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2017

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

# A Changing Climate for Contracts

Negotiating Controversial Clauses and  
Contentious Seller's Market Conditions

PAGE 38





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THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

November 2017

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Credit: Society of Women Engineers



Credit: Christie's Photographic Solutions/Society of Government Meeting Professionals



Credit: The Houstonian Hotel, Club & Spa

# Contentious Clauses & More



Diversity and inclusion in meetings and events is a top priority for the association community, led by ASAE and its efforts to track destinations attempting to pass discriminatory legislation such as the failed “bathroom bills” in North Carolina and Texas. In the summer of 2016, ASAE approved an anti-discrimination clause for its future convention center and hotel contracts, beginning with its July 2016 annual meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah. Our cover story describes the clause’s intent: “The enactment of discriminatory legislation has the effect of a force majeure, allowing the group to cancel the meeting with any penalties for cancellation or attrition waived, and with any amounts paid to the property based on the agreement refunded.” Planners seeking to include this clause can meet with resistance, however. Says Christopher Kirbabas, director of programs for the Society of Architectural Historians, “We’ve been trying to add an anti-discrimination clause into force majeure or in its own specific paragraph. We want to ensure that all of our attendees are protected in visiting the state or city. ...I’ve had a situation where one city was able to sign it, while another city in another state said, ‘Our lawyers will not allow this in the contract.’ So I think it just depends on the city and state, but I think this (kind of clause) will continue to crop up over time.” Read more about this and other contentious contract issues in “A Changing Climate for Contracts” on page 38.

Speaking of diversity, “It Takes a Village” on page 14 describes the challenges of organizing global meetings, and what — and who — it takes to successfully navigate geopolitical issues as well as cultural norms and expectations.

More challenges of a political nature are addressed in our feature “The State of Government Meetings.” Government planners find themselves under a cloud of uncertainty over meeting budgets. “From a federal perspective, we’re now in kind of a standstill,” says Michelle Milligan, CGMP, national president of the Society of Government Meeting Planners. “With every change of government administration, you just don’t know how things are going to go. For example, will there be as much money for meetings, more money, less money?”

All association meeting professionals face budget challenges, and in our story “Creative Cost-Cutting” on page 20, you’ll learn ways to save that don’t compromise the all-important “experience.”

There’s much more to learn in this issue, from effective networking programs to destination reports on Asia-Pacific, Las Vegas and Texas.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## Construction Begins on \$150M Live! by Loews – Arlington, TX



*This hotel will be the first to carry the Live! by Loews name when it opens in 2019.*

**ARLINGTON, TX** — Loews Hotels & Co., The Cordish Companies and Texas Rangers officially broke ground today on the new \$150 million flagship Live! by Loews – Arlington, TX hotel and convention center at Texas Live! More than \$1.25 billion of new development is now under construction in the Arlington Entertainment District including Texas Live! and the Rangers' new ballpark. Together, these projects are part of a greater \$4 billion vision for the Entertainment District that also includes the preservation of Globe Life Park. Texas Live!, anchored by Live! by Loews – Arlington, TX, is projected to significantly exceed \$100 million per year in economic output to the city of Arlington and Tarrant County. The 302-room hotel will feature a two-story, 35,000-sf Grand Event Center, offering sweeping views of the Entertainment District, plus unique event spaces including the Tower Terrace, an event lawn with LED screen, a rooftop terrace private event space and more. [www.loewshotels.com](http://www.loewshotels.com)

## Caesars Palace Completes \$100M Palace Tower Upgrade

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — The iconic Caesars Palace Las Vegas has completed the renovation of its Palace Tower, the resort's largest tower, featuring 1,181 stylishly designed guest rooms and suites and a price tag topping \$100 million. Considered the crown jewel of the tower, the 29th floor features 10 luxurious new villas ranging in size from 2,750 sf to 4,085 sf and featuring exquisite finishes, bespoke furnishings and a curated art program. The Palace Tower's elegantly designed new guest rooms and suites feature pillowtop king and queen beds, stone bathrooms and LED flat-screen televisions. Centrally located, the Palace Tower is a short walk to the resort's convention center, Appian Way shops and Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis.

Villa guests are entitled to additional perks and amenities, including private elevator entry to the 29th floor of the Palace Tower; around-the-clock access to butler service; limousine transportation to and from McCarran International Airport; and VIP check-in and Total Rewards Diamond queuing at locations throughout all Caesars Entertainment Las Vegas resorts.

The Palace Tower suites and villas, along with Caesars Entertainment's most exclusive collection of luxury accommodations across its portfolio of Las Vegas resorts, are available to view and book at [www.caesarssuites.com](http://www.caesarssuites.com). Pricing for Palace Tower villas begin at \$3,109 per night.

The Palace Tower renovation is the latest in a series of new and/or renovated rooms at Caesars Palace within the past six years, resulting in 90 percent of the resort's room product being new or remodeled. [www.caesars.com](http://www.caesars.com)

## Julie Coker Graham to Co-Chair MMBC

**WASHINGTON, DC** — The Meetings Mean Business Coalition (MMBC) has appointed Julie Coker Graham as its next co-chair. Coker Graham, president and CEO of



**Graham**

the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau (PHLCVB), will join Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of Meeting Professionals International, in leading the coalition

and promoting the value of face-to-face meetings, conferences, conventions, incentive travel, trade shows and exhibitions. Coker Graham is the first woman to lead the PHLCVB and the only African American woman to lead a destination marketing organization in a top U.S. market. Under her direction, MMBC will continue to advocate the industry's value story among a diverse group of stakeholders, including meeting professionals, business leaders and elected officials. The coalition also will continue to reinforce the economic impact of face-to-face meetings in cities such as Philadelphia, where in 2016, meetings and conventions booked by the PHLCVB generated an estimated \$989 million in economic impact. "I am looking forward to serving alongside Paul Van Deventer and the entire MMBC team as we advocate for the meetings and convention industry," said Coker Graham. "You cannot deny the value of face-to-face meetings — they are the foundation for generating positive results across all industries while also creating economic benefits for local communities across the country." Coker Graham will assume the leadership position previously held by Richard Harper, executive vice president at HelmsBriscoe. Coker Graham will begin her term January 1, 2018.

[www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com](http://www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com)

## PCMA Plans 'Amplified' Convening Leaders in Nashville

**CHICAGO, IL** — The Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) is pumping up the volume for Convening Leaders 2018 — the leading event for business events professionals, taking place January 7-10 at Nashville's Music City Center.

Under the theme "Amplifying Engagement," PCMA puts the spotlight on engagement as one of the most critical elements for connecting audiences. In an era dominated by digital distractions, the Convening Leaders' program is set to provide more than 4,500 industry professionals with invaluable knowledge and insights to successfully exceed attendee expectations; and ultimately, drive business success.

High-profile speakers at the event

include Neri Oxman, an award-winning designer who looks to nature for practical design solutions; Gen. Stan McChrystal, former general and visionary credited for his work during the war in Afghanistan and against Al-Qaeda in Iraq; and Bill Strickland, president and CEO of the Manchester Bidwell Corporation. Immediately following their presentations, conference host Nick Ross, former BBC broadcaster, will help the audience connect the dots between their big picture concepts and the business events industry.

Deborah Sexton, PCMA president and CEO, said, "We've entered the new school of engagement — one where business event organizers must amplify their attendees' engagement at every turn. Our

2018 Convening Leaders participants will learn how to electrify their experiences, elevate their conference's brand and truly engage with their audience. As always, we'll be transparent in how to scale and replicate the innovations we showcase."

Other highlights include the new "Future of Face-to-Face," an immersive learning environment that looks at the role of participant engagement through the lens of the future of events; PCMA's popular Business School sessions, a major draw for attendees, that will address topics ranging from marketing for strategic growth, innovation, financial acumen, change management and design thinking; and "Braindates," which returns in 2018 with one-on-one or small group learning experiences that enable delegates to share knowledge with each other. [www.conveningleaders.org](http://www.conveningleaders.org)

## Claudia Vecchio Selected to Head Sonoma County Tourism

**SANTA ROSA, CA** — Sonoma County Tourism has appointed tourism industry veteran Claudia Vecchio to the role of



**Vecchio**

president and CEO. Vecchio replaces Ken Fischang, who stepped down in May. Vecchio comes to Sonoma County from Nevada, where she was the director of the state's

Tourism and Cultural Affairs Department. Vecchio has held multiple leadership roles in tourism organizations, serving as the state tourism director at the Ohio Department of Development, Division of Travel and Tourism, and S.V.P. overseeing the tourism group at Edelman PR in Chicago. "Claudia has the energy and excitement to drive Sonoma County Tourism into record-breaking years," said Sonoma County Tourism Board Chair Joe Bartolomei. [www.sonomacounty.com](http://www.sonomacounty.com)

## GREATER ONTARIO CALIFORNIA



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## Charlotte Convention Center Expansion Plans Move Forward



Rendering of the expansion.

**CHARLOTTE, NC** — The Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority (CRVA) recently announced plans for a \$110 million expansion project at the Charlotte Convention Center slated to begin in spring 2019. Enhancements will include increased breakout space on the Stonewall Street side of the venue, expanded accessibility to Center City amenities via a pedestrian bridge and flexible breakout space in the Richardson Ballroom. Construction will start following Charlotte hosting the NBA All-Star Game in February 2019 and is scheduled for completion in December 2020. A premier component of the expansion will include a pedestrian bridge linking the new wing of the convention center to The Westin Charlotte hotel, the city's largest convention center hotel with more than 700 rooms. The pedestrian connectivity is located along Center City's convenient LYNX light rail with access to an area termed "Stonewall Corridor," which is currently undergoing a \$2.7 billion development boom. The architecture will boast a "picture window" design element and have a similar feel to New York City's High Line. Additional updates to the configuration will allow for an increase in meeting rooms and soft spaces where attendees can network between sessions. [www.charlotteconventionctr.com](http://www.charlotteconventionctr.com)

## Live! by Loews – St. Louis, MO to Be Part of Ballpark Village

**ST. LOUIS, MO** — Loews Hotels has announced plans to build its first-ever St. Louis hotel, which will be part of Ballpark Village's \$260 million expansion project. Ballpark Village, developed by the St. Louis Cardinals and The Cordish Companies, is a mixed-use dining and entertainment district adjacent to Busch Stadium. The hotel will



debut as Live! by Loews – St. Louis, MO, a partnership between Loews Hotels & Co., The Cordish Companies and the St. Louis Cardinals.

Located directly across from Busch Stadium, the \$65 million Live! by Loews – St. Louis, MO will feature 216 luxury guest rooms, including 19 suites, and 17,000 sf of meeting and special event space that

boasts incredible views of Busch Stadium, downtown St. Louis and the Gateway Arch. Located on the hotel's second level, these spaces include: a Grand Ballroom that flows out to an outdoor amenity deck; an Executive Boardroom; several breakout meeting rooms; and an expansive, exclusive outdoor event terrace. Plans call for construction to get underway late this year. [www.loewshotels.com](http://www.loewshotels.com)

## Designer Named for Las Vegas Convention Center Expansion Project

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) Board of Directors approved a recommendation to retain tvsdesign / Design Las Vegas to provide design services for the Las Vegas Convention Center District phase-two expansion project. The LVCC District Expansion (phase two) and Renovation (phase three) are expected to support nearly 14,000 construction jobs and nearly 7,800 full-time permanent jobs upon completion. The project will generate an additional \$2.1 billion in economic activity during construction, and upon completion will have an annual incremental economic impact of \$810 million while attracting more than 600,000 additional visitors each year.

The LVCC District expansion and renovation will be completed in a phased approach with a projected completion date of 2023. Construction of the \$860 million, phase-two 1.4-million-sf expansion, which will include at least 600,000 sf of new, leasable exhibit space, is projected to be complete by the end of 2020. The next phase will be the complete renovation of the existing 3.2-million-sf facility. The phased approach will ensure that no business will be displaced during the construction and renovation.

Overall, the tourism industry continues to be crucial to Southern Nevada's economy generating \$60 billion in total economic impact, supporting 407,000 jobs and \$16.9 billion in local wages and salaries. These jobs represent 44 percent of Southern Nevada's total workforce.

The project will allow the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority to pursue new business opportunities while also growing the shows currently taking place in the destination. [www.vegasmmeansbusiness.com](http://www.vegasmmeansbusiness.com), [www.lvcva.com](http://www.lvcva.com)





Credits: 1-3 IMEX America, 4 DMC Network, 5 Cincinnati USA, 6 Daytona Beach Area CVB, 7 SMG/Experient

**1** ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham speaks to an IMEX America audience. **2-3** IMEX America, held October 10–12 in Las Vegas, attracted more than 12,000 exhibitors, hosted buyers and attendees. **4** The 2018 president of the MPI Aloha Chapter, Mary Neister (left), chose Lauren Otomo Manuel (right) for this year’s Aloha Chapter Presidents Award based on her dedication and focus to make the chapter an “all-inclusive” experience. Lauren is an account executive with DeSilva Meeting Consultants – the DMC Network’s partner in Hawaii. **5** Cincinnati hosted more than 400 of the country’s top meeting planners in the faith and medical markets, along with representatives from Ohio-based associations, for three appointment-only trade shows hosted by Connect Meetings. **6** Daytona Beach Area CVB Sunshine Summit “Mega Fam” attendees enjoyed a deep-sea fishing excursion with Critter Fleet. The attendees represented tour and travel, sports, corporate, incentive, faith-based, military, fraternal, specialty, state association and third-party markets. **7** Representatives from three SMG-managed convention centers volunteered with a dozen Experient – a Maritz Global Events Company team members at the Akron/Canton (Ohio) Regional Foodbank on October 25. The 18 volunteers packed more than 1,200 two-pound packages of Cocoa Krispies cereal, providing 2,307 meals for needy families.

# How Event Technology

## Can Streamline Your Next Event

### Collecting the Right Data to Get the Right Results

**T**SNN, a leader in the trade show, exhibition and events industry, has released a study about technological advancement in the events industry, and the overriding message is this: Event managers want easy-to-use technology that will provide them with the right data, and if you can show them the value, they are willing to pay for it.

From Netflix, to Amazon, the world's most innovative and forward-thinking companies are putting "data driven decisions" at the core of their strategies. Harnessing the information from millions of users allows companies to make safer, more cost-effective decisions, and keep on moving in the direction that keeps them popular with their consumer base.

With more than one-third of event managers interviewed by TSNN stating that they plan to spend \$50k or more on an upcoming event, technology could help managers spend their resources in the right ways, to get the right results. While event technology is still in its infancy, effective use of event data has been proven to improve management decisions, attendance marketing and communications, and offer insights into attendee behavior that can be used to make overall improvements.

So how quickly is event technology maturing, and what are the current benefits of harnessing the new tools?

#### HOW TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING THE EVENT INDUSTRY

Smartphones and social media have dramatically changed the event landscape. While in the past, having event attendees glued to their cellphones would have been a bad sign, now apps collect data from attendees, "pushing" them to interact with other members, attend certain event activities and share content via social media. Research from Guidebook reveals that 88 percent of event

professionals believe that the use of event apps greatly improves attendee engagement.

Smartphones and social media offer more value for event organizers and attendees alike, allowing event organizers to improve the user experience for their events, from convenient ticketing via mobile payments and using e-tickets on smartphones, to increased audience interaction.

Whereas in the past events were quite one-sided with attendees watching, listening and handing out business cards, apps now make the experience more inclusive and interactive, offering real ROI, and allowing attendees to connect with one another and follow up with people they might have met at a previous event or during a social activity.

Especially for startups with low budgets and limited resources, this direct ROI can be a determining factor in the decision to attend events costing thousands of dollars.

Trust and transparency also are key factors. New technology offers a previously unseen level of digital visibility and the ability to offer impartial reviews, which establishes consumer trust. With Facebook having changed its algorithms to reduce organic traffic to business pages, it has become more difficult for event organizers to display client feedback. Through the use of apps and other third-party review sites, organizers are able to share experiences with past and potential attendees like never before.

#### EVENT DATA IMPROVES MANAGEMENT DECISIONS, ATTENDANCE MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Big data is king in most industries, but until recently, the events industry has not harnessed its potential. In the last few years, leading events organizers have jumped in with both feet collecting the right data to get the right results.

Sixty-seven percent of the event professionals who participated in the





Charlie Wright

TSNN study consider the most important development in event technology to be how it enables the use of event data to make better event management decisions.

Event tech expert Mike Piddock argues, “Event tech that gathers data, both during live events and presentations, and dipping into social media profiles to understand event communities, will be a must-have rather than a nice-to-have.”

From collecting the target-audience information needed to create an effective communications strategy before, during and after an event, to tracking attendance to improve content and speakers for future events, to gathering real-time RSVP data that can help ensure events are adequately

Not only does social media marketing make it easier to involve potential attendees in the planning process with questionnaires and surveys, nowadays, by comparing data from previous events with social media RSVP figures from platforms such as Facebook, it is much easier for organizers to make more accurate estimates about who will actually attend an event.

This is especially important when choosing a venue and organizing catering, two of the biggest expenditures for event organizers. Organizers can make safer estimates about attendee numbers, which will allow them to book the right size of venue, hire the right number of staff, and also

*Effective use of event data has been proven to improve management decisions, attendance marketing and communications, and offer insights into attendee behavior that can be used to make overall improvements.*

stocked with minimal waste, event data can dramatically improve the way event producers manage their resources, plan an event and make overall business decisions — and prevent an event from turning into a disaster.

#### **NEW TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP ORGANIZERS SAVE MONEY**

A study from Enterprise Event Marketing reveals effective use of event technology can create a 20 percent increase in event attendance while reducing related costs by up to 30 percent. However, despite the considerable potential savings on offer, studies indicate that one of the main reasons events organizers have been slow to integrate new technologies is cost.

Before the event tech revolution, events — especially if the first of their kind — involved a lot of guesswork. How many people will attend? How many people will RSVP but not come on the day? Who is interested in some events but not others? Is there enough demand for this expensive keynote speaker? What food and drinks will be most popular?

order the right amount of food and drinks for the numbers required. Event organizers also can lean on online reviews to make sure they bring on the right catering company and partner with the right venue, too.

It is clear that adapting to new technologies will offer a competitive advantage to event organizers in the years to come. However, this requires becoming familiar with and testing new technologies to find tools that offer value for the right price. Extracting event data from the many digital outlets out there, assessing this data in an efficient manner and then leveraging it to make an event a success is not as easy as it sounds, but those who take the leap will find themselves leagues in front of the competition.

AC&F

*Charlie Wright is a 25-year veteran of the global events fraternity. He founded a leading events business in the UAE that is today part of the Arena Group, one of the world's iconic event groups. His extensive experience has made him recognize the need for a transparent global platform that can connect a fragmented events industry.*

# Taking the Road Less Traveled

## Volunteering Leads to the Trip of a Lifetime

Corporate and association meeting planners always remember that one special meeting or event that stands out from the hundreds of others they have worked on over their career. It is even more rare when a planner can tie in a volunteer organization he or she is involved in with a successful event. That is exactly what I was able to achieve this past summer.

I am the manager of the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Events (MICE) Division for Omega World Travel in Fairfax, Virginia. But in my spare time, I am the Scoutmaster for the Boy Scouts of America Troop 1346 in Burke, Virginia. On July 24th, I led a group of 21 Boy Scouts and seven leaders on a 100-mile trek through northeastern New Mexico. The group spent 12 days hiking the New Mexico wilderness on a visit to Philmont Scout Ranch. Located in Cimarron, New Mexico, the 214-square-mile ranch is in the rugged wilderness of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and features trails climbing from 6,500 feet to 12,441 feet.

### ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME TRIP

These trips are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Boy Scouts and their leaders, and the preparation for them starts over a year-and-a-half in advance. The adult leaders handle all the logistics associated with each trip. In fact, I had planned two past trips to Canada and the Bahamas, but this one was longer with triple the number of participants. Last fall, I had just started working at Omega World Travel and decided to approach my director about having Omega help with the Boy Scout trip.

My meeting team at Omega was able to assemble several detailed proposals for the BSA group to consider. Omega incorporated and negotiated fairly priced air, ground transportation and hotel options for the Boy Scout crew. Because the Scouts and leaders need to acclimate to the high altitude of the area, Omega suggested two cities for the Scouts to tour prior to their arrival at Philmont Scout Ranch: Denver/Colorado Springs or Albuquerque. Both cities were above 5,000 feet, allowing for good acclimation.



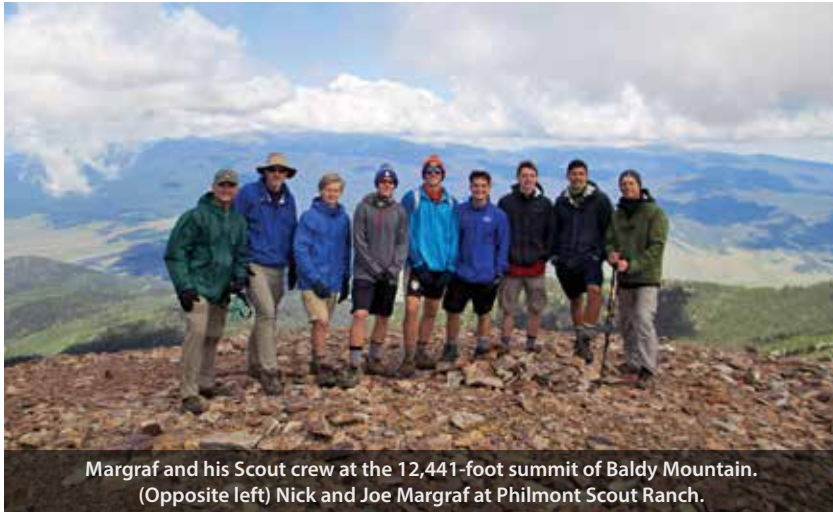
Omega's meetings division extensively researched the local areas of both cities to provide numerous activity options for the group during those two days. The Scouts ultimately voted to fly into Denver and spend two nights in Colorado Springs. While there, they visited the Garden of Gods, the U.S. Air Force Academy, the Cogwheel Railway to Pikes Peak and the U.S. Olympic Training Center. It was the perfect pre-trip before beginning the intense journey at Philmont. With a major part of the planning out of the way, the Scouts and leaders were now able to focus on the intense training required for their trek.

### HIGH-ALTITUDE ADVENTURE

Since the Boy Scout crew is boy-led — meaning the adult advisors are only there for guidance and safety — my 16-year-old son, Nick, was the crew chief for his group during the Philmont trek. It was his responsibility to handle all aspects of the hike. Each participant had to carry a 40- 50-pound backpack containing all of their supplies, including: tents, first-aid supplies, clothing, camp stoves and freeze-dried meals while hiking between camps. The hikes were at a very high altitude in bear and mountain lion territory, up and down steep climbs (switchbacks) and often during severe rain storms. The crew never passed a house or town along their journey, and only stopped for a short time every few days at bear-proof "commissaries" to grab



Joe Margraf



Margraf and his Scout crew at the 12,441-foot summit of Baldy Mountain. (Opposite left) Nick and Joe Margraf at Philmont Scout Ranch.



Credits: Joe Margraf

*These trips are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Boy Scouts and their leaders, and the preparation for them starts over a year-and-a-half in advance.*

more necessities. One of the most difficult yet highly anticipated parts of the trip was the climb to the summit of Baldy Mountain (12,441 feet.)

While on the trail, the Scouts participated in backcountry programs including rock climbing, building railroad track, black-powder shooting, hatchet throwing, blacksmithing, Western campfires as well as a conservation project centered on the upkeep of Philmont's ecosystem. Cellphones were limited to the leaders; however, service was only available at the highest peaks or openings, with nowhere for charging. I had all the Scouts leave their phones behind and I, too, followed their example. So instead of the Scouts being on their phones, they all needed to hang daily bear bags, cook and clean in the backcountry, and set up tents before almost daily fast-moving mountain storms crept in during the early afternoons.

This was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I am so glad I was able to complete the trek with my Scouts, fellow leaders and most importantly, my younger son, Nick. It was

his leadership and daily encouragement that helped me immensely while on the trail.

This trip was a personal goal of mine, but there was a bigger reason. I feel that giving back to my son, my Philmont crew and my Boy Scout Troop was so much more rewarding. Watching, guiding and mentoring these young men not only to complete this difficult trek but having them work together in difficult circumstances is a lesson they will use for the rest of their lives. If these Scouts and all my other Scouts only take this one lesson from their entire Scouting experience, then I feel I have helped out in a small way to make the world a better place.

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*Joe Margraf is a professional meetings executive with 30 years of extensive experience in managing all levels of the meetings and hospitality industry. He currently heads up the meetings and events division at Omega World Travel in Fairfax, Virginia. Joe enjoys problem-solving, implementing of solutions, producing in fast-paced and high-pressure environments in the meetings world. He has worked with major association clients, international unions and major corporations.*



# It Takes a Village

*The Keys to Successful  
Global Meetings*

By Sophia Bennett

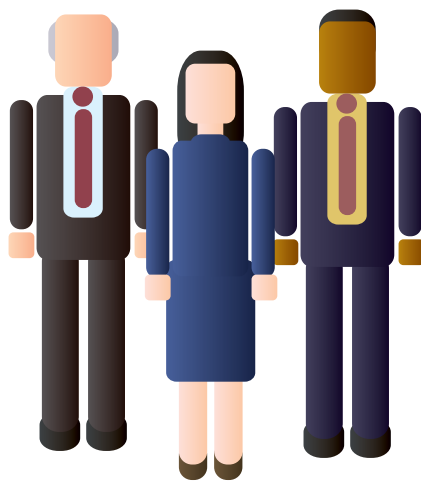
**M**eetings held in a country other than the planner's home nation and convenings that attract an international audience pose some unique challenges for meeting organizers. There can be regulatory barriers to overcome, questions around cultural norms and expectations, uncertainty about how websites or money transfers will work.

There are certainly some aspects of global meeting planning that are getting harder. "Sometimes it seems as if the issues are getting more intense, and, of course, everything is getting more expensive," says Roberta A. Kravitz, executive director for the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine (ISMRM), an international, professional association devoted to the promotion of research and education in magnetic resonance. She also leads the Society for MR Radiographers & Technologists, a subsection of ISMRM. The organization sponsors an annual meeting, 8 to 10 workshops, and a number of board meetings and retreats throughout the year. "And certainly we all know the geopolitical issues continue to grow. Many of these issues, though, have always been there, in one form or another."

But on the whole, the planners we talked to seem to think international gatherings are getting easier to organize. "Everyone is connected 24/7, so I feel like the biggest delay I ever have in an email is 12 hours," says Molly O'Neill Moir, CMP, vice president, programs and meetings

for the Parenteral Drug Association, which provides science, technology and regulatory information and education to the worldwide pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical communities. She works on 12 to 15 international events held within the United States every year and collaborates with colleagues and members to plan events in Europe and Asia. "Bank transfers are really easy now. It's becoming more common, so people have to implement policies that work for everyone. We're working in tier-one cities, so we have it easy because the expectation is that business is global now."

Our experienced planners had another shared takeaway for anyone working on global meetings: It takes a village to make any cross-continental event successful. Developing a network of international members and planners who work on international meetings is an important part of building your capacity and making your organization's gatherings successful.



### CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS

"The big tip for global is you can't assume (people from other countries) do business the same as you do," says Phelps R. Hope, CMP, senior vice president of meetings and expositions for Kellen, an association management company. "So for everything you know to be true, you have to test your own thinking or be prepared to be flexible."

Financial issues tend to be one of the biggest areas where planners run

into headaches. "Outside of the U.S., businesses and venues expect to be paid in full before you start your program," says Hope. "In the U.S. we've become very accustomed to establishing credit. The rest of the world works in cash.

"When you're doing online registration, you want to make sure that the country you're in doesn't have barriers that are going to preclude you from using your online payment system," he adds. The Chinese government tightly restricts what websites people can see. It also restricts the amount of money citizens can put on credit cards.

"One of our biggest challenges is currency exchange," says Jeanne White, director of conventions and meetings for the International Studies Association, a global organization for scholars involved in the field of international studies. She's involved in planning an annual convention, one to two international meetings, six regional events and several executive meetings that are held throughout the year. The International Studies Association gives out travel grants, but not everyone is able to accept a wire transfer. That means sometimes the grants are made through Paypal or even gift cards that people can use to purchase things like airline tickets.

"Some countries have limitations on how much currency

also freight and customs; speaker, board and staff travel and housing; and VAT/GST recovery, as well as currency."

There are venue considerations to think through with international gatherings. Infrastructure, including electrical currents and the availability and speed of internet service, are likely to vary widely in other countries, says Hope. So do the availability and expectations of service providers, including AV companies, caterers and printers.

Communicating with people across time zones can be a very real challenge for planners. "Just planning those calls requires a lot of flexibility from our members," says Moir.

Marketing an event in another country can be quite different than pitching one to a domestic audience. "We have international chapters, so we try to ask our

members or committee members who are local what kinds of conferences they're seeing," says Moir. "What are the registration rates? What kinds of topics are they covering? How long are they?" That helps her association understand how to structure their own events.

Here's an idea for marketing conferences to professionals overseas: "Get champions from those areas and share their experiences — either that they've gone and recommend it, or that they're going," says Hope. "They should be well-known people from each of the countries that you can promote are coming."

There also are cultural issues to take into account when planning global meetings. "Sometimes, even though you have partnership agreements written up, what sounds like a yes in our country may really be a no," says White. "In Japan, their culture doesn't permit them to say no to anything. So you have to make sure their yes is really a yes." She uses the book *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands* by Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conway (Adams Media) to learn about business customs and practices in other countries.

"We've never had anything blow up," White says. "We've had to deal with some challenges on the financial side of things at the end because someone else thought we were paying for things or we thought they were paying for things. It requires a lot of diplomacy, but we've always been able to resolve things amicably." To ensure disputes can be solved quickly, she always has a senior executive travel to events.

One issue that Kravitz expects will come up more in the future is concern about the environmental impact of meetings.



Phelps R. Hope, CMP  
SVP, Meetings and Expositions  
Kellen  
Atlanta, GA

**"After your peers, go to a local organizer. ...What they're giving you is confidence and time. That is the hottest currency for people who haven't done this before. It takes longer to learn about a culture and people's needs."**

you can take out of the country," she says. Others restrict how much money people can bring back, which means attendees need to spend down grant funds before they go home.

"We are always striving to keep registration fees consistent and reasonable even though the meeting costs swing significantly from region to region," says Kravitz. "Not only can facility rental and ancillary costs vary significantly, but



"There are seriously escalating challenges with global warming that are going to continue to force us to assess how we lessen our footprint and yet provide our attendees with the experiences and opportunities they crave," she says.

### NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL ATTENDEES

Because English is such a universal language, planners said they typically don't run into problems with language barriers. But Moir had some thoughts about how to make events more enjoyable for non-native speakers.

"One of the issues I do run into with people traveling to the U.S. is that they understand English, but they may not speak it that well," she says. "Sometimes they're hesitant to get up to the microphone during a question and answer session." To mitigate this, they invite people to write a question down on a piece of paper that can be given to the moderator.

"We request that presenters send their presentations in advance, and we post them online," says Moir. "International attendees like that because they can prepare themselves in advance and think of their questions. We try to remind our speakers and presenters that while everyone may speak English, a lot of accents are very different and hard to understand. We ask them to make sure they're speaking slowly and clearly so that even with a thick accent, everyone can still understand the same message."

Moir identified several other things that people visiting from other countries appreciate. "Wi-Fi is a must for international meetings," she says. "If you don't have an international plan, your phone is not going to work, but if people have Wi-Fi they can still use WhatsApp or the conference app.

"A lot of international guests like to take public transpor-

**"We have international chapters, so we try to ask our members or committee members who are local what kinds of conferences they're seeing. What are the registration rates? What kinds of topics are they covering? How long are they?"**

Molly O'Neill Moir, CMP

Vice President, Programs and Meetings  
Parenteral Drug Association, Bethesda, MD

**"I have a network of fellow planners who do international work. When I'm planning to go to a country, I always find a few planners who have been there and say, 'What did you run into? What do I need to know? What are the red flags?'"**



Jeanne White  
Director of Conventions & Meetings  
International Studies Association  
Storrs, CT

tation, whether it's to or from the airport or to dinner," she continues. "When we say, 'Just take an Uber,' they don't want to hear that." She encourages associations to put information about public transportation on the conference website or another place where attendees can easily find it.

The timing of meetings also can affect overseas attendance. "Many Europeans don't like to travel for work on the weekends," says Moir. "If I have a conference that starts at 8 a.m. on Monday morning, my European attendance may be a little lower because folks don't want to travel on Sunday."

Planners should pay attention to the food needs of guests, especially those driven by religion. "Some of this you can head off at the pass with your selection of menus," says Hope. "Anticipate some

needs and pre-plan, then communicate those out." One nuance to keep in mind: the term "continental breakfast" means different things in the U.S. and Europe.

"European folks are used to getting a hotel room that includes breakfast, and that's not a typical thing in the U.S. cities where we're having meetings," Moir says. She's worked with hotels to devise a room rate that includes a coupon for breakfast at their restaurant.

Being culturally sensitive is always important when welcoming international guests. But generally, Hope says not to drive yourself crazy by being too accommodating of people. "You've got to set your boundaries because you can't be reacting to each one of their needs."

Some of that boundary setting may be contingent on whether your attendees are seasoned travelers. If conference attendees are professionals, such as doctors and engineers





Roberta A. Kravitz  
Executive Director  
ISMRM and SMRT  
Concord, CA

**“We absolutely must stay current with our membership, with our leadership and with what is happening in the rest of the world so that we can minimize and manage the surprises.”**

who regularly travel to international conferences, they're likely to be more flexible and know what to expect, Hope says. If participants have never traveled overseas before, they may require more handholding.

The key to all of this is clear communication. Make sure you let attendees know what to expect when it comes to language, food, accommodations, transportation and all other major aspects of the event.

### **GEOPOLITICAL CONCERNS FOR MEETINGS**

In addition to thinking about logistical and participant needs, it's vitally important to consider what's happening on the international stage. “As leaders in this community and leaders within our own organizations, we absolutely must stay current with our membership, with our leadership and with what is happening in the rest of the world so that we can minimize and manage the surprises,” says Kravitz. “In other words, we must do our homework. Knowledge of our field, the area of the world we are working in and potential risks, coupled with working with honesty and integrity with our suppliers, will allow us to maintain our equilibrium and effectively lead our organizations through the challenges that are inevitably going to arise.”

To stay abreast of world events, White recommends building a strong network among the international membership. Her executive director has been really good about staying connected with trusted colleagues overseas who can give him a heads up about political unrest before it appears in the news, she says.

Sometimes it's clear which countries are too politically unstable to host major events. Sometimes it isn't. “We've had times where we've cancelled meetings be-

cause, say, there was a coup,” says White. There's not much that can be done in those instances. But she does have one other tip for avoiding potentially unstable countries. “Remember that things change. If you had a meeting in a country previously, things may have changed with the political or economic environment.”

The ability of attendees to get visas is becoming more problematic, and that raises a number of issues, including what to do when people suddenly can't enter the country where a meeting is being held. White has some experience there. President Trump's initial executive order restricting travel came three weeks before an International Studies Association meeting in Baltimore. “We didn't penalize people if they chose not to travel to the U.S.,” she says.

### **IT TAKES A VILLAGE**

Besides keeping in touch with people who can keep you informed about what's happening politically and socially in their countries, it's important to find peers in the meeting planning world you can rely on. “I have a network of fellow planners who do international work,” says White. “When I'm planning to go to a country, I always find a few planners who have been there and say, ‘What did you run into? What do I need to know? What are the red flags?’”

Moir has a colleague who plans the association's meeting in Europe, so that person is a good touchpoint for questions on events in Europe. For an upcoming meeting in Asia, she's had to reach out to a different source for information. “I'm planning this meeting in Singapore, and I've never been to Singapore, yet alone Asia, so I work a lot with my hotel partners.”

“After your peers, go to a local organizer, like a destination marketing company or an independent planner,” says Hope. “What they're giving you is confidence and time. That is the hot-

test currency for people who haven't done this before. It takes longer to learn about a culture and people's needs.” A local person or organization can help mightily with that.

“Make sure you work with PCOs (professional congress organizers), which are local organizations in-country that handle planning for people coming into their country,” says White. “They're usually connected to the government. Having those people has been very helpful for us. They know the ropes. They're usually a fee-based group, so we end up paying some money, but it's a great investment.”

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**“Hold your special event at a football stadium with locker room tours, player meet ‘n’ greets, tailgate-themed food, and use the existing digital signage to brand the venue with your own logo. It will nicely roll entertainment and venue costs into one.”**

Benjamin Rabe, CEM, Events Director, SmithBucklin

Benjamin Rabe, CEM, chats with Randall McDaniel, former offensive lineman for the Minnesota Vikings and Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee. The two met at a recent event in Minneapolis.

Credit: SmithBucklin

# Creative Cost-Cutting

## How to Find Savings in Key Areas Without Compromising the Experience

Maura Keller

If there was ever a day when association leadership gave meeting and event professionals the proverbial blank check to orchestrate a meeting or event, it's not today. Association meeting planners, recognizing the need to get the most bang for their buck, are expected to show budget restraint for all-out events that will generate maximum return on investment.

Increased scrutiny on meeting expenses has placed a tremendous amount of pressure on meeting professionals to cut costs while at the same time, show clear evidence that the money spent will connect the dots directly to growth in membership, attendance and revenue.

For some, tight travel budgets may result in shorter meetings and conventions, and attendees who may not stay for the entire program. And so, as the recently released, second Decision to Attend Study confirmed, the need to create impactful experiences for attendees is more important than ever. Finding the right balance between controlling costs and creating a compelling program is the challenge.

What follows is advice from seasoned planners on how to find savings in key areas, from food and beverage and site selection to transportation, entertainment and technology without compromising the ever important experience.

### FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Many associations are opting to downsize large formal dinners into equally appealing, but less expensive options, such as a wine tasting with locally infused appetizers or perhaps a casual outdoor barbecue — offering a memorable experience at a cost savings from traditional banquets.

Most venues will have a catering menu that offers packages for breakfast, lunch and breaks, as well as an à la carte

menu. Jody-Ann Rowe, founder of the Event Certificate says one of the key methods for cutting costs on food and beverage for meetings is working with the venue to create a customized menu for your event.

“While adding up à la carte options can increase your F&B cost significantly, choosing a preset menu package can also mean paying for extra food items you don't necessarily need,” Rowe says.

The best solution is to work with the venue to create a custom package for the event. For example, if an asso-

“Whether (flexibility) is with dates, location or event options — being open to changing from a Wednesday start day to a Thursday, for example, could end up saving a lot of money, depending on the selected destination.”



Jody-Ann Rowe  
Founder  
The Event Certificate  
Vaughan, ON

ciation meeting planner finds a package offered by the venue that they like but the cost is too high, they should ask the venue to customize the package and decrease the cost accordingly.

“This could include limiting salad options to one instead of two or three, using refillable pitchers instead of individually bottled beverages, or eliminating extra breakfast items such as yogurt parfaits and keeping it more simple,” Rowe says.

Benjamin Rabe, CEM, events director at SmithBucklin,

# Quick Tips

- If an association guarantees a food and beverage amount, often meeting space rentals will be waived.
- Do not allow guests to order extraneous beverages during breaks (have a water and coffee station, but no soda/juice).
- Having a dinner event on a Monday or Tuesday can save in venue fees.
- Tag-team with another event that is occurring at the same venue. For example, associations can save on décor left over from another event by sharing the costs and reusing the décor items.

— MK

recommends that instead of 1,000 hot breakfasts, ordering a continental breakfast and spicing it up with an additional order of 600 breakfast sandwiches and 600 parfaits, may be a less expensive option.

Likewise, Murphy McGarrity, events director at Smith-Bucklin, says that spa water — specifically fruit-infused water served in cups — will save more money than offering bottled water. “Most attendees won’t grab multiple cups like they might with bottles,” McGarrity says. “Plus, it enhances the attendee experience because it feels fancier.”

Ashley Pencak, CMP, events director at Smith-Bucklin, also suggests making the serving sizes of both food and beverages smaller. “Attendees won’t notice the difference if that’s the only size available. Set out teacups instead of coffee cups,” Pencak says. “Offer small plate sizes. As for the bar, it can be open for the first hour, but after that it could become a cash bar. Offer only beer and wine, no cocktails — attendees will still thoroughly enjoy themselves.”

Additionally, save on meal costs by selecting entrées that the hotel chef is already offering. Ask the chef what the kitchen is preparing for a particular day. Then model the menu with the same selections for attendees. This will save money by saving the chef’s preparation time and costs for purchasing specific ingredients for an event.

Michelle Perez, event planner and creative designer at Michelle Perez Events, says some additional key ways to cut costs within the food and beverage arena include:

Michelle Perez, event planner and creative designer at Michelle Perez Events, says some additional key ways to cut costs within the food and beverage arena include:

- Choose a venue that offers in-house catering, not one that you have to bring in a caterer as the travel, staff and service will undoubtedly be more expensive with the latter.
- Consider a cocktail reception versus a sit-down dinner. Serving bites and stations versus plated or buffet dinner helps to keep food costs down. It’s also fun because you can be more creative with options and varieties.
- Service of an open bar can be slowed down if the budget is being spent faster than expected. To make this decision, associations can ask the maitre ‘d or the beverage manager to let them know when the halfway point of the estimated budget is reached.
- When planning the menu, start with fixed costs such as room rental, bartenders, etc. Request a custom menu to fall in line with your desired budget.

## SITE SELECTION

Associations also can save money on meeting destinations by sourcing locations based on demand.

“Organizing the event over a low-demand period can mean greater negotiating power and lower prices,” Rowe says. “Planners can

**“In the end, keep as much as possible in-house. This includes linens, flatware, dance floor, tables and chairs. The lesser number of rentals, the more cost-effective the event will be.”**

Michelle Perez  
Event Planner and Creative Designer  
Michelle Perez Events  
New Brunswick, NJ



Credit: Michelle Perez Events

also take advantage of lower rates for off-peak or off-season periods in most cities.”

Rowe says a key to achieving lower rates is flexibility. “Whether this is with dates, location or event options — being open to changing from a Wednesday start day to a Thursday, for example, could end up saving a lot of money, depending on the selected destination,” Rowe says. “It is also important to inform suppliers of a planner’s flexibility so that they can offer cost-saving options if available.”

Association meeting planners agree that historically, the structure of conventions is usually two or three days, however some association groups cut their conventions by half or even a full day to save money. Some associations also are going from a two-day meeting to a one-day meeting to avoid the cost of an overnight for the members.

Rabe further recommends that planners be flexible as it relates to location. Sometimes timing is everything.

“For example, Atlanta was scheduled for a huge two-week event, and our client’s event was planned for the following week,” Rabe says. “Although we had been considering another location, we noticed that Atlanta’s hotel rooms were nearly empty following that big event. We quickly locked in our event, and by switching destinations, the client saved 18 percent on hotel rates.”

If another group will be in the same location right before your organization’s event, find out whether the same AV and exhibit hall entrance structures can be used for your group. That way only the logos and the conference look need to be changed.

“Three of SmithBucklin’s client organizations did this when they had back-to-back meetings in Seattle, and each group saved significantly on labor for setup,” Pencak says. “In another recent example, one client wrapping up its event left its existing stage set for another client just arriving at the same venue, saving additional labor charges for both events.”

Money can be saved through room blocks at the hotel and by hosting the event at the same hotel or resort in which the guests are staying.

“And remember, planning excursions and negotiating rates beforehand can be a money-saver, as associations will be able to confirm a certain number of visitors to the attraction or excursion venues,” Perez says.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment expenses can be a huge line item on an association’s meeting budget. Luckily entertainment also can be controlled significantly by sourcing locally in the destination. While high-profile performers might seem like a great option for increasing audience engagement, finding local talent at the meeting destination not only can help to save

on cost, but the subject of some acts may revolve around a regional or cultural uniqueness.

Vanessa Colosio Diaz, national meeting planner at creative services and consulting company Pipeline Pepper, also suggests inviting local talent. “It’s less expensive, there are fewer travel fees, and it brings in a different flavor,” Diaz says. “Also if it is in L.A. or New York City and you are bringing in known names, bring in talent that lives in that given city. Don’t bring in someone from New York City to an L.A. event; there is already a great amount of talent in L.A. and vice versa.”

McGarrity says tapping into the membership’s talent also can help cut costs. One health care-related client organization McGarrity serves “hired” association members who moonlighted in a band to be the event’s entertainment. “We only paid for AV. The members in the band loved it, and the members in the audience had a great time cheering on their peers,” McGarrity says.

## ROI Challenge

Return on investment (ROI) metrics show whether results of an event justify the event’s cost. From a financial perspective, demonstrating a meeting’s return on investment illustrates ways an event has improved the association’s standing among members, prospects and other industry constituents. Or how it may have improved membership figures. If an event doesn’t positively affect an association’s bottom line — future events and the money to fund them might not be a priority.

Associations should establish the potential for return on a meeting or event investment long before putting their stamp of approval on the expenditure, planners say.

For example, let’s say an association participates in a large annual convention. In addition to focusing on the number of memberships resulting from the convention, experts feel it also is imperative for an association to calculate the non-financial impact the event has on the association. If the organization chooses to have an innovative presence at the event, the association’s name may resonate for weeks or months with convention participants. In this case, the ROI is not a one-time reward, but an ongoing effect.

Demonstrating ROI can present a difficult challenge, and a positive ROI from a meeting or event is never certain. It requires steady promotion before and during the event, and a thorough follow-up afterward. But association meeting professionals agree: It is imperative to prove that a meeting or event had positive impact on an organization’s bottom line. Not only does a good ROI illustrate the benefits of a meeting or event, it also labels a meeting or event as a business accelerator in the minds of the management team.



Credit: Attendify

Event data technology solutions such as the Attendify platform can help to cut costs in a variety of areas, from registration to marketing campaigns.

Planners also can trim expenses by booking speakers who also offer an entertainment option in their fees. For example, a speaker who also works as a master of ceremonies (MC) could save on the cost of hiring an MC for the event. That is essentially one less speaker fee, hotel expense and travel expense that can be deducted from the budget.

And remember, says Rabe, offsite venues can be the entertainment. He advises, "Hold your special event at a football stadium with locker room tours, player meet 'n' greets, tailgate-themed food, and use the existing digital signage to brand the venue with your own logo. It will nicely roll entertainment and venue costs into one."

## TECHNOLOGY

Associations are incorporating more and more technology into events, whether to enhance the attendee experience or make their events more efficient. But what some don't realize is that technology also can act as a cost-cutting measure.

According to Michael Balyasny, CEO and founder of Attendify, a data platform that helps users harness event data, putting agenda, speaker listings and maps on the event app can significantly cut the costs of printed programs (and increase convenience for attendees). In addition, using online registration systems can free up your team to focus on other cost-cutting (or ROI-enhancing) activities. "Event organizers also



Vanessa Colosio Diaz  
Creative Services Consultant  
Pipeline Pepper  
Los Angeles, CA

**"For an event in San Diego, having Amtrak as a sponsor to bring in talent, speakers or guests is much less expensive than sending individual drivers."**

should consider that money still can be saved post-event as well, by effectively collecting and using data from past events to better plan and promote future ones," Balyasny says. "Using technology, associations can analyze everything from speakers/session ratings, poll results, social activity and more. Then, they can use that information to save money, increase attendance and improve attendee sentiment at future events." That same data can be used to more cost-effectively follow up with attendees after a conference with targeted communications for future event promotions, offers and incentives. This kind of sophisticated targeting can drive down marketing

costs by eliminating inefficient marketing campaigns while generating revenue at the same time.

## TRANSPORTATION

In our age of transformative transportation, options such as Uber, can help associations get creative with their transportation. If an association is covering the costs of attendees' transportation, UberEvents is definitely an option to explore. Attendees can use Uber to get to and from the event and, unlike reserving mass transportation, an association is only charged for the rides that they've used.

If attendees are paying their own way, meeting planners can still utilize Uber as a sponsorship partner for the event's transportation needs. Planners can work with the association's marketing team to create a discount partnership where attendees are provided with a unique ride code, and in return, planners can include their branding as a sponsor.

Perez recommends providing a shuttle service that can accommodate larger groups to help cut costs. Typically these charge in four-hour increments with as many trips as can fit in that amount of time — not by the number of trips.

Diaz also suggests meeting planners make sure the association is collecting flight points and, when possible, secure an Amtrak, airline or other transportation sponsor to cut costs.

"For an event in San Diego, having Amtrak as a sponsor to bring in talent, speakers or guests is much less expensive than sending individual drivers," Diaz says. "In addition, when booking talent, make it clear in the negotiations what their needs are and what you are and are not willing to cover. If you need to order a car service, it will be less expensive booking in advance instead of ordering in a pinch."

According to Pencak, there are opportunities to cut costs in a few other areas as well. For example, digital signage, such as using a TV outside a meeting room with a PowerPoint setup, is less expensive than multiple physical posters because it's a one-time TV cost.

"In the end, keep as much as possible in-house," Perez says. "This includes linens, flatware, dance floor, tables and chairs. The lesser number of rentals, the more cost-effective the event will be."

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Networking scenes from the Society of Women Engineers and Obesity Medicine Association conferences.

# Making the Right Connections

## Creating Effective Face-to-Face Networking Opportunities

By Maura Keller

**K**aren Horting, CEO of the Society of Women Engineers, understands firsthand how the design of a meeting or event can make or break networking opportunities. In her role, she oversees the organization's global initiatives in support of women in engineering and technology.

"We know that people with large, diverse networks are more successful and more likely to take risks. Therefore, we want to make sure we are providing an environment for our attendees where they can grow their network, make contacts, meet people who are helpful to them now or down the road, and let them share their expertise with other folks," Horting says.

Even in this digital age with everyone glued to their smartphones, Horting believes there's still a craving for the face-

to-face interaction that comes with in-person networking opportunities.

"There's nothing like a connection made in person. Conferences play a critical role in providing those opportunities for face-to-face interaction," Horting says.

Horting and her team at the Society of Women Engineers design the association's events so that there's ample space for networking. For example, they recently set up a "social media lounge" at their recent annual conference and career fair in Austin, Texas. This lounge provided people the opportunity to interact with each other in a low-pressure environment. They also organize various events that are specifically designed for networking and interaction.

"We try to utilize the hallway spaces at our events so that if



Credits: (opposite and this page) SWE and OIMA.

people are going between sessions, they have the opportunity to network," Horting says.

To further enhance networking opportunities, it's important to build in time where there's nothing scheduled, especially at international events. Horting and her team have received feedback at some of the organization's overseas events stating that people want more unstructured time so they can network.

"We make sure to not completely pack the agenda with programming, and have time where there's nothing competing so people can network," Horting says. "We have a mobile app that people can use to find others at the event with similar interests. We also leverage social media for people to connect before the event so they can meet face-to-face while at the event."

In her role as meeting planner and interim executive director at the Obesity Medical Association, Carly Crosby recognizes that at their core, meetings and conventions are about human interaction and a shared experience. Content and education are integral to the learning process, but it's the personal interactions that give content its context and emotionally connects learners.

"Connecting attendees through networking is essential to creating an experience and grounding those individuals in the mission of the organization," Crosby says. "We are in a constant

**"We know that people with large, diverse networks are more successful and more likely to take risks. Therefore, we want to make sure we are providing an environment for our attendees where they can grow their network."**



**Karen Horting**  
Executive Director and CEO  
Society of Women Engineers  
Chicago IL

state of improvement when it comes to networking. We use technology, such as conference apps and games, to incentivize attendees to attend an event. We encourage interactions with leadership during roundtable discussions. We also rely heavily on our membership committee to act as ambassadors to first-time attendees or new members. It's important to reinforce a welcoming culture from the classroom to receptions to offsite activities."

**STEPS TO TAKE**

Chrystal Huskey, CEO, Event Integrity and owner, Logis-



Chrystal Huskey  
CEO, Event Integrity  
Littleton, CO

**“Constantly ask yourself, what problems or questions does this group have that we can provide a solution for within the networking environment?”**

tical Meetings & Events, says technology can provide new ways to help attendees break the ice.

“Using a live poll to create a custom game specific to their area of expertise and challenge attendees is a fun and less expensive way to use technology for a large group of people,” Huskey says. “Live feeds via social media are also affordable but bring a modern feel to the event.”

As owner of Logistical Meetings & Events, Huskey creates experiences at meetings and events as a way to enhance networking.

“You can do this by engaging the attendees early — let

them see what options they have for building their schedule,” Huskey says. “Also, creating an experience within the flow of the space is a great way to not only control a crowd, but also get people in a positive state of mind for enjoying the event.”

This is something the Downtown Denver Partnership used when planning the 2017 Denver Startup Week’s kickoff breakfast.

“We wanted the crowd to have a fun entry that got them excited; it was a kickoff after all,” Huskey says. “Plus, we wanted people to network with others before the program started, and at 7 a.m. that can be hard to do. We staggered guest entry and had lots of coffee in the Galleria where the guests hung out after check-in. When it was their group’s turn to enter, they walked down a blue carpet, had their photos taken and hopped on an escalator to the ballroom. Groups were able to enter together as a newly bonded group.”

Before they entered the room, which was filled with lights and screens that had live Twitter feeds, they heard energizing music chosen specifically for the group.

Experiences aside, when it comes to networking, event flow is also important. If your attendees are a mixed-

The primary focus of Denver Startup Week 2017 was networking and providing an experience. The Opening Bash was at Union Station.



Credits: Ken Geha Photography



## Try These Tips

Ali Peña, meeting planner and CEO of Forums Inc., a meeting and event company in Miami, Florida, offers some great feedback on things she's done in past association conferences that have helped to create a more connected environment. These include:

- **Assigned seating at networking dinners.** The seating chart is created so that executives are paired with their customers during dinner. Each person is assigned a table number, and they are told that they will need to sit at that table for dinner. Background music is kept low to encourage conversations. The key to not making this too stuffy is to have some time before and after dinner where attendees can network freely. For example, start with a cocktail hour and then serve desserts in another area.
- **Make leisure activities competitive.** Instead of taking attendees to a tour, event planners should think about how to make them interactive. For example, instead of planning a catamaran cruise, plan a sailing regatta. Again, the key is to make sure that key executives are paired with customers so that teamwork is created.
- **Trade show environments should always include a meeting area.** This is a trend that is popular at larger shows. Not only are environments including meeting rooms but also lounge areas where customers can work and interact with others. — MK

interest crowd, having elements that aid in conversation throughout the space is paramount. Determine the kind of tables needed and what kind of networking will take place. Will the focus be on sitting down and reviewing something over food or having a cocktail while chatting? Will there be a photo opportunity? Also, such things as spaces with large windows and proper sun shading during the time of the event are important as the temperature of the room can affect attendees' comfort level and impact networking efforts. And the volume of any music playing should allow for conversations.

Drew Navolio, director of marketing and partner at David James Group, a marketing agency that runs events for associations, worked on planning the social media lounge at the Society of Women Engineers' conference and career fair. He says meeting planners need to move people from one place to another.

"Changing the environment lets people connect over something that isn't the convention center or meeting space," Navolio says. "Also in large rooms, such as a ballroom, break up the space with kiosks, signage, table space, perhaps even smaller grouped seating areas such as couches, to make the space feel more intimate."

And while exhibit hall receptions are nice in theory, they don't really produce the networking opportunities they once may have. Find a local establishment or eatery and host smaller receptions. Allow for audiences to fracture a little and choose where and with whom they network.

Also using a variety of furniture displays allows for different types of "meeting" spaces in an event design. Leverage what the hotel or venue has — i.e., high cocktail tables, large banquet rounds and low cocktail tables. The different surfaces and seating arrangements provide attendees with a variety of options to suit their style of communication and what works best for them. If the budget allows, bringing in some key lounge pieces can further accomplish this goal.

"Different people have different communication styles,"

**"Different people have different communication styles. The more they are supported and made to feel comfortable with the physical setup of the space, the more apt they will be to communicate."**



Sydney Wolf  
Event Sales Manager  
metroConnections  
Bloomington, MN

says Sydney Wolf, MPI member and sales manager with metroConnections. "The more they are supported and made to feel comfortable with the physical setup of the space, the more apt they will be to communicate."

The idea of incorporating activities or interactive sessions into a meeting schedule is also a great tool for association planners to make the most out of networking schedules. By using an icebreaker activity or "give back" event, you are able to rally attendees around a central cause and allow for easy conversations to happen. Association meeting planners can work with a teambuilding expert who can help pull together an activity that breaks a larger group up into teams that work together on a similar goal.

"Attending a conference is all about wanting natural and easy conversation to happen," Wolf says. "The more 'conversation starters' association planners can provide to give attendees something to talk about — the better."

## NETWORKING AND TECHNOLOGY

Most conferences and events these days have three generations represented in the audience. As such, each distinct group has a unique avenue by which they choose to network. Millennials will look for ways to connect through a mobile app or digital interface of some kind. Gen Xers and boomers, less so — they may prefer more face-to-face interaction and require a space that accommodates that type of interaction.

Technology has dramatically affected the way we communicate in all aspects of life. “Specific to conferences, technology provides a platform for communication in a variety of ways,” Wolf says. “For example, attendee-to-attendee messaging within a conference app allows for easier and more efficient connections to be made. The exchange of information can happen faster.” You can use the information



Carly Crosby  
Deputy Director  
Obesity Medicine Association  
Denver, CO

“Networking is where the passion for the field comes through. It is where learners become champions of the organization, and where relationships are forged for years to come.”

within the application to look up prospects and help connect names to faces much faster. When used correctly, the conference technology can be used to help educate yourself to make networking that much more efficient.

“The permeation of smartphones in the last 10 years makes some kind of custom mobile networking platform a mandatory component of any meeting or event,” Navolio says. “We’ve combined the two at our ‘social media lounge’ at the Society of Women Engineers’ conference and career fair. The lounge encourages mobile interaction while providing a space for face-to-face networking.”

As mobile apps advance, they continue to make strides in connecting attendees during an event. Attendees can connect with each other based off searching key terms. They also can share information and connect after the event is over, and not even have to cross paths during the meeting or event.

“The advent of social media, particularly Twitter, also facilitates instantaneous updates and promotion of networking events,” Navolio says. “Live Twitter feeds make it easier to drive attendance at networking events — even as its hap-

pening, highlight special features and communicate any last-minute changes and updates.”

## CONTINUED INITIATIVES

Technology, experience and return on investment are three focus areas for today’s association meetings and events. Showing value through education and true relationship enhancements are key. And measurable results that show the value in not only the event, but also the organization that they are paying to be a part of or considering becoming a part of, will continue to be important for attendance and ongoing association/membership participation.

“This is becoming especially important as costs in hotel, travel and other accommodations are increasing causing participation costs to also rise,” Huskey says. “The experience is the bonus for showing up and is what will help attendees consider joining again next time.”

While education and learning are important to the success of an event, networking plays an important role in what attendees gain from participating. As Horting notes, the events where people feel like they’re making good connections are the ones they see as valuable and the ones they will continue to attend.

“You can get professional development at a lot of places, but growing your network and meeting the right kind of contacts is not always easy to do,” Horting says. “Your event will stand out among the rest if it is designed to encourage networking and allow people to make those connections.”

To make networking opportunities successful, know your attendees’ wants and needs. What are they going to want to get out of the event? Just because a meeting planner may have tried something and knows it works with some groups doesn’t mean it works for all crowds.

“Constantly ask yourself, what problems or questions does this group have that we can provide a solution for within the networking environment?” Huskey says. “Sometimes they just want fun, sometimes they want to be entertained, and sometimes they want a takeaway. Figure out what the majority would be happy with and make sure your efforts are focusing on that throughout the planning process.”

And while there has been a major surge in technology over the last 10 years within the conference and meetings world, industry experts predict we will continue to see technology play a vital role, however, we also will see a shift back to the emphasis on face-to-face and authentic communication that people are so desperately craving.

“Networking is where the passion for the field comes through,” Crosby says. “It is where learners become champions of the organization, and where relationships are forged for years to come.”

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# The State of Government MEETINGS

## The New Administration Has Created an Unsettling Uncertainty for Budgets

By John Buchanan

Many veteran corporate and association meeting planners like to believe that the pressures and controversies that have intermittently flared up in the industry since the 2008 financial crisis are unique to them. The truth is, however, that government meetings always have been and always will be under more intense scrutiny, simply because they are paid for with taxpayer money.

That simple reality has led to a new set of concerns as political warfare and scandalous media headlines drive Washington, DC, as never before.

"The most important thing about the government meetings market right now, I think, is that we finally got over the scandals that hit the industry a few years ago," says Michelle Milligan, CGMP, national president of the Society of Government Meeting Professionals while also working as an in-house planner for the Third Circuit Court of Michigan. "But at the same time, from a federal perspective, we're also now in kind of a standstill. With every change of government administration, you just don't know how things are going to go. For example, will there be as much money for meetings, more money, less money? And right now, with the new administration, there are also still a lot of government jobs that are vacant, so there is a lot of uncertainty about what those agencies are going to be doing with their meetings. So we really are at a standstill at the federal level."

That uncertainty is taking a toll on Lori Kolker, owner of Rockville, Maryland-based Elle K Associates, an independent



meeting planning company that has served major federal government agencies for 20 years.

### **'UNPRECEDENTED UNCERTAINTY'**

"This has been a tough year so far," says Kolker, whose largest current clients include U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Customs & Border Patrol and U. S. Department of Homeland Security. The reason? A new administration that has created unprecedented uncertainty with a widespread and enduring lack of action so far.

"The bad news at the moment," Kolker says, "is that the federal government started its new fiscal year on October 1, but I still have not gotten budgets from some of my largest clients for 2018. And that's the first time in the 20 years I've been doing government meetings that has happened."

What explanation is she getting from her contacts at her clients? "The messages I'm getting from those clients that are in limbo at the moment," she says, "are along the lines of, 'There's





Planners attending The Society of Government Meeting Professionals' 2017 National Education Conference had much to learn and discuss, including how the current administration's policies will affect federal agency meeting budgets.



Credits: Christie's Photographic Solutions



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Michelle Milligan  
National President  
Society of Government Meeting Professionals  
Detroit, MI

Credit: Christie's Photographic Solutions

things will have on the government meeting industry going forward,” Kolker says. “And I am absolutely dumbfounded by that. I would never in a million years have ever believed we’d ever see anything like what we’re seeing. I’m at a loss for words, really. It’s shocking.”

### A MORE OPTIMISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Maureen Ford, owner of 20-year-old, Pasadena, Maryland-based Ford Hospitality Services Inc., another longtime independent planner of meetings for major federal agencies, does not share the assessment made by Kolker and Milligan that uncertainty is causing a virtual standstill in the market.

“I’m not seeing that concern about new budgets,” Ford says. “The clients I have already have their 2018 budgets approved. So that has not been an issue for me. But of course, there are going to be some that do not have their budgets yet. And I do agree that is simply because of the transition to a new administration.”

Ford believes that seven years after a major meeting-related scandal rocked the General Services Administration because of excessive and in some instances outrageous spending at a Las Vegas conference, the cloud that hung over government meetings for years has finally dissipated. GSA is the agency that broadly oversees government meeting policies such as per diem payments for hotel rooms and food.

“I actually think things are improving now,” she says. “When the whole GSA scandal happened a few years ago, it was absolutely horrible for us as third-party planners. Certain agencies cut us off completely. One of my largest clients was within the Department of Justice, as an example. And after the scandal, they were intimidated and told they could not work with us anymore. And a number of my clients told me that behind the scenes — that they were being pressured not to work with me. And it was because of the debacle of the GSA scandal. So thankfully, all of that has gone away now and things are back to normal.”

The pressure to stop using Ford Hospitality Services was only half of the problem, she says. “The other thing was that a lot of the agencies who did continue to work with us really cut back their budgets because the people in these agencies that approve the meetings were afraid of what their expenditures might look like if they got out there. Even worse was that some clients were told by their supervisors to use teleconferences or webinars instead of face-to-face meetings.”

### COST-CUTTING?

Serious concern is being expressed among government planners that Trump administration budget cuts will cause many meetings to be cancelled in favor of less expensive online meetings or webinars. “There is a concern now over how many meetings will continue to be held in person versus how many

a lot going on with this new administration, as you see on the news every night. I called upstairs to try to get an idea of what’s going on with our meetings for the coming year, and all I got in return was that nobody seems to know what’s going on now. So when that changes, you’ll be the first to know.’ Another one of my longtime clients said, ‘New administration. Things are weird around here. When I know what’s happening, I’ll let you know.’ The really bad news is that for weeks now, I have heard absolutely nothing from them.”

SGMP’s Milligan says she is not surprised by Kolker’s assessment. “I’m hearing that as well,” Milligan says, “from third-party SGMP members who plan meetings for federal agencies.”

Based on her long experience and her “inside the beltway” presence in greater Washington, DC, Kolker believes that what she characterizes as unprecedented gridlock among major U.S. government agencies represents a head-on collision between two factors well known around the country for months. The Trump White House has been slow to fill many top and mid-level non-Cabinet jobs at government agencies, at the same time the new administration is making equally unprecedented budget cuts across the government, with the exception of the Pentagon.

“What we don’t know yet is what lasting effect those two

will become a webinar or a web-based meeting," Milligan says. "I think that's at the forefront of planner concerns now."

And given the uncertainty created by the Trump administration, that current concern could morph into a career challenge in the foreseeable future. "That concern has been there for some time now," Milligan says. "But it's really there now because of the new administration and the talk about cost savings. So as planners, we really have to push back and make the case for why face-to-face meetings are so important."

The anticipation of broad budget cuts, in general, also are currently of concern to many planners, according to Milligan. "There don't appear to be a lot of budget changes yet," she says, "but there certainly could be."

The good news on that count, Kolker says, is that "so far, it looks like budgets, at least the ones I've seen, are at the same levels as last year. That means they're flat. But at least they're not being reduced — yet."

Meanwhile, the new GSA per diem rates released October 1 for hotel rooms, food and ancillary services such as audio-visual, were increased over 2017 rates, as a result of rising costs across the board worldwide.

At the same time, however, Kolker says, the number of attendees for some major meetings is trending downward as budget concerns grow with fiscally strict Republicans in complete control of the government.

One bright spot in the market, Kolker says, is that she is now

booking considerably more meetings hosted by associations that have their events paid for by the federal government because of the role they play in developing government policy. "The really good news is that I'm now getting a ton of association meetings that are funded by the government," Kolker says. "And a number of those meetings I'm getting now are funded by the Department of Education. I just booked an association meeting for 700 people in Chicago next March that's one of the ones funded by the government."

## HOTEL RATES AND NEGOTIATION

A major difference between government meetings and corporate or association meetings is that costs for hotel rooms and food are fixed, based on GSA's annual per diem rates, which cover the entire world and are broken down by destination and time of year.

As a result, Ford says, the simple and essential mantra of government planners is "per diem or better. Period."

Despite the fixed costs, hotels love government business, Kolker says. "And they are coming in with incredible deals," she says. "They're offering complimentary this and complimentary that. And many of my clients cannot pay for food and beverage, so I tell the hotel I need this or I need that, like a complimentary breakfast or a free welcome reception, and they're giving it to me." She believes that the motive behind the concessions is that hotel sales executives understand

the unique pressures that government meeting planners now face in terms of costs, while also very much wanting the business. "They also know how much volume there is in the government market and that, until this year at least, that volume was stable," Kolker says. "As soon as they see 'government meeting,' the first thing they say is 'what do you need? What can I do?'"

Somewhat ironically, perhaps, one reason hotels like government business so much is that there is virtually no negotiation of rates. "There's the government per diem, so there is nothing to negotiate. For the hotel, it's take it or leave it. And they take it."

Yet another reason hotels covet government meetings is that they last longer. Typical government meetings last a week, with Sunday check-in and Saturday departure, Kolker says, adding that even those that are shorter almost always last six nights.

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Lori Kolker  
Founder and President  
Elle K Associates  
Rockville, MD

“So far, it looks like budgets, at least the ones I’ve seen, are at the same levels as last year. That means they’re flat. But at least they’re not being reduced — yet.”

## FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Another quirk of government meetings is that many federal agencies do not allow any expenditure for food and beverage. Individual attendees pay for their own meals and are then reimbursed by their agency for the per diems.

“That means that for many of my biggest clients, there is also no negotiation over F&B,” Kolker says. “In general, even though some agencies do still use the per diem food rate to accommodate a group as a whole, after the scandal a few years ago GSA put tighter oversight into place, which in turn convinced agencies to have attendees dine on their own based on their per diems.”

In today’s market, Kolker says, the only time she does F&B as part of a major meeting is when sponsors can be found and convinced to pay for it.

Unlike Kolker, Ford typically books hotel rooms, food and beverage, and ancillary services such as audio-visual. And each is based on a prevailing GSA per diem rate.

“So if you want to use that food per diem for a group, for breakfast, lunch and dinner, you just add up the per diems for the day and then multiply by the number of attendees,” Ford says. “And you get a purchase order for that amount.”

She then negotiates with the hotel. “And in general, hotels do ‘government’ menus to hit the per diems,” she says. “And depending on the volume of meetings you do as a planner, you can negotiate better deals with the hotel than you could ordinarily afford on the per diems.”

On a state or local level, there is typically more budgetary flexibility when it comes to F&B, Milligan says. “For my job in Michigan, I can do F&B. I just have to follow the various per diems for food or a break or whatever it is. But we can also get exceptions, if for some reason the hotel’s rates are higher than what the per diem allows. And various Michigan agencies have their own per diems for what you can spend for each type of meal, like breakfast. But again, there are sometimes exceptions made if you can show there is no way you can get a particular meal in a particular place for the per diem.”

Perhaps most surprisingly to corporate and association planners, government meetings planned directly on behalf

of the sponsoring agency are executed with no contract. “The agency just issues a letter of intent that’s not even binding,” Kolker says. “But it does include everything we negotiated. And the hotels accept those because it’s like with the national debt. The government is behind it, so people know the commitment will be honored.”

Her hotel commission is not covered in the letter of intent. She attaches an addendum to the letter of intent.

Another significant difference between government and corporate or association meetings, Ford says, is that “a lot of my government clients have to go through multiple channels just to get approval of a meeting. And again, that’s something that came as a result of the GSA scandal. Things are getting a little better now, but getting a simple approval is often very complicated. That is typically not the case with corporate meetings, where there aren’t so many layers of approval required. So government meetings often take a lot longer to get approval.”

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

One specific concern government planners now share is “how much money there will be to put into a meeting,” Milligan says. “Often, there is the expectation from a government agency that you can go plan a big conference, but have very little money behind it. And in particular, that happens a lot at the local government level. But in general, I’d say that’s everyone’s biggest concern now. In other words, agencies say, ‘They want me to plan this wonderful event, but spend as little money as possible.’”

Another perspective broadly shared by planners is that the GSA scandal permanently exacerbated concerns about the potentially toxic relationship between costs and optics.

“But today, no one is ever spending the kind of money on things like the ones that caused the scandal,” Milligan says. “And it was never true that the kind of spending that caused the scandal was anywhere close to typical. Those were individual, isolated incidents. But unfortunately, based on the publicity, the whole industry was called out for overspending. But that was just not true. And for statewide and local meetings, there was never any indication that agencies and planners were overspending.”

Most important of all, in Ford’s opinion, is that fact that the government meeting industry is “pretty much back to normal. But the stigma of the GSA scandal has stayed with planners,” she says. “That means you just have to be very, very careful when it comes to cost and perception, because with the kind of mainstream media coverage that Washington scandals get now, it would be horrible for all of us if anything happens with regard to how government agencies spend money on meetings.”

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# A Changing Climate for Contracts

## Negotiating Controversial Clauses and Contentious Seller's Market Conditions

Patrick Simms

Convention center and hotel contracts are evolving documents sensitive to both market conditions and new risks that need to be managed. They are, in effect, “signs of the times” for the meeting industry. The anti-discrimination clause is a prominent example. Meeting venues are long accustomed to granting groups rights of cancellation based on contingencies such as natural disasters, health emergencies, civil wars and airline shutdowns. But the anti-discrimination clause includes a new — and more controversial — contingency as a basis for penalty-free cancellation, namely, discriminatory legislation passed at the meeting destination.

## ANTI-DISCRIMINATION CLAUSE

Motivated by the much-publicized efforts to pass “bathroom bills” in North Carolina and Texas that restrict public restroom usage by transgender individuals, the clause is an attempt both to protect attendees from discrimination and to protect the host organization from becoming associated



Christopher Kirbabas  
Director of Programs  
Society of Architectural Historians  
Chicago, IL

**“We’ve been trying to add an anti-discrimination clause into force majeure or in its own specific paragraph. We want to ensure that all of our attendees are protected in visiting the state or city.”**

with destinations where such laws are enacted. Last summer (2016), the ASAE approved an anti-discrimination clause for its future convention center and hotel contracts, beginning with its July annual meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah. To paraphrase the clause’s legalese, a “discriminatory” legislation or regulation would either repeal legal protections for subject individuals; allow discrimination in employment, housing or public accommodations or services; or prohibit access to facilities based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity, family responsibility, political affiliation or disability. The enactment of such legislation has the effect of a force majeure, allowing the group to cancel the meeting with any penalties for cancellation or attrition waived, and with any amounts paid to the property based on the agreement refunded.

While the clause is not unreasonable, planners can expect to encounter resistance to this application of the force majeure concept. Anecdotal evidence comes from Christopher Kirbabas, director of programs for the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH): “We’ve been trying to add an anti-discrimination clause into force majeure or in its own specific paragraph. We want to ensure that all of our attendees are protected in visiting the state or city. ...I’ve had a situation where one city was able to sign it, while another city in another state said, ‘Our lawyers will not allow this in the contract.’ So I think it just depends on the city and state, but I think this (kind of clause) will continue to crop up over time.”

## SELLER’S MARKET CONDITIONS

Seller’s market conditions also have increased the points

of contention during contract negotiations, and the discussion is often related to surcharges and fees. Jeffrey W. Wood, meetings director with the American Institute of Chemical Engineers (AIChE), has noticed hotels increasingly “trying to institute more rental (fees) for function space, which we fight tooth and nail. They’re still willing to negotiate that, but they’re starting to institute it in the contracts for some of our smaller meetings.” A less familiar fee arose at a New York City hotel for one of the AIChE’s smaller meetings. The hotel charged “a \$3.50 luggage fee for each attendee that wanted to store his bags for a late checkout,” says Wood. “It was in the contract, but when push came to shove, and they instituted it, all the attendees were shocked. We put that on the master; I said, ‘I’m not going to have the attendees pay that.’ So that’s a nickel-and-dime fee.”

For the AIChE’s annual meeting, which draws an attendance of around 5,000, a seller’s market is often inescapable, as the association typically meets in first-tier cities due to the superior international airlift. In such cities especially, “I think hotels want the business faster,” says Wood. “They’re pushing suspense dates, and we can’t always do it because we have a certain process here, and it takes a while to get the contract signed.” And in-demand convention centers can naturally be more selective about the business they do sign. “We’re not a full-center meeting in some cities, and they try to pair us up with another group,” he says. “I’ve seen that stiffen up, so they’re not willing to book us unless they can marry us with another group.”

Centers in first-tier cities also tend to “get away with having cancellation clauses that definitely work to their advan-

**“We’re not a full-center meeting in some cities, and they try to pair us up with another group. I’ve seen that stiffen up, so they’re not willing to book us unless they can marry us with another group.”**

Jeffrey W. Wood  
Meetings Director  
American Institute of Chemical Engineers  
New York, NY

tage,” Kirbabas observes. “But in cities like St. Paul, Minnesota (site of the SAH’s 2018 Annual International Conference), there is a lot more flexibility in the cancellation (terms).”

Of course, flexibility does not mean that the terms of attrition and cancellation laid out in the venue’s initial contract will favor the group. Kirbabas has found that features such as a sliding scale for the penalties and a rebooking clause have to be negotiated more often in the current



climate. "I've just been amazed that (such terms) are not included in the first place, where that was not the case several years ago. I'm also not seeing a lot of mutual indemnification," he says. "That's why it's really incumbent on the meeting planner to know which clauses you should have to protect your organization, by taking educational courses, reading trade magazines, etc."

## ATTRITION ISSUES

A company long known for its contract expertise is Meeting Sites Resource, founded by the late Tim Brown in 1993. Katie Muck, currently senior director, global meeting services at the company, suggests that planners try to negotiate away tiered attrition by leveraging a strong history of performance on the room block. On the tiered approach, the hotel offers the group certain opportunities to reduce the block prior to the meeting, and if those opportunities are not taken, the group is liable for the full block. So if the group is entitled to 20 percent attrition, "they are only provided that give two 'drop dates' prior to the group check-in. For example, the group may reduce their block by 10 percent 30 days prior to arrival and then another 10 percent 21 days prior to arrival," Muck explains. "After that point, the client is responsible for the full block if they do not take advantage of the dates to reduce. The argument with this that it allows the hotel to progressively resell the rooms on the front end; however, this is very difficult for groups, especially for associations, since the attendees typically make their reservations closer to arrival date."

When calculating attrition, the association should be given credit for rooms booked at a rate lower than the group rate. "Be sure to include in the attrition clause that all sleeping rooms of registered meeting attendees will be counted toward the block regardless of rate paid to avoid attrition, and do an audit to capture any rooms around the block," Muck advises. A published rate clause, if accepted, actually prevents the hotel from offering rates over the dates of the program that are lower than the contracted rates. "If this happens, we then ask the hotel to adjust our group rate down accordingly," says Muck. The clause does not apply to rates offered by third-party wholesale entities such as Travelocity. In addition, most hotels will adjust the clause to cover peak sleeping room nights as opposed to all meeting dates, she notes.

Securing a published rate clause may be challenging in the current state of the market, however. "If it's a first-tier city, I feel I'm less successful at getting that clause into a contract," says Kirbabas. Where Kirbabas has found success is in adjusting the room block to prevent attrition in the years leading up to the meeting. "We book four years out,

and I do look to the hotel to partner (on preventing attrition) as best as they can. Suppose they're giving us a \$149 room rate, and I can give rooms back two years out, one year out, etc., and they can resell those rooms at a higher rate to another group. That's to their advantage and to my advantage," he says.

## ROOM BLOCK VS. FUNCTION SPACE

Win-win situations are always nice, but it's also important to be cognizant of the respects in which one's business is not ideal for the property. In the spirit of fairness, one may then agree to a contractual item that is less favorable to the group. Some association meetings, for example, promise a guest room block that is small relative to the amount of meeting space the group will use. "Groups taking over all of the meeting space in the hotel but only blocking half of the hotel rooms, leave the hotel only having transient rooms to sell. For a hotel that is not a highly used transient property,

**"Groups taking over all of the meeting space in the hotel but only blocking half of the hotel rooms, leave the hotel only having transient rooms to sell."**



Deborah Borak, CDS, CMM  
SMMC, V.P., Team Director  
Conference Direct, Littleton, CO

this meeting will not be as attractive to bid on," explains Deborah Borak, CDS, CMM, SMMC, vice president/team director for Conference Direct. One reason that some associations end up with a relatively small room block is that, unlike corporate groups, attendees pay their own way and may share rooms to save on lodging costs. In view of that less attractive guest-room-to-meeting-space ratio, "the hotel might add meeting room rental or ask for a higher food and beverage minimum to increase revenue from the meeting," Borak notes. "But it is always a business decision and contingent on the hotel and their historical booking data on whether a group is a good fit or not."

If the hotel decides on charging a meeting room rental fee due to the relatively low guest room revenue, here is where a planner might "give" instead of "take." "With some of our smaller meetings there is a disproportionate use of function space relative to the room block, and I'd be the first to admit it, having a hotel background," Wood says. "So sometimes we do pay a meeting room rental, but it's minimal; we try to get it down as low as possible." On the other

hand, "if it's the annual conference, then they understand that there's no meeting room rental because of the huge F&B that we spend."

## F&B MINIMUMS

In what is perhaps another symptom of the seller's market, some hoteliers have been calculating the F&B minimum based on the function space square footage the group is utilizing, Muck observes. "This does not calculate correctly when you have a program that consists of breakouts or exhibits in addition to their general session and meal room," she says. "I would advise that data is key, and to present to the hotel a cost analysis report showing the number of attendees for each meal event multiplied by the hotel's average menu prices to support that the F&B minimum can be met."



**Katie Muck**  
Senior Director  
Global Meeting Services  
Meeting Sites Resource  
Omaha, NE

**"Present to the hotel a cost analysis report showing the number of attendees for each meal event multiplied by the hotel's average menu prices to support that the F&B minimum can be met."**

Kirbabas, who has not encountered the square-footage calculation of the minimum, comments, "We wouldn't be able to do that. I don't think that we're necessarily space hogs, but we have a very low, very specific F&B spend, and if we were required (to spend) based on the square footage of our meeting space, we would just move on to the next property."

When an issue arises during a hotel contract negotiation, it may be valuable to involve the chain's national representative as a means of leverage, especially if one has a relationship with that individual. But it should be borne in mind that the relationship with the property rep is also important, lest one make such a decision hastily. "I feel very fortunate that in my 20 years of (convention planning) I've fostered some really great relationships with national sales hotel reps at Hilton, Hyatt, Marriott and Omni," says Kirbabas. "But I don't always escalate any situations I have with the hotel to my national salesperson, because I do want that relationship with the (property) salesperson. If I'm just not getting quite what I need, then I will take it to our national sales rep. But I want to start with the salesperson at the hotel." The national rep is of course more likely to be aware of the scope of the group's

business across the chain, and can make a case for awarding the group a given concession on the contract.

## TOUT THE VALUE OF YOUR BUSINESS

In a seller's market, however, association planners themselves need to be more skilled than ever at making a case for the value of their own business, and gaining desirable contract terms as a result. For the AIChE, the F&B revenue is what stands out to many hotels and convention centers, Wood feels. "The F&B is the kicker. Once they get wind of what we actually do spend, then they're much more negotiable," he observes. "We spent \$800,000 on our F&B in San Francisco (2016 Annual Meeting). That's a lot for a scientific/technical society, and the reason is that we have 60-64 university alumni receptions that take place all week. We try to split up the spend between the convention center and hotels. So the F&B is one attractive incentive for them to deal with us."

The SAH's F&B spend is comparatively small, so Kirbabas emphasizes the additional revenue the group promises in virtue of attendees extending their stay in the city. "Most of our members can be very frugal because they don't always get paid a lot of money. But because they're so interested and curious about the location, they will come into the city before and stay after the meeting to explore the region and all of the architecture," he explains. "I try to tell the CVBs that it's not just what they do during our meeting, it's also what they do before and after. They will stay in the hotels, they will continue to have breakfast, lunch and dinner, and so on."

Apart from revenue considerations, some association meetings look good on a city's "resume" and can draw the attention of groups in related industries that are not yet clients. That aspect is worth emphasizing (if it is not already obvious to the city) at the contract stage or sooner. The AIChE Annual Meeting draws chemical engineers from all over the world to present the latest research. "There is some prestige attached to it," says Wood. "We make the point to the CVB initially and then start dealing with the individual properties." On occasion, he finds that bringing the annual to a city will afford leverage in negotiations for smaller AIChE meetings in that locale; the association holds approximately 35 small meetings throughout the year.

While Kirbabas does advocate for the value of SAH meetings business to CVBs, he finds that not all of them will then further the group's case in contract negotiations with facilities. "There are some CVBs that are just hands off; that's not what they do per their policies and bylaws. But by and large CVBs will step up to the plate and be your advocate (in discussions with) a convention center or hotel," he says. Which is ideal, given that planners are contending with a negotiation climate that is often rife with new challenges.

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**W**hen the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) conference convened in Hawaii in 2011, President Obama noted that the global economic center was shifting from Europe and North America to Asia, making it a huge draw for many North American groups. The vast region encompasses far more than we can include here. But the six destinations below and the experience

and strategies of those who booked conferences in them provide valuable insights on how to make meetings across Asia-Pacific successful.

### Hawaii

Perhaps no destination says “Hawaii” more definitively than Waikiki, Honolulu’s oft-photographed beachfront

# Asia-Pacific Meetings

## This Vast Region Offers Diversity, Deep Culture and Know-how

By Christine Loomis

A Maori opening ceremony and cultural evening entertained a conference group visiting New Zealand.

**“As I travel, I’m always intrigued by how New Zealand...is described by others — a country on the edge of the world, a country of breathtaking beauty, a place where the wine and food are fabulous, a place to try new activities, people who are open and friendly, safe.”**



Jan Tonkin  
Managing Director  
The Conference Company  
Auckland, New Zealand

Pacific Rim, where we have partnered with two other professional societies; The Electrochemical Society of Japan and The Korean Electrochemical Society.”

The program runs at the Hawaii Convention Center. “We have about 4,000 attendees,” Calvo says. “The correlation between attendees and presenters of technical info is almost one to one. It’s a very technical program — we require more technical setup than most other types of meetings, not necessarily in terms of specialized equipment or requirements but in terms of capacity and execution. It takes considerable manpower and equipment to put on a meeting of this type and size.”

Reliable execution is critical. “Our execution has to be very, very good,” Calvo says. “We can’t be late and we can’t be down. We have to be precise with timing because of the number of presentations we offer over the course of the meeting — we present 4,000 papers — and because attendees and presenters travel long distances to be here, maybe for a 20-minute presentation. Every presentation must run on time. We’ve found over the years that the convention center has good capacity and execution, as does the hotel.”

Additionally, he says, room sizes are good, the distance between rooms is not significant and people can easily find rooms. “This facility is the perfect size for us. Because of our size, we’re the only user of the facility, which provides a good experience for attendees in terms of intimacy and programs.”

For this group, Honolulu is the obvious choice. “None of the other islands have the meeting space we need. We have a long relationship with Hilton Hawaiian Village, which accommodates the majority of our attendees. Because it’s set away from downtown on Waikiki Beach, I feel it gives guests a real Hawaii experience, which most city hotels cannot. It’s very functional as well,” Calvo says, adding that the resort has a good culture in terms of service.

“The aloha spirit comes through from the staff, and that makes it a special experience for our people. It is a bit of a walk to the convention center so we provide shuttle buses.”

neighborhood. That’s where the Electrochemical Society holds its PRIME event every four years, including 2016. The main host hotel is Hilton Hawaiian Village.

“The target audience for this meeting is Pacific Rim scientists in our discipline, and it’s geographically ideal,” says Roque J. Calvo, the society’s executive director and CEO. “We draw attendees from around the world, but the core is



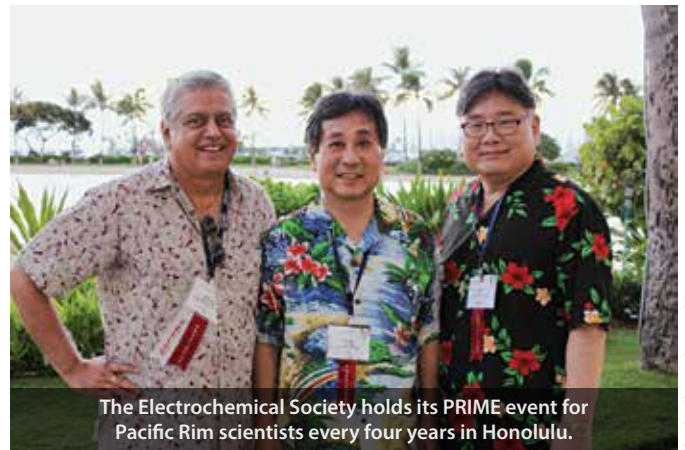
Roque J. Calvo, MBA, CAE  
Executive Director and CEO  
The Electrochemical Society  
Pennington, NJ

**“We have a long relationship with Hilton Hawaiian Village, which accommodates the majority of our attendees. ...The aloha spirit comes through from the staff, and that makes it a special experience for our people.”**

Calvo says he has to provide diversity of price because the group has a large student population, so they also use the Ala Moana hotel, which is closer to the convention center.

The biggest challenge, Calvo says, is “overcoming the belief by some managers and organizations that Hawaii is a boondoggle and serious business doesn’t get done there. Obviously that is not the case. We suppress that notion by focusing on our meeting and what it is — the largest, most relevant meeting in our field. This meeting comes every four years, and it’s the place to be in our industry, which helps us overcome that challenge.”

Partners make the difference. “The biggest driver for our attendance since 1987 has been finding the right partner and right destination,” Calvo notes. “Oahu works for our demographic and partnerships because it’s well located geographically, and the lure of the destination is strong among our attendees, presenters and partners, most from the Pacific Rim. It’s a huge destination for Japan, for example, and the Electrochemical Society of Japan was our first partner. Now we partner with The Korean Electrochemical Society as well, and it’s also a place Koreans like to visit. Hawaii is a place many attendees want to visit, and if you can help them get there with a good technical program, that’s a benefit and helps drive attendance.”



The Electrochemical Society holds its PRIME event for Pacific Rim scientists every four years in Honolulu.

Credit: Electrochemical Society

## China

The Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) has held its annual convention in Asia several times, including October 2016 in Wenzhou, China, with about 300 attendees based at the Wenzhou Shangri-La Hotel. With many members having experienced China before, meeting outside of the traditional two or three big cities provided exposure to the regional culture and aspects of the Zhejiang Province.

A benefit to organizing the meeting was that SATW’s management company, Kellen, has personnel in China. “Since we have a staffed office in Beijing, with multiple meeting planners and account executives, it’s relatively easy for us to propose a conference anywhere within China,” says Kellen’s Phelps Hope, CMP, senior vice president meetings and expositions. “Using our Chinese nationals in the Kellen office to interpret both the language and the meeting’s needs into an RFP-type document outlining the needs for the convention, the Wenzhou Tourism Board was able to accurately propose to host this conference.”

That said, Hope notes that contracts in China are tricky. “Contracts in China are simply a confirmation of the order, and they require full payment ahead of time as credit cannot be established at Chinese venues. Additionally, the country and all infrastructure are literally owned by the government, which includes convention centers and many hotels. If the government decides to renovate, close, expand or change one of the venues, it’s done without much (or any in one case we experienced!) advance communication to the planner.”

Communication itself is another difficulty. “Communications in China is always the toughest challenge. If you do not ask a specific question you will not necessarily be informed of a nuance that differs from your experiences and processes,” Hope cautions. “This means you must always be questioning, in many cases multiple times, to confirm that plans are on track. The biggest skill needed by a meeting planner heading into China for the first time is to be flexible and patient.



A banquet setup on the Great Lawn at the Hilton Hawaiian Village in Waikiki Beach.

Credit: Hilton Hawaiian Village

The Chinese have adopted many business practices from the Western world, but they still are very unique in many approaches to meeting and event planning. Don't assume what is standard elsewhere is standard in China!"

With so many challenges, is it worth holding a meeting in China? For SATW, the answer was a definitive yes. "It's worth it," says Hope, "to reach the huge economy and diverse experiences that China offers." But connecting with local experts is imperative.

"Work with a certified DMC and professional conference organizer in the area where you want to meet," he says. "It will make all the difference."

## Macau

SIGGRAPH Asia, a conference and exhibition of computer graphics and interactive techniques, took place at The Venetian Macao last year, with 5,000 attendees and exhibitors from across the world. Speakers included experts from Google VR, Facebook and Pixar Studios, among others.

Prakash Ramajillu, Singapore-based conference strategy director with Koelnmesse Pte Ltd., which organizes trade fairs, exhibitions and events, calls Macau a one-stop destination. "We previously held SIGGRAPH Asia in nearby locations including Hong Kong and Shenzhen, but Macau was different



The Venetian Macao.

Credit: The Venetian Macao

as our entire event, including accommodations, was under one roof. It was easily accessible, and Macau provided our attendees with a mix of modern and traditional experiences."

Among the highlights, Ramajillu says, was "The grand scale of the venue, which provided state-of-the-art conference and exhibition facilities, with more than 25,000 square meters of flexible conference space and 12,000 hotel rooms — all within five-minutes walking distance. It's one of the best venues in Macau. Everything was integrated, which made things easier for us. SIGGRAPH Asia is only held at world-class venues so we wanted to ensure that these standards were kept."

One thing for planners to consider: The Venetian Macao's immense size. "For some people it may be overwhelming,"

## In Macau "delegates can learn about the fusion of Chinese and Portuguese cultures, architectural legacies and authentic cuisine."

Prakash Ramajillu, Conference Strategy Director

Koelnmesse Pte Ltd, Singapore

Ramajillu notes, "but to us it was perfect. Our event was held over three floors. Exhibition and conference rooms were very accessible given the strategic location of the escalators, which made the journey from one location to another seamless. The Venetian also provided all entertainment, which added another dimension to the delegate experience."

But attendees should get out and explore. "Ensure that your attendees get the opportunity to explore Macau as well," Ramajillu suggests. "Guests can walk down to Taipa, which is nearby, a great way to experience the less concrete Macau. Delegates can learn about the fusion of Chinese and Portuguese cultures, architectural legacies and authentic cuisine," he adds.

Planners should understand that The Venetian hosts many events. "We were informed well in advance that a huge group was arriving during the tail end of our event so we were prepared, and The Venetian ensured there was no disruption to SIGGRAPH Asia."

Ramajillu advises planners to do a site visit before planning starts to get a feel for the space and options. "There are always challenges running an event in a location other than where you are based," he notes. "The key is to ensure that your partners have good communication and are agile. The Venetian was great with both. There were restrictions with what we could do due to certain rules and regulations, but we always found alternative solutions with the help of the venue."

Of note for planners, the world's longest bridge is under construction here. When completed this year, it will connect Macau with Hong Kong, 39 miles away (passports required). The second MGM hotel is open this year, and in 2018, Lisboa Palace, the first hotel designed by Karl Lagerfeld, will open.

## Singapore

In May 2016, 5,800 delegates gathered in Singapore for the 24th annual meeting of the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine (ISMRM), headquartered at Pan Pacific Singapore.

"Singapore met our requirements as a suitable city in Asia given its location, airlift, ease of access, cost, etc. In addition, the visa requirements were really beneficial to our group, which represents over 60 countries worldwide," says Roberta A. Kravitz, ISMRM executive director.

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# BIG PROBLEM? BIG SOLUTION

Since pneumatic (air-filled) tyres were invented in 1887, disposing of them has presented a problem. With more than 1 billion tyres produced each year, taking an estimated 500 years to break down, it's an industry with a big waste challenge. Some tyres are reused in things like asphalt roads, kids' playgrounds and racetrack crash barriers. But this still leaves millions languishing in graveyards around the world, creating fire hazards and a long-term, global environmental problem.

Despite many attempts, there has been no economically viable way to recycle rubber tyres effectively – until now. Established in 2009, Australian company Green Distillation Technologies (GDT) has developed world-first technology that converts tyres back into high-quality, in-demand oil, carbon and steel. The technology recycles 100 per cent of every tyre and presents enormous potential.

## TRANSFORMING TYRES INTO OIL, CARBON AND STEEL

Discovered by GDT's Chief Technical Officer, Denis Randall, the patented, top-secret process – called 'destructive distillation' – is a chemical reaction that breaks down tyres, leaving oil, carbon and steel. What makes it so ground-breaking is that it is the first method to be developed that turns tyres into high-demand raw materials, without producing any emissions.

According to GDT, a typical 10-kilogram car tyre yields four litres of oil, four kilograms of carbon and two kilograms of steel, while a four-tonne oversized dump truck tyre will yield 1,500 litres of oil, 1.6 tonnes of carbon and 0.8 tonnes of steel.

The destructive distillation process begins by loading whole tyres into a process chamber, which is evacuated of air and sealed. Heat is then applied, which drives the chemical reaction, breaking the tyre down into different compounds, one of which is collected and condensed into 'manufactured' oil. At the end of the process, the carbon and steel are extracted, cooled and separated.

The process is entirely emission-free because all vapours are captured and condensed. The exhaust stream is cooled and washed before it is released, leaving it well below required limits. GDT makes the process even more environmentally efficient by using the manufactured oil as the heat source.

The oil GDT produces through this process is a biocrude oil, which is similar to diesel.

"The Queensland University of Technology has tested the oil and found it can be blended with small amounts of fossil fuel, resulting in no loss of engine performance and 30 per cent less nitrogen oxide in exhaust emissions," says Trevor Bayley, GDT's Chief Operating Officer.

GDT sells its oil to a refinery, which in turn converts it into a renewable, highly efficient fuel for diesel engines. According to Bayley, the oil could also be used as a heating fuel or further refined into an aviation jet fuel.

The steel commands a high resale price and is sold back to tyre manufacturers for reuse. The carbon, meanwhile, is a high-grade product that can be used in place of carbon sourced from fossil fuels, although GDT is yet to firm up a market for it.

## REWRITING THE FUTURE OF TYRE DISPOSAL

This environmental success story came about somewhat by chance, when Randall, a scientist and passionate inventor of waste-to-renewable energy technologies, discovered the destructive distillation process after more than 35 years of study and experimentation. He initially used it to recycle agricultural waste, but recognised that the process would work with any material containing carbon.

When he crossed paths in 2009 with Trevor Bayley and GDT CEO Craig Dunn, they quickly realised the potential to address the world's tyre problem.

GDT has one plant in its early stages of operations, located near Warren in western New South Wales, with plans to have it running at full capacity soon. Bayley says a single plant can process 19,300 tonnes

of tyres per year, which equates to roughly 658,000 tyres.

The company plans to establish another six plants, eventually giving it capacity to recycle around 26 per cent of Australia's available end-of-life tyre market.

GDT has attracted "huge" interest from international companies keen to establish joint ventures, in countries including the UK, USA, Japan, Thailand, Russia, Chile, Argentina, South Africa and Qatar.

GDT hopes to eventually manage 30 per cent of the global end-of-life tyre market. That's roughly 420 million tyres per year converted into usable and in demand materials via an environmentally sustainable process.

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Author: Ruby Lohman*

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Roberta A. Kravitz  
Executive Director  
International Society for  
Magnetic Resonance in Medicine  
Concord, CA

**“The service level is so high in Singapore. When combined with the willingness of local contacts to assist in every detail, from visas to parties in public areas, it makes Singapore a truly essential option for those planning a meeting in Asia.”**

“The city was so welcoming and willing to work with us when we identified a public area where we wanted to do a very large party,” she says. “This apparently had never been done before in Singapore, yet with the help of East-West Planners, we were able to have our very successful closing party at Glutton’s Bay. Truly memorable.”

Another highlight, Kravitz notes, was “The beautiful Suntec Convention Centre and its technical capabilities, electronic signage and strong internet framework. We took over the center, locating most of our hotels within walking distance.”

Kravitz calls the meeting a positive experience for staff and attendees. “The service level is so high in Singapore. When combined with the willingness of local contacts to assist in every detail, from visas to parties in public areas, it makes Singapore a truly essential option for those planning a meeting in Asia.”

She advises planners to reach out to others who have held similar events in Singapore. “Identify what worked well for others and what did not,” she says, adding that, “There is always a solution or another option in Singapore.”

Singapore continues to evolve. In 2017 four new hotels opened or are scheduled including Andaz Singapore, Hotel InterContinental Robertson Quay, Courtyard by Marriott and Yotel Singapore.

Singapore attendees who want to add a post-convention trip to Malaysia should know that the first-in-the-world 20th Century Fox World theme park is slated to open in Genting Highlands in 2018. This year, SkyAvenue hotel and mall opened nearby, offering five stories of retail shops and restaurants at the top of a mountain.

## New Zealand

Planners looking for an expert championing New Zealand as a meeting destination need look no further than Jan Tonkin, managing director of The Conference Company, an Auckland PCO.

“As I travel, I’m always intrigued by how New Zealand and New Zealanders are described by others — a country on the edge of the world, a country of breathtaking beauty, a place where the wine and food are fabulous, a place to try new activities, people who are open and friendly, safe,” Tonkin says. “They talk almost as if it’s a place beyond imagining. But I’m a practical conference organizer, so I focus on how that sense of something beyond imagination can be captured and turned into reality.”

Perhaps most important, she says, there’s a closely knit business-events community throughout the country. “We’re lucky to have the perfect mix of people — those who have made the meetings world their life’s work, those who come back from working in the industry offshore bringing valuable skills and learnings, and those who are enthusiastically starting out and can see possibilities with fresh eyes. There’s a camaraderie and sense of teaming up to create something great for a client. Underpinning it is the spirit of “manaakitanga,” which, in the language of the Maori, refers to hospitality, kindness, generosity, showing respect and caring for others.”

As an example of all that, Tonkin points to the International Union for Health Promotion and Education World Conference, which will convene in Rotorua, a lakeside city in the central North Island.

“On paper it may look like a challenging location for 2,000 plus delegates,” Tonkin says. “But the Rotorua business-events team was not put off for a moment. They listened to what our client wanted to achieve and looked to see how they could facilitate planning in so many ways, always staying true to the sense of place.”

By bringing in local government and local health professionals, inviting local Maori to participate, and thinking creatively about venues, Tonkin says, “they described how we can deliver social events that, while for large numbers, have a boutique feel about them and are true to the region.”

There’s no question that New Zealand’s dual assets of spectacular landscapes and exceptional food and wine are powerful draws for attendees, and Tonkin says it’s easy to incorporate activities into conferences because they’re within easy reach of almost any area. As for “wow events,” these, too, are easy to come by.

“Where would you hold a dinner in a shed stacked with boats other than in Auckland, which has some of the highest boat ownership in the world? Or a rustic dinner in a barn on a sheep station, no distance at all from a lively conference town? Beautiful vineyard settings abound as do opportunities to hold functions in museums as unusual as Te Papa in Wellington and Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre in Blenheim and art galleries as beautiful as Dunedin’s and New Plymouth’s.”

Fortunately, North American planners don't have to be experts on New Zealand as there are plenty of experts available. Tourism New Zealand's Conference Assistance Programme is particularly valuable. "Not only is funding available through that program but also introductions to experts to help with bidding and marketing. The convention bureaus nationwide are equally helpful. The very best way to turn what might have previously been a thought or a possibility into a reality," Tonkin says, "is by tapping into the local know-how of convention bureaus, independent meeting planners and destination management companies."

## Australia

In July, the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) gathered in Sydney for their International Conference, with 2,000-plus participants from across the globe. Hilton Sydney served as the primary hotel.

"Business Events Sydney assisted with the successful bid to bring the conference to Sydney," says Tamara Kavalec, CEO of Arinex, a PCO. "Arinex delivered a depth and breadth of experience that supported IIA and paved the way for best practice with an Australian flavor. It worked like a well-fitted hand in

The IIA 2017 International Conference gala dinner took place at the Overseas Passenger Terminal at Circular Quay, which overlooks the Sydney Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge.



Credit: Arinex Pty Ltd.

**"This brand new international venue (ICC Sydney) is set to become Asia-Pacific's premier integrated convention and exhibition center."**



Tamara Kavalec  
CEO, Arinex Pty Ltd.  
Sydney, Australia

glove and contributed to a well-oiled working experience that was a pleasure."

The conference was staged at International Convention Centre, Sydney (ICC Sydney), which opened in early 2017. "This brand new international venue is set to become Asia-Pacific's premier integrated convention and exhibition center," says Kavalec, noting its many highlights including, "The ease with which ICC staff integrated their duties in an unobtrusive way, state-of-the-art technology that provided clear signage and the ability to switch directions and information at the flick of a switch, and the high quality of the food and beverages."

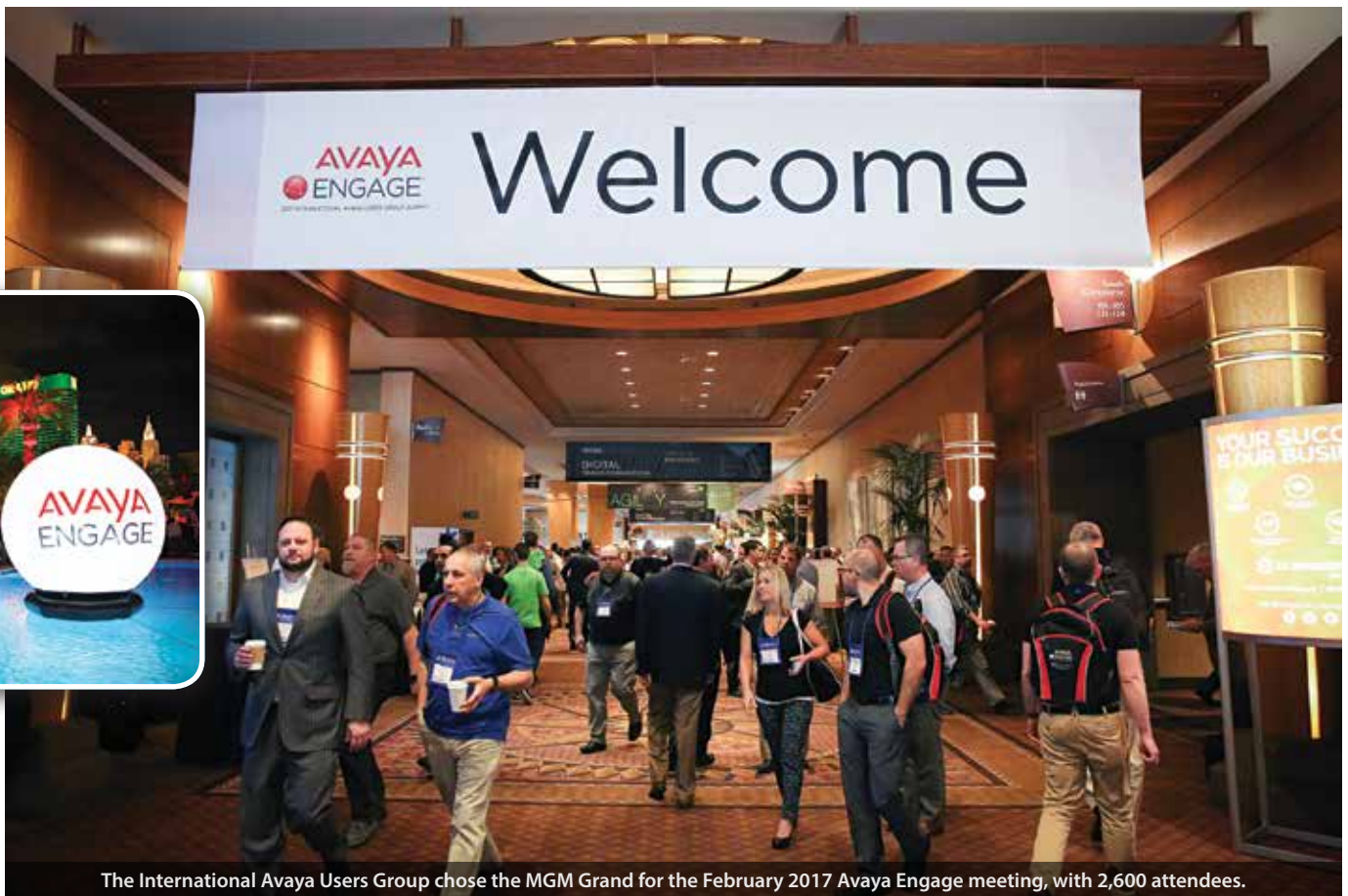
Kavalec says ICC Sydney can accommodate 750–8,000 attendees in plenary spaces and offers 35,000 square meters of exhibition space as well as banquet space for more than 2,000.

IIA needed accommodations in a range of price points within walking distance of the convention center, and Sydney delivered. "Hilton Sydney, Swissotel Sydney, Hyatt Regency Sydney Darling Harbour, Parkroyal Darling Harbour Sydney, The Westin Sydney and Sheraton on the Park covered off a number of global brands enabling delegates to use loyalty programs and stay where they feel at home," Kavalec says, adding that it's "Always best to appoint the PCO to handle hotel bookings and gain the local advantage of strong relationships with hotels when the town is full and favors are needed."

The main challenge was that the center wasn't yet open during the planning process, meaning there was risk until it fully launched. However, Kavalec says, Arinex's strong relationship with the venue staff and knowledge of how things would work was a plus. "A lot of inside knowledge made it an overall smooth experience."

For planners considering ICC Sydney, Kavalec advises working with a local PCO to determine which rooms and spaces are needed and how best to assign those spaces in terms of logistics because it can be a long distance between exhibition halls and the conference center. "Allow extra time for this travel during breaks and turn the experience into a plus by conducting a 'steps' competition on the app," she says. "Most centers around the world cover distances but few have such spectacular views such as ICC offers."

AC&F



The International Avaya Users Group chose the MGM Grand for the February 2017 Avaya Engage meeting, with 2,600 attendees.

# The Las Vegas Difference

## Variety Is the Spice of Life — and Ingredient for Meeting Success

By Christine Loomis

Las Vegas is more than the sum of its casinos — of which there are 40, give or take, along The Strip alone, according to the Nevada Gaming Commission, and another 60-plus across the city.

To be sure, casinos are a major draw for many attendees. But so too are all of the other free-time and networking options, from a huge variety of only-in-Las-Vegas shows and performances by music's mega stars to dozens of restaurants helmed by celebrity chefs, not to mention the assortment of thrilling rides and tours, spas and outdoor pursuits in the red rock canyons just a short drive away.

Gaming aside, Las Vegas is pro business to the max with

everything meeting planners need to execute a successful meeting, and anything attendees want before, during and after conference sessions.

### ONE SIZE FITS ALL

Victor Bohnert, executive director of the International Avaya Users Group, an organization of communications technology professionals, chose the MGM Grand for the February 2017 Avaya Engage meeting, with 2,600 attendees. He says one important aspect of meeting was that everything could be in one place.

"That gave us the ability to host a variety of functions, from

large parties with 2,000 people to more intimate receptions, without using the same venue twice. And keeping everything in one place ensured increased attendance and participation. However," he adds, "within a short walk or cab ride, our attendees could enjoy world-class restaurants and entertainment."

Bohnert notes that the city also offers many available flights and affordable hotels, which works well for the makeup of this group. "We have a high number of education and government attendees, so the value we get from hosting our event in Vegas is appealing."

In terms of MGM's facilities, Bohnert says, "MGM has the size to host our general session and program and also our trade show. It has the flexibility of having large, finished (carpet and lighting) areas, and that allows us to keep our costs down. It also has breakout space that allows us to be flexible in size and number, configuring them to meet our individual size requirements. And finally, the trade show space allowed our partners to create large booth structures and complement them with signage, increasing the experience."

In addition, he says, outside the event space, there are plenty of restaurants and entertainment options to meet all interests and budgets. "All of these factors together allowed us to create a self-contained event experience, without people feeling trapped."

The group held its opening event at the resort's pool and closing reception at Hakkessan nightclub. "Both offered extremely unique experiences for our attendees," Bohnert says.

There are a few things he would do differently in hindsight. "It was exactly one mile from the hotel desk to the event center. The walk isn't bad but in hindsight I would have done more with branding to keep it fun. I'd also consider virtual engagement opportunities that can extend beyond the event center itself (RFID, or beaconing).

That said, Bohnert calls the MGM staff fantastic, "which allows you to work around any unexpected issues that may pop up!"

The Monte Carlo Resort and Casino is undergoing a complete transformation into the new Park MGM.



Credit: MGM Resorts International

**"We have a high number of education and government attendees, so the value we get from hosting our event in Vegas is appealing."**



**Victor Bohnert**  
Executive Director  
International Avaya Users Group  
Franklin, TN

Like others, Bohnert has found that the city can present challenges in terms of perception, but says these can be overcome. "Getting people to Vegas can be a challenge. People don't often see it as a place to do work. We led with our conference agenda and program, and stressed experiences that started in the morning and went through the evening. We also stressed the value of doing it at a place like MGM Grand. The price was great for lodging and travel."

To planners considering Las Vegas and the MGM, he suggests focusing on experience. "The size of the MGM allows you to do a lot of creative ideas that fit any budget."

MGM Resorts International, with multiple venues in the city, isn't focused only on large groups. In fact, its highly anticipated new conference space, part of Monte Carlo Resort and Casino's transformation to the Park MGM, is geared specifically for small groups.

Included among the Park's innovative and flexible spaces are the city's first Executive Meeting Center (EMC) and Ideation Labs, both designed to maximize productivity for small groups. Planners also will have access to the hotel's multiple ballrooms, 30,000-sf Park Theater, restaurants by celebrity chefs, an expansive pool environment and more. The main conference space will open this fall; the EMC and Ideation Lab will debut early 2018.

## AN INTIMATE VENUE

Linda Kirk, executive director of the Institute for Responsible Housing Preservation (IRHP), chose the Four Seasons Las Vegas for the institute's September seminar with 110 in attendance. Part of the hotel's appeal is that there's no gaming directly on the property but it is nearby for those who want it.

"We love the Four Seasons because it's a more intimate venue, which is a good fit for our group. Additionally, no onsite casino is a plus for this group. Lots of our folks do gamble, and the proximity to Mandalay Bay



Kari Messenger, CMP  
Association Management Center  
Chicago, IL

**“The service we receive at the Rio is fantastic. We’re always greeted warmly, and the staff goes above and beyond to ensure we are taken care of during the meeting.”**

gives any attendees wishing to gamble an easy option, but attendees that prefer a calmer atmosphere are also provided for at the Four Seasons. This property has proven to be a winning choice for us.”

The group has met at the Four Seasons multiple times. “IRHP does several seminars each year, one in NYC, one in Chicago and one in Las Vegas. We formerly held our West Coast programs in Santa Monica or La Jolla, but Las Vegas has proven to be a bigger draw for our membership. There’s so much to do within walking distance as well as within the property.”

About the hotel Kirk says, “Every aspect of this property is very guest oriented. It has a courteous and efficient staff, delicious food, comfortable guest rooms and wonderful amenities. It’s an amazing experience — not merely a hotel stay.”

The Four Seasons served as the gathering point for all meeting functions. “We used the hotel conference space for our meeting and for our F&B needs,” Kirk says. “The rooms are comfortable and beautifully designed. Our AV experience with PSAV was excellent, and our technician even built a PowerPoint loop on the morning of our meeting as we had forgotten to provide one. There were no problems with the Wi-Fi, catering was excellent, and both the food and service were impeccable. It is a bit of a hike from sleeping rooms to meeting space, but it’s actually nice to have work and play separated.”

Kirk had just one small complaint during the 2017 seminar. “The meeting space was uncomfortably cold and even after several requests to raise the temperature, the temperature remained too cool for comfort.”

Although IRHP does not have any sponsored events outside of the hotel, Kirk says that small groups of 10 to 25 often got together for a dinner at restaurants off-property, which is easy because there are so many within walking distance.

The one challenge for IRHP is the room block. “We sell out quickly,” Kirk notes, “but there is little wiggle room for attrition, so even one cancellation can affect our block commitment.”

### ABOVE-AND-BEYOND SERVICE

Kari Messenger, CMP, Association Management Center, booked the Rio All-Suite Las Vegas Hotel and Casino, a Caesars property, for the Awards & Personalization Association (APA). The group’s 2017 International Awards & Personalization Expo was held in February, drawing 2,000 attendees.

“The Rio’s space and rate make the most sense for our program and budget, and Awards & Personalization has built a



A theater setup in one of Flamingo Las Vegas' newly renovated meeting and event spaces.

Credit: Flamingo Las Vegas

great relationship not only with Caesars but with the Rio as a standalone hotel,” Messenger says. “APA has been hosting its international meeting at the Rio since 2013 and is now signed through 2023. The space is the perfect fit for this meeting as it’s far enough away from those coming to Vegas for pleasure but close enough to have all the perks of being in Vegas. The meeting space is in its own private area away from all the hustle and bustle of the hotel so our attendees can focus on the content being presented at the meeting.”

Messenger says that since her team has been traveling to the Rio on an annual basis, “Our staff members have formed their own relations with the hotel team. Each year it’s a nostalgic feeling to come back and see the same servers that took care of us the year before. They remember us and treat us like old friends visiting once again. The service we receive at the Rio is fantastic. We’re always greeted warmly, and the staff



The Awards & Personalization Association’s 2017 International Awards & Personalization Expo was held at Rio.

Credit: Rio All-Suite Las Vegas Hotel and Casino



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Credit: NANS

The North American Neuromodulation Society has used Las Vegas for its annual meeting for more than 10 years. The 2017 annual meeting (pictured) was held at Caesars Palace, which was a good fit for the 2,800-attendee event.

goes above and beyond to ensure we are taken care of during the meeting.”

Although the Rio is off The Strip, Messenger says planners should not count it out. “The space is quiet and tucked away for attendees to engage and still close enough to enjoy all the amenities of being in Las Vegas.”

For this year’s staff outing, Messenger and her team headed to Town Square Las Vegas, a 100-acre open-air shopping, dining and entertainment center. “We enjoyed our meal at Tommy Bahama’s Restaurant & Bar, which my CVB rep had

**“We love the Four Seasons because it’s a more intimate venue, which is a good fit for our group. Additionally, no onsite casino is a plus for this group.”**

Linda Kirk, CMP, Executive Director  
Institute for Responsible Housing Preservation, Franklin, TN

brought me to a year before. It was a hit. Great service, delicious menu and the room set was Hollow Square so we had a chance to talk with everyone at the dinner. It was a nice refresher to be away from The Strip and relax for a moment during the show.”

### SELF-CONTAINED CONFERENCE VENUE

The North American Neuromodulation Society has held its annual meeting in Las Vegas for more than 10 years. Executive Director Chris Welber says the group likes to meet in a self-contained conference venue rather than a standalone convention center, which makes Caesars Palace a good fit. The 2017 convention was held in January with 2,800 attendees.

“Las Vegas is a fairly easy destination for our attendees to reach, so that is a plus,” Welber notes. “There are also many options for post-meeting entertainment and other activities that our attendees enjoy taking advantage of.”

All dedicated events were held on-property at Caesars Palace in the hotel’s convention center. “Rates and location were good, and it’s located in the city we have been calling home for our meeting for many years,” Welber says. “It’s a very large space with a lot of options. It’s easy to get what you need in the self-contained facilities. It’s also nice to have tiered room pricing and options available.”

Among potential drawbacks, however, is the requirement to use the in-house AV as well as the distance from sleeping rooms to meeting space. “We are required to use in-house AV as part of our agreement, and this is perhaps one drawback some groups may find, including ours,” Welber says. “Of course, with any Las Vegas property, we always receive feedback that it is a rather long walk to get from sleeping rooms to the convention area. However, we were able to secure the majority of our room block in the tower closest to the meeting and function space. Catering was satisfactory, the catering team(s) were always attentive, and Wi-Fi was adequate throughout the property.”

Although they had to use the in-house AV provider, Welber says they also brought their own production manager, “who is familiar with our meeting product, knows our meeting requirements best and helped oversee things. Our production staff negotiated with the in-house company to try and achieve economies of scale and reduce costs as needed.”

To planners considering Caesars and/or Las Vegas, Welber says, “Be thorough and explore all of the options available on-site. We learned there was much more than we would have necessarily expected at this property. We will now take advantage of more of these items in future years.”

### RESPONDING TO TRAGEDY

In addition to Caesars Palace and the Rio, Caesars Entertainment has multiple hotels and venues in Las Vegas and was quick to respond to the tragic October 1 shooting in the city. On October 9, the company announced it had organized \$2 million in support of those affected by the shooting. Caesars’



# Reno Offers Its Own Brand of Spice

Set at the base of the Sierra near mesmerizing Lake Tahoe, Reno combines the appeal of gaming with reverence for the great outdoors—inspiration guaranteed.

Reno, aka The Biggest Little City in the World, just might have everything a planner needs to convince attendees to register. In addition to casinos, downtown sports a half-mile kayak park, the world's largest outdoor climbing wall and a collection of stellar hotels.

Grand Sierra Resort & Casino is the city's largest meeting/convention hotel, with 200,000-plus sf of flexible space and 1,900 accommodations. Peppermill Reno, an environmental innovator, offers 1,623 guest rooms and 106,000 sf of meeting space. Connected by skybridge to the 500,000-sf Reno-Sparks Convention Center, Atlantis Reno features 824 accommodations and 50,000 sf of space. Learn more from the Reno Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority.

[www.visitrenotahoe.com](http://www.visitrenotahoe.com)

— CL

employees, its roster of celebrity chefs and many of its entertainment personalities came together to help those in need.

"This senseless tragedy has forever impacted the lives of so many, and we are committed to offering resources to help those affected and to support the community organizations who will need our ongoing assistance," said Mark Frissora, chief executive officer and president of Caesars Entertainment. "Last week's events are still fresh and while we are still organizing the event, every single one of our celebrity chefs immediately jumped at the opportunity to help. I'm very proud of how our Caesars family has come together in support of our hometown."

## MOVING FORWARD

Las Vegas continues to be a city looking and moving forward, and convention attendance continues to grow. At the end of August, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority statistics showed that the city hosted 4,695,270 convention attendees, up 6.2 percent over the prior year. And those numbers will continue to rise: The completion of The Las Vegas Convention Center District (LVCCD) expansion and renovation project is estimated to attract an additional 600,000 visitors each year. Here's a project update:

The LVCCD Committee, a subcommittee of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) Board of Directors, recently approved a recommendation to submit TVS Design/Design Las Vegas as the firm to provide design services for



Credit: LVCCD

Planning is underway for the Las Vegas Convention Center District's phase-two expansion project, to be completed in 2021.

the LVCCD phase two expansion project. The \$860 million, 1.4-million-sf expansion will include at least 600,000 sf of new exhibition leasable space.

The LVCCD expansion and renovation will be completed in a phased approach with a projected completion date of 2023. Construction of the phase two 1.4-million-sf expansion is projected to be complete by 2021. The next phase will be the complete renovation of the existing 3.2-million-sf facility.

Among other news:

Caesars Palace has completed the renovation of its Palace Tower, the resort's largest tower, featuring 1,181 stylishly designed guest rooms and suites, and a price tag topping \$100 million. Considered the crown jewel of the tower, the 29th floor features 10 luxurious new villas ranging in size from 2,750 sf to 4,085 sf and featuring exquisite finishes, bespoke furnishings and a curated art program. Centrally located, the Palace Tower is a short walk to the resort's convention center, Appian Way shops and Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis.

MGM Grand is constructing a 250,000-sf, \$130 million expansion of its conference center that is scheduled for completion in fall 2018. The new facility will connect to the existing conference center on all three levels and will include two large ballrooms encompassing 49,000 sf and 32,000 sf, three smaller ballrooms and an outdoor event space. Upon completion, the expansion will give MGM Grand a total of 850,000 sf of meeting and convention space. The expansion includes



The 250,000-sf expansion of the MGM Grand Conference Center is scheduled for completion in 2018.

Credit: MGM Resorts International



Chris Welber, MBA  
Executive Director  
North American  
Neuromodulation Society  
Chicago, IL

**“We learned there was much more than we would have necessarily expected at (Caesars Palace). We will now take advantage of more of these items in future years.”**

an additional 22,000 sf covering the conference center’s entire second floor for Stay Well Meetings, the industry’s first wellness meeting experience, first introduced at the MGM Grand in 2014.

The Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas recently completed an expansion of its meeting and convention space with the reopening of the 28,000-sf Artist Ballroom. The newly expanded Artist Ballroom can be divided into eight separate and flexible configurations. Ceiling heights in the new space reach up to 22 feet for optimal exhibition use. The property has added nearly 18,000 sf of meeting and convention space, new exterior signage along Paradise Road and the relocation of the fully functional Business Center. Hard Rock Hotel now boasts a total of nearly 110,000 sf of contiguous meeting and convention space.

Wynn Las Vegas plans to keep groups returning with several improvements, including the new \$1.5 billion Wynn Paradise Park, which will begin phase-one construction by January 2018 and is scheduled for a 2019 completion. The park will include a 1,000- 2,000-room hotel tower and 260,000 sf of beachfront meeting and ballroom space overlooking a 20-acre lagoon with water sports activities, a 4,000-foot board-

walk and a white sand beach. Additionally, Wynn will offer more upscale shopping outlets with the construction of Wynn Plaza, a 75,000-sf Strip-front expansion scheduled for completion during the first quarter of 2018.

South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa, which overlooks the famous Las Vegas Strip and the surrounding mountainscape, features a 52,000-sf conference center and an 80,000-sf exhibit hall. Each of the 2,100 oversized guest rooms features state-of-the-art LED televisions as well as Wi-Fi with high-speed internet connections. There are 11 restaurants, including the award-winning Michael’s Gourmet Room, the world-class Costa Del Sur Spa and Salon, a 400-seat showroom featuring headliner entertainment, a 700-seat Bingo room, a 16-screen Cinemark movie complex and a state-of-the-art 64-lane bowling center. South Point Hotel is also home to the Tournament Bowling Plaza, a multimillion-dollar professional bowling tournament facility. Unique to Las Vegas, South Point claims one of the top equestrian event facilities in the country. The 240,000 sf of event space features three climate-controlled arenas.

The Strip’s most storied property, the Flamingo Las Vegas, has completed a \$6.5 million meeting space renovation, which began in April 2017. A \$90 million renovation of 1,270 guest rooms began in August, with completion scheduled for the second quarter of 2018. Caesars describes the new look as “unique, contemporary and retro-chic designs with accents that celebrate Flamingo’s rich history.” The 70-year-old hotel offers a total of more than 3,500 guest rooms and a 73,000-sf Corporate Convention Center and Executive Conference Center.

### BRINGING ‘EM BACK FOR MORE

It’s this continued growth and variety that brings planners back to Las Vegas again and again. Messenger and Kirk are among those who point to the city’s variety of offerings for groups of all sizes and budgets as one of its greatest assets.

“Las Vegas is more than just casinos and nightlife,” Messenger says. “The art scene is growing with more options for Broadway shows and galleries popping up. The old Strip is also coming back as a destination area with additional restaurants and entertainment to check out.”

Kirk concurs. “Las Vegas has meeting options for every size group,” she says. “While our meeting is small, groups of 10,000 can be accommodated here. There are numerous shows and concerts, celebrity chef restaurants, old Las Vegas — there’s something for everyone.”

Even in a city famed for its over-the-top everything, that’s not an overstatement. AC&F



The Grand Ballroom at South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa.

Credit: South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa



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In Texas the unofficial motto, “Don’t mess with Texas,” illustrates its can-do spirit, not a warning to stay clear. Especially pertinent in the meetings world, the state’s promises — “we can do it bigger” and “we can make it better” — are what planners seek and their attendees strive toward. So, along the lines of a realtor’s allegiance to location, location, location, the destination of Texas as a meetings venue appears prime property.

In concurrence, ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE, states: “The latest Decision to Attend Study research confirms that content and meeting location are the top two drivers for people in deciding whether to attend a meeting, but it also highlights how attendees have higher expectations and desire new experiences.”

### MADE-IN-TEXAS EXPERIENCES

One made-in-Texas experience is Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort & Spa’s “Hooves & Horns” mascot program, which allows groups to interact with Texas Longhorns, an American mustang, miniature horses and alpacas — all resort residents. Located just outside Austin and serving up 60,000 sf of indoor and 240,000 sf of outdoor event space, the area’s McKinney Roughs Nature Park (1,100 acres of pine forest and box canyons) offers teambuilding with a capital “T.” In conjunction with the Hyatt, these possibilities include zip-lining, trap shooting, archery, kayaking and rafting excursions on the lower Colorado River, on the banks of which the AAA Four Diamond, 491-room resort sits. And after a day of any of the above, what better way to network and bond than around an outdoor firepit while enjoying the resort’s nightly s’mores roast?

Along the lines of food, the cuisine of the Hilton Austin is guided by the philosophy of General Manager Robert Watson. With respect to planners and their attendees, he feels they should be able to “taste our city on their plate.” Reflective of this viewpoint is the menu of the hotel’s Cannon + Belle, with such selections as black-eyed pea hummus, shrimp tamales and marinated Texas Wagyu rib eye. And The Reverberary is a flexible indoor/outdoor space with specially designed food and drink menus that reflect the culinary culture of the Live Music Capital.

As the setting of the February 16-19, 2017, annual convention of the Texas Optometric Association for 1,138 attendees (not including exhibitors), Sherry Ballance, CAE, associate director, touts this hotel’s food fare. “The chef at the Hilton Austin was truly a pleasure to work with and planned creative, off-the-menu meals within our budget.”

Having hosted this convention in Austin for more than 25 years, in no small part due to its central Texas location, the city’s appeal is two-fold. “The destination is great for those who enjoy live music and great food,” says Ballance.

Of equal importance is the hotel’s logistical match to her

# YOU Had Me at Texas!

Doing It Bigger and  
Better for Meetings

By Cynthia Dial



Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort & Spa's "Hooves & Horns" mascot program allows groups to interact with Texas Longhorns.



Sherry Ballance, CAE  
Associate Director  
Texas Optometric Association  
Austin, TX

**“The chef at the Hilton Austin was truly a pleasure to work with and planned creative, off-the-menu meals within our budget. (Austin) is great for those who enjoy live music and great food.”**



The Zilker Ballroom Terrace at the Hyatt Regency Austin.

Credit: Hyatt Regency Austin

are several restaurants, bars and entertainment venues within walking distance.” Proof of her pleasure: Texas Optometric Association Annual Convention is returning in 2018 and 2019.

### RETURN TO AUSTIN

Another group under contract to return to Austin through 2019 (with additional future years under consideration) is the Texas Medical Association, states Liz Sansom, its conference logistics manager. “We have been holding our conference at the Hyatt Regency Austin on and off for the last 12 years,” she says of the two-day winter event that hosts between 400 and 500 annually. One of several explanations for her group’s fidelity: “Our attendees appreciate being able to return to the same location and see familiar faces among the staff.”

With 448 non-smoking rooms and 45,000 sf of customizable function space (including the 2014 addition of the 14,138-sf Zilker Ballroom), additional appeals of the AAA Four Diamond hotel to the meeting planner are its past two-year renovation and its central location. “Recent refurbishments in the meeting space have given the hotel a much brighter and more open feeling,” she says. And though situated in the middle of eclectic Austin’s action, its setting on Lady Bird Lake projects resort-like tranquility. Nearby nature options include a 10-mile hike and bike trail adjacent to the hotel, Barton Springs Pool and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

Having opened 35 years ago, Hyatt Regency Austin has made a bit of history as the birthplace of the fajita, created in 1982 by Chef George Wiedmann, and for the discovery of actor Matthew McConaughey by the casting director of “Dazed and Confused” in the hotel bar. Sansom says that while her association typically minimizes the impact of food and beverage at their meetings, she scores the hotel’s creativity second to none and mentions its ballroom transformation into a park setting with food trucks and picnic tables, which she attended for another event.

But though the ingenuity of the Texas Medical Association’s meetings isn’t typically focused on its food offerings, the selection of a 2017 general session speaker was exceptional — a presentation by the on-call physician at the Dallas hospital that treated most of the victims of the July 2016 mass police shooting.

Informative presentations, tailor-made space and prime location are key ingredients for a successful meeting and the

association — two ballrooms and several breakout rooms on both the fourth and sixth floors. The layout allows the group to have its continuing education on one level and the exhibit hall on the other — making it easy for attendees and exhibitors when it comes to arrival, easy access to the continuing education courses and trade show set up and tear down. She elaborates: “Our trade show consisting of 138 exhibitors is one of our main highlights. We provide a non-compete exhibit hall where no other activities are held in opposition to this event.”

The location of the 801-room, AAA Four Diamond hotel provides additional appeal — adjacent to the convention center in downtown Austin; one block from Sixth Street Entertainment District; one mile from the University of Texas at Austin, Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike Trail and the Texas State Capitol; and seven miles from Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. Another plus for this property with 80,000 sf of flexible meeting space is its recognition as one of Cvent’s Top 100 U.S. Meeting Hotels.

In conclusion, Ballance offers advice to professionals considering this property. “If planners are looking for a hotel to hold a larger event that isn’t quite big enough for a convention center, or they just prefer a hotel over a convention center, the (Hilton Austin) works very nicely — especially as there



The Reverberation at the Hilton Austin is an indoor/outdoor music-themed space with specially designed food and drink menus.

Credit: Hilton Austin

longevity of an organization/hotel relationship. The planner's summation: "I would recommend the Hyatt Regency Austin to anyone looking for a venue in central Austin. Its accessibility to downtown, its parking capacity and its staff's warm welcome are always appreciated."

**FOUR SEASONS-STYLE SERVICE**

Of the American Academy of Otolaryngic Allergy (AAOA) and the Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas, Jami Lucas, AAOA executive director/CEO, says: "Over a decade ago, we chose this venue due to its location. Flights to Dallas are readily available and affordable. We have continued to select this venue because of the value of the conference package and excellent service." Having celebrated its 16th year with the association's February 2017 AAOA Interactive Allergy & Rhinology Course, the continuing medical education meeting was attended by 125.

"In addition to the exceptional service, we really like the availability of the conference package that includes meeting space, food and beverage, internet access and more," states Lucas. "It allows for easy budgeting and saves us time on selecting menus."

Accolades extend to the AV team that assisted in the

**"The entire (Four Seasons) team is really there to help make your meeting successful. They do their jobs so well, that as a meeting planner, you can eliminate worries about the onsite logistics."**



Jami Lucas  
Executive Director and CEO  
American Academy of  
Otolaryngic Allergy  
Reston, VA

2017 meeting's utilization of an audience participation routine using a mobile app that turned attendees' cellphones into microphones. AV guidance during the planning process and when onsite translated to a seamless sequence during the event.

The association professional's advice to other planners is instructive. Touting the hotel's extensive experience, she urges trust in their recommendations, compliments their flexibility and says to not be afraid to ask for something that may not be standard. "The staff worked with us this year to fit into

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Mike Waterman  
President, Visit Houston

**“Houston is open for business and back to hosting meetings, with its reputation for hospitality untouched.”**

our food-and-beverage budget by being creative with offerings during meal functions,” details Lucas. “The entire team is really there to help make your meeting successful. They do their jobs so well, that as a meeting planner, you can eliminate worries about the onsite logistics.”

Beyond an educational course for a group of 125, the refreshed facilities of this Four Seasons Resort can accommodate larger groups with greater requisites. Recent updates include a redesign and renovation of the first level of the 34,000-sf conference center, the expansion of the Pecos

The Pegasus Lawn at the Omni Dallas Hotel.



Credit: Omni Dallas

Room (more than 600 sf of new breakout space) and the addition of the 4,400-sf Lantana Room, which can be divided into two equal sections to accommodate 400 guests. The hotel’s signature restaurant, LAW (Land, Air and Water), touts a menu indicative of its name with game, meats, poultry and fish — all prepared with a Texas twist. Of its several outdoor event spaces, the Event Lawn can accommodate up to 750 people. The best part for all venues is that the hotel’s culinary team is committed to locally sourced ingredients and offers diverse farm-to-table menus.

### DALLAS PRIME

With 1,001 rooms, 110,000 sf of meeting space, a sky-bridge connection to the 2.1 million-sf Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center and recognized as the largest LEED Gold-certified hotel outside of Las Vegas, Omni Dallas Hotel is a



Rendering of a new ballroom that is part of a \$120 million expansion at the Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center.

Credit: Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center

prime-time Texas meetings location. New to the scene is the outdoor event space, Pegasus Lawn, and its open-air pavilion. Add to the mix such food choices as Bob’s Steak & Chop House (*Bon Appétit’s* shout-out: “the kind of cuisine you’ll want to go back for again and again”) seats 170; Texas Spice (described as “Texas cuisine in a casual setting”) seats 265 indoors, 100 on the patio; and Biergarten, whose ivy-covered outside patio and beckoning interior reflect a today-twist of an old-style German beer garden — the result is an irresistible Dallas option.

Smack dab in the middle of downtown Fort Worth and mere steps from Sundance Square is a four-star luxury retreat, The Worthington Renaissance Fort Worth Hotel. Appeals of this 12-story, 504-room, non-smoking luxury hotel — 53,000 sf of venue space, a signature Southwestern restaurant Vidalias and proximity to just about “everything of note” in the city — have put this property on the radar of Texas-interested meeting planners. Centrally located, it is within walking distance of the Bass Performance Center, less than three miles from the Kimbell Art Museum and the Fort Worth Stockyards Historic District, a 20-minute drive from AT&T Stadium (formerly Cowboys Stadium) and Six Flags Over Texas, and 24 miles from Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

### GRAPEVINE

Midway between Dallas and Fort Worth and a 10-minute drive from the airport is Grapevine and its 1,511-guest room Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center. News for this mega hotel, known for its 179,520-sf Longhorn Exhibit Hall, is the addition of the “rustic and refined” Vineyard Tower (slated to debut July 2018). Details of the \$120 million ex-

Live! By Loews - Arlington, TX will debut in 2019 in the Arlington Entertainment District.



Credit: Live! By Loews



pansion: 303 luxury guest rooms, 86,000 sf of meeting space (30,000-sf ballroom, 30,000 sf of breakout space and 26,000 sf of prefunction space). Upon completion, the Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center will offer 1,814 rooms and nearly 500,000 sf of meeting space — becoming one of the nation's top three largest non-gaming convention resorts.

## ARLINGTON

Coming soon to nearby Arlington is Texas Live! — a \$250 million world-class dining, entertainment and hospitality destination being developed by a trio of partners including The Cordish Companies, Texas Rangers and the City of Arlington. It is a part of the \$4 billion vision for the Arlington Entertainment District that includes the Texas Rangers new \$1 billion ballpark and preservation of Globe Life Park.

Texas-experience entertainment at The Houstonian Hotel, Club & Spa.



Complementing the concept will be the 302-room, \$150 million flagship hotel, Live! By Loews - Arlington, TX, slated to open in 2019. Described as the first of its kind in the country, it promises “an unprecedented upscale experience that blends sports and entertainment with first-class hospitality and superior amenities.”

## GALVESTON ISLAND

Moving south and coastal, the Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa and Convention Center is located on Galveston Island — a back-in-the-day-like getaway less than a one-hour drive from Houston and its big city vibe. Situated in a botanical setting upon 242 acres of natural Gulf scenery, on-property assets are the 418-room luxury hotel, 103,000 sf of event space and such impressive attractions as the Discovery pyramid, an aquarium pyramid, a rainforest pyramid, a ropes course and zip line.

## HOUSTON STRONG

The Houstonian Hotel, Club & Spa is the rare combo of an 18-acre wooded oasis amid an energetic metropolis. It's



The Texas-shaped lazy river at new Marriott Marquis Houston, which is connected to the George R. Brown Convention Center.

said the hotel “offers a rare opportunity to escape into the city — not from it.” Of special appeal to planners are 32,000 sf of meeting space, an award-winning aquatics department (recognized as the state's top aquatics program), a state-of-the-art jogging path (which connects to the almost three-mile Memorial Park trail), the 17,000-sf Trellis Spa and the on-property Manor House. Built in 1955, this historic home is now The Houstonian's elite dining venue. Also available for groups, The Manor House offers such catered cuisine possibilities as pimento cheese deviled eggs, Texas caviar salad and Dr. Pepper glazed pork tenderloin.

Within the city's downtown district is its newest kid on the block, Avenida Houston. Named after Avenida de las Americas, the boulevard adjacent to the nearby George R. Brown Convention Center and running from Minute Maid Park to the Hilton Americas-Houston hotel, this complex is the latest in dining, entertainment and the arts. Here you'll find festivals, live music, public art installations and an assortment of bars and restaurants — all surrounded by Houston's downtown skyline. The Rustic, a Texas restaurant, bar and live music concept offering 25,000 sf, is slated to open in Avenida Houston in 2018. Connected to the George R. Brown Convention Center via a climate-controlled skybridge is the new Marriott Marquis Houston, which opened in late 2016 and features 52 meeting rooms that boast more than 100,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including a 39,000-sf ballroom — the largest in Houston; a Texas-shaped lazy river; and a special events pavilion overlooking the 12-acre Discovery Green Park.

Having already made significant progress in its recovery from this summer's devastating hurricane and bringing home a World Series win for the first time ever in the fall, Houston best embodies the state's “can do” spirit — with a future that is positive.

Mike Waterman, president of Visit Houston, agrees: “While Houston was certainly impacted by Hurricane Harvey, and many are still working to rebuild, much of the affected areas were residential — with 98 percent of the hotels, and the majority of restaurants and major attractions back in operation shortly after the storm. Bottom line: Houston is open for business and back to hosting meetings, with its reputation for hospitality untouched.”

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**MOLINA**



**PARKHILL**



**CONAWAY**



**MATTHEWS**



**BENSON**



**ZAHN**



**GOODSPEED**



**SWINTON**

Teneo Hospitality Group, Eden Prairie, Minnesota, has named **Adriana Molina** as vice president, association sales, based in Teneo's Washington, DC, offices. She most recently led the Starwood Hotels & Resorts' global sales office in Washington, DC. **Bob Korin** was appointed director of sales for the Northeast, based in Connecticut. He formerly served as director of national accounts for Hilton Hawaii. **Meghan Kelleher** was named as director of sales, Northeast. She most recently served as director of national accounts for Chatham Bars Inn in Chatham, Massachusetts.

Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, has promoted **Lynnette Parkhill** to director of group sales. She most recently served as a senior sales executive for the resort.

Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, has named **Michael Hurley** as senior sales manager. He formerly served as senior sales manager for the JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. Live, and The Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles.

VisitPittsburgh has named **Katie Conaway** as domestic and international group sales director. She most recently served as group sales and audience development manager at Pittsburgh Public Theater, among her other roles in the city's Cultural District.

**Ernest G. Matthews Jr.** was named group sales manager at the Snohomish County Tourism Bureau in Washington, with a focus on SMERF meetings. He was consultant/task force manager for the

Doubletree by Hilton Chamblee Dunwoody in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau has announced the addition of **Brandon Benson** as director of national accounts, serving the mid-Atlantic territory for the convention sales and services team. He most recently served as a national sales manager for The Peabody Hotel Memphis in Tennessee.

Visit Plano in Plano, Texas, has promoted **Blaire Zahn** to SMERF and government sales manager. She most recently served as convention services coordinator.

The Greater Palm Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau, Palm Springs, California, has appointed **Sharon Goodspeed** as national sales manager, Northeast region for convention sales. She previously served as national sales manager for Caesars Entertainment Corporation where she represented 13 major properties in Las Vegas and Atlantic City.

Visit Baltimore has named **Kireem Swinton** as director of convention sales development mid-Atlantic region and trade shows. He most recently served as Visit Seattle's national account director for the Washington, DC, area.

Meet Puerto Rico has appointed **Gabriela Ong** as vice president of sales, based in the New York area. With more than 16 years of hospitality experience, Ong most recently served as brand sales manager, Northeast region, for Meet Puerto Rico.

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