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INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES



Tom Wilson
Division Vice President
Financial Services Sector Leader
Maritz Travel

Incentive Travel Trends

From Budgets to Disruptions
Page 22

F&B Trends

Planners Partner With Chefs to Raise the Bar
Page 16

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Credit: Maritz Travel



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Credit: The Westin Nashville



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The Club Lounge at The Westin Nashville.

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A cut-and-create salad promoted by the Hilton Meet With Purpose program.

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The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs.

Credit: The Broadmoor

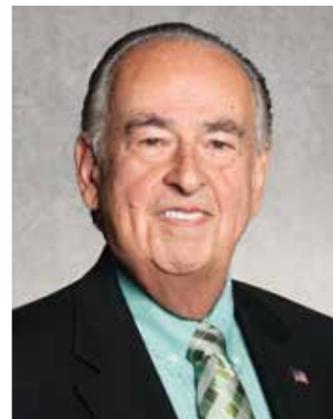


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Publisher's Message

The Show Must Go On

Despite challenges from budgets, complex federal regulations, event disruptions and safety concerns — not to mention uncertainty over conflict of interest rules — incentive travel programs must go on because of their tremendous value for recognition and motivation, and also because financial and insurance companies need them as a means of delivering business and education content, and teambuilding and corporate social responsibility programs.



The Incentive Research Foundation's 2017 Trends Study shows the use of non-cash rewards has increased to 84 percent of all U.S. businesses in 2016; and that incentive travel specifically is used by nearly 40 percent of U.S. businesses today.

"Our research shows that destination is a very significant driver from a motivation perspective," says Tom Wilson, division V.P. - financial services sector leader, Maritz Travel, who graces our cover. "So having the right destination, having the right program inclusions, all of that is critically important."

Among the incentive travel trends experienced by Wilson and other insurance and financial meeting planners who contributed to our cover story: flat — not reduced — budgets; longer lead times; bucket-list and off-the-beaten path destinations offering authentic, local, individualized experiences; accommodating millennial preferences for adventure and more free time; adding a community service component; and, most notably, blending in more business content to achieve higher ROI. "That is the biggest trend that I've seen over the last five years," says Wilson. "There are legitimate business reasons to be getting together and celebrating success, but more importantly there is a learning opportunity to help attendees serve their clients better. How can we create an experience for an individual that recognizes him or her, but more importantly, how can they take that back home to make their business better? That is the absolute key."

For example one of Wilson's clients likes to "bring in academia to talk about the economy, the political environment, trends that are shaking the broader world and so forth." Which speaks to another trend: burgeoning safety and security concerns. Lisa Ramsay, CMP, A.V.P. event and meeting management with Protective Life Insurance, says tragedies in Europe and the U.S. could have caused the postponement of certain of her company's incentive travel plans, but "our senior executives made the decision to stay the course...we can't put our lives on hold. But we will do everything in our power to ensure everyone's safety."

The show must go on...

Harvey Grotsky

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PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Harvey Grotsky
 harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Mitch D. Miller
 mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITORS
Susan W. Fell
 susan.fell@themeetingmagazines.com

Susan S. Gregg
 sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Ron Bernthal
Sara Churchill
Cynthia Dial
Maura Keller
Christine Loomis
Derek Reveron
Mark Rowh
Patrick Simms
David Swanson

PRESIDENT & CEO
Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS
David Middlebrook
 david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES
 2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120
 Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394
 561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509
 advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

NEW ENGLAND/MID-ATLANTIC
Howard Richman
 203-340-9818
 howard.richman@themeetingmagazines.com

WESTERN STATES/HAWAII
Marshall Rubin
 818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907
 marshall.rubin@themeetingmagazines.com

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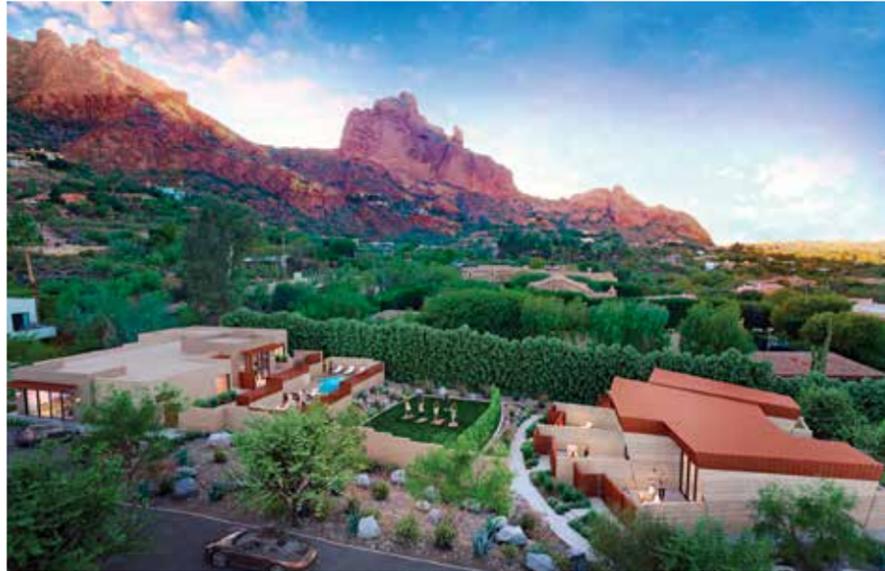
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Spa Casitas and Suites Renovation Caps Enhancement at Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa

SCOTTSDALE, AZ — The unveiling of \$2 million in renovations to its Spa Casitas and Spa Suites completes a comprehensive, two-year capital investment at Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa. Conducted in three stages, the campaign also saw the 2016 introduction of Spa House, an exclusive private mountain home for small groups of up to 16, and a complete redesign of the resort's Mountain Casita accommodations in 2015. Sanctuary's Spa Casitas surround the resort's stunning infinity-edge pool and award-winning Sanctuary Spa. All 12 of the casitas have been refreshed with new upholstered beds, nightstands and tables, as well as outdoor patio furniture. Lighting, artwork, upholstery, rugs and bathroom draperies also have been



A rendering of the Spa House.

replaced. Their spacious bathrooms feature double sinks, separate tubs

and showers, and walk-in closets. www.sanctuaryaz.com

Global DMC Partners Offers Event Tech Solutions Through Giant iTab

WASHINGTON, DC — Global DMC Partners, the largest global network of Destination Management Companies (DMCs), and Giant iTab, an award-winning touchscreen solution for digital engagement at events, announced a new strategic partnership. Global DMC Partners will offer Giant iTab solutions as an additional global event service designed to facilitate attendee interaction and engagement at events worldwide.



CHAULET

Giant iTab takes existing client content and replicates it on a giant touchscreen.

Meeting planners can use it to display event show guides, floor plans, agendas, attendee lists, speaker information, visitor check-in, collect customer feedback, social media feeds and much more.

Catherine Chaulet, president of Global DMC Partners, says, "Technology and events now go hand-in-hand, and we are proud to offer their cutting-edge technology on a global basis to our worldwide client base."

www.globaldmcpartners.com

AlliedPRA Acquires Destination Services Corporation

SAN DIEGO, CA — AlliedPRA Inc., a global leader in the destination management company (DMC) sector, has acquired Destination Services Corporation (DSC), the leading destination management firm covering the Rocky Mountain region of North America. At more than \$100 million in system revenue and 29 locations, AlliedPRA and DSC will combine to hold the No. 1 market share position in the DMC category of the U.S. Business Events Industry. DSC Founder and President Kathy Fort Carty will continue



FORT CARTY

to lead DSC, under the highly respected DSC brand, and she will join the AlliedPRA Board of Directors.

For more than 30 years, DSC has pioneered and perfected the destination experience in the West. The company, in nine locations across four states, creates authentic destination experiences in Denver, Colorado Springs, Vail, Beaver Creek, Aspen, Salt Lake City, Park City, Lake Tahoe and Jackson Hole.

www.alliedpra.com

Meetings Mean Business Coalition Goes Global

WASHINGTON, DC — The Meetings Mean Business Coalition (MMB), a cross-industry communications and advocacy initiative, is introducing a platform for industry professionals in every corner of the globe to better advocate for the power of face-to-face meetings. A newly created licensing agreement will allow partners in countries and regions outside of the U.S. to use MMB branding, messaging and research to form one strong, cohesive voice for the industry.



VAN DEVENTER

"We are thrilled to welcome more international partners into the MMB family through this global expansion," said Paul Van Deventer, president and chief executive officer of Meeting Professionals International and co-chair of Meetings Mean Business. "This will allow us to extend the MMB brand in an authentic, grassroots and meaningful way, which truly emphasizes that meetings matter all over the world and provide a platform to engage the global events community."

MMB provides a framework for an industry-wide communications and advocacy coalition that can be customized in a way that is authentic to each country or region. International partners will leverage existing MMB tools and resources, repurposing the materials and messaging to best fit their cultural environment and community needs. Collectively, these organizations will globalize a universal message about the value of in-person meetings and the industry behind them.

The Business Events Industry Coalition of Canada (BEICC) is the first to execute the MMB licensing agreement and will soon be rebranding as Meetings Mean Business Canada (MMB Canada). The BEICC board is actively reaching out to key industry stakeholders across all sectors of the Canadian meetings industry to transform the coalition into a proactive, well-funded advocacy movement with strong connections to federal, provincial and municipal governments.

Meetings Mean Business is in talks with additional partners. www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com

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IRF Releases 2017 Outlook Study

WASHINGTON, DC — The Incentive Research Foundation has released the IRF 2017 Outlook Study, an analysis of how incentive, rewards and recognition programs are being designed and budgeted for 2017. The study includes a detailed look at key industry metrics. With the release of the IRF 2017 Outlook Study, the IRF launches its Net Optimism Score, a new simplified metric to track the economic outlook for the incentives industry.



VAN DYKE

Executed in the fall of 2016, nearly 250 industry representatives including suppliers, corporate end users and incentive house representatives gave their feedback on the outlook for U.S. incentive travel and reward programs in 2017. “The IRF 2017 Outlook Study not only provides up-to-date industry data, it also puts this year’s findings in a historical and cyclical context, so we can deliver a big-picture view of the industry,” said IRF President Melissa Van Dyke. Some insights from the IRF 2017 Outlook Study:

- The Economic Net Optimism Score for fall 2016 is 26 percent, reflecting the incentive travel industry’s moderate optimism about the economy and its impact on the industry.
- There is a strong positive outlook for budget increases in incentive travel programs — overall and for F&B and rooms.
- The most commonly selected destinations for incentive group travel are the USA, Caribbean, Mexico and Europe.
- Incentive merchandise and gift card programs are expected to continue enjoying positive benefits from the economy.
- Electronics are the most prevalent rewards.

Read the full study at theirf.org/research/irf-2017-outlook-study/2020.

Pacific World’s New Destination Index

SINGAPORE — Pacific World, a leading global destination and event management company, in collaboration with Access Destination Services has announced its 2017 Annual Destination Index, which provides insight on the top industry trends. In addition to the types of meetings and destinations groups are seeking, the index details what attendees consider to be most meaningful.

A sampling of some of the top trends:

- Second-tier and uprising destinations are becoming more popular event destinations, such as a small village — Champagne as opposed to Paris.
- The meetings industry has seen an increase in Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives focusing on local communities.
- More groups are requesting a return on engagement in addition to investment, creating an impact and everlasting memory.
- More than a trend, experiencing the culture of a destination makes an event truly exceptional and is now key to its success.
- Groups are looking for local and nutritious cuisine, farm-to-table options and special dietary requirements.
- Engaging reception-style dinners opposed to seated dinners are on the rise.
- Groups are still utilizing technology often, including live video streaming or geolocation games. www.pacificworld.com

ALH Acquires Europe-Based Worldhotels

ORLANDO, FL — Associated Luxury Hotels has significantly expanded its global footprint with the acquisition of Frankfurt, Germany-based Worldhotels. Associated Luxury Hotels owns and operates Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), a leading independent global sales organization serving the North American meetings and incentive marketplace for 30 years. ALHI and Worldhotels are both highly respected, leading global groups of independent upper-upscale and luxury-level hotels and resorts and independent hotel brands around the world.

Worldhotels remains focused on serving individual business travelers, leisure travelers, meeting groups and providing loyalty solutions for its 350 member hotels and resorts, offering 75,000 rooms in 65 countries worldwide. ALHI will continue concentrating on the North American meetings, incentives and conventions marketplace for its membership of more than 250 luxury-level independent hotels and resorts worldwide totaling 138,500 rooms; plus, their Global Alliance partnership including 23 luxury cruise ships, and Destination Management Companies in more than 100 locations worldwide. ALHI has 20 global sales offices across North America and will add ALHI GSO sales offices in Europe in 2017. Worldhotels has 35 sales offices worldwide.

The company will operate ALHI and Worldhotels as separate divisions. Both portfolios feature luxury-level and upper-upscale city center business hotels, exquisite resorts, historic grand landmark hotels, lifestyle hotels and boutique hotels around the world. www.alhi.com

SnapShots



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

1-4 Ireland was the setting for this year’s Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Executive Summit held January 29–February 2 in Dublin. Ken Lyons, president of the SITE Ireland chapter said, “The event was part of a strategy to showcase Ireland’s transformation, with a focus on the unique and creative food and beverage experience and diversity of venues from the historic to the modern and chic.” 2 New SITE International Board Member Anne-Marie Rogers (left), director of meetings and incentives, Direct Travel, and new SITE Foundation Trustee Bonnie Boisner, V.P. event management for Aimia, flank SITE Past President, Patrick Delaney, managing partner and CEO, SoolNua. 5-7 The 2017 FICP Winter Symposium took place January 29–31 at the Boston Park Plaza, drawing more than 100 planner and supplier attendees. Memorable networking events included a New England farmer’s market-style event at Faneuil Hall with decor, food, drinks and activities to match. Attendees tested their green thumbs during a farmer’s market floral demo, and Gardens by Renee was onsite to talk about ways to incorporate more healthful foods into everyday life.



4 Ways to Incentivize Yourself to Higher Productivity

"I always felt that I hadn't achieved what I wanted to achieve. I always felt I could get better. That's the whole incentive."— Dame Virginia Wade, OBE, retired British professional tennis player.

Incentivization may be a buzzword in business circles, but it's a buzzword for good reasons. Researchers have known for years that most employees aren't fully engaged with their work; some never engage at all. Even the best of us sometimes see our jobs as little more than guaranteed paychecks — a means to the end of a comfortable lifestyle or, in more troubled times, fiscal survival.

Hence the need for motivators not to just do better work, but to bother to work hard at all. Motivation has always

been a prime worry of management, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. User-friendly technology and social factors have made it more likely than ever that unhappy or dissatisfied workers will cut themselves free of the traditional corporate structures for the greener, if less certain, pastures of self-employment.

feedback, ambition, a drive to be the best. Intrinsic motivation often beats out the extrinsic. Even better, it's free — and there are no finite resources involved. Sometimes the best motivation comes from your own selfish impulses. If you promise yourself a walk around your building once you get a quality report on your supervisor's desk, then you have a compelling reason to work your way through any difficulties or reluctance to perform and get that thing done.

Ideally, the ramifications of failing to do your work would push you into getting it done — but procrastination and negative self-talk often raise their ugly heads. If you're having a hard time overcoming your Motivational Deficit Disorder, or just can't seem to get the traction you need to excel, consider these ways to convince yourself to power toward the 100th percentile.

- 1. Gamify your work.** Originally a concept used in marketing, gamification involves rewarding yourself for doing the hard things. One way is to give yourself points for important tasks, which you can then trade in for a mani-pedi, your favorite craft beer or a golf game once you've accumulated enough. The more important or higher priority the task, the more points you get. Or, you can simply do as I suggested before, and promise yourself a one-time treat (like chocolate) for completing something crucial.
- 2. Adopt a mantra.** Find a favorite saying to help keep you going, and repeat it when you're down. Walt Disney's favorite was "Keep moving forward." Responsibility for your performance rests fully on your shoulders, so you might tell yourself, "If it's to be, it's up to me." In the animated movie "Finding Nemo," Nemo's friend Dory sings, "Just keep swimming!" Find something that works for you and make it a mantra.

Sometimes the best motivation comes from your own selfish impulses.

Extrinsic, Intrinsic

Motivation comes in two basic flavors: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivators include perks (parking spots, corner offices, cubicle doors) and financial stimuli such as bonuses, raises and promotions. Intrinsic motivators come from within: pride for a job well done, happiness at positive



- 3. One step at a time.** When you're snowed under and have no idea how you're going to get going, much less maintain your high level of performance — well, just start. Do something easy, even if it's just a baby step. Hopefully, you'll soon get into gear. You can't always eat the frog first, even when you need to.

- 4. Make yourself happy.** Buy yourself some flowers. Take a nice walk. Listen to an upbeat playlist. Smile. Treat yourself to your favorite coffee or a dessert. Think: What can you do to elevate your mood? Find ways to boost your happiness and cheer yourself up, even when you want to stew in despair or anger. Happy people work harder, and they don't let obstacles stop them as easily.

Bing, Bang, Boom

We all get sick of work, have bad days and just don't see the point of striving sometimes. But if you want to maximize your productivity, you can't let momentary moods slow you down. If you can't engage, look for reasons to make

yourself engage. If your leadership has rewarded you with a promotion or bonus for your great work, or to get you to do great work, think about that and give them what you owe them. Even if they haven't, find internal ways to step up to the plate and knock a homer. If it's to be, it's up to thee.

I&FMM

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, CPAE, is an award-winning keynote speaker, best-selling author, and noted authority on employee and team productivity. She is the president of *The Productivity Pro Inc.*, a company dedicated to helping leaders increase workplace performance in high-stress environments. Stack has authored seven books, including *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time (January 18, 2016)*. She is a past president of the *National Speakers Association*, and in 2015 was inducted into its exclusive *Speaker Hall of Fame (with fewer than 175 members worldwide)*. Stack's clients include *Cisco Systems, Walmart and Bank of America*, and she has been featured on the *"CBS Early Show"* and *CNN*, and in *The New York Times*. To have Laura Stack speak at your next event, call 303-471-7401 or visit www.theproductivitypro.com.

Social Media

By Scott Steinberg



How to Manage an Online Brand and Reputation

The role of marketing and public relations within insurance and financial organizations has shifted drastically with the advent of social media and has moved to greater emphasis on storytelling. Traditionally, organizations would simply broadcast news, or channel it through one specific type of influencer — members of the media — and observe the reaction, then respond on a somewhat more flexible timetable. Today, it's not simply about beaming out a message: It's about building trust with end-users, telling a compelling story and creating social streams of dialogue that work two ways.

Whether marketing meetings and events, or business solutions, it's important to remember: In a connected, online and multitasking world, companies must first find ways to connect with increasingly fragmented audiences, then work to build empathy and awareness, and create channels through which customers and influencers of every sort can engage with your brand in exciting new ways. Moreover, customer impression carries increasing weight, with brand impression able to travel greater distances in less time than ever before, and users looking to their personal networks for expertise and validation as opposed to traditional media channels. However, while the media matrix and consumption patterns have irrevocably shifted, the value of powerful communication strategies has only become more vital. In fact, traditional marketing and public relations principles play more of a role than ever, and practitioners can excel in the modern world — provided, that is, they adapt to changing markets and best practices.

Following are several hints and tips to keep in mind as you work to create and nurture positive conversation.

Establishing a Social Media Policy

Make it clear to employees what's OK to share online, how and when to do so, and the most appropriate manner in which to conduct outreach efforts. With every employee a brand ambassador, training should begin the first day on the job to reinforce and instill the importance of these organizational values — establishing formal rules of engagement, clearly communicating them to workers and explaining what's expected from hires is crucial.

Guidelines are only the beginning, however: Establish an

internal program designed to teach social media literacy and aptitude, provide continued education efforts and reward employees for successfully practicing these skills. You may wish to consider regular skills refreshes, training sessions, certification courses and gamification-based programs to reinforce these maxims.

Be straightforward and specific about what's expected in terms of tone, attitude, end-results and output from your social media pros, and regularly monitor and assess how well they're aligning with and meeting these goals. Providing running feedback and commentary to help them grow and improve is a vital way to bolster performance in these areas. To this extent, you may wish to have team leaders provide sample tweets, posts or updates to provide a sense of how to better shape these communications efforts.

For the sake of clarity and assurance of appropriate conduct, also post formal guidelines for communication within your own blogs, communities and online venues, public-facing or otherwise. Having established guidelines in place helps set expectations upfront, provides a level playing field and helps you address any issues that may arise, such as having to ban argumentative users or remove inappropriate posts.

Setting Clear Guidelines

The immediacy of social media allows you to interact with your organization's customers directly and often without filters. However, policy and protocols must be set in place beforehand to ensure professional and productive interactions. Understanding that some room must be given to operate between formal guidelines, make it clear to employees what appropriate rules of conduct are when speaking directly to end-users or customers, whether exchanges are B2B or B2C in nature.

Provide ongoing development and training regarding these policies, and make sure employees who manage social media efforts, outreach and campaigns receive regular, ongoing instruction and are passing on learning and knowledge gained from direct frontline interactions with customers throughout the organization to promote positive trans-

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fer and enhance best practices. Creating internal sharing systems, online platforms and programs where employees can share insights, ask questions and contribute individual findings can greatly assist in this regard. Sharing findings, knowledge and commentary on the back of ongoing efforts helps boost program growth, engagement and participation.

Marketing campaigns and branding efforts also should adhere to consistent guidelines, helping you ensure the right messages are being sent and that your company is being portrayed with the image and professionalism you desire.

Outside of formal guidelines, basic rules of politeness,

Note that kindness, courtesy, positivity and empathy should be reflected in every post.

professionalism and business etiquette should be practiced online, just as you would when engaging with a customer face-to-face.

Through social media, you also will likely interact not just with individual customers, but entire communities of customers who follow certain blogs, trends, etc. Identify which influencers to reach out to, the best methods for doing so and optimum means of engaging them, and ensure employees are briefed on these topics.

Promoting Messages Across Different Mediums

When you've got a good story to tell, it often makes sense to tell it across multiple mediums to maximize your reach, and tailor content and promotions by platform. The way individuals consume content on Twitter is very different from that of Facebook or Pinterest. A one-size-fits-all approach is not advised. However, if you've got a YouTube video containing several fun or juicy nuggets of information, the incremental effort to write a blog post, schedule some tweets featuring highlights, or otherwise adapt it for use in other formats can easily be justified.

As alluded, tailor your message according to the medium to best resonate with and serve your audience: Content

can take myriad short- or long-form shapes — all of which should be adapted for the platform, and easy user consumption. Remember, each medium has its strengths and weaknesses. Visual promotions such as infographics might best be served on Pinterest or Facebook, while key points from them might be better called out in short spurts on Twitter.

Bring value to online conversations by looking for ways to add unique information and insights, and acknowledge and respond to others' reactions.

Always be respectful when interacting with others online, and keep a cool head, even when you encounter rude or inappropriate behavior by other parties.

Be helpful to others, and find ways through your comments, content and actions to create value and benefit for recipients. Doing a good turn for colleagues, customers and others we interact with across different forms of media helps promote goodwill and empathy — valuable business assets.

Expressing Your Brand's Online Personality

When people go to social media sites, they expect exchanges to be more personal, more immediate and more engaging: Be less formal, but make sure you adhere to the rules and guidelines your company sets forth about your brand, message and tone of voice while also creating value for your audience.

Casual and fun doesn't equate to flippant, glib or self-centered. Think about how you or your brand may be perceived, and take care to present yourself as affably and respectfully as possible. Be cognizant of quality as well, including taking care to eliminate grammatical and spelling errors. Note that kindness, courtesy, positivity and empathy should be reflected in every post.

Humor is appropriate to use depending on context — however, only the same sort of humor that is appropriate for use in an office or business casual setting. Avoid risqué or controversial statements.

I&FMM

Scott Steinberg, an award-winning professional speaker, is among today's best-known trends experts and futurists, and the bestselling author of *Netiquette Essentials: New Rules for Minding Your Manners in a Digital World*, *Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself*, *Fearlessly Innovate*, and *Succeed Despite Uncertainty and Millennial Marketing: Bridging the Generation Gap*. The founder of *Select nightlife magazine*, and host of *Next Up on NewsWatch*, his website is www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com.



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

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



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2017 F&B Trends

Planners Partner With Chefs to Raise the Bar for Creative Food Events

By Christine Loomis

Trends aren't always brand new. Often, they're a continuation of changes in an industry that evolve over time and as the knowledge, experience and expectations of stakeholders shift accordingly. New or not, evolution in an industry is bound to raise the bar, and nowhere is that truer than in F&B.

Planners, like almost everyone else these days, are acutely aware of the food scene across the country, thanks in part to a slew of food and restaurant shows on TV and the corresponding contin-

gent of celebrity chefs, along with a social media network that allows everyone to share what they see and know.

That "foodie" mentality is not new this year, but it continues to evolve and to drive planners as well as chefs and catering departments to up their game in terms of what is expected, what is possible and what is offered at meetings and events in the realm of food. There also seems to be an evolving dynamic between chefs and meeting planners in terms of partnering in the creative pro-

cess, and a willingness on both sides to experiment.

Koleen M. Roach, director, meetings and conference management, for Securian Financial Group, agrees. "I love how chefs and planners are more willing to incorporate spices and more unique flavors into standard banquet type foods," she says. "Adding a hint of truffle oil to scrambled eggs or vanilla to pancake batter on a breakfast buffet, or fresh rosemary sprigs to a carafe of lemonade served with lunch, or using

lightly scented candles during dinner to stimulate senses a bit and warm the atmosphere — these are simple touches that make something rather boring a bit more exciting."

But it's the partnership potential between chefs and planners that Roach believes has high value. "Our incentive programs demand a sense of uniqueness and creativity from destination and promotion to lodging and environment; food and beverage commands the same approach. It's what sets our events apart from each other and what keeps our qualifiers coming back year after year," she says. "Going beyond the new norm of offering healthy, colorful, fresh and flavorful cuisine can be a challenge for sure, but the foodie scene and chefs in hotels and specialty venues today really encourage creativity and thinking outside the box, and they are so enthusiastic about sitting down with meeting planners to create new and exciting experiences for any size group."

Uniquely Minnesotan Menu

The locavore movement is hardly new but it is not just about local farm produce and products, and it isn't specific to areas known for remarkable cuisine. It works just as well on your home turf as in any other location. Roach talks with enthusiasm about an event for Securian, a Minnesota company, held at a Minneapolis hotel and based entirely on a Minnesota theme. "We had a great time working with the chef and his team on food stations that represented all of the wonderful traditions that are uniquely Minnesotan," she says. "We started with the décor by bringing in lots of fresh birch and pine trees, sunset up-lighting colors, plaid linens in reds, blacks, whites and greens, wooden barrels in place of tall boys, and wood and candle centerpieces.

"Passed apps included maple-glazed bacon on a stick, Walleye cakes and Lake Superior-stout-braised short-rib tarts. The food stations were fantastic and included a soup-and-salad station of White Earth wild rice soup and locally grown greens, vegetables and cheeses for topping; another station included

tater tot hot dish, whipped potatoes and sweet potatoes with all locally sourced cheeses, sour cream, maple syrup and other toppings. Another station was called Prairie Meats and included Swedish meatballs and egg noodles, and locally raised turkey with wild rice and cranberry stuffing. The dessert station was a make-your-own s'mores and hot apple crisp with all sorts of local toppings and locally made ice creams."

Beverages for the event included Minnesota craft beer and locally distilled gin and vodka, touching on another trend that is still evolving — local craft beer and local distilled spirits. "The response was great," Roach says. "Everyone had a terrific time, many eating tater tot hot dish for the first time ever."

Sensory Experience

Roach says creating an experience around food is important today, recalling a sensory extravaganza she experienced at one of her own events and most recently at an industry event she attended. "Each course was prepared to inspire a sense, e.g., taste, sight, sound, smell and touch. Before one course," she says, "we placed masks over our eyes and were asked to breathe in the aroma of what was served, and then to take a taste while blindfolded. We then removed the masks and tasted the food again, learning that the taste was far more intense while blindfolded. One course was just so visually beautiful, very colorful and decorative, while another required us to pour pop rocks over it, and that, of course, was the sound sense. During the touch course it was not food related; rather it was a lesson in unique napkin folds, which everyone very much enjoyed. The women were serious and meticulous during this course, the men turned into five-year-olds, but it was great fun and a nice way to break up a five-course meal."

Fresh, local, healthful, colorful and from scratch are continuing themes for 2017, according to hotel chefs across the nation. Also important is creating an experience around food and drink. And there's this novel idea: group and banquet food can and should meet the same standards as restaurant dining.

Chef's Choice

Chef Paul Nagan, executive chef at Range in the Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center, which frequent-



"Chefs in hotels and specialty venues today really encourage creativity...and they are so enthusiastic about sitting down with meeting planners to create new and exciting experiences."

Koleen M. Roach
 Director, Meetings and Conference Management
 Securian Financial Group, St. Paul, MN



Securian Financial Group's sensory dinner with blindfold: "Each course was prepared to inspire a sense," says Koleen Roach.

“We’ve seen a lot of different things, but probably the hottest trend is personalized beverages. Each group has the option to work with our team to create custom punches or barrel their own cocktail.”

Paul Nagan
Executive Chef, Range
Renaissance Denver Downtown
Denver, CO



Credits: Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center

ly hosts corporate groups, says, “The focus is still local, local, local, as well as bringing the trends of great restaurants into your meeting space. Groups and hotels appear to be transitioning away from the tables-and-chairs mindset to focus more on the experiential side of meetings. This focus ranges from the flow of the room to the presentation of food. Individual portions with custom displays are incredibly popular.”

At Westgate Park City Resort & Spa in Park City, Utah, where many corporate, insurance and financial meetings are set, Ivan Ruiz, executive chef and director of food and beverage, says the biggest trend he sees for groups today is the continued expectation that banquet food meet the same standards as a restaurant dining experience. “To achieve that, farm-to-table is still important and making more items from scratch is important. It’s a huge point of emphasis here at Westgate Park City, as our groups look for that consistency in quality from their banquet lunch to their dinner at one of our signature restaurants.”

Tony Porcellini, director of food and beverage at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort, known for executing creative group events, says people want to know what they’re eating. “It’s not necessarily farm to table, but knowing the source of the product and what’s in it is important. The trend is going to be about fresh ingredients,” he says.

Beyond that, Porcellini adds, “I be-



The Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center’s charcuterie on a stick for meeting breaks; and the Range restaurant’s bar ritual, which includes a punch created uniquely for individual events.

lieve that gluten-free will continue. Comfort food will always be here to stay but in 2017 it will have a bit of a twist. We’re going to clean up the burger a little bit, clean up the hot dog a little bit — you don’t have to smother it in cheese and all these bad ingredients. It’s a way to extend the use of good, healthy ingredients so you can eat what you want to eat as far as comfort food. And barbecue will continue to get bigger. I think the cooking method of smoking foods will continue to be a growing trend because it can be a healthier option.”

‘The Mule Is Alive and Kicking’

In terms of beverages, from cocktails to breakfast and break drinks, Nagan says, “We’ve seen a lot of different things, but probably the hottest trend is personalized beverages. Each group has the option to work with our team to create custom punches or barrel their own cocktail for an evening reception. In the morning and afternoon, groups like fresh and a lot of color. Get away from the traditional juices and offer custom smoothies with protein or an energy boost.”

Ruiz believes that beverage options that pair well with foods, beyond just wine, will continue to play out in 2017. “We’re really seeing the classic cocktails like the martini and old fashioned make a return. It makes sense, as there is a reason they’re classics; everyone loves them. For beer, local craft brews remain very popular. We’re partnering with a local crafter here in Utah to offer unique brews and ones that we can pair with our banquet food to create a truly complimentary dining experience, just as if the attendees were dining in a restaurant.”

Porcellini thinks craft cocktails may be slowing down a little bit but that, “People want to see fresh ingredients in drinks. People want to drink less, but better quality. I don’t think the mule is dead yet,” he adds. “The mule is alive and kicking, whether it’s a Kentucky mule or Moscow mule. In fact, we’ve just added a mule station in our banquet department for groups to purchase.”

As for craft beer, Porcellini notes, “Craft beer is definitely here to stay. It’s not going away, and it’s not taking a backseat to anything.”

Meeting-Break Fare

Of all the evolving trends over the past few years, the greatest changes may have come in the area of meeting break foods. In one of those why-didn’t-anyone-get-this-before scenarios, there was a sudden collective realization in the industry that loading attendees up with sugar during breaks would ultimately send them crashing, and nodding off, during afternoon sessions — hardly a productive strategy for meeting organizers or presenters.

Today, break options are increasingly part of the healthful foods trend, with planners typically ordering more proteins and fresh ingredients to complement some sweets, and local plays in here, too. “Every group meeting has a purpose, and you must build breaks around that purpose,” Nagan says. “The way food affects the body and mind is important to the meeting and the attendee. We offer a variety of items from local jerky, an assortment of local trail

mixes, housemade sweet snacks, energy beverages, etc. Almost all of our break offerings also showcase a local offering.”

Porcellini says in addition to healthful options, less is more when it comes to break foods. “Before, it was an array of food everywhere for everybody to attack,” he says. “Now, less is more. Break foods need to be meaningful. Breaks are there to energize people as they’re coming out of a meeting, so breaks are going in a way where the food should energize. Now, it’s more about taking raw and natural foods that will really energize people rather than just give them a sugar high. You’re starting to see foods like dark chocolates, bitter chocolates, cranberries, natural antioxidants and natural energizers and less carbs and sugar.”

Breaks also can be experiential, and that’s one of the trends Ruiz sees at the Westgate Park City, in addition to the healthful focus. “Planners are looking to get away from your standard breaks and instead use them as an opportunity to create something exciting, memorable and that helps the productivity of their meeting,” he says. “To appeal to that need, we offer colored themed breaks that highlight a particular color. For example, our red-themed break features strawberries and raspberry tartlets. We then add some red lights

and accents to bring it all together and create a wow moment for attendees. Breaks are steering away from heavy foods and instead offer lighter fare such as quinoa, kale and fish that won’t make attendees drowsy.”

Fitness Pairings

It’s not just about the break foods, however. It’s also about getting attendees up and moving during meetings, another way to keep the brain and body alert for sessions and to keep attendees happy and engaged with a meeting overall. Hilton Worldwide has taken a lead in finding ways to do just that. In September, the company launched the next iteration of its Meet With Purpose program. It was prompted in part by the results of a May global survey conducted by Hilton that found, not surprisingly, that attendees struggle to focus in the afternoons, often due to heavy lunches, no chance to exercise and a letdown after the high of sugary break foods.

One in three respondents said they’re drowsy in the afternoons during conferences, with 2–4 p.m. the least productive time period. Fully half of all respondents said they were not satisfied with their ability to stay on track with diets or normal eating and exercise during conferences and 7 out of 10 said they consider good diet and ex-



“Planners are looking to get away from your standard breaks and instead use them as an opportunity to create something exciting, memorable and that helps the productivity of their meeting.”

Ivan Ruiz
Director of Food & Beverage/
Executive Chef
Westgate Park City Resort & Spa
Park City, UT



Credits: Hilton Hotels & Resorts

Hilton's Meet With Purpose program offers menus of healthy foods paired with fitness activities to promote wellness and enhance attentiveness in meetings.

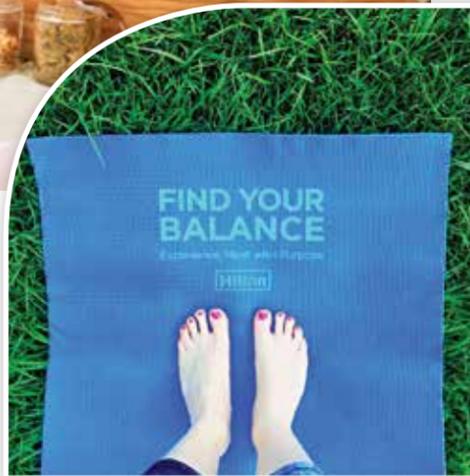
ercise an important part of daily living. When asked how to promote a more satisfying meeting experience, 46 percent were in favor of fitness activities in the local area, such as guided walks or runs, and the same number thought spa promotions to unwind after meetings would be helpful. As for food, 52 percent voted for balanced menu options, including locally sourced and seasonal ingredients.

If these options are available, the survey found that four out of five attendees would be more likely to partici-

pate and to be attentive during sessions, which would increase overall meeting satisfaction and, as a result, ROI.

Hilton Worldwide took that information and created combination menus of healthy foods paired with activities, such as Yogurt & Yoga, a 50-minute, instructor-led yoga class paired with a menu featuring such items as watermelon, yuzu and mint salad with citrus-basil dressing; house-made granola with nuts; a chef's choice of protein and savory; and seasonal fruit-infused yogurt. Other activities on offer: a one-

or two-mile fun run or power walk and a 25-minute stretch session. Hilton's Meditative Moment pairs a 10-minute meditation session with a customizable lean protein plus veggies or a fruit smoothie. Health and wellness menus are available at more than 40 Hilton hotels in the United States, a clear mandate for wellness and healthy food trends at meetings.



Fresh Advice

"Really, there is so much going on in the food and beverage industry right now it's almost hard to keep up, Roach says. For planners who are faced with continually upping the ante in terms of creating spectacular and memorable meals and events, she has a few suggestions to help.

"Study menus when you are out to eat at new and unique restaurants and watch shows like 'Top Chef' and 'Chopped.' Take time to network with industry peers to share experiences, engage in culinary events at industry shows and work with your catering manager and culinary team as early as possible to create the new and unique experience you are looking for."

There's a good chance the chefs and catering managers will be very excited to partner in creating those experiences, and the event will be better for the partnership. **I&FMM**

"Breaks are..more about taking raw and natural foods that will really energize people rather than just give them a sugar high."



Tony Porcellini
Director of Food & Beverage
Walt Disney World
Swan and Dolphin Hotel
Orlando, FL

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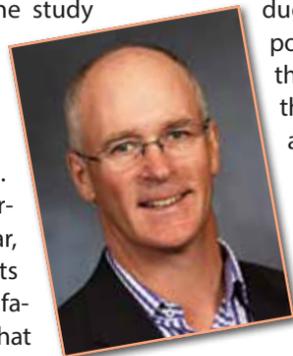
Incentive qualifiers find destination motivation in far-flung locales such as Australia.

Incentive Travel Trends

Despite Challenges From Budgets to Event Disruptions, the Show Must Go On

By Patrick Simms

The big picture is promising for incentive travel, as corporations have been increasingly using that reward strategy over the last 20 years, according to the Incentive Research Foundation. The IRF's 2017 Trends Study estimates that the use of non-cash rewards has increased from 26 percent of all U.S. businesses in 1996 to 84 percent of all U.S. businesses in 2016. The study also cites that incentive travel specifically is used by nearly 40 percent of U.S. businesses today, according to the Incentive Federation. But for financial and insurance companies in particular, incentive travel has seen its challenges, including the infamous AIG incident of 2008 that led to the paring down of the extravagance of the trips.



Tom Wilson, Division V.P., Financial Services Sector Leader Maritz Travel, Fenton MO

Fiduciary Fuss

More recently, the U.S. Department of Labor's 2016 Conflict of Interest rule has been impacting the work of incentive planners at many firms. The rule is intended to ensure that retirement investment advisors act in their clients' best interest, especially in the sale of annuity products, and redefines an advisor's fiduciary responsibility in reporting the incentives tied to those sales. One response to the rule may be to not count annuity sales toward trip qualification, which can

"Our research shows that destination is a very significant driver from a motivation perspective."

decrease the number of qualifiers. In any case, the design of incentive programs in light of the regulation has become "more difficult" according to 60 percent of respondents in the latest IRF Pulse Study.

"Every single financial services firm in the country is spending significant amounts of time and energy trying to understand the rule and the implications that it will have for their incentive and recognition programs," says Tom Wilson, division vice president, financial services sector lead, Maritz Travel Company. Roughly 35 percent to 45 percent of Maritz's client companies are in the

insurance and financial sectors. "The clients that we work with have taken the appropriate steps to design their programs such that they eliminate any conflict of interest," Wilson adds. "So we and our clients feel very comfortable with the programs that they're operating."

While the first round of compliance with the DOL's new rule was set for April 10, President Trump issued an executive order on February 3 that requires the DOL to delay implementation and conduct a review of the rule. The administration, known for its aim to deregulate the financial services industry, argues that the rule would effectively limit consumers' choices in financial products. With the Conflict of Interest rule suspended, it remains to be seen whether the industry's preparation for compliance has been time well spent.

Budgets and Booking Challenges

Aside from the new ruling, rising costs present a different sort of challenge: Over 50 percent of planner respondents in the IRF's most recent Pulse survey said costs — including travel, room rates and F&B — are rising faster than their budgets. According to Colleen Deckert, CMM, CMP, assistant vice president, event marketing with Investors Group

Financial Services, "there doesn't seem to be the same pressure to reduce budget. I would say my experience is more of the budgets remaining flat year over year, as opposed to the big decreases as we've seen in the past."

Deckert explains that when budgets remain flat in the face of rising costs, "you have to make the same dollars go further, and then something in that program is suffering, whether it's entertainment or digital technology."

Lynn J. Schwandt, CMP, senior event planner with Thrivent Financial and a new FICP board member, corroborates the trend Deckert cites: "In general what I hear is that budgets are pretty much staying the same."

Lead time, however, cannot remain status quo. Hotel availability overall is lower than in the past, and planning incentives in popular markets with a relatively short lead time can present a booking challenge. The IRF 2017 Trends Study notes that planners are "pushing out their booking, with over half of planners now booking more than a year out."



Lisa Ramsay, CMP, A.V.P., Event and Meeting Management Protective Life Insurance Co., Birmingham, AL

Destinations such as Africa, Australia and the Far East have "bucket list" appeal, as "they may be destinations the average family would not experience on their own."

"We do contract (our incentive programs) well in advance; for example, we have several programs contracted through 2019 and will soon be working on 2020," Schwandt says. "Our recognition conference is contracted through 2021 because it's our biggest conference, and it requires a large room block as well as a large ballroom."

Destination Motivation

It's not just about securing space in the desired property, but also securing the desired city itself. More so than the hotel, the destination is a major motivator for potential qualifiers. "Our research shows that destination is a very signifi-

cant driver from a motivation perspective," says Wilson. "So having the right destination, having the right program inclusions, all of that is critically important."

The Maritz team queries its clients on the ideal destination as well as aspects such as program length, activities, family participation, and so on, in order to achieve a "guest-centric design" for the incentive trip. In general, sun-and-fun destinations are still highly popular, with the IRF 2017 Trends Study reporting that "Mexico and the Caribbean... remain top destinations for U.S. planners' outbound programs, with roughly 70 percent or more of planners sending groups to those regions." In addition, "the strong dollar and larger budgets also are contributing to an increase in European programs, with 64 percent of planners headed to European destinations in 2017 — a large jump from 40 percent last year."

As far as international travel, Lisa Ramsay, CMP, A.V.P., event and meeting management, Protective Life Insurance Co., adds that destinations such as Africa, Australia and the Far East have "bucket list" appeal, as "they may be destinations the average family would not experience

on their own."

Many planners also have had success with less commonly selected cities, as they can offer the well-traveled agent a new experience. "We did a program a couple years ago in Stockholm," Deckert relates. "I thought it was a fantastic city, but it was a little bit of a harder sell. It wouldn't be a city on most people's radar. We were challenged a bit with the weather when the group got there, but at the end of the day it was a strong program. We did our welcome reception at the Vasa Museum (a maritime museum displaying the only fully intact 17th century ship ever recovered). We're reluctant to do events at museums; typically

they're not best suited for incentives. But seeing the Vasa up close really set the tone for that conference."

Off the Beaten Path

Less traditional domestic destinations also can host successful programs, although again they can be a "harder sell." "A few years ago we booked a 250-person incentive in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. After announcing the location, responses were mixed: Why there? What's there to do?" Ramsay relates. "However, after arriving in this truly amazing destination, everyone's questions were answered. At the conclusion of our week together, attendees were commenting they would definitely return."

Allyson D. Singer, CMP, manager, The Event Group with TD Ameritrade, recently saw Lake Tahoe, Nevada, deliver a great experience for 125 incentive participants (including spouses). "The program had traditionally been in Las Vegas for many years, so we were a little bit nervous about the change," says Singer, "but it ended up being a successful program with amazing feedback. We did an evening dinner cruise that people seem to really enjoy, and they said they'd like to do that during the day. So for our next Tahoe event we'll do it in the daytime so they can really see the 360."

Along the same nontraditional lines,

TD Ameritrade is bringing its May incentive program to Portland, Oregon. "We're excited to offer some outdoor activities and winery tours, and sort of get them out of the 'beach box' if you will," says Singer. "It's just another opportunity to keep everything fresh."

While the destination remains a key motivator, there is something to be said for the motivational value of the company brand itself, which is the common denominator through all



Lynn J. Schwandt, CMP, Senior Event Planner, Event Planning and Recognition Thrivent Financial, Appleton, WI

"We are finding that our groups like the adventure. Not necessarily a risky activity, but something that's not just a walk through a museum."

its programs. "We're fortunate in that we have a sales force who know the quality at which our incentives are delivered," says Deckert. "We've had instances where they've gone to a destination that maybe didn't incentivize them as much as others, but they had faith that the program would be strong, and the survey results told us that we've achieved the goal at the end of the day. So we're actually promoting the brand of the incentive in conjunction with destination. People aren't going to say, I don't want to go to Stockholm or Tokyo or Russia, so I'm not going to qualify. They're mo-

tivated by being in this incentive group regardless of the destination."

Authentic Local Experiences

Of course, destination is just part of the story; it's also the kinds of local experiences qualifiers have that distinguishes the program. According to the IRF 2017 Trends Study, "The focus for travel is now not only on the destination and venue, but equally important are the authentic, unique, individualized experiences delivered throughout the agenda. This has

led to the productizing of mini-experiences: from various types of tastings to personalized training sessions to behind-the-scenes introductions to chefs."

Indeed, 42 percent of program owners are increasing the number of "experiential rewards" in their portfolio, the study notes. What makes for a rewarding experience is subjective, and so the ideal program affords participants time to seek out those experiences that match their tastes and interests. "We offer a pick your own activity day," says Singer. "That might be spa, golf, hiking, zip lining or horseback riding — whatever is indigenous to the area that makes sense. And then if they just want to enjoy the day at leisure, they may do that as well."

Millennial Preferences

Millennials especially appreciate those unstructured days where they can immerse themselves in the destination as they choose. "Free time is very important to that generation; they would rather have the opportunity to explore on their own, as opposed to, say, a group teambuilding event," Wilson observes.

"We are finding that our groups like the adventure," says Schwandt, who notes she is starting to see a shift toward younger, under-40 qualifiers. "Not necessarily a risky activity, but something that's



not just a walk through a museum. Some examples from previous programs: Sydney Harbor Bridge Climb (in Australia), zip lining in Coeur d'Alene and even biking in Paris is more" to their preference.

Millennials also are more likely to be keen on having a mobile app that complements the incentive trip. The

Deckert, for example, observes that on incentive trips "we find that once the qualifiers get to the destination they're not on their devices."

More Business Content

However, incentive programs that are incor-

"We really are moving toward a model that has a very heavy focus on education for our attendees in terms of how they can grow their practice and build their business."

Colleen Deckert, CMM, CMP, A.V.P., Event Marketing Investors Group Financial Services, Winnipeg, MB

most recent IRF Pulse Study reports that 60 percent of respondents are incorporating mobile apps into their programs. Among Maritz's incentive clients, Wilson sees the adoption of apps rising annually. "The use of mobile apps is definitely a trend even on smaller incentive and recognition programs, just as a means of communication.

"From a sustainability standpoint it's greener than using paper, which is important to a lot of our clients," Wilson continues. "And being able to have their customized schedule on a mobile app is becoming just as important on an incentive and recognition as a large user conference. We love to have the app go out before they leave for the destination and use it to send a welcome message when they hit the ground. Mobile apps from our perspective are another touchpoint with attendees."

Nonetheless, there are planners who have not found that investing in an app for incentives offers a significant return.

Millennials prefer accessing incentive program and business content on mobile apps.

tent, and it will actually become an even bigger component going forward," says Deckert. "We really are moving toward a model that has a very heavy focus on education for our attendees in terms of how they can grow their practice and build their business."

"That is the biggest trend that I've seen over the last five years," Wilson affirms. "There are legitimate business reasons to be getting together and celebrating success, but more importantly there is a learning opportunity to help attendees serve their clients better. How can we create an experi-

ence for an individual that recognizes him or her, but more importantly how can they take that back home to make their business better? That is the absolute key."

Resources at the destination, such as universities, also can support the education component. "We work with one client for whom continuing education is paramount, and so we tie in an academic experience with the program," says Wilson. "There might be a day at Stanford if the program is in San Francisco, or a day at Georgetown if the program is in Washington, DC, where you bring in the academia



Credit: James Francis/TravelPortland

Authentic local experiences, such as sampling Portland's ubiquitous craft beer scene, are important elements to include in successful incentive programs.



Credit: Investors Group Financial Services

Investors Group Financial Services' Portugal incentive program included a wagon-building CSR activity.



to talk about the economy, the political environment, trends that are shaking the broader world and so forth. They have found that to be highly engaging for their guests, so I think there's some uniqueness associated with that."

Giving Back

Business meetings, educational experiences and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities all count toward the "50 percent business" component that Investors Group, as a Canadian company, is required to build into its incentive programs, Deckert explains. "We've done some great CSR activities. We have partnered for a number of years with Stop Hunger Now, where we package meals and send them to affected areas all around the world," she says. "Over a four- or five-year period I think we've made over 3 million meals, and we just have tremendous success when we offer that. This past year we traveled to South Africa for our incentive and we delivered two CSR programs where we refurbished a daycare and a senior citizens home. It's really part of Investors Group's overall culture."



Allyson D. Singer, CMP, Manager, The Event Group
TD Ameritrade, Fort Worth, TX

Similarly, Protective Life Insurance Co. is incorporating a "give back" component to an upcoming incentive this spring. "We are working in conjunction with an organization to arrange a silent auction of art pieces from youth around the community, and all proceeds raised will be given to their school," Ramsay says.

Event Disruptions

With firms continually exploring new incentive destinations, new opportuni-

ties arise to assist communities in more parts of the world. New concerns also arise, however, as to the safety of travelers as they venture to these locales. Threats can range from diseases such as Zika to terrorism to political unrest to extreme weather. According to research by the IRF and the University of South Carolina that will be released this June, "almost 60 percent of planners have experienced some form of disruption in their events, estimating that almost a quarter of their events have been affected in some way."

In addition, "almost 50 percent of planners said they experienced a disruption costing their organization \$10,000–\$99,000." The most frequently cited kinds of disruption were "weather-related events (38 percent) followed by vendor failures (28 percent)." Crisis management is a team effort that includes a planner's sup-

plier partners, and respondents to the study found hotels to be "best prepared to handle crises or disruptions, followed by destination management companies and airlines."

"We're starting to do more checking with the hotel on how they handle security," Schwandt says. "Our in-house security does an assessment of the location (city) and also submits a questionnaire to the hotel security, which is then compiled into a final security report."

Ramsay's team also relies heavily on the host hotel's insight on local safety conditions. "Our incentive house and us as the company's planners are very diligent about staying in constant contact with the hotel property and monitoring current affairs taking place in that country," she says. "We also have security procedures outlined in our program specs that our staff and hotel partners have at their fingertips for the duration of the program."

The crisis management plan can and should involve other suppliers as well. "We've done a lot of work over the last 18 months or so to make these plans as comprehensive as we can," Deckert says. "Besides hotels, the focus is also now on the offsite venues, busing and all of those other components. All of our suppliers need to complete forms that tell us the information that we need to build out our crisis management plan."

The Show Must Go On

Today incentive travel has an unquestionable value, not just for recognition and motivation, but also as a vehicle for business content, teambuilding, education and CSR. Given that value proposition, "the show must go on" despite the threat of disruption.

Ramsay relates a telling case in point: "We are contracted for an incentive in

Monte Carlo this October. When the terrible tragedy happened in Nice (Bastille Day, 2016), we discussed if we should postpone this location for a future incentive and considered staying state-side. However, our senior executives made the decision to stay the course. Unfortunately, we've witnessed terrible atrocities in the United States, and took the stance we can't put our lives on hold. But we will do everything in our power to ensure everyone's safety." **I&FMM**

"We're excited to offer some outdoor activities and winery tours, and sort of get them out of the 'beach box' if you will. It's just another opportunity to keep everything fresh."

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Fostering Great Supplier Relationships

Develop a Network of Trusted Partners as an Essential Extension of Your Team

By Mark Rowh

Planners need suppliers. Vendors need business from planners. But is mutual dependence enough to make for a solid relationship?

In answering such a question, a study by the Incentive Research Foundation may be revealing. Results of the study, announced in November, were based

“Without our vendors, we cannot be of service to our clients. We cannot be masters of all tasks so it is essential for strategic planners to have a network of trusted partners with whom they work.”



Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM
Founder
Strategic Meetings & Events Inc.
Bernardsville, NJ

on a survey of 126 hotel sales representatives and 160 meeting and incentive travel planners about the present state of the hotelier-planner relationship.

On the plus side, the majority of both planners and hoteliers indicated they viewed their relationship with the other party as either collaborative or supportive. But at the same time, depending on the hotel role in question (national sales, property sales, or convention services manager) just 11 to 22 percent of planners rated the relationship as one of full trust or friendship.

The study identified several other challenges, with rising costs and space/date availability seen as particularly pressing issues, along with the eRFP process. Another concern was the increasingly transactional and technological nature of these relationships.

So how can planners make the most of relationships with suppliers? Christy

Lamagna, founder of New Jersey-based Strategic Meetings & Events, says an important first step is to recognize just how important vendors are to successful meetings.

“Without our vendors, we cannot be of service to our clients,” she says. “We cannot be masters of all tasks so it is essential for strategic planners to have a network of trusted partners with whom they work.”

Treat With Respect

In fact vendors should be extensions of your team, she argues.

“They are the backbone on which your business functions and should be treated with tremendous respect,” she says. How someone treats their vendors is usually indicative of how they treat employees, she adds. If employees are unhappy that shows in their work product or in potential turnover mid-program.

For the optimum working relationship, suppliers need to demonstrate that they share your values and work ethic

“Be friendly and be open to ideas, because the majority of the time, you don’t know what’s out there and what it costs. Be open to paying more for things you want and cut things that don’t make sense.”

Greg Palomino, CMP, CSEP
CEO
CRE8AD8 Event & Travel Management
San Antonio, TX



and echo your work style, Lamagna notes. Once that has been established, consistently professional treatment should go both ways.

“By channeling all appropriate spend to vetted vendors you can leverage spend, receive preferred treatment and deliver more to your clients while simultaneously bringing them business,” she says. “In return for their service, their invoices should be paid within 14 days of receipt.”

Lamagna recalls an incident that taught her an early lesson in how exceptional treatment can lead to productive long-term relationships. In her first communication with The Westin St. Francis in San Francisco, she was faced with the daunting task of explaining that a staff member had bought out their hotel by mistake due to a catastrophic math error. In fact the same mistake had been made with a total of four hotels, and 18,000 room nights had been booked instead of 1,800.

“I had to reverse-engineer contracts with multiple hotels,” she says, but three of the four hotels held the company to the contract as signed.”

The St. Francis representative told her that he felt terrible for the situation she was put in and then brainstormed on ways to create a win-win.

“That by far is the best customer service I have ever received, and that happened 17 years ago,” she says. “To this day I tell that story and work with him whenever I can.”

Even if relationships are not warm and fuzzy, it’s important to keep them on the positive side, according to Greg Palomino, CMP, CSEP, CEO of CRE8AD8 Event & Travel Management in San Antonio, Texas.

“Building and retaining relationships with vendors is like keeping in touch with family or your boss,” he says. “You may not always need or want to talk to them, but when you need them, they’ll be there. And the more you keep in touch, the less awkward it will feel asking for help or discounts.”

Palomino says while vendors realize they’re on the sales side of events, they appreciate being treated as more than just suppliers.

“They know you need them, and they want to sell you something, but treating them as such will never get you in good graces for the cool, new, trendy and available concessions if you can’t be friendly and approachable,” he says. “Spending time with your vendors, getting to know them and treating them like part of the team is important,” he says. He notes that keeping vendors in your social media loop is a good way to keep in touch without spending the time to talk with them frequently.

“You’d be surprised how many of our vendors we may only talk with once every quarter, but they know about my life, kids and hobbies,” Palomino says.

Of course not every partnership experience can be positive, but even less successful experiences may inform future operations, especially when there are multiple options from which to choose.

Communication Is Key

“The benefit of us as an event management company is that we’ve produced so many events that we’ve weeded out the vendors that are just not a good fit for us or our clients,” Palomino says. He finds prompt communication a

must. If it takes more than a day to connect with a vendor, other than during a holiday period, he feels that the vendor is not a good choice for his firm.

“If they’re too busy for us, then they’re never going to get us answers for our client in a timely manner either,” he says.

Keeping an open mind is also well-advised, Palomino says. “Be friendly and be open to ideas, because the majority of the time, you don’t know what’s out there and what it costs,” he says. “Be open to paying more for things you want and cut things that don’t make sense.”

Barbara Myers, CAE, is CEO at Arlington, Virginia-based IMN Solutions, and works with clients in the insurance and financial industries. She says it pays to discuss your vision of the relationship.

“Outsourced relationships that are the most successful are ones where the provider is an integral part of your in-house team,” she says. “Be candid and establish open lines of communication,

“One benefit of outsourcing is that vendors have experience with many other organizations doing similar work and can offer recommendations for improvements or changes.”



Barbara Myers, CAE
CEO
IMN Solutions
Arlington, VA

be clear about your expectations and share details of the project’s progress, challenges, internal conflicts or changes that need to be made.”

Myers says accepting feedback is also a key.

“One benefit of outsourcing is that vendors have experience with many other organizations doing similar work and can offer recommendations for improvements or changes,” she says. To this end, managers should communicate the firm’s vision of the outsourced relationship to all staff, clearly identify

who is responsible for each part of the project and clarify relevant time lines.

A major area where relationships become especially important is in contract negotiations, according to Marla Harr, business professional development consultant with Business Etiquette International and who also teaches meeting management at Arizona State University.

"It goes back to the old saying that people do business with people they know, like and trust, and it takes time to develop a relationship that reflects that saying," she says. "Once you do, it makes the contract process so much easier."

With a hotel contract, for example, a positive relationship may make it more likely to gain concessions such as discounts on food and beverages, audiovisual equipment and staff room rates, even for a conference that is not a real revenue generator for the hotel.

"In real estate, it's location, location, location," Harr says. "I believe in the event world it really is relationship, relationship, relationship."

She says that even with a smaller conference there can be a host of sup-

"Planners too often mistakenly commoditize the relationship with the suppliers to try to save a few dollars. This can backfire and result in losing supplier loyalty during tough times."



Anil Punyapu

Vice President Of Sales
Cvent
Tysons Corner, VA

pliers such as the hotel, AV company, ground transportation, florist, provider of give-a-way items and speakers. "You need a good relationship with all of them to ensure a smooth event," she says. "The trick is to make them feel a part of the team and the event."

She recalls a proposed hotel contract where the in-house AV company

Four Tips for Positive Relationships

Marla Harr, a business professional development consultant who also teaches meeting management at Arizona State University, offers these tips for maintaining positive relationships with suppliers.

1. The first time working with them or reaching out for information, pick up the phone and introduce yourself and the reason for the contact. Old school, but it still works.
2. Always ask what is their preferred forms of communication (email, text, phone). Not everyone loves to text, so communicate in the way that works for them, not you.
3. Keep your commitments, including providing information, arriving on time for a meeting or call, and most important, any deadline agreed to. This is a trust builder.
4. Use proper email and phone etiquette. —MR

wanted to charge about \$30,000 for three days of internet service.

"Needless to say it was way over my budget and really ridiculous pricing," she says. "It was a deal breaker, but my hotel sales person got it down to where we could afford the internet and use that hotel. Relationships were the key."

Harr adds that holding an event in another country brings a whole new ball game in building relationships.

"It takes time, research and understanding as to how that country does business based on their customs and cultural differences to the way we do business," he says. "If a planner hasn't done due diligence before planning an event in a foreign country, they are in for many surprises that could cost money, time and the success of the event."

Trusted Advisor

Anil Punyapu, vice president of sales at Cvent, an enterprise event management company based in Tysons Corner, Virginia, echoes the importance of the trust factor.

A good relationship among meeting planners and suppliers and other partners is similar to a "trusted advisor" relationship that requires effort from both sides, he says. "Suppliers should focus on gaining industry insights so that they

may apply these insights to aid their client, while planners — through having access to a lot of data and information on the web — should expect and trust the direct market insights of the supplier."

He notes that in developing a good relationship with a supplier, meeting planners should focus on understanding the motivations and long-term goals of the supplier. At the same time, meeting planners should understand the supplier's profit margins and apply reasonable numbers to them.

A mistake, he adds, is to focus too much on minor cost savings.

"Planners too often mistakenly commoditize the relationship with the suppliers to try to save a few dollars," Punyapu says. "This can backfire and result in losing supplier loyalty during tough times."

Negotiate in Good Faith and Keep Communication Open

Jeff Kear, founder of event management software provider Planning Pod, in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, emphasizes the importance of professionalism with the financial side of event management.

"Negotiate with suppliers in good faith and pay on time," he says. "Nothing will get you blacklisted faster by a supplier than if you pay them late or repeatedly beat them up on pricing to the point that they barely make a profit." He says that every supplier involved in

an event deserves a fair profit, and if assuring that poses problems, planners should look to additional sources of funding for the event in question. The alternative is to end up working with low-cost providers who may cut corners and provide inferior service, irreparably harming events in the process.

Kear also suggests promoting suppliers and partners whenever possible and sending referrals their way.

"The best way to have your partners go above and beyond for you with your events is to spread your love for them ahead of time," he says. "This includes shouting out about them consistently on social media and recommending them to your industry peers when they have a need for the partner's services." In making referrals, he adds, the best way to make sure suppliers realize where the referral came from is to provide an introduction via email.

Taking the broad view is also advisable, according to Andrew Schrage, co-owner of Denver-based Money Crashers Personal Finance, who says the reasons for building relationships with suppliers go beyond any single meeting.

"If one were just planning a one-off event, it might not be necessary," he says. "But these relationships are essential moving forward so you can get possible discounts for repeat business, better and faster customer service, and last-minute orders fulfilled when necessary."

To foster such relationships, he suggests staying in touch on a continual basis.

"Give a shout out or mention of the vendors and suppliers at your event. They'll appreciate the free advertising, and it will also further foster the relationship."



Andrew Schrage
Co-owner
Money Crashers Personal Finance
Denver, CO

"Even if you don't need an order or other service, it never hurts to check in once in a while," he says. "Connect with your vendors on your social media accounts. It's another great way to keep in touch and stay abreast of current events and trends."

Being considerate with deadlines also will be appreciated.

"Give them as much lead time as possible when planning your events," Schrage says. "Last-minute stuff will probably pop up from time to time, but try to keep that as minimal as possible."

Another step is simply offering praise. "Give a shout out or mention of the vendors and suppliers at your event," he says. "They'll appreciate the free advertising, and it also will further foster the relationship."

In any transaction, all parties concerned should remember that relationships go both ways reminds Kim Harvey, sales manager at Doral Arrowwood in White Plains, New York. In her work with planners, she has learned to meet high expectations.

"Financial and insurance meeting planning professionals are typically very seasoned and knowledgeable of their hospitality industry partners, capabilities and services," Harvey says. "I feel it is necessary to approach meeting planners in this market on a consultative basis. It's key to provide them with open, honest and strong communications."

She says that to be successful and foster strong relationships with clients in this market, she and her team must understand who they are and what their needs are by asking key questions: what division, what level of group, why they have a need for the off-site meeting, what is important to the host, what are the organization's goals?

"The more we understand a client's needs the better we understand if we are truly the best location for the meeting or if we should recommend another

"Financial and insurance meeting planning

professionals are typically very seasoned and knowledgeable of their hospitality industry partners, capabilities and services."



Kim Harvey
Sales Manager
Doral Arrowwood
White Plains, NY

property in our portfolio or elsewhere," she says. This necessitates clearly understanding the meeting planner's needs, the attendees' needs and the overall corporate goal.

"Clients are looking for a quality experience at the best possible value," Harvey says. "This industry, like many others, is doing more with less, and we need to support our clients in this market more than ever."

The Bottom Line

In any setting, planners will do well to make a conscious and consistent effort to foster great relationships. Lamagna advises keeping in mind that dealing with a vendor makes for a reciprocating relationship. "Vendors can be a pipeline for new clients, advise you when you need creative solutions related to their areas of expertise, and are often relied upon when a client needs an impossible ask in an improbable time frame," she says. "Vendors are there to fill in your gaps be it knowledge or manpower. You need them to want to help you shine."

For that to happen of course, vendors must feel that you are treating them well. "Nothing inspires loyalty as much as respect and kindness," Lamagna says. So behavior that reflects those values is a must.

"Bottom line: your vendors are walking billboards for your organization," she says. "It's your choice as to what they're saying about you."

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Cerise at Virgin Hotel Chicago.



Private dining room at New York's Park South Hotel. The Roof at Park South reopens in April.

Elevate Your Events!

Focus on Hotel Rooftops and Other Lofty Venues to Meet High Expectations

By Sara Churchville



Upstairs at The Kimberly in Midtown Manhattan.



The Knickerbocker Hotel's St. Cloud rooftop bar overlooks Times Square.

Hotel ballrooms and convention center halls certainly have their place and their purpose, but facilitating the capture of Instagram-ready moments is not necessarily one of them. A few choice venues, on the other hand, offer both space enough for a networking session and reason enough on their own to focus the smartphone outward.

"We like to think of ourselves as non-traditional advisors and consultants, so a traditional meeting space does not match the culture we foster with our

clients, nor does it match our office culture," says Dominic Piccirillo, principal with New York insurance broker The Cody Group. Given that, when planning a thank-you event for a group of about 50 clients, mostly entrepreneurs and salespeople, Piccirillo wanted to try something that would really wow them.

Since many of his clients work in Midtown Manhattan, he reached out to several local hotels with rooftops and narrowed his choices down to three, ultimately deciding on the 3,000-sf Upstairs at The Kimberly. There's certainly

no dearth of inviting rooftop venues to choose from in New York City, and Piccirillo credits one "difference maker" for his final decision: the venue's director of sales and events. "She was incredibly helpful and understood exactly what we were trying to achieve with our event. She worked within our budget to deliver exactly what we wanted. We felt totally comfortable placing our event in her hands and will be doing so again in the near future," he says.

The 30th-floor space's retractable glass ceilings and walls mean the wrap-

around views of Midtown Manhattan are available in all weather, and the massive rooftop space, overhung with bulbs, offers a mix of décors, with mahogany-colored, plush club chairs and dark rattan side tables as well as lighter, more casual lounge chairs; as such, attendees could potentially utilize at least three different themed sections on different parts of the roof. And the food and drink isn't an afterthought;



"By setting up the event in a relaxed, yet upscale and sophisticated setting, we were able to facilitate meaningful introductions."

Dominic Piccirillo, Principal
The Cody Group, New York, NY

lemon and lime topped with champagne — as well as chef-prepared small plates such as grilled lamb lollipops, truffled mac and cheese and spiced duck cigars with a side of pomegranate sauce.

"By setting up the event in a relaxed, yet upscale and sophisticated setting, we were able to facilitate meaningful introductions that allowed people the potential of creating future business dealings. In doing so, we also were

Down-to-Earth Options

Ping-Pong Emporium? Innovation. Disruption. Ping-Pong. Planners can count on at minimum the latter for meetings at the 5,500-sf Killerspin House in downtown Chicago. The table tennis emporium can accommodate up to 250 attendees, offering everything for a Silicon Valley-style, dream-big meeting including dry-erase boards, Wi-Fi, flat-screen TVs, a speaker system, a stage and a full kitchen with all the necessary eating and drinking implements. Food and drink catering also is available separately.

On the Gulf. Attendees staying at The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village can get a feel for Florida's West Coast at The Nauti Mermaid Dockside Bar & Grill, where guests can arrive by boat if they choose to watch the sunset on the Gulf of Mexico while sipping on a free Sundowner Shot (orange vodka with sour mix). The menu is an unexpected mix of foods from elsewhere given a Gulf top-up: smoked jalapeno and salmon tacos; the Montreal "delicacy" poutine made with tempura grouper; Cuban mojo-roasted pulled pork sliders; and flatbread with Gulf shrimp and basil pesto are a few examples. For a more unforgettable teambuilding or incentive event, attendees can enjoy a "hook and cook" in the Gulf: whatever they catch, the



The Nauti Mermaid Dockside Bar & Grill at Westin Cape Coral Resort.

restaurant will clean and prepare to order, with two sides and a salad thrown into the bargain.

Lakeside setting. Offering a secluded lakeside setting with miles of trails and numerous possible meeting spaces is Wisconsin's Green Lake Conference Center. The two standout meeting spaces are the 400-seat Vesper Circle, an outdoor venue with proscenium seating facing the tree-lined Lac Verde



Renaissance Chicago Downtown Hotel's rooftop bar "Raised."

able to add value to our existing relationships," says Piccirillo, who further describes the event as a "huge success." "The atmosphere was fun and inviting for our guests, and they were genuinely excited to be there. Everyone loved the venue and couldn't stop talking about the views and the great service. Our clients were very impressed by the sophisticated crowd and the versatility of the space."

New in New York

The Roof at Park South, which re-opens in April after a makeover, accommodates 120 attendees for private events and offers photo-worthy views of the Chrysler Building. The drink menu is front and center at this venue, with offerings that include Duke's Martini: frozen Plymouth gin (proprietary to Plymouth, England, and the base for the "pink gin" cocktail) served with

caviar; Swamp Water: cachaca (the base for the Brazilian cocktail, caipirinha), chartreuse, pineapple and lime; growlers, aka, 64 ounces of beer; and "bar residencies and pop-ups" that will feature a cast of temporary mixologists to be determined by the Roof's beverage director. The Park South Hotel also features a private dining room that accommodates up to 40 attendees.

Not to be outdone by the preponderance of Manhattan rooftops, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, has its own recently opened rooftop scene in the making in the form of the 64-room McCarren Hotel & Pool. Views from the rooftop encompass McCarren Park as well as the Manhattan panorama, and group packages are available.

Hot Dogs on High

"It's not a bar; it's an event space," Kyle Gilroy, executive director, Real Estate Finance for CIBC World Markets, says of the 1,400-sf penthouse at The Kitano New York. He chose the spot for his annual summer get-together for about 45 people last June because it offered exactly what he envisioned for the group: something upscale

from which the center takes its name. Tea House, a meeting house with a stone fireplace, seats 70.

No stone unturned. European castles make for an unforgettable attendee experience, but planners who want to stay closer to home need head no farther afield than Lutherville in Maryland's Baltimore County. Finished in 1916, the Tudor-style Castle at Maryvale was inspired by England's Warwick Castle. Grounded among 88 acres of woods, the castle is made from stone from a nearby quarry and features design details that are faithful to its architectural period, including oak paneling, a winding staircase, a porte-cochere and a great hall. Suitable for its period, it looks primed for battle and can peacefully accommodate 200, or 114 seated. The castle also boasts English-style gardens and a solarium with a fireplace. Perhaps inevitably, the structure is part of the campus of a girls' prep school. Quite nearby is another venue patterned on an old European castle, Cloisters Castle. The owners bequeathed it to the city of Baltimore in the 1970s, and since then, when not hosting events or providing the backdrop for nuptials (Will Smith and Jada Pinkett were married here), it has made a face for itself on shows like "The Wire" and "Homicide."

South Shore secret. Strictly speaking, The River Club in



The River Club on the South Shore.

Scituate, on the South Shore between Plymouth and Boston, Massachusetts, is a wedding venue. As such, it has no unphotogenic angles, and as the owner arranges only one event per day, planners can work with her to craft an event for up to 300 attendees, or 220 seated. A stone fireplace, exposed beams, high ceilings are the order of the day, and the layout is flexible. A smaller area next to the main room can accommodate up to 60 meeting-goers.

and private but casual, a change from the typical business dinner.

The 149-room boutique hotel on Park Avenue features a giant Botero sculpture in the lobby, among other artworks, and offers amenities including bathroom towel warmers and complimentary Japanese green tea. It also offers, seemingly counterintuitively for a space that trades in tranquility, a rooftop barbecue that Gilroy was quick to seize upon. "For a fairly similar price point, we could have had a little section of a bar with a little outdoor section with a velvet rope," he says. Instead, "our space was private, not a corner of a room; it was all us, and that changed the vibe. We weren't sharing servers or bartenders. Everyone who was there was there to cater to our event, and it felt that way. It was better than having a wristband or a little area. We did that last year, and it felt cheaper."

Gilroy chose how the tables would be laid out, had signs placed in the lobby and decided which wines and



"Because Chicago has such a short summer, we want to do something really spectacular that will leave a lasting impression in the minds of the participants."

Hanson Ansary, President and CEO
AlliedPRA Chicago

beers to provide; the hotel did the rest. On one of the penthouse's two terraces was the chef laboring over a grill; on the other, a buffet table for the grilled hot dogs, hamburgers, veggie burgers, chicken sausages, French fries, coleslaw, salad, cookies and brownies, and a few beers and wines. One of the terraces had a view of the sunset, and from the rooftop guests could see the Empire State Building, Chrysler Building and MetLife Building.

"It was our answer to a barbecue in the suburbs, just on a roof on Park Avenue," Gilroy says. "Everyone had a couple of drinks and relaxed, and they were not on top of each other; there was plenty of room to walk either in-

side or onto the other private balcony to talk." When it started to drizzle later in the evening, the hotel staff moved the bar to the inside area. And Gilroy's attendees certainly weren't put off by a little rain: the group had such a good time that he ultimately extended the evening an extra half hour beyond the time he'd contracted for.

"A casual event in a really nice space is a nice mix; it really allowed people to relax and have a good time," he says, noting that he would definitely have another event there. The inside area has floor-to-ceiling windows that allow attendees to experience the majesty of the New York skyline even during the colder months.

Winter on the Roof

Both Bar 54 at Hyatt Times Square and 230 Fifth Rooftop Lounge have futuristic, winter-themed, enclosed rooftop "igloos" — The Bubbles, as they're called at Bar 54 — that let attendees enjoy the view of the outdoors with-



Bar 54 terrace at Hyatt Times Square.

Credit: Hyatt Times Square

out being full frontal in it. 230 Fifth has both an indoor penthouse and an outdoor roofdeck; Bar 54 is on the 54th floor with views of the Hudson River, Central Park and Times Square, and it's furnished with, appropriately enough, white Skruvsta chairs and white lamb-skin blankets.

Capital in Lights

The 49-room Rosewood Washington, DC (formerly the Capella) in Georgetown recently changed hands but still features a 2,775-sf space that can hold about 100 attendees and includes the Rooftop Bar and Lounge as well as an infinity pool with a built-in fireplace. Both are now open only to hotel guests and offer what by many accounts are "stunning" views of the Potomac River, Kennedy Center and Washington Monument. Pascal Forotti, the hotel's managing director, reportedly told the *Washington Business Journal* last spring that the hotel would consider ways to use the rooftop for more private events. In any case, the change-up at the luxury hotel might offer planners the opportunity for some creative negotiating.

Chi-Town in the Sky

Hanson Ansary, president and CEO of AlliedPRA Chicago, is bullish on the city's burgeoning hotel scene: he says he wouldn't hesitate to plan an event at any one of half a dozen hotel rooftops. In Chicago, rooftop season is June to the end of September. "Because Chicago has such a short summer, we want to do something really spectacular that will leave a lasting impression in the

minds of the participants," he says. One event he planned for June 2015 was an incentive for a group of 45 couples from a New York-headquartered national insurance company. The group stayed at the United States' first Virgin Hotel, a former office building housed in what is now an historic landmark



The Rooftop Bar and Lounge at Rosewood Washington, DC.

Credit: Rosewood Washington, DC

building, where they also attended an event at Cerise, the hotel's 26th-floor rooftop space. "There's a view of the Chicago River, Trump Tower and also a view of the El, so it's nice for people who are all out-of-towners to get a feel for the city," he says.

Later, in July 2015, he planned a larger cocktail reception — a 120-person stakeholders meeting — for a different New York-based insurer at the Loews Hotel's Streeterville Social — on the 35th floor with a view of the city skyline and of Lake Michigan. "Having been in meetings all day, they want-

ed an airy space before they headed to dinner," he says. A three-piece orchestra Ansary hired was playing in the background as the sun began its descent. "In general, the reaction was very positive and encouraging," he says. But of course, he adds, "wow, this is so nice" tends to be the standard reaction for a get-together on any rooftop.

At both venues, the hotel provided catering with a premium bar as well as an alternate indoor possibility in case of inclement weather, while Ansary's team provided the décor, which was minimal: highboy tables with votives. "The venue itself was the centerpiece," he says. For planners considering a rooftop venture, Ansary suggests: "Make sure that the hotel provides you with a complete list of do's and don'ts on a rooftop; trash disposal etc.," not-

ing there are liabilities that can be different from the norm.

At the 7,000-sf Roof on The Wit, on the 27th floor of the hotel, attendees can see the Chicago skyline both with the naked eye and with the rooftop telescope as they munch on, for example, a chilled seafood tower of lobster, oysters, shrimp and king crab; or a specialty flatbread with caramelized cauliflower, Merguez sausage, curried fennel, goat cheese and pickled mustard seed, for starters — definitely a food-spotting, Instagram moment to savor!

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CSR Programs Make a Difference

Corporate Teambuilding Brings Cheer and Gives Back to the Community

By Maura Keller

Volunteerism. It's on our to-do list and often one of our New Year's resolutions. It's something that we know we need to do, but sometimes we just can't find the time.

Fortunately, many insurance and financial firms have recognized that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming an essential part of doing business nowadays. Companies that practice CSR

often devote a block of time for volunteerism activities in the community that is hosting their events. In fact, attendees often request opportunities for these community service projects, especially those that employ a teambuilding approach.

Fortunately, a variety of turnkey CSR programs abound such as Cheeriodicals, which provides "get well soon" gifts for hospital patients.



Cheeriodicals brings cheer to hospitalized children and good feelings to corporate teambuilders, too.



Credits: Cheeriodicals



Teambuilding participants often get to hand deliver all the boxes directly to the patients in the children's hospitals and veterans hospitals.



Gift boxes deliver joy and cheer! Cheeriodicals designs boxes, one for each inpatient, for every age group and fills them with toys and crafts.

Making a Difference

Cheeriodicals started in 2011 as an online hospital gift company. Consumers visit the Cheeriodicals website to purchase a box filled with magazines and snacks (in lieu of sending flowers or balloons) for a friend or loved one in the hospital.

In early 2012, Cheeriodicals added a second division to the company — a community outreach event. Cheeriodicals and Northwestern Mutual of Alabama developed a program that provided a Cheeriodical (a big green box filled with small toys, magazines and crafts) to all 238 patients at Children's of Alabama Hospital as a way to remind the patients and their families that the Birmingham community cared about them.

Cheeriodicals assembled the gift boxes, and the Northwestern Mutual management and sales team visited the patients and delivered the gifts in person.

"Soon after the first event, the Cheeriodicals program evolved and became a corporate teambuilding event where Cheeriodicals provides all of the supplies and a coach, and the corporate team assembles hundreds of Cheeriodicals gift boxes," says Rachelle Stone, DMCP, CLC, market education and business development for Cheeriodicals. "After the teambuilding event, the assembly of the gift boxes, Cheeriodicals escorts a smaller group of the corporate team to the local children's hospital or

Ronald McDonald House to personally distribute the gifts — often room by room throughout the hospital."

Cheeriodicals finished up 2016 very strong, and have now delivered more than 30,000 big green boxes of cheer to hospitalized children throughout the U.S. and Canada. Future plans include their first event in Hawaii in 2017, and they look forward to many more opportunities to spread Cheer at hospitals nationwide, according to Stone.

Life-Changing Experiences

Heather Foppe, associate financial representative from Northwestern Mutual in St. Louis, Missouri, helped plan her teambuilding initiative by engaging Cheeriodicals on two separate occasions. In January 2013, the Northwestern Mutual team participated in an

the boxes were delivered and a few of us were able to hand out the boxes to the children," Foppe says. "Therefore only a few were able to experience the true joy of watching the kids open the boxes. For our second event, we did a teambuilding event where we had over 125 people participating in putting the boxes together and then just a few again delivering them to the hospital. As exciting as it is to be a part of the hospital delivery, it was a very special day watching that many people put so many toys in a box in such uniformity and having a blast doing it and personalizing their cards on the box."

Foppe says the teambuilding event was most enjoyable. "It was great watching every table put their boxes together in different syncs — true teambuilding to be the most efficient — but looking



Mary Marks Photography

"Cheeriodicals escorts a smaller group of the corporate team to the local children's hospital...to personally distribute the gifts...room by room throughout the hospital!"

Rachelle Stone, DMCP, CLC, Market Education and Business Development, Cheeriodicals, Chelsea, AL

event at St. Louis Children's Hospital and in January 2014, the team visited SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital. Both events attracted more than 125 people at each teambuilding event.

"During our first Cheeriodicals event

ing at the glow in a child's face when you hand him a big green box, there is nothing that can compare," Foppe says. "Each time was such a wonderful and life-changing experience for our team.

Tressa Ogles, senior vice president,

West Tennessee Marketing at Regions Financial Corporation in Memphis also helped plan her company's event with the Cheeriodicals program. "Our team loved working with Cheeriodicals because they made it easy for them to give back locally and benefit hospitalized children right in Memphis," Ogles says.

Twenty members of the Regions West Tennessee management team participated in a Cheeriodicals teambuilding workshop two years in a row during the Christmas holidays. The event was held at the bank's offices in Memphis.

The experience made a lasting impact on the entire team. "We put together 200 Cheeriodical boxes for the patients at LeBonheur Children's Hospital," Ogles says. "We split up into teams and had a great time creating each box in an assembly line of sorts. Each person had a specific job with specific items that went into each box. While we packed the boxes, we could not help but think of the children that would receive them. Knowing the boxes we were preparing might bring a smile to their small faces, if even for a few minutes, makes this event worth it."

Regions Financial Corporation wants to make life better each and every day for their customers and their employees. "We also want to make life better for those in our community," Ogles says. "Our partnership with Cheeriodicals helps us to do just that with the children and families at LeBonheur Children's

hospital. It's difficult to imagine what a family goes through when they find out their child is ill or when their child experiences a life-threatening accident. When you deliver the boxes to the children, you can watch the parent's reaction when their small child opens the

"We could not help but think of the children. ...Knowing the boxes we were preparing might bring a smile to their small faces...makes this event worth it."

Tressa Ogles, Senior Vice President, West Tennessee Marketing Regions Financial Corporation, Memphis, TN

green Cheeriodical gift and finds a box full of fun new toys and activities. The parent's smile is as big as their child's. You know it brings them joy to see their son or daughter happy in that moment. The smile in the logo on the Cheeriodicals box is a great representation of what the gift inside will bring its recipient."

Impactful Teambuilding Approach

Cheeriodicals is providing teambuilding events that not only bond teams, but also allow corporate teams to give back to their communities in a very tangible and personal way. In addition, for the children and families who receive gift boxes through these events, Cheeriodicals and their corporate clients are giving thousands of hospitalized children and their families a respite from the challenges they are facing during their hospital stay.

As Stone explains, Cheeriodicals works with teams from 25–2,000 or more people. Once a team contacts Cheeriodicals about an event, Cheeriodicals works with the client to determine which hospital in the city of the meeting location best suits the size of the program. Chee-

riodicals then delivers all the materials, tools and instruction to the client's meeting location. A Cheeriodicals team of coaches provides a short inspirational presentation, which emphasizes how much the gifts will mean to the patients. Often, a representative from the children's hospital also will speak to the client team to provide their perspective on how this type of volunteer effort impacts the entire community. The Cheeriodicals team of coaches then oversee the assembly of the gift boxes by the client team, which takes less than two hours.

After all the gift boxes are assembled, they are transported to the local children's hospital (or Ronald McDonald House or Veterans Hospital). The Cheeriodicals team and a small group of the client's employees (approximately 10 client employees) travel to the children's hospital to deliver the gift boxes.

"It was great watching every table put their boxes together in different syncs...but looking at the glow in a child's face when you hand him a big green box, there is nothing that can compare."

Heather Foppe, Associate Financial Representative
Northwestern Mutual, St. Louis, MO

Cheeriodicals coordinates all the details with the children's hospital in advance so that they are totally prepared when the team arrives. The time spent delivering gift boxes to the patients depends on how much time the client team has available.

"Most teams spend one to two hours delivering gift boxes," Stone says. "The hospital's Child Life team will deliver all remaining gift boxes — ensuring every child in the hospital receives a gift box."

In order to allow all of the client's employees to experience the emotional distribution of the gifts at the hospital (not just the 10 employees who were able to be at the hospital), Cheeriodicals provides a video creation service. Cheeriodicals will video portions of the teambuilding event as well as portions of the gift distribution at the hospital to create a video that can be shown to the entire client team on the last day of their meeting.

"One of the reasons corporate event planners like partnering with Cheeriodicals is because Cheeriodicals coordinates all the details related to the teambuilding event, including supplies, instructions, coaches, as well the delivery of the gift boxes at the children's hospital," Stone says. "We've had several meeting planners tell us how refreshing it is to work with a teambuilding company that handles so many of the details so that they can focus on other areas of the meeting."

Cheers for Military Veterans

Stone relates a feel-good story about cheering up military vets. The regional vice president of Wells Fargo Private Bank wanted to host a corporate teambuilding activity for his 75-person team in Tennessee and Alabama that would directly impact military veterans. "He liked our exact format for chil-

dren's hospitals, but felt the veterans are often forgotten and wanted to have his group's effort have measurable impact at the Birmingham (VA Medical Center)," Stone says. "He also wanted his team to be able to deliver the Cheeriodicals personally and witness the impact of the gifts up close and personal. "We planned a teambuilding activity where his team assembled 125 Cheeriodicals with contents that perfectly matched the needs of the patients at the Birmingham veterans hospital," says Stone.

The Cheeriodicals staff interviewed the social worker staff to get their input on the items the veterans would appre-

"Working with Cheeriodicals allowed our network office...to do more than just have fun. It allowed us to change lives for so many children and families."

Jim Schmitz, Director of Development and Training
Northwestern Mutual, Detroit, MI

ciate and utilize. We designed veterans Cheeriodicals that included, among other things, a blanket embroidered with 'Thank you for your service to our country.' We scheduled a two-hour delivery event where 10 members of the Wells Fargo team could come into the hospital and deliver all 125 Cheeriodicals, room by room, to every veteran admitted to the hospital that day."

Teambuilding Works

The team at Northwestern Mutual in Troy, Michigan, also participated in the Cheeriodicals program in the summer of 2014.

"Working with Cheeriodicals allowed our network office to be able to utilize teambuilding to do more than just have fun," says Jim Schmitz, director of development and training at Northwestern Mutual in Detroit, Michigan, who helped plan their re-

cent Cheeriodicals event and worked as the meeting planner/liaison for the event. "It allowed us to change lives for so many children and families in Detroit and Ann Arbor."

Approximately 50 people took part in the box-building teambuilding event at their offices. "My team not only had a bunch of fun building the boxes, we got to know each other better through the event," Schmitz says. "Spending quality time around small tables with your coworkers gives you time to have non-work related conversation and get to know each other better. We also had time to discuss the impact our donations would have on the children we would be delivering the Cheeriodicals to."

Schmitz also thoroughly enjoyed the visit to C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

"I was able to join the smaller team and visit the hospital to deliver the box-

es to each child," Schmitz says. "Seeing the joy and surprise on the children's faces — and parents too — was more fulfilling than I can describe. It was a day that I will not forget for a very long time."

A Spirit-Lifting Gift

The Cheeriodicals organization has received a great deal of feedback from children who receive the Cheeriodicals gift boxes. "Most often we hear that the Big Green Box of Cheer creates a wonderful distraction for the child — giving them a reason to smile and have fun," Stone says. "The parents often tell us that for them, it allows them time to relax while their child is entertained for several hours with the toys in the gift box. Even the nursing staff and Child Life team have told us that a delivery of this magnitude — such that every child receives a surprise gift box — lifts the spirits of the entire hospital." **I&FMM**

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Colorado

From Denver and Beyond, the Centennial State Has Something for Everyone! By Mark Rowh



The Broadmoor recently debuted The Estate House, a 12,000-sf historic mansion. The opulent dining room seats up to 16.

Credits: The Broadmoor

When it comes to a central location with a wealth of attractions, it's hard to beat Colorado. Combining stunning mountain beauty, frontier history and the progressiveness of the modern West, not to mention easy access from virtually anywhere, the state can be an outstanding meeting destination.

"Colorado is a great location for professional meetings," says Nicolette Eaves, owner and chief event designer for Sparrow Event Planning in Denver. "It is centrally located, and traveling to the state is easy." She cites top-notch hotels and meeting venues as pluses, along with an impressive array of entertainment opportunities. "And you can't argue with over 300 days of sunshine," she adds.

Earlier this year, Eaves planned and executed a meeting that took place at

The Westin Riverfront Resort & Spa at Beaver Creek Mountain. She feels the event was a big success.

"Beaver Creek is an absolutely gorgeous location with stunning mountain views, world-class dining and abundant recreation options at your fingertips," she says. "The hotel staff was welcoming and professional, and the facility is nicely appointed without being stuffy or elitist."

Eaves likes the flexibility offered by the state's destinations.

"In the past 10 years Colorado has really positioned itself well to receive meetings of all sizes and budgets," she says. "So many new hotels and venues have been built or renovated with the latest technology and comforts in mind. Colorado really does have something for everyone!"

Paula J. Karchner, CMP, vice president of meetings for the Washington, DC-based Council of Insurance Agents & Brokers, couldn't agree more. The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs is a favorite as they hold two meetings a year there.

With a long-standing reputation as

says that when she places a meeting there, she rests assured that it will be a success not just for participants, but for spouses and guests as well.

She recalls that at the closing dinner for her last meeting, the food and beverage team took the theme of the party and designed a menu completely around it.

"They did not serve the attendees a regular meal," she says. "They gave them an experience and it made the evening even more of a success."

For some guests, a highlight was checking out the resort's new wilderness experiences, Cloud Camp and the Ranch at Emerald Valley. Cloud Camp, sitting at an elevation of 9,200 feet, accommodates 56 guests with 11 one- and two-bedroom guest cabins and a six-room lodge. An unusual two-story fire tower suite features a living room and bedroom, each with 360-degree views. Located in Pike National Forest at an 8,200-foot altitude,

floor reading rooms provide additional flex space, and an outdoor covered veranda overlooks two sprawling croquet lawns and manicured gardens, offering a natural extension to the inside areas.

In addition to the

"In the past 10 years Colorado has really positioned itself well to receive meetings of all sizes and budgets. Colorado really does have something for everyone."



Nicolette Eaves
Owner
Sparrow Event Planning
Denver, CO

meeting and event rooms, the property features five spacious and well-appointed bedrooms, each with a king or two queen beds and private baths.

A stay at The Estate House also affords access to the full range of the

a luxury hotel, The Broadmoor sits on 5,000 acres of parkland on the southern edge of the Rockies. The huge selection of meeting options includes 62 venues totaling 185,000 sf of meeting space. More than 600 guest rooms include traditional rooms, suites, two brownstones and 44 cottage bedrooms.

"Colorado Springs is a great destination for meetings," says Karchner. "It's normally just one flight for both the East Coast and the West Coast."

About 500 executives and spouses attend an annual May meeting, while the October event attracts 900 attendees and 500 spouses.

"The Broadmoor provides the best of everything," Karchner says. "Their quality of service is what every hotel strives to achieve, the food and beverage experience is fantastic and the conference service team is out of this world." She

the ranch offers a private escape in one of 10 cabins with gas fireplaces and modern amenities

In late 2016, The Broadmoor opened The Estate House, a 12,000-sf historic mansion, which was designed in the 1920s and evokes visions of Gatsby-esque grand affairs and parties with its luxurious and opulent setting. The home has been entirely refreshed while maintaining the historic sophistication of the home's original woodwork, art and other period features.

This private retreat boasts a variety of spaces, customizable to fit the needs of any group. A grand parlor is equally suited to a cocktail reception of up to 120, private dinners for up to 60, or meetings. The dining room seats up to 16 and is serviced by The Broadmoor's culinary team. For a quiet escape, or breakout meeting, the library and third-

resort's amenities where guests can spend downtime at one of three championship golf courses, the Forbes Five Star spa and fitness center, a nationally recognized year-round tennis program, 26 retail boutiques and more than 20 restaurants, cafés and lounges, including Colorado's only Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond restaurant, Penrose Room. Other activities on the resort's 5,000 acres include falconry, guided mountain biking, hiking, rock-climbing tours, fly-fishing, paintball and more. Offsite attractions for teambuilding include Pikes Peak Cog Railway, Seven Falls and The Broadmoor Soaring Adventure zip-line courses.

Denver

Baird, a firm specializing in wealth management, capital markets, private equity and asset management with



Sunrise, sunset? Both are great options at Red Rock Canyon in Colorado Springs.

Credit: Steve Crecelius/Visit Denver

headquarters in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has had great success with recent meetings in the Denver area.

"We love the options and quality of venues in Colorado," says Katherine LaMacchia, vice president and corporate events manager for Baird Corporate Events. "With over 70 branches in the United States alone, we have associates coming from every direction for our meetings and events," she says. "Denver is such an incredible hub, with a plethora of flights. It makes it easier for our attendees to spend less time away from their business and families, which is really important to us."

Most recently, the company held its Women Advisor Summit at the JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek. More than 100 of the company's female advisors, senior management, speakers and business partners attended the annual event.

Lee says the Baird Women Advisor Summit is special to the company, and planners wanted a venue that would treat advisors and upper management with great care. The facilities also met the meeting's twin purposes: professional development and networking.

"It was a perfect fit," she says. "We liked the ample and flexible meeting space, attentive staff that could recognize our program needs some-

times before I even needed to ask, and wonderful facilities like their spa and Second Home restaurant for continued networking."

Located in the Cherry Creek shopping and dining district, the hotel offers 196 guest rooms and suites, many with attractive mountain views.

Its 8,400 sf of meeting space includes the Fireside, an outdoor

"Denver is such an incredible hub, with a plethora of flights. It makes it easier for our attendees to spend less time away from their business and families, which is really important to us."



Katherine LaMacchia
Vice President
Baird Corporate Events
Milwaukee, WI

event space featuring two walls of retractable glass doors leading to a patio with fire pits.

A special attraction is the hotel's huge collection of Colorado art. Along with the hotel's own restaurant and spa options, guests may explore the surrounding neighborhood with its more than 400 art galleries, boutiques, restaurants and spas.

The hotel offers an interactive guest

engagement program that can be downloaded on mobile phones or tablets. Dubbed the PlaceApp, it can be customized for meetings and corporate guests, providing access to agendas and other event info.

For Baird, easy access was a major consideration in selection of the location as well as the event's ultimate success. "The ease of getting to and from, both from the number of flights offered in and out of Denver and the ground transportation options around the city, were huge deciding factors," Lee says.

The quality of the experience was also paramount. "The level of service and quality of facilities at the JW Marriott Cherry Creek were important to the success of our program," she notes.

Participants thoroughly enjoyed the venue, and a group of 10-15 women from different branches extended their stay to continue networking.

"We kept the spa busy around our program, and the many shopping and restaurant options literally steps from the JW were definitely a reason for some to spend some extra time," she says. Also, the central location proved advantageous to associates who wanted to take a trip to a neighboring mountain town or visit a client in the area after the program.

Lee reports that evaluations for the summit showed some of the highest scores to date.

"We recognize that the options within the Denver area, specifically the JW

Marriott Cherry Creek, are largely to thank for the success of our program goals," she says. "We're planning on being back for a different summit this fall at the JW to repeat the success."

Certainly the Mile High City has the options to meet almost any group's needs. According to Visit Denver, the city's convention and visitors bureau, Denver offers more than 9,400 hotel rooms within walking distance of the Colorado Convention Center and 44,000 metro wide with all brands and price points represented.

Over the past 10 years the city has generated record tourism numbers, including a 2016 increase of one million visitors over 2015. And those visitors translated into \$5 billion in spending in Denver. Richard Scharf, president and CEO of Visit Denver, says the record tourism numbers "validate Denver voter approval to increase tourism marketing dollars back in 2005. Since that increase," he adds, "Denver has seen dramatic tourism growth that translates into greater economic impact for the city."

No surprise, then, that Denver is No. 11 on the *Forbes* 2016 list of America's 20 Fastest Growing Cities. That kind of growth generates a lot of positives, including new and improved infrastructure and more options in terms of hotels, restaurants, amenities and activities for planners and their groups.

Already attractive for meeting attendees, conference space at the Grand Hyatt Denver was modernized including floor and wall coverings in patterns inspired by the city's urban grid, using tones of gray and sunset rusts. The use of natural materials and dark walnut millwork complement custom light fixtures to provide a soft and flattering glow.

Located in the heart of downtown Denver's business and financial district, the hotel offers more than 52,000 sf of meeting and event space, including five large ballrooms and 14 meeting rooms. Along with 516 guest rooms are rooftop jogging tracks and tennis courts, a 24-hour health club and access to a number of local attractions within easy walking distance.

The Hyatt Regency Denver at Colo-

rado Convention Center boasts more than 60,000 sf of meeting space including two large ballrooms complemented by adjoining prefunction areas. Like the Grand Hyatt Denver, the hotel is also updating its look. Enhancements include layers of color and texture to evoke the surrounding mountains, more contemporary furnishings, collaborative seating and work tables and added flexibility in configuring meeting areas.

Along with 1,100 recently redesigned accommodations, the hotel, which is adjacent to the convention center, features a 6,700-sf fitness center and a 27th floor lounge with stunning views of the Rocky Mountains.

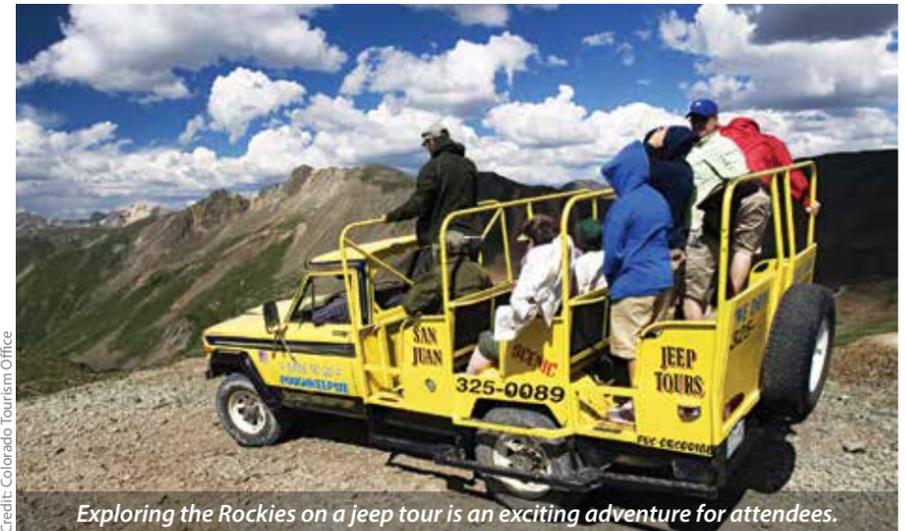
Additions to the Denver scene include the Crawford Hotel at Union Station, an Aloft, a Z-block and the innovative Art Hotel. Located in the city's

voters overwhelmingly approved a major expansion of the Colorado Convention Center.

The new expansion will include the development of new flexible meeting and ballroom space of up to 85,000 sf and the addition of more than 100,000 sf of new prefunction and service space that also will include a 50,000-sf outdoor terrace to be located on the roof of the existing convention center.

Technology improvements will be made that will position the Colorado Convention Center as a "best-in-class" facility, keeping pace with current technologies and demand, including increased capacity for Wi-Fi and streaming video.

New and improved networking spaces will be incorporated into the building, providing innovative spaces



Credit: Colorado Tourism Office

Exploring the Rockies on a jeep tour is an exciting adventure for attendees.

cultural district, this 165-room hotel is an art showplace, with contemporary art on display in two galleries, meeting rooms, hallways and other areas throughout the property.

The Westin Denver International Airport opened last year as part of the new hotel and transit center, which also features an outdoor plaza and a public transit center with rail service to the downtown area. Along with more than 519 soundproof guest rooms, The Westin offers 37,500 sf of function space.

Along with new and improved hotel properties, Denver will benefit from upgrades to convention facilities. On November 3, 2015, Denver

intended to capture the spirit of Denver and Colorado, and allow attendees to connect in new ways.

Beyond Denver

Another Colorado Springs option is the Cheyenne Mountain Resort, a top-rated resort with 40,000 sf of meeting and event space. Along with 316 guest rooms, the resort offers a lake and beach area, tennis, hiking and a renovated championship Pete Dye-designed golf course. A recent addition is the full-featured Alluvia spa. The 38 dedicated conference rooms at the Cheyenne Mountain Conference Center, which includes a tiered amphitheater,



Larimer Square, the street where Denver first began, is home to some of the best shopping, restaurants and entertainment in the downtown area.

Credit: Visit Denver

can accommodate groups of 10–600 attendees in a variety of meeting formats.

Also located in Colorado Springs, The Mining Exchange, a Wyndham Grand Resort & Spa offers seven rooms totaling 17,000 sf of event space. A 3,500-sf grand ballroom seats 220 people for banquets or up to 400 for receptions. Two smaller rooms also are available, one with hardwood floors, exposed brick walls and an attached terrace for a combination indoor-outdoor space.

Located between Denver and Boulder and 30 minutes from Denver International Airport, The Westin Westminster has 369 guest rooms and plenty of amenities. A total of 26 meeting rooms provide more than 30,000 sf of event space, including a 12,000-sf grand ballroom. Plenty of outdoor event space also is available. Staff like to point out the technology offered to conference attendees, including state-of-the-art wireless internet access, telephone drops to fiber optics connections and T-1 lines expandable to the equivalent of two T-3s. Guests enjoy outdoor activities such as skiing, snowboarding, horseback riding and mountain biking.

Situated 90 miles west of the Denver International Airport, the Keystone Conference Center has more than 60,000 sf of meeting, exhibit and event space. With another 40,000 sf of meeting space resort-wide, the combined Keystone Resort and Conference Center stands as the largest meeting venue in

Colorado's Rocky Mountains. The free-standing conference center features two ballrooms on the same level, making it easy to schedule back-to-back general sessions and multiple breakouts. The second floor supports smaller sessions with additional meeting rooms secluded from the ballroom area. Other meeting space in the resort includes an outdoor pavilion and a mountaintop venue. Guests may enjoy any of 1,200 lodging units in three neighborhoods arranged in a campus-style layout, each within a short walk or shuttle ride from the conference center.

Offerings from the Gateway Canyons Resort & Spa include both traditional boardroom and ballroom settings as well as outdoor gathering sites. Located an hour southwest of Grand Junction and surrounded by majestic canyons, the Gateway's facilities include 72 guest rooms and 8,778 sf of total meeting space. Other features include three restaurants, an adventure center and outfitting store, amphitheater, stables and a spa. They're enhanced by attractions such as air tours, an auto museum and horseback rides.

At the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek, located about 130 miles from the Denver International Airport, 20,000 sf of event space is available, including newly updated facilities both indoors and outdoors. A grand ballroom and junior ballroom feature great views with outdoor balconies and patios. Some

190 guest rooms are available. Among other amenities are a spa, fitness center and a number of special programs for teambuilding,

Located in the mountain town of Breckenridge, the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel has 9,000 sf of event space with 10 meeting rooms featuring newly installed seating. The 208 guest rooms, renovated in July 2013, are complemented by both an indoor and outdoor hot tubs. Across the street is Peak 9 of the Breckenridge Ski Resort, which offers ski equipment rental, pre-ski yoga and a variety of outdoor activities.

Boulder's largest hotel, the Millennium Harvest House, has just renovated 100 of its 269 rooms. Located adjacent to the University of Colorado campus, it offers 18,000 sf of event space, including a 5,000-sf ballroom.

New & Noteworthy

Aurora, Colorado, just east of downtown Denver and directly south of Denver International Airport, is a new area for corporate meetings.

The Anschutz Medical Campus helped to launch Aurora's transformation and drive an expansion of ancillary businesses. In April, Hyatt Regency Aurora-Denver Conference Center, a mile from the medical campus, opened with 249 rooms and 30,000 sf of meeting and function space. Additionally, the 1,500-room Gaylord Rockies Resort & Conference Center will open in Aurora in late 2018, becoming the state's largest hotel.

The Grand Hyatt Denver and Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center had a combined \$10 million makeover to meeting spaces and ballrooms, with new designs providing more of a Colorado aesthetic and sense of place. Between the two hotels, planners have access to more than 113,200 sf of meeting and function space.

Boulder's renowned historic hotel, The Boulderado, is updating its annex guest rooms and event center, as well as the mezzanine and lobby in the main building. The work will be completed in two phases. The hotel has 160 guest rooms and 10,000 sf of meeting and event space.

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LARRAGUETA

Celebrity Cruises has added two new team members to their incentive and charter sales team. **Tom Dougher** was named manager, North America charter sales. He previously was director of charter sales for Norwegian Cruise Line. **Alexis Puma** was named international charter manager. She formerly served as manager, national accounts for Windstar Cruises.

Sonesta Fort Lauderdale Beach has named **Russell Jenkins** as senior sales manager. He was the senior sales manager for Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach.

Jason Kycek was named vice president of sales and marketing for Casa de Campo Resort & Villas in La

Romana, Dominican Republic. He was vice president of sales and marketing for the Edgewater Hotel Spa in Madison, Wisconsin.

Georg Garnitschnig was named vice president of sales and marketing for Trump National Doral Miami. Prior to joining Trump National, he was regional director of sales and marketing for Fairmont Hotels & Resorts.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort has named **Aaron Weegar** as director of sales. He was director of sales at The Diplomat Resort & Spa in Fort Lauderdale. **Nick Anderson** was promoted to director of group sales. He was associate director of sales.

Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa in Rancho Santa Fe, California, has named **Katie Rooney** regional group sales manager. She was senior national sales manager for the Inn at Rancho Santa Fe in San Diego.

Joseph M. DeMille Sr. was named director of sales and marketing for The Chattanooga in Tennessee. He most recently was the director of sales and marketing for Turnberry Isle Miami.

The Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority has appointed **Michael Larragueta** as vice president of sales. He was previously vice president of global distribution sales for Baha Mar in Nassau, Bahamas. **I&FMM**

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