many associations. "I'm seeing an increase in the number of people who are exhibiting," says Julie Butler, CMP, DES, director of conference programs and exhibits for the International City/County Management Association. "For us it's gone up dramatically since 2009, when the economy tanked. We increase the price every year, and we've been able to do that and grow substantially. Last year we had several more large booths. We typically just have 10-by-10 feet with a couple 20-by-20 feet. This last year there were six or seven large booths, which is unusual."

If you're looking for more ways to attract new business to your shows, consider these ideas.

BEACONS

Beacons stand to revolutionize the trade show experience in many ways. These small, wireless transmitting devices allow planners to track each individual's movement through a show, learn about their interests and share this information with an approved group of people.

This data has numerous applications before, during and after the show. It can help associations increase booth sales to new exhibitors by providing qualitative information about the volume of traffic they can expect to receive.

It also can help upsell existing vendors. "We assume the corner booth will get more traffic, but now we can demonstrate it does," says Phelps Hope, CMP, senior vice president of meetings and exhibitions at Kellen, an association management company. With data about how much traffic exhibitors can expect in certain locations or at certain times, it's easier to sell them on why they should participate.

Some beacons have the ability to "push" notifications to attendees on their event app. When people visit certain types of exhibitors or attend workshops on certain subject areas, the app can suggest booths that person might want to visit. Associations also can program the software to make these suggestions based on the information attendees have provided on their registration forms.

This practice allows shows to be more personalized to an individual's needs than ever before — another prominent industry trend. "We have to become the business manager on behalf of the attendees and the exhibitors more than we ever have," says Hope. "Through the registration process, we have to get people to share more about why they're there and what's important to them. We have to understand the individual buyer that a person wants and what's important to them. That helps them walk away with leads or business that increases the value of the show, and if everyone feels they're

getting more from the show, you can charge more for the show. There's a ripple effect."

Beacons will be increasingly important to how shows are managed. "They're going to come to the point where you can get a report overnight," says Tom Corcoran, president of Corcoran Expositions, an exhibit management firm. "Let's say I get a report and the upper left side of my floor plan looks light (in foot traffic). I can make a few changes to my food and beverage stands and solve it. As beacons move toward providing real-time data, they'll be an even better tool."

The technology also can help associations plan better for future shows. "If you have shows that repeat in the same facility, you can see where traffic was and, even more important, where traffic was not," says Corcoran. "Then you can re-engineer the floor plan to better optimize it."

"I'm seeing an increase in the number of people who are exhibiting. For us it's gone up dramatically since 2009, when the economy tanked. We increase the price every year, and we've been able to do that and grow substantially."

Julie Butler, CMP, DES
Director, Conference
Programs and Exhibits
International City/County Management Association
Washington, DC

Beacons do present a few challenges. One is understanding what types of data are most valuable to exhibitors and other stakeholders. "One of the reasons we haven't deployed beacons so far is that if we make that investment, we want to make sure we're collecting the data we can use and exhibitors want," says Lexy Olisko, CMP, CEM, director of conferences for the Specialty Graphic Imaging Association (SGIA). Without a good understanding of what you need, it's easy to invest a lot of money in a worthwhile technology then stop using it because you don't see the return on investment.

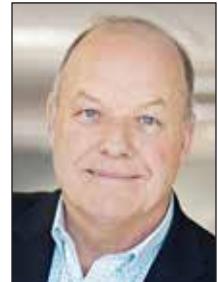
SGIA is looking into setting up an exhibitor task force to examine, among other things, the most effective ways to gather data and use technology to serve exhibitor needs at future events. "We want to know what sort of information they're looking for or what networking opportunities we can help them with," Olisko says. "It could be something very simple that we aren't currently providing that we could do without too much cost. It's just a matter of having that conversation.

If you view it more as a partnership, then it ends up working out a lot better."

Determining how to use the sheer volume of data collected by beacons can be another challenge. "The tough part for our industry is the analytics part," says Dave Weil, CAE, vice president of event services for SmithBucklin, an association management company. "It's easy to gather a bunch of data, but it's harder to say what does this mean and how do we use it? It requires different skill sets." He predicts that people with good critical thinking skills, technology knowledge and methods for analyzing data will be in hot demand in coming years.

THE DEMISE OF THE SHOW PROGRAM

Another area where technology is having a big impact is the printed trade show program. "Many shows are using event apps now," says Corcoran. "The thing I like about event apps is as things change, they can get those changes to you."



Tom Corcoran
President
Corcoran Expositions
Chicago, IL

"The trend now is, instead of being about the number of hours you're open, it's about the number of hours you're able to keep the aisles filled."

CUSTOMIZATION

"We're seeing the dawn of the personalization of the experience," Weil says. "It's going to impact our shows in a lot of different ways."

On the consumer side, Weil is seeing more trade shows offer VIP experiences or other customized packages. At a recent event, his client gave attendees the chance to purchase special passes that gave them reserved seats at highly anticipated talks, entrance to a special cocktail hour with influencers and a chance to hang out backstage with the keynote speaker. The package sold out quickly.

"One of the reasons we haven't deployed beacons so far is that if we make that investment, we want to make sure we're collecting the data we can use and exhibitors want."



Lexy Olisko, CMP, CEM
Director of Conferences
Specialty Graphic Imaging Association
Fairfax, VA

"It doesn't have to be that everyone has the same experience," he says. "You can create a show within a show that gives people more access, or more of a feeling of exclusivity."

For exhibitors, Weil sees an end to the practice of having the same price for all square footage. "There are more opportunities to price and do things strategically," he says. "With the technology we have, we can measure traffic flow and create dynamic pricing." Booths in busy parts of an expo hall can cost more, while the same sized booth in a quieter portion may be more affordable.

Weil sees more trade shows curating exhibitors to provide the best possible experience to their attendees. "We're seeing a shift to this more targeted approach," he reports. "Associations are targeting certain companies and making sure they provide what they need rather than selling a booth to anyone."

EXPERIENTIAL BOOTHS AND EXHIBITS

Similar to the trend of providing a more personalized experience for attendees is providing more interactive opportunities for them.

"Companies are trying to be unique in their efforts to draw people into the booths," says Butler. "They're trying to make it more of an experience and give people something to do. They might hire a massage therapist, or they might have an espresso machine. Prizes have been around for a long time, but they're getting pretty good."

"Overall, the experience has to be more engaging," says Hope. "Trade shows have always been the carnival where the hawker is there and pulling you into the tent. We're resisting that stuff now. The approach to sales is different."

To understand why, it's important to understand modern buyer behavior, he says. "People know a lot more now because of smartphones and the internet. You're not taking an informed person who's starting from square one and



SuperZoo – the National Show for Pet Retailers 2016 took place at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas.

educating them." You might be educating them about a specific product or service, but chances are they already know something about what you're selling. That means they need a higher level of information. They may want to feel more of a personal connection to the person they're talking to, rather than feeling like they're being sold to.

"Increasingly, we're seeing the lines between educational offerings and the trade show floor blur," says Doug Poindexter, president of the World Pet Association. "This happens informally as exhibitors are realizing their expanding roles as not just vendors, but as business consultants. They are working with attendees to give them merchandising ideas, to share brand stories and generally to help them realize how to strategically plan a merchandising mix that aligns with the direction of consumer trends. It's also happening formally in terms of on-floor education, planned coordination between conference content and expo content, and even docent-led educational tours of the exhibit hall."

"The people on the floor are demanding more," Hope says. "They want to engage more. They want to touch things. They



Credit: World Pet Association

"Increasingly, we're seeing the lines between educational offerings and the trade show floor blur. This happens informally as exhibitors are realizing their expanding roles as not just vendors, but as business consultants."



Doug Poindexter
President
World Pet Association
Monrovia, CA



credit: Lagnappe Studio/SmithBucklin

At the Fresh Pavilion, retailers and suppliers at the KeHE Summer Selling Show got a taste of exhibitors' deli, bakery and cheese selections all in one place.

don't want to talk to the sales guy, they want to talk to their peers." To encourage these informal gatherings, planners are advised to create comfortable seating areas in the expo hall, preferably with good food and beverage. These stations will keep people in the hall longer and provide them a space for swapping information with other attendees.

In addition to buying a trade show booth, many exhibitors also host offsite gatherings so they have more of an opportunity to interact with customers. Olisko says SGIA is looking for ways to merge those two types of events.

"We're working with exhibitors to provide more information about who attends the show and more opportunities to interact with attendees," she says. This provides a better deal for companies, but it also can be a better deal for associations. Offsite events and trade show booths often are funded from the same pot, she points out. By keeping everything within the trade show walls, associations stand to sell bigger booths and earn more sponsorship dollars.

ALTERNATIVE LAYOUTS

"Show floor plans are changing a lot," Corcoran says. "Your floor plans are based on your buildings. Pretty much all shows are in rooms that are rectangles or squares. Instead of doing



Dave Weil, CAE
V.P. Event Services
SmithBucklin
Chicago, IL

"It doesn't have to be that everyone has the same experience. You can create a show within a show that gives people more access, or more of a feeling of exclusivity."

squares, we're doing Y or X patterns or making the floor plan more interesting. That's been well-received."

The biggest challenge when moving away from the traditional show layout is ensuring all of the booths have access to power and data lines. "Most of these floors were set up on a grid and the electrical is all in the ground," Corcoran says. "You have to have a veteran eye when you're laying it out. You don't want bumps in the carpet from the power strips and cords."

Based on feedback from attendees and exhibitors, the World Pet Association recently reconfigured their show layout so the aisles are shorter and easier for attendees to navigate. "This will also add roughly 100 additional 10-by-10-foot booth locations," Poindexter says.

If there's a theme you want to highlight at a show — maybe high-tech startups or firms with exciting products that are still under development — Weil recommends grouping them together. Call it something like a "startup alley" and put them in an area likely to draw plenty of traffic.

Hope has a word of caution about mixing up the floor plan. "Just changing the design of a show isn't going to help the ROI," he says. "If you do some of those logistic changes without a purpose behind them, you confuse people. You can't just do the physical part of it, you have to have the business part of it."

One thing hasn't changed for show layouts. "The No. 1 draw for any floor is good food and beverage," says Corcoran. Place break stations wisely to move guests in the directions you want them to go.

SHORTER SHOWS/DIFFERENT OPERATING HOURS

"The duration of shows is changing a lot," says Corcoran. "There was a time where there were a lot of four-day shows. Then it became three-day shows.

"Shows a lot of time are defined by the number of hours you're open," he adds. "There's a movement away from that. Instead of having a show that's open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with some dead times, there's a movement that says, 'If you can deliver a large percent of the audience, we're open. When it's not busy, close the exhibition.'"

Many trade show vendors are also small business owners, Corcoran notes. They need time to work on other parts of their businesses and serve clients. In addition, when a trade show happens in conjunction with a conference, many exhibitors want to attend the educational sessions. "The trend now is, instead of being about the number of hours you're open, it's about the number of hours you're able to keep the aisles filled," he says.

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Responsible Meetings

Leading by Example in Sustainability and Community Service

The Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association's Landscape Show in Orlando.

Credit: FNGLA

By Maura Keller

Turn on the television or open a newspaper today, and you are sure to see something related to the environment, weather extremes and climate change. But no matter what side of the debate you're on, there's no debating that the sustainability and "going green" movement is important to the association community. From sustainable coffee production practices to eco-friendly products to water conservation and waste management practices at conventions, meeting planners are taking notice and changing the way they're doing business.

GREENING FOR GOOD

Each year, the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA), embraces sustainability at their Landscape Show whereby 50 to 75 nurseries donate their plants and trees at the end of the show to designated donees.

For many years, FNGLA donated much of the material to Give Kids the World, which is a resort-like facility for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families to come and immerse themselves in the fun and beauty of Central Florida and its family-focused entertainment options. An important part of the stay is enjoying the beautifully landscaped housing provided for the families, all at no charge.

"Plants and trees not only add beauty to our lives, but also wellness and health benefits, all important qualities for a restorative venue such as Give Kids the World," says Linda Adams, chief operations officer at FNGLA. "In fact, FNGLA members have been assisting Give Kids the World for many years, not only with donations, but with landscape maintenance days, so it was an easy decision to make them the recipient of the donated materials. Over the years, nearly \$100,000 in trees and plants has been donated to Give Kids the World."

More recently, the plant and tree donations from the Landscape Show have been going to Central Florida Boys and Girls Clubs. As more clubs are added to the area, landscaping is needed to help make the clubs more inviting and secure environments for the children who participate.

"We work with one of our landscape contractor members who is an active supporter of the Central Florida Boys and Girls Club," Adams says. "He arranges to pick up the donated materials at the end of the show and facilitates getting them planted at the club where they are most needed. We estimate approximately \$20,000 in plant material is donated with each show."



Deirdre T. Flynn, CFSP
Executive Vice President
North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers
Chicago, IL

"The donation program for exhibitors reduces transportation costs and emissions, as they don't need to bring trucks in from around the state to haul the plants and trees back to their nurseries."



Linda Adams
Chief Operations Officer
Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association
Orlando, FL

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

The FNGLA is not alone. More and more associations are recognizing the important role sustainability initiatives play in meetings, conferences and other events.

Take the North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers (NAFEM): Deirdre Flynn, CFSP, executive vice president at NAFEM and her meeting planning team look to reduce, reuse and recycle wherever possible when planning small specialty meetings and The NAFEM Show, the association's major trade show.

They continually look at ways to reduce their association's carbon footprint, including using electronic show guides, event schedules and handouts; using recycled paper goods for disposables; and water coolers instead of plastic bottles. They even donate the extra food at The NAFEM Show to local food banks.

"We work closely with our hotels and convention centers to contribute to their sustainability plans, too," Flynn says.

Scott Craighead, CEM, vice president of exhibitions and events, International Association of Exhibitions and Events, says that they are seeing a conversion from paper show guides and other paper handouts for delivery by mobile app and other technology applications.

"Associations are also developing programs with general service contractors, event facilities and facility service providers to ensure environmentally responsible and sustainable practices," Craighead says. "It's the right thing to do, and it will appeal to members."

According to Martin Bay, CMP, senior director of meetings operations and procurement at Kellen, an association management company, the single most important

"Current and future generations of meeting attendees have environmental responsibility top of mind."

Top 10 Practices

Last fall at IMEX America, the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC), which is part of the Events Industry Council, released the results of a research project "Sustainable Meeting and Event Practices: The State of the Industry" in which planners listed the top 10 practices that are most important to them:

1. Sorting recyclables.
2. Donating leftover food to charitable organizations.
3. Diverting food waste from waste stream.
4. Linen and towel reuse programs.
5. Using water glasses and filling stations (in lieu of bottled water).
6. Offering vegetarian and allergy-friendly menus.
7. Sourcing local food
8. Using event apps (to reduce paper usage).
9. Requesting energy-efficient lighting.
10. Planning give-back programs for the local community.

The study also revealed that meeting professionals prefer that their suppliers include sustainable practices at the RFP stage without having to ask about them; and that the suppliers should absorb the costs because, ultimately, most of the actions will save the supplier money.

For planners interested in reporting and tracking sustainability initiatives, the GMIC recommends the following tools, which "all measure against the APEX/ASTM standards, ISO 20121 standards or Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards — or some combination of all three," according to GMIC (gmicglobal.org).

- **MeetGreen Calculator:** meetgreen.com/products/meetgreen-calculator
- **iCompli Sustainability:** icomplisustainability.com/index.php/event-standards-service

earth-friendly event possible by providing products and services that support them. As such, Chase works with associations to plan events that are truly sustainable and environmentally focused.

In fact, there are several key ways that association meeting and convention planners are working to hold greener meetings. First, many meeting planners include a "green" component in their RFPs to discover the sustainability initiatives of the venue and destination. For instance, meeting planners usually place a high priority on holding meetings and conventions in green buildings and venues that have established a basic level of environmental stewardship.

Some of the sustainability trends Chase sees associations investing in include:

- **Sign substrates:** More and more groups are choosing to use sign materials that contain recycled materials and can be 100 percent recycled after use.
- **Donation programs:** Many groups are gathering the leftover usable materials from the expo floors and donating them to local charities.
- **Legacy projects:** Associations are giving back to the community where they hold their event by setting up volunteer projects with the goal of leaving behind something good for the community long after they are gone.

"Most of the convention centers that you go to in major cities in the U.S. have created a list of local needs and groups that are asking for help, and they are connecting the two groups together and magic happens," Chase says. "This includes everything from making food packets for Third World hunger programs to clothing drives to help give a suit to a

young person looking for a job. Or other attendees may paint a building or clean up a park — all of this is done by event attendees volunteering their time while visiting that city for the event."

Freeman recently helped orchestrate the show for the Specialty Coffee Association in Seattle. They worked closely with the association's meeting planners to provide special compost bins in the booths.

"The booths are sampling coffee and they have lots of coffee grounds in the booths so they asked if we could provide a solution," Chase says. "We created a special waste bin for compost only in the booths. It was a great success and helped keep the waste streams clean and kept the recycling stream clean and the compost stream pure."

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

The implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become widely adopted as more and more or-

"Meetings and conferences can bring the publicity and exposure that we need, and the more community service components and social-economic impacts we show, the better."



Tommy Mayne
V.P. Meetings
IEEE PES
Piscataway, NJ

Green Ideas



- Ask every attendee and every supplier and venue involved in your association's meeting or event to sign a pledge to do at least one thing differently that will be sustainable in nature.
- Encourage carpooling and shuttles versus driving.
- Use recycled materials where possible; bring in an artist who uses throwaways to create art; auction off a finished item at a raffle for children's charity of your choice.
- Offer access to normally printed materials on event apps or reusable USB thumb drives. Ask attendees to, at their option, upload to their laptops and return the drives wiped clean for next year or for donation to a school.



"Associations are also developing programs with...facility service providers to ensure environmentally responsible and sustainable practices. It's the right thing to do, and it will appeal to members."

decision an association can have on making its meeting as environmentally friendly and sustainable as possible is in the choice of the venue.

"The use of energy, recycling, food purchasing and so forth are all controlled by the venue," Bay says. "The next steps in creating a positive impact are to be as paperless as possible, accurate with food ordering, having a plan for the repurposing of unused cooked and prepped food to food banks, and including sustainability into the programming."

CUT COSTS AND SHOW YOU CARE

Jeff Chase, vice president of sustainability with brand experience company Freeman, works closely with several associations including Specialty Food Association, Specialty Coffee Association, American Chemical Association and the Consumer Technology Association, to name a few.

"When you focus on being more environmentally responsible for your event it will help you rethink how you do everything," Chase says. "If you are worried about your event budget then that's all the more reason to focus on being sustainable and environmentally focused. You can save money and cut costs by going green."

Chase says that associations also need to consider the de-

mographic of their membership who come every year and what they care about in their day-to-day lives. "If they want to keep them, surveys have shown that people care about the environment and helping others in their community, so by providing them the opportunity at the event helps show the association cares."

The IEEE Power and Energy Society has always been environmentally responsible. "Engineering can be defined as, 'The practical application of technology for the betterment of mankind' and that is what we as engineers do," says Tommy Mayne, vice president of meetings for IEEE PES.

As an example, the IEEE PES leads the IEEE Smart Grid technologies issue that addresses the technology needed to implement the "smart" aspect of using electricity. "Smart means more efficient in every aspect of power. And that is only one of many aspects of power and power efficiency that we address," says Mayne. "It follows that our conferences, and how they are run, are expected to adhere to that culture. With our conferences, we track several operational aspects that address areas like efficiency on food and beverage, transportation, existing venue programs, and others. Our members much prefer paperless over paper for our conferences. This is not only environmentally responsible but financial efficient as well."

Although IEEE PES is a worldwide association, their ongoing sustainability initiatives within meetings is addressed locally. "From a meeting perspective, we are committed to use as much of our local services that are available at the venue," Mayne says. "If we can find the services locally we will use them. All our conferences have a local organizational committee made up of local volunteers who are IEEE PES members, and we rely on that committee to recommend and incorporate any services that are available in their area. This allows IEEE PES conferences to be both socially and environmentally responsible."

Freeman also has made the commitment to find ways to help their clients meet their goals of producing the most



"As society continues to make sustainability important in our daily lives, that will ripple deeper and deeper into the planning and execution of our association meetings."

ganizations find tangible value in volunteerism. Many organizations regularly integrate volunteer programs as part of teambuilding activities during meetings, trade shows and conventions. Attendees walk away feeling inspired by the experience, while local community groups gain much-needed help and assistance.

More of Kellen's association clients have built community service committees that are active year round with programs to help to give back and promote sustainability. The meetings become one component of this committee's activity, and the volunteers also help to identify and execute a local community service program in the location of the meeting.

"By sanctioning and supporting by assignment of association resources — primarily personnel and budget allocation — the volunteers become the passion engine to motivate others and the worker bees to get the work done, thereby making an impact on the community on behalf of the association," Bay says.

For the GreenBuild show in Washington, DC, Freeman worked to help provide a donation program for exhibitors, and they have worked with the convention center and local charities to provide leftover materials from the show to go to the Feast of Sharing event coming in right after their show.

"We did a clothing donation and reclaimed show bags that were donated to help the homeless in DC," Chase says.

For Craighead at IAEE, it's important to members to exercise their civic responsibility by giving back to the cities and communities that are involved in and support that association's particular industry.

"Sustainability measures will continue to increase for meetings as more and more planners demand it and as technology advances," Craighead says.

While sustainability and being community-focused is good for the association, its members and the community at large, it also is just good business.

As we are learning more about the millennial generation, community service and "giving back" are two pillars of their beliefs.

"The more we can help to facilitate that belief as association professionals, the easier it is to make a difference," Bay says. "As society continues to make sustainability important in our daily lives, that will ripple deeper and deeper into the planning and execution of our association meetings. The future is very bright for the continued growth of sustainability in our association meetings."

Mayne and his team at IEEE PES feel engineers are, in general, not recognized at the status that they should be. "Doctors and lawyers have a cultural perception to their profession, but engineers are often considered nerds and geeks," Mayne says. "In my opinion, this perception should be changed. There is nothing wrong with nerds and geeks but our impact on the betterment of society is more far-reaching than the general public realizes. We have not done a decent job of marketing ourselves. Meetings and conferences can bring the publicity and exposure that we need, and the more community service components and social-economic impacts we show, the better."

Indeed, Adams with FNGLA recognizes that trees and plants are, by their very nature, significant contributors to a healthy environment. The more we can encourage their use in community areas, the better for everyone, as they serve to reduce air pollution, noise pollution, reduce heat through the creation of shade zones, reduce stress and increase wellness, as well as add beauty to the environment.

"It's important for FNGLA to share these very valuable resources to communities which can benefit the most," Adams says. "The donation program for exhibitors reduces transportation costs and emissions, as they don't need to bring trucks in from around the state to haul the plants and trees back to their nurseries."

KEEPING IT TOP OF MIND

Whether it is through food recycling programs or green paper products, according to Flynn, sustainable and responsible meetings will continue to grow. "Current and future generations of meeting attendees have environmental responsibility top of mind," Flynn says.

"Some of the associations have realized that in order for them to continue their 100-year-old association, they have a new generation of young people coming up that are looking at things in a whole new way, and it really matters to them about the environment and the community," Chase says. "If they want the next generation to join in and be a part of their association, they need to show that they are listening and care about them."



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Attendance-Boosting Marketing Tactics

The Name of the Game Is to Get Them in the Door With the Right Value Proposition

Marketing is the proverbial “name of the game” within the association conference and meeting arena. Just ask Ushma Suvarnakar, MTA, CMP, director of meetings and conferences at the American Anthropological Association in Arlington, Virginia. Suvarnakar recognizes that with the evolving economy, growth of social media and diminishing travel budgets, there is a lot of pressure on association planners to showcase their meeting as THE meeting to attend over others.

And Suvarnakar is not alone. More and more association planners are working to highlight all the new elements of their meeting or convention that differ from the experience of previous years. The result? Using unique marketing tactics has kept planners on their toes and kept them from producing the same and sometimes stagnant meetings year after year.

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

In the marketing management game, it's all about getting people to remember your association, your convention, your products, your services and your brand. It's the philosophy and core behind all business development. Marketing is the arena that puts the “big picture” perspective into focus and determines where an association makes (or breaks) its future. More and more event marketers and planners are realizing the important role marketing plays in making both immediate and lasting impressions on association members.

As Kelly Ricker, executive vice president, events and education at Downers Grove, Illinois-based Computer Technology Industry Association-CompTIA, explains, five to 10 years ago, it was much more acceptable to go to the same meetings year in and year out. The trips were routine and unmeasured. But today, attendees are under pressure to show a return on their investment, which includes both the hard travel and expense costs as well as the time out of office.

“As a result, we've worked with our research team to

“We've worked with our research team to build an arsenal of important stats proving our meetings are must-attend activities. Using the attendee survey for our largest conference, we were able to calculate ROI and actively promote that attendees could expect a return of \$3 in value for every dollar spent to attend.”



Kelly Ricker
Executive Vice President, Events and Education
Computer Technology Industry Association, CompTIA
Downers Grove, IL

there's no one-size-fits-all marketing approach to attracting everyone,” Suvarnakar says.

The American Anthropological Association uses teaser promotional materials that have worked well.

“Withholding just a little bit of information piques the interest of attendees,” Suvarnakar says.

CompTIA has some tried-and-true activities they know are effective. These include email, at least one direct mail piece, and a telesales campaign using member engagement staff with whom attendees have a relationship.

“These are the workhorses of our plan, but we also inject a few new tactics every year to keep things fresh and increase our chances of gaining attention,” Ricker says. “We've done things like peer-to-peer email campaigns, running a pre-event video contest for exhibitors — encouraging par-

ticipants to lobby for votes and therefore build awareness of our event with prospective attendees, and posting testimonial video clips from key executives to show we attract the who's who of the industry.”

They also have conducted an exhibitor recruitment challenge by which companies receive credit for every registration they secure — complete with a leaderboard on their website to foster friendly competition; they have embedded a video message into email; bartered with media properties for valuable ad space and blog placements; and built strategic partnerships with related organizations that wanted to co-locate.

“These special features keep our event in the ‘must go’

versus ‘might go’ column,” Ricker says.



Mazda Miles, CMM
President, Chief Event Strategist
Perfection Events Inc.
Philadelphia, PA

"I have seen a shift to more content-based incentives, such as changing the makeup of the meeting to provide more in-depth opportunities for networking, increasing opportunities for CEUs and offering more dynamic programming. A healthy mix of cost- and content-based incentives work to increase attendance."

Mazda Miles, CMM, chief event strategist and president of Philadelphia-based Perfection Events Inc., plans meetings and events for associations such as the Philadelphia Direct Marketing Association, the National Association of Women Business Owners of Greater Philadelphia and the Project Management Institute. Through her experience, Miles has learned associations have traditionally used cost-based incentive models for boosting attendance — significantly reduced introductory registration rates, volume discounting for groups, travel scholarships, etc.

"In recent years, I have seen a shift to more content-based incentives, such as changing the makeup of the meeting to provide more in-depth opportunities for networking, increasing opportunities for CEUs and offering more dynamic programming," Miles says. "I've seen that a healthy mix of cost- and content-based incentives work to increase attendance."

As Miles explains, price-driven tactics are helpful for attendees who are getting financial support from their employer because they can make a strong case for going to a meeting, especially during times when budgets are constrained. Content-based tactics are most successful when attendees are paying some or part of the fees and travel, or are personally responsible for the budget expenditure and need to feel good about making the investment or personal sacrifice.

"From a content perspective, some of the most interesting ideas we've seen work include allowing attendees to build their own schedules based on the mix of knowledge and networking that works for them, finding non-traditional ways to provide CEUs like open forums or un-conference formats with facilitated learning opportunities and mobile workshops, which bring case studies to life via live tours or visits," Miles says. "Highlighting the new and notable components of the meetings also have been attendance drivers."

The most noticeable changes another expert has seen in the past few years involve the nearly complete transition

from print to digital marketing. Print tactics — notably direct mail and print advertising — have been replaced by email, content marketing via social media, and digital advertising using mobile, pay-per-click and limited banner advertising.

This marketing expert suggests that direct mail is still used for prospecting, since email is ineffective for communicating with people who don't know the sender, but for the most part, the bulk of marketing dollars are spent on digital tactics.

SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE

As with most businesses today, the access to members and potential attendees is much more prevalent via the internet and social media.

"Potential attendees have many more choices on how to spend their time and their money, which means we, as conference organizers, have to be much clearer on the value proposition for each conference," says Phelps R. Hope, CMP, senior vice president, meetings and expositions at Atlanta-based Kellen, an association management company. "No longer is it just about the fun destination or a headliner keynote. Potential attendees want to know how they will benefit directly from attending conferences."

For the past two years at the American Anthropological Association's annual meeting, the organization implemented a fun challenge for attendees to post to social media using their meeting hashtag for a chance to win a free registration for the meeting the following year.

According to Suvarnakar, the results were two-fold. Not only did it help with the association's social media presence; it also acted as free promotion through the eyes of an attendee.

"We added a few social media walls throughout the venue that aggregated all the posts through various social media platforms," Suvarnakar says. "We would be remiss to not use social media for marketing purposes. There is a social media platform out there for everyone, regardless of generation. Attendees want a customized experience. This can only be accomplished through promoting the meeting through all the various channels out there."

Social media also is an important component of CompTIA's attendee recruitment plan. Many of their tech-savvy constituency automate their inboxes, sending mass communications straight to their delete folder, including CompTIA's standard promotions and event newsletters.

"Through social posts we're able to distribute short updates, links to important details, and draw attention to event news and calls to action," Ricker says.

The use of social media also depends on the association, the industries served and primary demographic. The associations that Miles serves that skew to a more age mature audience spend more effort on email and postal mail pieces. Alternatively, the associations that are skewing to millennial or middle-aged audiences are using social media quite a bit.

"Regardless of the demographics, social media is a key component to any marketing plan, at least on some level, and the association just has to decide who they are looking to engage through the social media," Miles says. "If targeting the millennial or technology sector, they are going to be more successful on a platform like Instagram. If they are reaching a broader audience, Facebook comes into play. I have also seen them use key management and executive staff to post updates on LinkedIn. These posts have been surprisingly popular, since attendees do respect association leadership, and view a LinkedIn post as a personal endorsement."

And while social media appears to work for many associations, Hope's experience is that it is best used to enhance member engagement while at the show. When used with an official trade show hashtag, social media posts can help members "continue" the session, and can open new friendships while there. It is important to take the time to build an active social channel before depending on this form of communication for urgent announcements. And when it comes to announcements, while everyone might have their own go-to social media channel from Facebook to Twitter to Instagram, email is ubiquitous and can be the best direct form of communication, especially for schedule changes where you need more assurance you are reaching them.

KEY TACTICS

Social media aside, there are some other key marketing tactics association meeting planners can and should be using to market their conventions and events.

Hope says it's important that association planners are very clear on the return on their investment

The American Anthropological Association uses cutouts of famous anthropologists (like Franz Boas shown here) on their step-and-repeat banners for event photos.

Credit: Anne Kelsey

with statements such as, "By attending this conference you will have the opportunity to meet with 27 new exhibiting vendors, experience a hands-on-class in technical software, hear from the keynote about the next three years globally in our industry and how the global economy will affect us, etc.

"These should be specific benefits, not just broad statements. That is what we have found attendees want to hear today," Hope says.

Testimonials from peers are still the strongest qualifier for new or potential attendees, but Hope says those testimonials also have to be specific, such as "I learned how to use the new module of technical software and have since saved two hours a week in my efficiency, plus I was able to source a new vendor that has saved me and my team over \$10 a day."

Of course, with those tactics that work, there also are several that association planners need to avoid. For example, discounting registration fees are too transactional for the sophisticated attendee of today.

"Other marketing mistakes are usually around loosely worded messaging that is misleading or is so 'sales-y' that it





"While I never think meetings are going away, there is a great opportunity for more hybrid meetings that includes virtual conferencing. This is especially the case if there's a high level of interaction between the in-person and the virtual audience."

Ushma Suvarnakar, MTA, CMP
Director, Meetings and Conferences
American Anthropological Association, Arlington, VA

actually turns people away," Hope says. "The other mistake is a deep discount, which is too widely used and ends up costing the organization money because the details of the discount were not defined well enough."

CompTIA learned that it's a bad idea to employ any tactic that makes it too easy to register without a real intention to attend.

"For example, one year we made a huge effort to generate registrations while working our booths at other industry events," Ricker says. "We did generate a ton of registrations and saw our pre-reg numbers skyrocket, but our no-show rate on those registrations was huge."

Hope adds that the marketing tactics for association meetings will not evolve very quickly as associations often lag behind adopters of any new technology and processes.

"The emerging generations will want more interaction through social media platforms, but unless the association has its own social media tool — app — and supports it with a rich stream of content and constant daily updating, the app will be too passive and just another reference tool," Hope says. "The messaging certainly will need to continue to evolve and be more specific and pointedly value-driven for the individual as time and money continue to be diminishing resources for attendees."

Ricker believes the biggest challenge facing association planners and marketers is how to rise above the influx of messages fighting for our attention all day, every day.

"Cutting through the noise is tough today and will only get tougher in the future," Ricker says. "Savvy event producers will craft nimble marketing plans that can be supplemented or tweaked when numbers are lagging. It's important to mix old-school tactics and more current social media tactics, and keep current on new communication tools, platforms and channels to get your message out to the right people."

The biggest mistakes the marketing expert sees consist-

tently is the use of outdated databases. Without a good database of past attendees and prospects, an association can't reach its full potential in terms of attendance, yet many associations struggle with having accurate and reliable databases.

A rule to consider: Any data that is more than three years old is obsolete because of employment turnover, yet many organizations use the same mailing lists for five or more years. Keeping a database constantly current and accurate is the single most important thing a show organizer can do.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As Suvarnakar points out, the meetings industry is constantly evolving and once implementing change and improvement stops, attendees start losing interest in the meeting.

"While I never think meetings are going away, there is a great opportunity for more hybrid meetings that includes virtual conferencing," Suvarnakar says. "This is especially the case if there's a high level of interaction between the in-person and the virtual audience."

Miles advises association planners to remember that attendees are more savvy nowadays and are well aware of how to get their hands on information. They also are

"The emerging generations will want more interaction through social media platforms, but unless the association has its own social media tool — app — and supports it with a rich stream of content and constant daily updating, the app will be too passive and just another reference tool."

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

able to attend sessions close to home, with minimal cost, to obtain CEUs.

"This means we have to give them what they really need from us, which is the opportunity to connect with their peers from all over the country — and world, and learn from one another," Miles says. "We have to be very clear about the value of live meetings and give them the opportunity to contribute to the format and outcome of the knowledge sharing. The future of marketing meetings is directly connected to building programs that are relevant and deliver the appropriate mix of rich peer-to-peer interaction and traditional learning."

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Speaker Trends



**From TED Talks
to Interactivity,
Today's Approach
Is Innovative
and Impactful**

By John Buchanan

If content is now king at association meetings, then by definition the selection of speakers is a critical factor in the success of any gathering, large or small.

Over the last few years, however, the consideration of what defines a successful presentation has changed and evolved. At the same time, budget pressures have changed the cost-benefit equation.

But the good news is that after a marked downturn during the long and lingering recession, the market is healthy and dynamic again.

"The best thing about the speaker market today is that association meetings are on the rise again," says Stacy Tetschner, CAE, FASAE, the CEO of the Tempe, Arizona-based National Speakers Association. "Things are getting back to normal in terms of demand for speakers after the recession and the years afterward. And that is especially true in the association market, because associations rely so much on the use of speakers."

Tetschner notes that associations depend on

outside speakers considerably more so than the corporate meeting market does because in one way or another, an association's basic business is ongoing education of its members. "So that fact alone creates a lot of opportunity for many different kinds of speakers," Tetschner says.

The primary factor driving the market now, he says, is "Who's new? Who's different? Who's best?" In other words, he says, the bar is being raised. "And one thing we're seeing now is that associations sometimes choose to bring in someone who is an industry expert, even if they're not



professional speakers," he says. "The other trend I see now is that there is more demand for speakers of all levels of experience and expertise, because more and more associations are looking for a unique perspective that is a perfect fit for their market. So those two factors are tending to broaden the speaker market, which is good for associations and also good for speakers."

In fact, he says, the growing demand for a truly unique and compelling perspective is the single most important factor in the success of a speaker today.

THE AUDIENCE EFFECT

The other major issue that is impacting the association market, just as it is in the corporate market, is the ever-increasing role of the audience in the development and planning of meetings. "Today, it's the audience that drives the content for the meeting and the types of speakers they want to hear, Tetschner says. That has led to an increasingly impor-



Barrett Cordero
President
BigSpeak Inc.
Santa Barbara, CA

"The other thing is that presentations have to be very relevant to the association's industry. They also now tend to be more narrow in scope — very focused. They have to serve a clear purpose. They have to be interactive."

tant best practice, which is in-depth pre-meeting collaboration between meeting planners and speakers to craft a presentation or speech that is tailor-made for the group. Largely gone are the days of a standard canned speech that is delivered generically to audience after audience, week after week.

THE IMPACT OF TED

Another key factor that is transforming meetings is shorter, more focused presentations that follow the well-established and enormously influential TED model. Because of TED's success, the old notion of the one-hour keynote is on the endangered species list.

"TED has had the single biggest impact on the length and style of presentations," Tetschner says. "TED has been able to show everyone in the industry how a speaker can — in 18 minutes or less — make a really good talk that will change an audience's thinking, change the way they see something, change the way they act. It has been a real revolution."

And its impact will only continue to grow in the meeting industry, he says.

"The other factor, based on what I said earlier," he says, "is that more and more meeting planners are now asking themselves, 'What does the audience want?' For the longest time, most planners just said, 'Hey, here's what you get — the standard one hour or 45-minute keynote speech or whatever. But in the last few years, more and more planners have come to realize that a shorter, more specific presentation delivers better results and that attendees like it better. So because of things like the feedback planners get from social media, like a Twitter feed at the meeting, they realize that often they are getting killed by the same old 45-minute speech. And that's why more and more, they're looking for something new and different. Something unique that will resonate with their audience."

The result has been genuine innovation.

"First, we saw shorter TED-style presentations that were limited to 20 minutes or so. But more recently, we've seen situations where creative new ideas are coming into play in ways that enhance engagement and communication. For example, at a recent meeting of ours, we did an event we called 'Fast Five,' which included five speakers for five minutes each. And it was very effective, especially because it was done in front of an audience of speakers. It showed you can take an entirely different approach and get results," says Tetschner.

THE GENERATION GAP

Barrett Cordero, president of Santa Barbara, California-based speakers bureau BigSpeak Inc., agrees that transformational change has come to the association meeting market over the last few years when it comes to the use of speakers.

"As a planner, you have to pay attention to the trends," he says. "And I agree that one of the major changes has been shorter or more abbreviated keynotes and other talks. The other thing is that presentations have to be very relevant to the association's industry. They also now tend to be more narrow in scope — very focused. They have to serve a clear purpose. They have to be interactive."

And most of all, he says, they have to be memorable and impactful.

A related factor — and a major challenge for planners — is the generation gap that now looms over many meetings.

"That is a factor that now affects every aspect of a meeting, including the speakers," Tetschner says. "In the typical audience today, you have representatives of five different generations sitting there. That means their individual experiences and expectations are essentially very different from

one another. And that means that when a speaker makes an analogy or cites an example, those things have to communicate across those generational lines. And that is very hard to do. It's not easy to bring the entire audience along with you anymore since your audience is so diverse in terms of perception and tastes. If you're not careful, you can be perceived as irrelevant to large sectors of your audience very quickly."

The generational issue is now so critical that the National Speakers Association has addressed it in breakout sessions at several of its major meetings, including an annual conference.

The solution the organization preaches: Find commonality, Tetschner says, by doing in-depth attendee research before the meeting to find the common threads of interest across generations.

THE BUDGET QUESTION

Another rather obvious factor is post-recession budgets, which remain tight for many associations. And one way budgets can be reduced is by hiring less expensive speakers than the long-popular, best-selling author, celebrity or sports hero.

David Poulos, chief consultant at Sparks, Maryland-based meeting planning and consulting firm Granite Partners, has a somewhat unique perspective on the issue because he also is a speaker.

"In general, since the recession, association budgets for speakers have shrunk slightly," Poulos says. "And at the same time, speaker fees have risen. If you want a marquee speaker today, he or she is going to cost you at least \$20,000. You can get an 'almost marquee' guy for \$5,000. So the reason why now you see fewer associations hiring marquee speakers is obvious. But the problem with that calculus is that the marquee speaker is going to bring you more attendees based on his or her reputation, visibility and notoriety. So in general, you can save money on the speaker that costs you a quarter as much. But you're not going to get the same draw or the same value."

Unfortunately, since the recession, too many meeting planners fail to accurately quantify the value of a speaker and how that factors into the bottom-line success of the meeting.

As the head of a highly successful speakers bureau, Cordero disputes Poulos' assessment. Speaker fees are back to normal, he says. Budgets are healthy again. Tangible value — the perceived drawing power of a particular speaker for a particular meeting — is more important than ever.

But, he adds, there also is more diversity in terms of what is available at what price point.

"The other trend I see now is that there is more demand for speakers of all levels of experience and expertise, because more and more associations are looking for a unique perspective that is a perfect fit for their market."



Stacy Tetschner, CAE, FASAE
CEO
National Speakers Association
Tempe, AZ

"But at the same time, in my experience," he says, "the typical association has the budget available to support our recommendation in terms of what will work best for them."

'NUTS AND BOLTS'

Aside from budgets themselves is the now more widely debated issue of the underlying purpose of a presentation. In other words, planners are weighing the value of a "big name" speaker versus a lesser known one whose talk might deliver much more practical benefit.

A current trend Poulos sees is that what he calls "nuts and bolts" speakers are transplanting celebrities and experts — and not just because they are considerably less expensive. "With the nuts and bolts speakers, the value is obvious," he says. "They can say to the planner, 'When I'm done, your attendees will be able to do X, Y and Z.' It's a practical consideration. With the more well-known and glitzy speaker, you're going to get celebrity and a draw. But you're not going to get the same amount of takeaway knowledge that the nuts and bolts guy will give you."

He adds that for attendees and the companies that pay their meeting registration fees and travel costs, the nuts and bolts speaker also has more appeal. "That's because more and more," Poulos says, "companies are asking, before they decide to send people to the meeting, 'What's the takeaway? What value will I get out of sending people to the meeting?' And those kinds of questions are more important than ever to most companies.

"What you hear these days is that when a CFO is told X dollars are being spent to send people to a meeting, his first question is, 'What are we going to get for that money?' And you need to have a good answer to that. So that drives the trend toward more practical speakers that can satisfy that requirement. But they're not going to deliver any excitement. And they're not going to increase attendance. So the decision as to what kind of speaker

you hire, at what cost, has to be made based on what you want. And you have to be very clear about what you want and why. That said, there will always be a market for Katie Couric or anyone else of that stature. But you have to know exactly why you want Katie Couric."

STAR POWER

While Cordero does not challenge Poulos' assertion about the growing appeal of more practical, less well-known speakers, he says without hesitation that demand for well-known, recognizable speakers is robust and will always be robust for obvious reasons — star appeal and drawing power.

"One of the most obvious trends I see right now is that many associations are looking for celebrity speakers or at least someone who is widely recognized," he says.



David Poulos
Chief Consultant
Granite Partners
Sparks, MD

"With the nuts and bolts speakers, the value is obvious. ...With the more well-known and glitz speaker, you're going to get celebrity and a draw. But you're not going to get the same amount of takeaway knowledge that the nuts and bolts guy will give you."

"That's because they want to draw attention to who will be speaking at the meeting as a way of generating interest and attendance. They want the draw that only a well-known speaker can generate."

There has been one significant change in the market, Cordero says. "Best-selling authors carry less weight now than ever before, because there are just so many best-selling authors out there in the age of self-publishing that their value has diminished," he says. "If someone is truly a major author who wrote a book a lot of people know about, then that can be a draw. But in general, I'd say authors are less popular than ever before."

By comparison, he says, celebrities are more popular than ever. "And part of that is because of the way they can promote and merchandise themselves via social media. And the notion of who is a celebrity today doesn't just include people who are in the movies or TV or in sports. There are 'business celebrities' today and they are very popular now with association meeting groups, because

their business expertise and celebrity makes them very relevant to the audience."

For example, Cordero says, among the most in-demand business speakers for the last year or so have been people like Mark Cuban and Kevin O'Leary of the "Shark Tank" TV show, as well as their two less well-known colleagues. "They are popular because they are well-known business people who have big brand presences," Cordero says. "And even more important, they have proven business acumen, so what they have to say is more relevant to personal development and individual performance."

Other much-in-demand speakers, according to Cordero, include high achievers such as astronauts and Olympic gold medalists. "They will always be in demand, for obvious reasons," he says.

BEST ADVICE

Of course, many of the factors that go into the selection of a speaker are subjective. And what works well for one association meeting might be a flop at another.

Therefore, Poulos says, planners should adhere to a simple principle.

"In today's world, planners need to be creative," he says. "They need to be innovative. Anybody can spend money. Today, it's more about identifying and chasing down speakers that can do a great job for you at a good price. And that often means going outside the speaker bureaus and finding more creative ways to communicate with a speaker. For example, find someone who knows someone who knows them. Or use your social media networks. If you know a reasonable number of people, you can find someone who can put you in touch. If you can establish direct communication, you'll often be able to negotiate a better price. It's about how you approach people and how you deal with them. If you come at it from a different angle, you can get a good deal for yourself and also do something that appeals to the speaker."

Tetschner offers another piece of well-informed counsel.

"Be relevant," he says. "Major industries are changing so fast now, thanks to things like technology or global markets, that associations need to pay more attention to what the needs of their attendees are. And the same principle applies to speakers at meetings. Today, a meeting planner has to ask himself or herself when they're planning a meeting, 'Where is the pain our members are feeling? And how can we help alleviate that pain?' Until you know and understand that, you can't design the right content and hire the right speakers. Alleviating the pain your members are feeling as their industry changes is the most important factor in why someone is going to come to your meeting — and why they'll want to sit and hear what your speakers have to say."

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Family-Friendly Meetings

Get a 'Relative' Boost in Attendance and the Bottom Line

There are many reasons associations allow members to bring family along to a meeting or convention, not the least of which is that doing so can boost attendance. For some, it fits with the culture of the association and/or its membership base, so that bringing family along is the only way to go.

Including family can be structured in many ways. They might be at most or all convention functions, on spouse or family tours when members are in sessions, at evening functions only. Often, family members tag along for the start or finish of a convention, providing attendees with a way to combine business and vacation in one trip.

Including family works best in a destination that's both family- and business-friendly. Any city or town with stellar museums, a range of family attractions, nature opportunities and tours with appeal to all age groups, as well as excellent conference facilities can work. Here's how five family-friendly cities and associations make balancing business and family easy.

ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

With its notable theme parks, Anaheim is a family magnet. "For meeting and convention attendees in Anaheim or Orange County, traveling for business doesn't mean sacrificing family

time," says Junior Tauvaa with Visit Anaheim. "Home to world renowned theme parks, beautiful beaches and sporting events, Anaheim makes it easy for meeting and convention attendees to arrive early or extend their stay to vacation with family and build lasting memories."

LaDonna Pettit, director of operations and conferences for Stone Fort Group, worked with the Automotive Service Association (ASA) on the 2016 show management of the NACE/CARS event in August, with 7,000 attendees.

"A big majority of NACE/CARS attendees are mechanical and collision repair shops that are family owned, so being a family oriented convention is important," she says. "On behalf of ASA, Stone Fort Group coordinated and operated several activity options/tours during the event."

Among them were discounted tours via LuxBus America to Universal Studios Hollywood, Los Angeles, Orange County Beaches and the Peterson Automotive Museum. There were also discounted Disney theme park tickets and information on a variety of other attractions, including Knott's Berry Farm and ART (Anaheim Resort Transportation) and on local restaurants.

Pettit says the inclusion of family definitely impacted location selection. "During site inspections, we visited many of the offsite activities we organized and offered during the

event. Chris Nuccio, CMP, at Visit Anaheim was amazing and took great care to ensure we understood the venues and activities available and personally took us to visit them."

This was the first time NACE/CARS was on the West Coast, and Anaheim proved perfect. "The weather was beautiful in August. Airlift was easy, and between L.A. and Orange County, the availability was fantastic," Pettit says. "We found great local entertainment for the outdoor opening reception and even enjoyed fireworks at Disney at the end of the night as you can see them from the convention center and convention hotels."

Available hotels also made Anaheim a good choice. "Every hotel pool was busy throughout the week," Pettit says. "Many of the resorts offer breakfast buffets in the package, which was great for families. I highly encourage that option for groups considering Anaheim."

Upscale food trucks on the outdoor promenade worked well for lunches. "This was a hit," Pettit says, "and easy to arrange via Aramark. Access Destinations also assisted with opening reception food trucks, which offered a variety for all ages."

The conference included sessions that families didn't attend, and, Pettit notes, "Because we have heavy equipment on the show floor there was an age limit there. We did not provide childcare as most parents enjoyed Anaheim with their children pre and post the event."

Because this is a large convention and everyone wanted to be in Anaheim, early hotel reservations were a must. Pettit advises planners to offer hotel packages and discounts to parks and tours pre and post. "This may call for being creative with the tour company or DMC," she says, "but in Anaheim, everyone was very accommodating."

NAPLES, FLORIDA

With sublime beaches, dolphins leaping offshore, excellent golf and numerous ways to enjoy the compelling Gulf Coast environs, Naples is popular with families. It's also a fine choice for meetings. The National Pasta Association (NPA) successfully combined business and family at LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort in 2014 and 2016, drawing 120–150 attendees.

Linda Arcangeli-Story, CMP, manager, meetings and expositions with association management company Kellen, notes differences in meetings that include family. "Associations that include families typically contract more sleeping rooms than we typically would in the room block on shoulder nights, including larger suites to accommodate families traveling with larger numbers or who want to

"Events with a family element result in higher registration numbers. For attendees who can't always afford family vacations, these meetings let them tie vacation in with a work trip, which saves money and makes the entire family happy."



Linda Arcangeli-Story, CMP
Manager, Meetings and Expositions
Kellen
Atlanta, GA

stay additional days. A larger (and full!) room block supports the association financially, which is always a benefit," she says.

"I've also found that when doing an event with a high family element, attendees want more free time, which means a shorter day event-wise. In turn, the association doesn't have to hold as many food and beverage events, resulting in cost savings. Additionally, I've noticed that events with a family element result in higher registration numbers. For attendees who can't always afford family vacations, these meetings let them tie vacation in with a work trip, which saves money and makes the entire family happy."

In terms of the right destination, Arcangeli-Story says, "Florida by far is No. 1. Orlando is obvious; however, Naples, Tampa, Clearwater and South Florida also are very popular, and Arizona does well, too." She says resorts that have worked well for family-friendly meetings include Ponte Vedra Inn & Club (Ponte Vedra), LaPlaya Golf & Beach Resort (Naples), various Ritz-Carlton properties across Florida and the Wigwam Resort in Arizona.

"An ideal family/business location also has to have easy lift



An airboat adventure in the Everglades near Naples, Florida.



Credit: National Cattlemen's Beef Association

and be cost effective," she says. "You want a top-tier location that families can easily travel to but won't cost an arm and a leg. Perfect properties have great pools, are near or on the beach, have activities for families onsite but also great meeting space — preferably off the beaten path and away from the pool. You don't want people in swimsuits wandering into your meeting space."

She also likes to make sure that hotels where families and spouses attend are safe and have easy access to transportation to and from all amenities, onsite or off.

Naples' beaches are a huge draw, but the town has multiple family attractions, including Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens, the Nature Center at Conservancy of Southwest Florida and catamaran sailing adventures. Families also can book tours in the Everglades, about 1½ hours away. Most NPA families spend time together before or after the meetings and create their own activity schedules. By design, the resorts booked for these meetings include daycare or children's programs, giving parents time at adult functions and meetings or on their own.

Most NPA meeting functions are for adults only, with typical food and entertainment provided. However, NPA offers a few activities that include families, too. "Families are included in sports events, such as golf and bocce," Arcangeli-Story says. "This allows attendees time to network and do business but also time with family."

She adds that conference functions typically end early enough that members can spend time with family or go out as a group. "And for those events where children are included," she says, "we offer different food options on a lower scale for kids, and activities to keep them busy, such as face painting, characters and a variety of options on the dance floor."

The biggest challenge, she says, "is finding a property that's ideal for a family-friendly meeting but also cost-effective for attendees and the association's bottom line. Some are willing to spend over \$279 a night, but not all."

At the end of the day, Arcangeli-Story says, "Conferences with and without families are not all that different, as long as you know your audience. That's the key in event planning:

Know whom you are planning for. If you have that, finding the property isn't complicated."

In addition to knowing your groups, she says, you have to also know their expectations. "If you know what is desired, then you can make it happen. Do your best to do a site visit and always ask what other events or activities are occurring at the property when your group is there. You don't want to find a dream location then realize you booked over spring break."

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

It's known for songwriters and some of the country's coolest music venues. But Nashville also easily melds family and business. If your meeting happens to take place at Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center, there's enough to keep a family occupied for many hours inside the resort, including a "riverboat" ride along the property's meandering manmade river.

Butch Spyridon, president and CEO of Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. says, "In a city known for music, there's plenty to do for the family. The interactive Grammy Museum Gallery at Musicians Hall of Fame is a great and appropriate start. The Nashville Zoo's addition of four exhibits in 2017 makes it a must-see. Then, there's the Adventure Science Center, zip lining and canoeing in the surrounding areas, and of course our new AAA ballpark with a miniature golf course to round out the family experience."

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association set its Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show, with nearly 10,000 attendees, at Gaylord Opryland Resort in February. Kristin Torres, executive director, meetings and events, says, "Allowing family members is a huge positive for our association. Many of our members work with their families; they run family operations. For a lot of our members, our event has become their annual vacation. They don't always travel a lot."

Torres says the association accommodates spouses and kids. "We offer spouse discounts on registration and don't charge for children under the age of 12. We do spouse tours for a select VIP group but don't offer them to the masses because we've found historically that most of the time people do their own

thing. We do specific marketing around the destination/facility being family friendly."

She says Nashville is a great location for members for several reasons. "It allows for drive-in traffic; there are a lot of cattle producers in the region who can easily travel in for a day trip. The entertainment options Nashville provides are endless. Our members are huge country music fans and love not only the music in the city but the history behind it. Nashville is easy for our group to navigate and it's a safe, comfortable and friendly city."

"There are also tons of things for families to do outside of the convention," Torres adds. "That said, most of our families that do attend also attend the convention, especially the trade show."

No need to ask what was served at convention functions. "We serve beef and things that go with beef at our events, and that works great for our members," Torres notes. "We do not adjust our menus for families."

Evening functions were family oriented but also provided adult-only time. "We make our evening events kid friendly," Torres says. "One night we did a reception at the Country Music Hall of Fame and entire families attended that. The next night we were at the Grand Ole Opry and again had a lot of kids. But we follow that event with an after-party just for adults so our members feel like they are getting some adult time as well."

Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center is a good fit for this large group that prefers to be mostly under one roof. "Gaylord Opryland provides us the ability to get a large chunk of our attendees staying in the same place. Our group is very social and having them in close proximity always works the best," Torres says.

There can be challenges with kids around, especially with a large trade show in the mix. "Probably the biggest challenge is when we have attendees/exhibitors who bring their family and

"We make our evening events kid friendly. One night we did a reception at the Country Music Hall of Fame and entire families attended that. The next night we were at the Grand Ole Opry and again had a lot of kids."



Kristin Torres
Executive Director
Meetings and Events
National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Centennial, CO

they want to have the kids in the trade show during setup. It's not safe for them to be there and most folks don't understand that. Additionally, a lot of people won't register their kids, which can affect our seating/numbers etc."

That aside, Torres points to the many advantages that come with families. "It makes it so much easier for attendees to justify not only attending an event but staying for the whole thing. Everyone is strapped for time these days. If you can bring your family to an event, it can eliminate the guilt of not being home with them," she says.

To those planning an event that includes families, Torres says, "Be as flexible as possible. Don't make it difficult for people to bring their families. It will make your attendees happier and ultimately make them want to return to attend your event year after year."

ORLANDO, FLORIDA

It's no surprise that Orlando is a top destination for meetings that include family. When the Florida Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers met in January for a seminar and board meeting for 109 and 70, respectively, the Disney Springs Area was the choice — and location was primary.

"We focus on a central location in the state that may also work as a family trip for our members," says Becky Barlow, executive director. "The location near Disney Springs covered that focus." In addition to location, Barlow says the other major factor in deciding where to go is price.

In terms of meeting this and other needs, Holiday Inn Orlando-Disney Springs Area is a good choice given the brand's standard options such as Kids Eat Free, allowing up to four children under the age for 12 to eat free with a paying adult. "Being in the heart of the Walt Disney World Resort, we also make getting to the four Disney parks easy with transportation every 30 minutes at no additional charge to groups and their families," notes the hotel's Christine Burns. "Another savings is specially priced Disney tickets for meetings



The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort offers a host of family-friendly activities and theme park privileges.

Credit: Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort



"This year, we hosted two evening functions for members and their families: a night of tubing with s'mores and hot chocolate, and a sponsored reception with hamburgers and hot dogs."

and conventions, available to attendees and their guests, which includes a bonus for two-day or longer full-day tickets."

As is true for many associations, Barlow says this one sees great value in including family members at a meeting. "Our members work long hours so any chance they have to mix work with family is a bonus."

For very large association groups visiting Orlando, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is an ideal fit with 2,267 guest rooms and more than 329,000 sf of recently renovated meeting space. Guest rooms in the Swan hotel were updated in 2015, and the Dolphin hotel guest rooms and lobby will complete a makeover this fall. Guests of the resort enjoy free transportation throughout the Walt Disney Resort and special extended theme park hours. Kids at the resort can take part in Camp Dolphin, with supervised activities during evening hours. There also is mini golf, five swimming pools and beach, a game room, basketball, beach volleyball and more.

TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN

Attendees at the January family-medicine conference of the Michigan Association of Osteopathic Family Physicians (MAOFP) easily combined education and family time. While the Traverse City area is well known to families for its lakeside setting and outdoor recreation in warmer months, it offers much for families in winter, including skiing and snowshoeing. It's also well priced and safe.

Mary Anne LaMarre, CAE, the group's account executive, says this is an important element of the meeting. "Family physicians put in many work hours per week while trying to balance their personal/family life," she says. "By offering an event where they can obtain their continuing medical education credits at a fam-



A Michigan Association of Osteopathic Family Physicians conference family enjoys tubing at ShantyCreek Resort in Traverse City.

Credit: MAOFP

In the end, most associations that include family at meetings derive valuable benefits from doing so, including increased attendance and ongoing commitment to attend year after year. In an age when drawing enough attendees sometimes proves difficult, that is an ROI factor that can make a difference to an association's bottom line.

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ily-friendly resort, they can bring their families to enjoy resort amenities while they attend the conference, and then they can spend their free time with their families."

After meeting space and lodging needs, LaMarre says, "A location that is family friendly with reasonable pricing is a factor in choosing the facility." She adds that resort amenities, dining and shopping also impact the final decision.

Shanty Creek Resorts, a four-season property with skiing, offered exactly what the group of 200-plus needed to meet conference goals. Among the pluses it brought to the table, says LaMarre, were location and access, customer service, ease of reservations and good property/facility conditions. It offered the right business amenities, including private meeting space in one central area, Wi-Fi, shuttle service, flexibility and AV equipment and staff, along with the right family amenities, such as onsite restaurants, activities and babysitting.

"At Shanty Creek Resort, family members can ski for free during the conference dates," notes LaMarre. "MAOFP also offers guest tickets for family members to attend conference special events such as evening receptions. This year, we hosted two evening functions for members and their families: a night of tubing with s'mores and hot chocolate, and a sponsored reception with hamburgers and hot dogs."

Breakfast and lunch functions were for conference delegates only; families had those meals at their own time and cost. However, at functions with families in attendance, LaMarre says, there were child meal options, and those functions were set at an earlier time. The group also provided entertainment applicable to families rather than just adults.

LaMarre says planners who work on conferences that include family members must "hit the right mark" in providing what attendees and their families need in terms of activities, and that can impact attendance. "Families who attend conferences usually form bonds with other families who participate in the activities," she says. "That can help in the decision to return to the next family conference."

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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By Sophia Bennett

Meeting in the Silver State

What's New in Las Vegas and Reno-Tahoe



Credit: Brian Jones/Las Vegas News Bureau

The Las Vegas Strip at dusk as seen from Bellagio.

Las Vegas continues to be one of the hottest meeting destinations around. Last year it hosted nearly 22,000 meetings with 6.3 million delegates, a new record. In March, *Trade Show News Network* named it America's No. 1 trade show destination for the 23rd year in a row. Planners pick Las Vegas not only for its plethora of venues, but its easy access to entertainment, restaurants, shopping and, increasingly, sports. Easy access to air transportation and warm weather only add to the community's appeal.

But Las Vegas isn't Nevada's only outstanding destination. The Reno/Sparks/Lake Tahoe region is holding its own as a great place to host meetings. Associations nervous about the

distractions of Sin City, or interested in entertainment options centered on outdoor recreation and the West's colorful history, would be wise to look north for their meeting needs.

Las Vegas

One of the biggest things that draws planners to Las Vegas is the sheer availability of meeting space and sleeping rooms. It already has more venues and bigger venues than most other U.S. cities, and it seems a new destination is always on the horizon. "In the next few years we're going to see about half



"In the next few years we're going to see about half a million square feet of new meeting space come online."

Chris Meyer, CEM, CMP
V.P., Global Business Sales
Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

a million square feet of new meeting space come online," says Chris Meyer, CEM, CMP, vice president of global business sales for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

Aria Resort & Casino is adding 200,000 sf of meeting space with many high-tech features. Wynn Resorts is adding 1,000–2,000 hotel rooms and 260,000 sf of conference facilities as part of their new Paradise Park development. In addition, the Las Vegas Convention Center plans to add 600,000 sf of new exhibit space and 100,000 sf of meeting space in the future.

Given Las Vegas' dependence on the hospitality industry — tourism is the No. 1 economic driver, generating an estimated \$59 billion a year and supporting 407,000 jobs — locals know how to treat visitors right. Planners repeatedly tout the exceptional customer service and quality of local hotels and convention centers.

Barbara Rapp is the assistant vice president for housing and leadership events at the National Association of Home Builders. The association has hosted its annual International Builders' Show at the Las Vegas Convention Center for the last four years, most recently in 2016. The Wynn has served as the headquarters hotel and hosted VIP sleeping rooms and receptions, dinners and pre-show events. The association also has booked about 1,500 to 1,600 rooms at the Encore and Wynn.

"The level of service there is just unmatched," Rapp says of the Wynn. "With convention services, I was lucky to have the same person for all four years, and he was amazing. It was the same in the housing area for reservations — we had the same person over the years. That was great for me, because when you have the same people every year, you don't have to reinvent the wheel, and you develop professional relationships with these individuals, which is key when something comes up where one side or the other needs assistance or to resolve an issue."

Both hotels had an attention to detail that Rapp appreciated. "Even if you go into the public restrooms, nothing is out of place," she says. "Everything is clean

and nothing is out of place. It's a level that's above anything else I've seen. It's one of the nicest hotels I've visited in all my travels. The fact that this hotel has so many rooms and keeps that level of service and quality is just amazing."

The Wynn and Encore are on The Strip, which made accessing entertainment and shopping easy, Rapp says. For people who didn't want to venture too far from their rooms, the hotels had excellent and diverse dining options. Even though the property felt quite luxurious, the rates were in line with many other hotels in the area.

William Piché, marketing and events manager for the Novi, Michigan-based Chain Drug Marketing Association, also had high praise for his event property. The association hosted its 92nd annual trade exposition, a three-day event that draws approximately 350 people, at the South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa for the second year in 2017. They plan to return in 2018.

"I like the size and cleanliness of the facility," he adds. "The ballroom that we hold our events in is always top-notch. The other biggest pull for me is the rooms. The hotel rooms are double the size you usually get. The amenities are great. The spa is nice, and the pool area is really nice in the summer."

"All of our attendees complimented the hotel on how good guest relations were," he adds. "Vegas is such a tourist town, so a lot of the people you deal with from when you get to the airport to when you leave — there's a different mentality. There's a more hospitable, welcoming feeling." He also had the experience of dealing with the same staff for multiple years, which says something about the way the hotel treats its employees, he notes.

South Point isn't on The Strip, but some attendees appreciate that. "It offers Vegas without being Vegas," Piché says. "It's such a relaxed atmosphere away from all the hustle and bustle and craziness." Those who were looking forward to ex-



South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa offers more than 2,100 guest rooms and 170,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Credit: South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa



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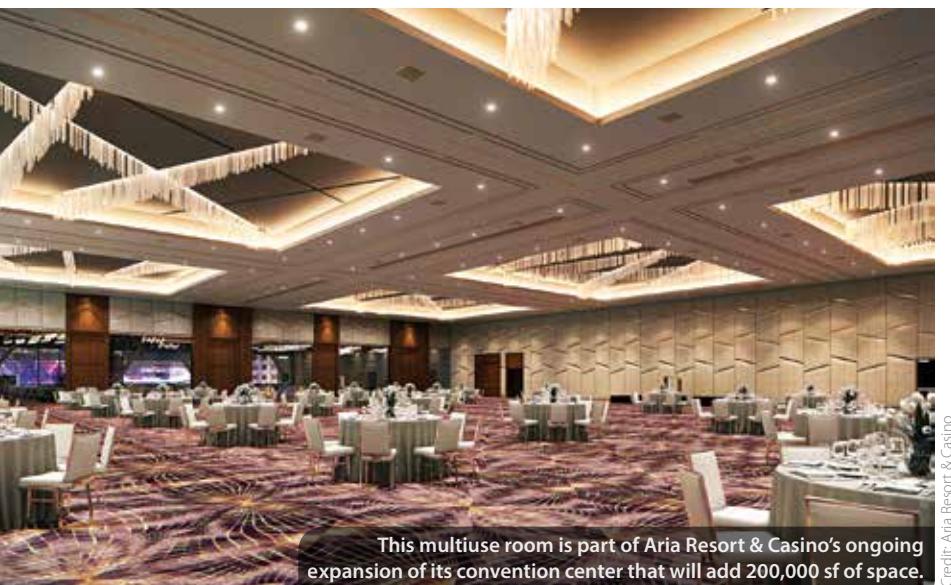
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periencing the town's energy and entertainment could catch a shuttle bus to The Strip.

For associations that lack the budget to hire musicians or other performers, those entertainment options provide a real advantage. "If your guests want offsite entertainment, it's Las Vegas, so there's a wide selection," says Sylvia Done, events and sales development manager for the Receivables Management Association (formerly known as DBA International). Their three-day annual meeting, which draws 900 to 1,200 attendees and 100 trade show exhibitors, was at the Aria Resort & Casino in 2016 and is booked at the facility through 2019. "Your meeting can be small in size but you still get a big bang just by being in Las Vegas itself."

Las Vegas will welcome the Oakland Raiders NFL franchise beginning as early as 2019. "For meetings it works out well, because it gives us another opportunity for businesses to entertain their customers," Meyer says. The Vegas Golden Knights, a new National Hockey League franchise, will begin playing in Las Vegas in the coming season. And NASCAR recently announced it's bringing a second tripleheader week-



This multiuse room is part of Aria Resort & Casino's ongoing expansion of its convention center that will add 200,000 sf of space.
Credit: Aria Resort & Casino

end to Las Vegas, making it the only city to host two such races every year.

Non-sports fans can see Bruno Mars, Ricky Martin, the Backstreet Boys and many other acts this year. Jon Lovitz and Dana Carvey are doing joint standup shows at the SLS Las Vegas.

The ease of travel to and from Southern Nevada is another attractive feature. "The reason we're in Las Vegas is it's got a good airport, which is important because our attendees come from all over the U.S." says Done. "We never have weather-related issues in Las Vegas. It's a good hub."

"We've almost finished the expansion to the international

gates at the airport," Meyer says. "We've been so successful at attracting new international service that the airport is upgrading and adding seven new gates." A nonstop flight from Beijing is performing so well that it soon will be available daily. On the domestic side, Frontier Airlines recently announced that they're adding four new flights to Las Vegas, including service from Washington, DC, and Indianapolis.

Ground transportation inside the region also has improved in recent years, says Rapp with the National Association of Home Builders. "Years ago you'd be standing in long taxi lines. Now those long lines go quickly, and they've put in areas for Uber and Lyft." The Clark County commission recently approved an expansion of the monorail, which will allow passengers to ride it to the city's soon-to-be-built football stadium.

Reno/Sparks/Lake Tahoe

Las Vegas is such a draw that planners sometimes forget Nevada's other prime destination. Reno, Sparks and the nearby Lake Tahoe region offer many of the same advantages as Las Vegas, but with a different feel and setting. "Nevada is now the second-fastest growing state economically in the U.S." says

Phil DeLane, president and CEO of the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority. "In Northern Nevada we've had 400 to 500 new companies move here in just the last several years."

That growth means good things for the community's infrastructure. Reno's airport and air service have grown significantly in recent years. There are now nonstop flights from New York and Atlanta, and nonstop service to Chicago is coming soon. There are more good restaurants and shopping venues than in years past.

"Our hotel products are all either fresh or new," says DeLane. "The Grand Sierra Resort just spent millions renovating its 2,000-room property. The Nugget in Sparks is undergoing a \$25 million top-to-bottom renovation with all new guest rooms and suites and a completely remodeled convention facility. The convention center itself was recently upgraded. We spent over \$1 million just upgrading the Wi-Fi so it has state-of-the-art 10G capability."

Like Las Vegas, Reno has casinos, big-name music acts and good nightlife. One of the areas where it differs is its access to outdoor recreation. Lake Tahoe, which is 40 minutes from downtown Reno, has the highest concentration of ski resorts in North America. The lake can be used for boating, fishing, swimming, standup paddleboarding and more. The

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"The level of service (at Wynn) is just unmatched. With convention services, I was lucky to have the same person for all four years, and he was amazing."

Barbara Rapp
Assistant V.P. for Housing and Leadership Events
National Association of Home Builders
Washington, DC

region has 30 golf courses and places for hiking, biking and other activities.

The lure of the outdoors drew the National Watermelon Association to Lake Tahoe. It hosted its 103rd annual convention at the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino in Incline Village. The 400+ members who typically attend the conference often bring their extended families, so the association tries to hold its meetings in places where everyone can enjoy themselves, says executive director Bob Morrissey. Nearly all of the association's members live in the southern United States, so meetings tend to stay south of the Mason-Dixon line. However, once in a while they travel farther north to give people an excuse to do some snow sports.

Their experience in Lake Tahoe was an excellent one. "We couldn't have asked for a better property," Morrissey says. "The Hyatt Regency is a beautiful hotel. We try to get into a



Credit: National Watermelon Association

A National Watermelon Association family visits the bear family of the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe (in their watermelon fleece).

property where we have our own floor if it's a large property, or are the major or only group in-house," he continues. "That worked extremely well. We were the only event on property."

That may be part of the reason the onsite staff was so responsive. Morrissey says they saw the director of sales and general manager every day. Both gave out their personal cell phone numbers in case the group needed anything. "They've got a great staff," he says. "One of the best — if not the best property staff — that we've ever worked with."

Entertainment was never a problem. Members had ample opportunities for snowboarding and skiing at the nearby resorts. The local CVB set up a snowboarding adventure, which quickly sold out. "The casino did a good job," says Morrissey of the onsite gambling venue. "People went down in the evenings and really enjoyed themselves. It was clean and comfortable. The spa is incredible. The Lone Eagle Grill across the street was exceptional." Thanks to these and other amenities, the Reno meeting had the highest attendance of any Watermelon Board meeting held west of Texas.

A different set of qualities drew the Western States Sheriffs Association (WSSA) to Reno for their 2015 and 2016 annual training conference and vendor exhibition. The association was chartered in Nevada and is required to host one meeting per year there. They moved from Reno to Las Vegas several years ago because of ease of travel, says executive director Jim Pond, but chose to come back to Reno in 2015.

"Las Vegas was starting to get a stigma, particularly in public service, as a party town," he says. "It's difficult for some of our sheriffs to justify going to a conference there. Reno doesn't have that stigma of a destination where it's all entertainment and not business." Cost was another factor in the decision; the association found that destinations in Reno were more affordable.

WSSA selected the Peppermill Resort Spa Casino as the site for their meeting after looking at several venues. "It was a difficult choice for us because all properties were very nice," Pond says. "They all offered what we needed. The Peppermill offered the best service for our needs, and it's a very nice destination. The amenities are great. We had a lot of good comments from our attendees as well as our business partners that attended. They liked the property and were very pleased with the service they got there."

In 2015, WSSA planned a shooting event at a local gun club that went very well. "They were outstanding in their support of our association and helped put on that event," Pond says. In 2016 the association organized a bus trip to Virginia City, a historic gold and silver mining town, which also was quite successful.

Other attendees enjoyed shopping at The Outlets at Sparks, a local outlet mall, or visiting local restaurants, nightclubs and

other entertainment venues. "Their whole experience was very positive," Pond says.

New and Noteworthy

According to Wynn Resorts CEO Steve Wynn in a late April earnings call, the Wynn board of directors has approved phase one construction of the new **Wynn Paradise Park** that will begin in December 2017 or January 2018. The master-planned park will replace the Wynn Golf Club with a 1,000- 2,000-room hotel tower and 260,000 sf of beachfront meeting and ballroom space overlooking a 20-acre lagoon — offering water sports activities — and a white sand beach and 4,000-foot boardwalk. Cabanas, attractions and food service also are planned. The phased \$1.5 billion project is slated for a 2019 completion. And this fall, Wynn Plaza — a 75,000-sf luxury retail hub bordering Las Vegas Boulevard — will debut.

Just 20 minutes from the Las Vegas Strip in Henderson, Nevada is a more serene, lakeside destination — **The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa**. The resort, which was purchased in late 2015 by Pacifica Host Hotels, is currently undergoing a multimillion-dollar renovation. The hotel is



Credit: Wynn Las Vegas
The Sunset Terrace at Wynn.

updating and renovating all guest rooms, as well as adding new carpeting and wall sconces in the common areas outside of the guest rooms. Work is expected to wrap up in late summer or early fall. The 493-room Westin offers more than 100,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting and event space, which includes a 20,000-sf ballroom and 30 flexible spaces, as well as gardens and lawns, terraces, poolside decks and lakeside beaches. Golf is a big draw for the resort, which offers access to three courses including the Jack Nicklaus-designed, 18-hole, Reflection Bay golf course.

The 1,003-room **Plaza Hotel & Casino**, which has the largest ballroom in downtown Las Vegas at 19,000 sf, is cur-

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rently conducting a multimillion-dollar renovation to the 30,000 sf of ballroom and convention space located on its third floor. This renovation is on track to be completed this June and will include numerous upgrades including partitioning, lighting, projection capabilities and a new portable stage, new carpeting, new readerboards with smartphone download technology, and new banquet facilities and menus.

The Plaza also plans to expand its convention space with 12,000 sf of additional breakout rooms and a new business center to open fall 2017.

Earlier this year, the Plaza opened the Plaza Event Center, a nearly 5,000-sf special event space located adjacent to the casino floor with 18 large screen HD televisions, two projectors and a state-of-the-art sound system. The multipurpose space can accommodate approximately 200 guests in a variety of flexible seating options. With two stages, the Plaza Event Center also can host live entertainment for audiences of up to 300 people. Available for private parties, such as conferences and corporate events, the space complements the Plaza's existing ballroom and convention space.



The Plaza Hotel & Casino is conducting a multimillion-dollar renovation and expansion of its meeting and convention space.

Credit: Plaza Hotel & Casino



A poolside event setup at The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa.

Credit: Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa

The Plaza also added furnishing upgrades to its rooftop pool and recreation deck, which were renovated last summer. In addition, five hotel suites that open directly onto the pool deck were completely upgraded to conform with the hotel's "retro Palm Springs meets classic downtown Las Vegas" feel.

Caesars Entertainment has added newly renovated suites to its luxury accommodations collection across its portfolio of Las Vegas resorts. As part of Caesars Suites, formerly Anthology Suites, more than 2,000 suites and villas are available to view and book online via one comprehensive new website, www.CaesarsSuites.com. And Caesars Entertainment recently launched Las Vegas' first interactive video gaming experience. Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino is the first property to receive the machine from Gamblit Gaming. Others will be added soon. Players can choose from two games: Gamblit Poker and Cannonbeard's Treasure, which is similar to blackjack but with a pirate-themed twist.

To meet the needs of their growing clientele, **Mandalay Bay's Convention Center** recently expanded by 350,000 sf to a total of more than 2 million sf, enabling Mandalay Bay to accommodate existing customer growth needs as well as to attract new corporate and association business. The expansion added new exhibit space, ballrooms and underground parking, and the project creates one of the most flexible, customer-focused convention facilities in North America.

At a cost of \$70 million, the expansion also included a bandwidth increase to accommodate more attendees and allow for the most advanced presentations, while allowing seamless connectivity from convention space to public spaces to guest rooms. In spring 2016, the final phase of a resort-wide remodel of more than 3,000 guest rooms and suites was completed.

Aria Resort & Casino is in the midst of a \$154 million expansion of its convention center that will add 200,000 sf of technologically advanced, flexible meeting space across four stories, highlighted by stunning indoor/open-air spaces and a glass-enclosed venue with dramatic views of The Park and



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"Our hotel products are all either fresh or new. ...The convention center itself was recently upgraded. We spent over \$1 million just upgrading the Wi-Fi so it has state-of-the-art 10G capability."

Phil DeLone
President and CEO
Reno-Sparks Convention and
Visitors Authority

new T-Mobile Arena. With the completion of the expansion, Aria will feature more than 500,000 sf of meeting space. Construction began in May 2016 with anticipated completion in February 2018.

Owned and operated by Caesars Entertainment, Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys Lake Tahoe Resort Casino are located on the south shore of America's largest alpine lake and surrounded by America's largest concentration of ski resorts. The hotels are just a few minutes' walk from the high-speed gondola at Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Harrah's 18-story, 512-room hotel features a recently added floor of luxury suites, and a renovated lobby, casino and showroom/nightclub. A remodel of every guest room was completed in spring 2016. The Special Events Center was completely remodeled just last year, including all new furniture, fixtures and equipment, plus a new, state-of-the-art sound and lighting system. The 17,500-sf facility can be divided into multiple meeting and convention spaces and can accommodate more than 850 attendees in a banquet setting; 1,200 theater style; or 600 classroom style.

Located right across the highway and connected to Harrah's by tunnel, Harveys Resort Casino has 742 guest rooms in two towers—the Lake and newly remodeled Mount-

The towers at Peppermill Resort Spa Casino in Reno.



Credit: Peppermill Resort Spa Casino

tain Tower. Founded in 1944 as a small café and gas station with three slot machines, Harvey is the oldest ongoing—and now the largest—casino operation at Lake Tahoe. The resort has 17,000 sf of convention and meeting space that accommodates up to 1,100 people; and 650 in a banquet setting.

Eldorado Resorts, which owns Silver Legacy, Eldorado Reno and Circus Circus Reno, is investing more than \$50 million in the three properties. Silver Legacy is opening Canter's Delicatessen, a branch of the popular Los Angeles deli, and upgrading guest bathrooms. Eldorado is remodeling its guest rooms, redesigning the luxury spa and adding a new Hidden Pizza restaurant. Circus Circus plans to revamp guest rooms



Credit: Caesars Entertainment

and public spaces, remodel its buffet and café, and add Kokopelli's Cantina, which will serve Japanese and Mexican fusion cuisine.

Last year Peppermill Resort Spa Casino in Reno celebrated 45 years in operation, serving meeting attendees and other guests. For the occasion, the resort redesigned some of its spaces and venues, including Edge, providing an intimate but vibrant nightlife experience. Lighting, soft goods and LED panels were among the changes. Six video walls also were installed throughout the property to bring the world into the resort via technology, giving guests the feeling of globetrotting while never leaving Reno. Peppermill also continues its emphasis on sustainability via a variety of dedicated practices and programs that cut energy costs and water use.

In January the Nugget Casino Resort in Reno began a \$25 million upgrade to its conference facilities and guest rooms. Renovations to the 110,000-sf convention center will include new carpet, paint, wall treatments, lighting and fixtures. The nearly 800 overnight rooms in the West Tower will receive a complete overhaul to modernize them and give them more of a "modern lodge" feel. This round of renovations will conclude in June 2017. The Nugget is planning additional renovations in late 2017 and 2018.

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The Lone Star State Caters to Big Stetson-Size Groups and Warmly Welcomes Smaller Gatherings

s bigger better? In Texas, the answer is typically a Stetson-size 'yes' with a meetings scene that is no exception. But it's not just big groups to which this larger-than-life destination caters, as smaller gatherings are as warmly welcomed and perfectly executed as their oversized counterparts.

So welcome to this Lone Star-style state, its collection of venues that gives bragging rights to visiting planners and a wholesome hospitality that envelopes guests like surround-sound.

Beginning at its heart, "Austin is a very popular, high-demand city. Something is always happening in this town," says Jill M. Gately, CMP, director of meetings for NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education in Washington,

At the new JW Marriott Austin, the Corner restaurant offers a great patio, perfect happy hour or an al fresco dinner.

By Cynthia Dial

DC. As the leading association for the advancement, health and sustainability of the student affairs profession (15,000 members in 50 states, 25 countries and eight U.S. territories), NASPA selected the capital city for the association's March 2020 conference.



"Our 7,000-person citywide is a great fit for Austin," says the planner. "We will take over the entire convention center and will hold a block of rooms in almost every hotel within walking distance. We will host more than 600 educational sessions and more than 300 meetings and receptions between the convention center and the two headquarter hotels, JW Marriott Austin and Hilton Austin."

The meeting planning appeal of the 34-story, 1,012-room JW Marriott is found in its 120,000-plus sf of meeting and event space (including its outdoor venues, 6,000-sf Congress Avenue Terrace and 4,200-sf Capitol View Terrace) and a location two blocks from the convention center and within walking distance of the state capitol. The Hilton Austin is equally appealing: 801 newly renovated guest rooms, 80,000 sf of flexible meeting space (including The Reverberry, an indoor/outdoor venue described as "part cozy, part funky" and reflective of Austin's recording studio vibe) and situated adjacent to the Austin Convention Center.

The city of Austin has received a lot of hype in the last few years, believes Gately. The February 2015 opening of the JW Marriott created buzz among planners seeking a fresh new option for a conference hotel. Regarding the city's entertainment scene: "There is more than just Sixth Street in Austin. Most of our attendees prefer the local nightlife that Rainey Street has to offer. Where else can you find a street of old bungalows that have been fixed up and turned into bars and cocktail lounges with cool backyards and porches? There is always a new restaurant opening up or a new development to be excited about," elaborates NASPA's planner, who cites the Austin City Music Tour (a guided visit to four live music spots, complete with reserved seating) as one of the best she's experienced.

Describing a pre-conference event, The Placement Exchange (a partnership with an organization called ACUHO-i), Gately says: "Imagine 140,000 sf of exhibit space converted into an interview hall where more than 12,000 interviews take place in three days. This isn't a job fair, but actual interviews that are pre-scheduled online to take place face-to-face at one of 700 interview tables."

A word of caution from the seasoned planner (18-plus years in the industry) about numbers. She advises that whether a meeting is for 100 or 5,000, it's important to be accurate (i.e., less conservative than normal) with respect to the amount of peak nights. "Between all the other meetings and festivals taking place in this city, when the city runs out of rooms, it runs out!"

CONVENIENT LOCALE

Described as the perfect location for the Arlington, Virginia-based USA Rice Federation, Jeanette Davis, CMP, senior di-



A lounge at The Reverberry — a unique event venue at the Hilton Austin — boasts industrial modern architecture and mid-century modern furniture.

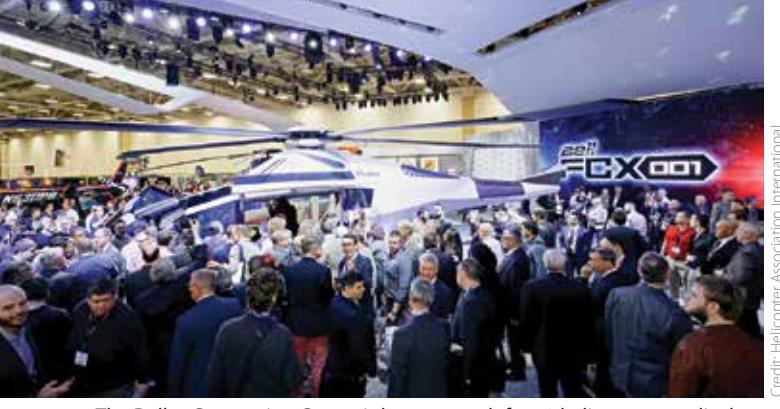
rector, meetings and member services, explains her association's selection of the Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas for its yearly July meeting of approximately 120. "I have people coming from Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Texas and California. Dallas is a non-stop flight for most and some can drive," says the planner of the centrally situated hotel only 20 minutes from the city's two airports.

Having held approximately 25 annual committee and board meetings at this Irving, Texas, property for the past 18 years, Davis has seen changes — most recently the redesign and renovation of level one of the 34,000-sf conference center. A significant inclusion is the 4,400-sf Lantana Room, which features a floor-to-ceiling window wall of natural light that can be divided into two equal sections and accommodates up to 400. Of personal appeal is its cuisine: "Because we are a rice industry meeting, the chef provides an assortment of U.S. rice dishes." Redesign, renovation and rice recipes — all elements of this property's attention to detail — explain the federation's repeat business, as well as

"Most of our attendees prefer the local nightlife that Rainey Street has to offer. Where else can you find a street of old bungalows that have been...turned into bars and cocktail lounges with cool backyards and porches? There is always a new restaurant opening up...to be excited about."



Jill M. Gately, CMP
Director of Meetings
NASPA-Student Affairs
Administrators in Higher
Education
Washington, DC



Credit: Helicopter Association International

The Dallas Convention Center is large enough for 50 helicopters on display for the HAI Heli-Expo 2017.

the consistent ranking of Four Seasons Las Colinas as a top meetings resort by Cvent.

Out of the many properties with which Davis has worked during her 29-year meeting-planning career, she cites Four Seasons Las Colinas a favorite. "There is something special about this property. It has a lot of long-time employees and for me, it is like seeing family when I go every July."

As executive director with the Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau, Maura Allen Gast, FCDME, summates her city: "When you count names like ExxonMobil, Kimberly-Clark, Fluor and Flowserve as your neighbors, Irving is much more than just a suburb."

What brought the world's largest helicopter trade show and convention HAI Heli-Expo 2017's group of 17,778 attendees to Dallas in March? "The helicopter market is big in the Texas area, the Dallas Convention Center fits our show, and the convention center allows our helicopters to land there," explains Karen Gebhart, vice president business development, Helicopter Association International in Alexandria, Virginia.

Going "big" in Texas translates to flying and trucking in more than 50 helicopters for display on the convention center's show floor — one of the show's magnets responsible for attendees spending 80 percent of their time at the convention center.

Primarily using the Omni Dallas Hotel, Hilton Anatole and Hyatt Regency Dallas, group activities showcased many of the city's premier offerings. Four of the largest exhibitors held events with more than 1,000 guests each at the Perot Museum, the Texas Horse Park, Union Station's top floor and at the Rustic (a downhome eatery located in the city's Uptown). More one-of-a-

kind area attractions include the Neiman Marcus flagship store, Dealey Plaza, the Sixth Floor Museum (located within the former Texas School Book Depository, it chronicles the assassination of President John F. Kennedy), the George W. Bush Presidential Library and the historic West End.

Centered in revitalized downtown Dallas and connected by a skybridge to the 2.1-million-sf Kay Bailey Hutchinson Convention Center is Omni Dallas Hotel — the city's only LEED Gold-certified hotel and the country's largest outside of Las Vegas. Offering 110,000 sf of meeting space, the 1,001-room hotel additionally serves up seven dining options (many available as venues) — from a casual farm-to-table Texas cuisine eatery, Texas Spice, which can accommodate 265 indoors and 100 on the patio, to a nationally celebrated steak restaurant Bob's Steak & Chop House, seating 170.

Renowned as the city's most recognizable landmark by



Credit: Thomas Garza Photography

An outdoor function at the Omni Dallas Hotel.

its 50-story tower topped by a shimmering dome, Hyatt Regency Dallas offers the meeting planner 1,120 guest rooms, 160,000 sf of function space, 60 meeting rooms, Five Sixty by Wolfgang Puck (a restaurant that sits atop Reunion Tower), which is connected by an underground concourse to Dallas' historic Union Station.

Known for its cavernous center atrium, Hilton Anatole is a Dallas icon that beckons the meetings world with such incentives as 1,600 guest rooms, 79 meeting rooms, 600,000 sf of event space (more than any other Dallas hotel) and a seven-acre Sculpture Park available for private events — all situated on the resort's 45 acres.

Also in the Dallas area is Plano, home of the largest building project in the DFW area, Legacy West, which includes corporate offices for Toyota's North American Headquarters, Liberty Mutual Insurance, J.P. Morgan, FedEx, JCPenney and a new 300-room Renaissance Hotel (offering 30,000 sf of meeting space). The recently renovated Plano Centre is an



Credit: ©Dan Ham

A banquet setup at the Landmark Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Dallas.

86,400-sf facility that provides flexible function space and accommodates as many as 5,000.

Mark Thompson, CDME, CMP, executive director of Visit Plano assesses his city's future. "The outlook for Plano is a great one...there is nothing but growth and prosperity on the horizon for the city and its meetings and events market. With the addition of the new Legacy West development, Plano has now become a destination in its own right. We are no longer North Dallas, we are Plano."

THIS IS TEXAS

Scattered throughout the massive state are a variety of venues for large and small meetings, with major and minor enhancements. This is Texas.

The Dallas area's welcoming theme continues. "Grapevine is a slice of hometown Americana where every conventioneer and conference attendee is the focus of our homespun hospitality and recognized for their substantial contributions to the success of our city as a convention and meetings destination," says Paul W. McCallum, executive director, Grapevine Convention & Visitors Bureau. Home to the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (offers 2,000-plus flights daily), 5,445 hotel rooms, nearly 1 million sf of meeting space and the

unique charm of downtown Grapevine (listed on the National Register of Historic Places), the destination's appeal to the meetings market is that even at first glance, it ticks numerous items off a planner's wish list.

Home to such luminary assets as the Dallas Cowboys and AT&T Stadium, Texas Rangers and Globe Life Park and Six Flags Over Texas and Hurricane Harbor, Arlington's meetings world is further energized by its coming attractions. Texas Live!, a 200,000-sf retail and entertainment center slated for business

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"The helicopter market is big in the Texas area, the Dallas Convention Center fits our show, and the convention center allows our helicopters to land there."

on Texas Rangers' Opening Day 2018, will be complemented by the 300-room Live! by Loews hotel when it opens in 2019. Additional news is the recent approval of a new, retractable roof baseball park for the Texas Rangers — slated to open for the 2020 MLB regular season. "Arlington is a big city — America's 50th — with a small-town feel. What that means to our meeting and convention clients is that they always feel important," says Jon Hixon, CMP, vice president of sales and services, Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Galveston is an unusual meetings city. Meg Winchester, CMP, director, Galveston Island Convention & Visitors Bureau explains: "There is nowhere else in the U.S. that offers a tropical island setting that you can drive to in less than an hour from one of the nation's four largest cities (Houston) and also has beachfront meeting facilities, one of the country's largest collections of well-preserved Victorian architecture and attendee attractions from the historic sites of Bishop's



Credit: ©Vadim Toshkin

A horse-drawn carriage tours The Strand, Galveston's Historic Landmark District.

Palace, Moody Mansion and 1877 Tall Ship Elissa to an amusement park stretching over the Gulf of Mexico." Features of the 140,000-sf Galveston Island Convention Center at the San Luis Resort are a 43,100-sf column-free exhibition hall, 12,000 sf of breakout meeting space and 700 guest rooms adjacent to the center.

Situated in the state's most picturesque terrain, the JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa tempts planners with found-only-in-Texas adventures. Working in conjunction with a local astronomy club is the opportunity to stargaze through high-powered telescopes and follow up the evening by roasting marshmallows around an old-fashioned campfire. Cibolo Moon, the resort's main restaurant, is home to one of the state's only bars with the Tequila Regulatory Commission's "T" certification (a designation awarded to establishments showcasing and educating about tequila). The

nearby Guadalupe River (beginning in the Hill Country and weaving for 250 miles to the Gulf of Mexico) is one of the nation's top 100 streams for rainbow and brown trout fishing.

Reflective of the surrounding Texas Hill Country is the 26,000-sf Lantana Spa (one of the state's largest). Known for its menu of indigenous treatments — several of which showcase the area's rich Mexican-American heritage with the incorporation of such native herbs as wild lavender and sarsaparilla — this pamper palace was recognized as one of the "Top Five Favorite New U.S. Spas" by *American Spa* magazine.

Located in Houston's perennially popular and populated Galleria area, yet adjacent to Memorial Park and the Houston Arboretum & Nature Center, The Houstonian Hotel, Club & Spa (a four-star, 18-acre retreat) has the vibe of a secluded wooded resort. The hotel's 33,000 sf of meeting space includes a variety of options for the planner — all with floor-to-ceiling wooded views — including the Hearth Room at Olivette and The Manor House Estate (a 30-year-old restaurant and former home to George H.W. Bush).

"We know what Texas parties feel like," says Steve Frontierhouse, Houstonian general manager. "We string outdoor lights, hire a country guitar duo and set fresh sage linens. Our chefs set up their grills for the finest ribeye steaks and redfish on the half shell and a spit roaster for a whole suckling pig. Everything from the food presentation to the friendly service gives a unique nod to Texas and guests love it."

Bottom line: On the lengthy list that describes Texas, adjectives seem to represent just about everything to everyone — though "ordinary" isn't one of them.

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa's \$16 million expansion of the **River Bluff Water Experience** increases its presence from six to nine acres and creates new event and meeting space, including the multiuse River Bend Pavilion and an 18,000-sf outdoor event lawn.

The **Irving Music Factory** — described as a walkable urban lifestyle center with an 8,000-capacity Live Nation indoor/outdoor concert venue, Alamo Drafthouse Cinema and numerous restaurants and bars — is scheduled to debut fall 2017. Slated to open late 2018 and situated between the Irving Convention Center and the Music Factory and is a \$110-million convention headquarter hotel, which will be under the Westin brand and have 12 stories, 350 guest rooms and 16,000 sf of meeting space (including a 10,000-sf ballroom).

The campus surrounding Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center is now welcoming convention attendees to **Avenida Houston** — two headquarter hotels, a 12-acre park and dozens of restaurants and entertainment options. Mike Waterman, president of Greater Houston Convention & Visi-



Credit: The JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa

tors Bureau, says it is this campus environment that most distinguishes his city from other meeting destinations. "Attendees and meeting planners want ease of access. They want to be able to host a great event that also allows them to explore the culture and flavor of a city. I believe we're providing them that." Consequently, Houston's numbers concur as the city has recently realized an upward movement in bookings (24 percent for 2017; 48 percent for 2018).

The Frisco Convention & Visitors Bureau rolled out its "**365 Day Site Tour**" program, which invites qualified planners to select any day of the year to visit the city for a site inspection.

The Texas town of **Grapevine** is on the move with the \$120 million expansion of the Gaylord Texan Resort (includes an additional 300 guest rooms and 86,000 sf of meeting space); the building of a 1,000-room, water-park-themed resort by Stand Rock Hospitality; a \$13 million restoration of the Embassy Suites by Hilton Dallas DFW Airport North; approval for a 300-room Renaissance-brand hotel; and TEXRail (light rail) train service from DFW International Airport's terminal B to Grapevine's Historic Main Street with continuation to Fort Worth (scheduled for operation December 2018).

Plano's newest teambuilding activity, **Go Ape**, is an exhilarating treetop experience comprised of five zip lines, 39 crossings and numerous rope ladders.

Though the Galveston-located **Moody Gardens' Aquarium Pyramid**, a popular site for groups and known for such exhibits as its Humboldt Penguin Habitat and Jellyfish Gallery, is currently closed, the grand reveal of its \$37 million renovation is scheduled for Memorial Day weekend.

Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa, located right outside of Austin, provides a one-stop shop for a group experience. The property features expansive meeting options with more than 300,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, as well as a wide variety of specialized activities to provide a custom experience for virtually every type of group.

"Groups can experience the very best of the Lone Star State at Hyatt Regency Lost Pines," says Ryan Galvin, director of

sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa. "Our property provides expansive and versatile meeting areas to fit the needs and size requirements of any event. The property also features a wide array of teambuilding options. From zip lining through the McKinney Roughs Nature Park and kayaking down the Colorado River to 'meet and greet' opportunities with real-life longhorns or relaxing at the award-winning Spa Django, Hyatt Regency Lost Pines is sure to be the perfect backdrop for a memorable meeting experience."

Located on more than 440 acres, the property is home to the Renegade Trailhead which offers trap shooting classes as



Credit: Off the Vine

Credit: Off the Vine

Credit: Off the Vine

Credit: Off the Vine

well as guided horseback rides through McKinney Roughs Nature Park. With direct access to the Colorado River, the property also features several water activities including kayaking and rafting trips, river floats, air boat rides and even fly fishing excursions. The property also features the "Hooves & Horns" mascot program, where groups get to interact with Texas longhorns, an American mustang, miniature horses and alpacas, all of which live at the resort.



LANG



GOLDBERG



SPURR



SMITH



CECHAK

Brian Lang was named director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center and Grand Hyatt Denver. He was director of sales, marketing and events at Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino.

The Sheraton New York Times Square Hotel has promoted **Leon Goldberg** to complex director of sales and marketing for the Sheraton New York Times Square and the New York Marriott Marquis. He has been the DOSM at the New York Marriott Marquis for 10 years.

JW Marriott Austin has welcomed **Jay Spurr** back as the market director of sales and marketing. He was previously the hotel's DOSM from 2011-2015. He most recently was DOSM for the San Francisco Marriott Marquis.

Streamsong Resort in Central Florida has promoted **Andrea Smith** to director of group sales. She was senior sales manager at the resort. **LoriLynn Cox** was promoted to group sales manager. She was business development manager. **Jennifer Corso** was named group sales manager.

She was director of catering at Sheraton Orlando North.

Nick Cechak was named executive meetings manager for Destination DC. He was on the national meetings and events marketing team for Caesars Entertainment in Las Vegas.

VisitPittsburgh named **Michelyn (Mikey) Tinor** as national sales director responsible for SMERF markets, government agencies and the Southeast market. She was in pharmaceutical sales at Pfizer Inc. AC&F

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COV IV	New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau	800-672-6124	www.neworleanscvb.com	Cara Banasch	cnvsales@neworleanscvb.com
5	Omni Dallas Hotel	214-744-6664	www.omnihotels.com/dallas	Harold Queisser	hqueisser@omnihotels.com
57	Plaza Hotel & Casino	702-386-2320	www.plazahotelcasino.com	Michele Marsee	plaza.sales@playlv.com
59	South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa	702-797-8050	www.southpointmeetings.com	Maureen Robinson	sales@southpointcasino.com
35	Streamsong Resort	863-428-1000	www.streamsongresort.com	Group Sales	meetings@streamsongresort.com
17	Team San Jose	800-SAN-JOSE	www.sanjose.org	Cheryl Little	clittle@sanjose.org
23	Visit Anaheim	855-405-5020	www.meetings.anahiemoc.org	Junior Tauvaa	jtauvaa@visitanheim.org
41	Visit Orlando	800-643-0482	www.orlandomeeting.com	Fred Shea	convention.sales@orlandocvb.com
47	Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel	800-524-4939	www.swandalphinmeetings.com	Gino Marasco	meetings@swandalphin.com
55	The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa	702-567-6118	www.westinlakelasvegas.com	Group Sales	wllvgroupsales@westinlakelasvegas.com
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