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CONFERENCE & FACILITIES

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THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION & FACILITIES PLANNING MANAGEMENT

## GDPR Compliance Is Here

What You REALLY  
Need to Know

PAGE 10

Neil O'Keefe, Senior Vice President of Content and Marketing, Data & Marketing Association, identifies social media strategies that deliver the highest level of attendee engagement.

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## It's All About the Buzz!

Meaningful Social  
Media Marketing — Join  
the Conversation

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Trade Show Floor  
of the Future

Innovations That Drive Up Value for  
Today's Attendees and Exhibitors

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## Joining the Conversation



The power of social media — for good or ill — plays out in the news on a daily basis. Its influence on — and dominance of — our daily lives is ubiquitous and here to stay, that's for sure. For meeting planners, harnessing and leveraging the marketing power of social media has become indispensable for creating buzz and giving life to meetings and conventions.

In our cover story on page 26 "It's All About the Buzz!" association marketing pros reveal their "omnichannel" strategies for cutting through information overload to catch and hold an attendee's imagination and attention. Easier said than done in this age of digital distractions: "If someone thinks you can put a post up and say 'come to our conference' and provide a link to register, they're dreaming," says Neil O'Keefe, senior vice president of content and marketing for the Data and Marketing Association. "I think those days are long gone. It has to be engaging content." O'Keefe, pictured on our cover, and other marketing experts rate the relative effectiveness of various platforms in their engagement efforts and emphasize the importance of targeting the audience via "psychographics" — in other words, identifying lifestyles, likes, dislikes, so events can be personalized.

Given the sheer number and variety of channels used to reach the audience, consistency of messaging is vital to the success of any marketing effort. "We want to create an on-brand experience across all channels," O'Keefe explains. "That includes our printed catalogs and brochures, print ads in magazines, social media, search engine marketing, search engine optimization and remarketing."

Of course, marketing engagement is just the beginning. Planners have to keep the conversation going on the trade show floor. Says David Solsbery, vice president of creative services with Hargrove, the architect of the immersive experience at ASAE's recent Xperience Design Project, "Attendees are sophisticated but are also willing to be targeted through marketing efforts as long as the experience is authentic and they are kept engaged. Short attention spans mean they want and need to be surprised with fresh ideas like activations and experiential engagements." Learn about the latest in innovative show floor environments and compelling new ways to deliver content in "Trade Show Floor of the Future" on page 14.

Don't miss the rest of the engaging content in this issue, including what you really need to know about GDPR compliance (page 10), making meetings more accessible (page 12) reducing your event's carbon footprint (page 20), working with AMCs (page 32), family-friendly convention destinations (page 38) and Sunshine State meetings (page 44).

Harvey Grotzky  
Publisher

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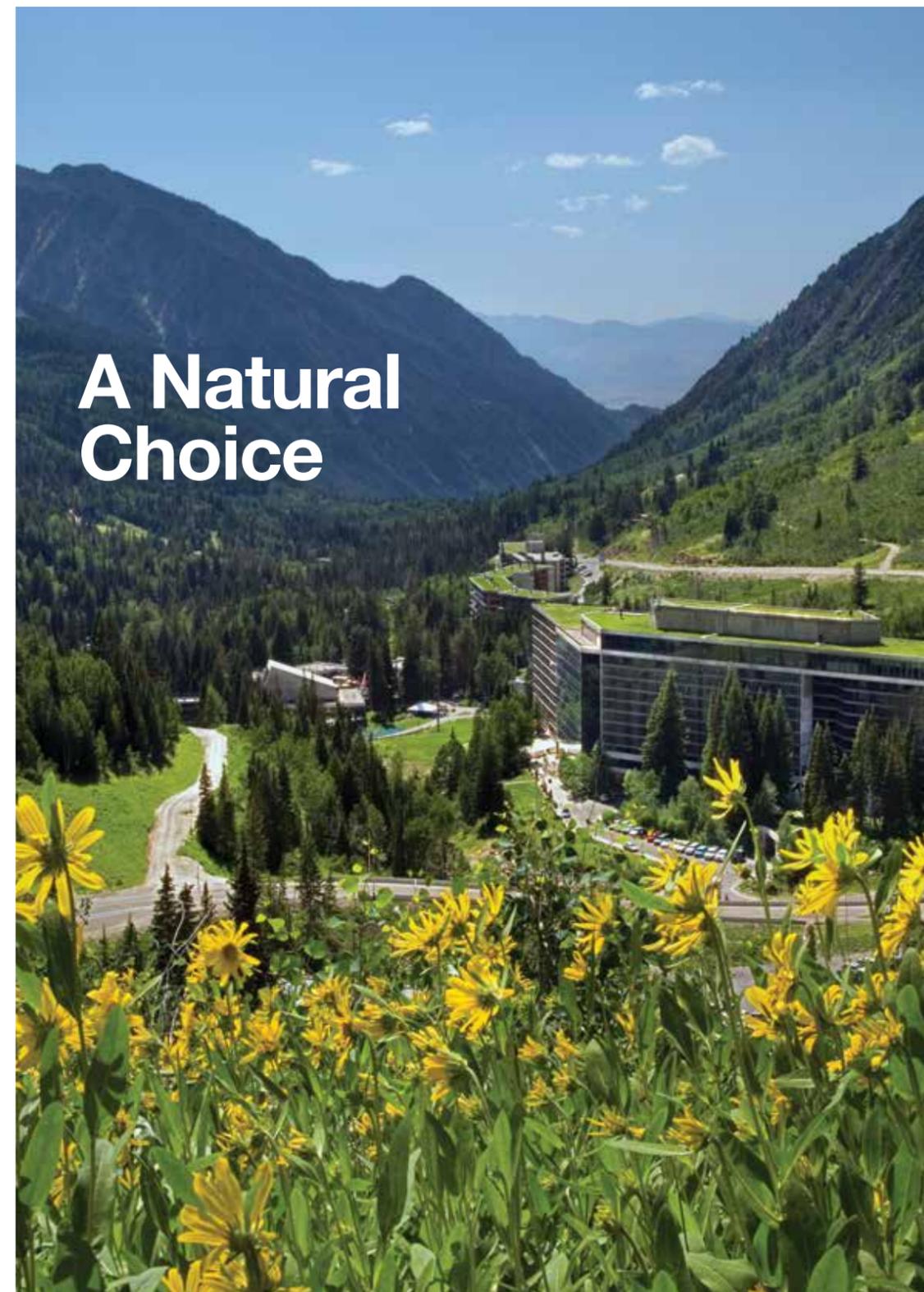
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## New Orleans Exhibition Hall Authority Board Members Tour Real Time Crime Monitoring Center



Touring the Real Time Crime Monitoring Center are (l to r) Commissioner Darren Mire, Ernest N. Morial Convention Center President/GM Michael Sawaya, Commissioner Bonita Robertson, Ernest N. Morial Convention Center VP of Finance Alita Caparotta, Commissioner Robert Bray, Commissioner Steve Pettis and Chief of Public Safety Support Services Ross Bourgeois.

**NEW ORLEANS, LA** — Board members of the Ernest N. Morial New Orleans Exhibition Hall Authority visited the New Orleans Police Department's Real Time Crime Monitoring Center recently to learn about its crime-reduction capabilities. The facility allows law enforcement to pinpoint the location of crimes and support ongoing police investigations using advanced technologies. The crime monitoring center is one part of a \$40 million multi-step public safety program put forward by the City of New Orleans.

The Real Time Crime Monitoring Center currently relies on more than 125 cameras installed at areas of interest based on historical crime trends in the city, as well as input from New Orleans Police. Eventually, the system will use more than 300 cameras throughout the city. The Center will provide instant intelligence information 24/7 to all the public safety partners in New Orleans. In six months the Center was able to contribute relevant information to more than 170 investigations.

<https://exhallnola.com>

## Omni Hotels & Resorts Appoints Cara Banasch as VP Sales

**DALLAS, TX** — Omni Hotels & Resorts announced the appointment of Cara Banasch as vice president of sales effective May 21, 2018. Banasch will lead all field and global sales teams and will be responsible for creating and implementing revenue-generating strategies across the entire luxury hotel brand.



BANASCH

Prior to joining Omni, Banasch served as senior vice president of business development and strategy for the

New Orleans Convention & Visitor's Bureau. She worked with a team of partners and professionals to grow business opportunities for the hospitality industry and her leadership led to a record-breaking production performance. She is also an active phi-

lanthropist and supports local charities such as the Louis Armstrong Jazz Camp. [www.omnihotels.com](http://www.omnihotels.com)

## The Summit, a Dolce Hotel by Wyndham Opens in Cincinnati

**CINCINNATI, OH** — The Summit, a Dolce Hotel by Wyndham, recently debuted in Cincinnati's vibrant Madisonville neighborhood. The 239-room hotel resides on the former site of the NuTone door chime factory and later Medpace's iconic rainbow parking garage — a quirky, local landmark preserved in elements of the hotel. The hotel's design weaves the building's industrial history with modern, art-centric features. The lobby's 20-foot ceilings showcase the building's original, exposed sandblasted columns.

The hotel's 32,600 sf of indoor and outdoor event space includes the modern Madisonville Ballroom and 17 meeting rooms with high-tech amenities and natural light. Planners also can use space on the sprawling Rooftop Terrace. Attendees will have easy access to downtown, the Duke Energy Convention Center and Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (CVG).

For meeting breaks, the brand's signature Nourishment Hubs — protein-filled and vegan-friendly stations unique to Dolce hotels — offer items ranging from fresh produce and low-glycemic bites to unexpected treats, like s'mores bars with marshmallows made from scratch.

Meeting planners at The Summit benefit from Wyndham Hotel Group's go meet, the first formal rewards program of its kind catering to both professional and casual meeting/event planners. Planners who are members of the Wyndham Rewards loyalty program can earn one point for every dollar spent on qualifying revenue, regardless of billing method, with no minimum spend requirement and no maximum point limit. On average, meeting planners earn 45,000 points per meeting — enough for three free nights at any of Wyndham Hotel Group's more than 8,400 hotels around the world.

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

## Minneapolis Convention Center Celebrates a Banner Year

**MINNEAPOLIS, MN** — The Minneapolis Convention Center (MCC) has big goals for 2018, as it marks its best year ever for revenue in 2017 — hosting 380 meetings, conventions and trade shows. Additionally, 2018 is shaping up to be a standout year, following its success as a Super Bowl events venue and with numerous marquee conventions scheduled.

Minneapolis Convention Center highlights for 2017 include:

- Produced \$19.6 million in revenue, \$1 million more than ever before, and 105 percent of the year's goal.
- Generated an estimated \$18 million in tax revenue for the City of Minneapolis.
- Welcomed 819,000 attendees to 380 events.



In an industry where 70 percent occupancy is considered fully-booked to allow for move-in and move-out days, the MCC maintained 60 percent occupancy for 2017.

The MCC is also reaching new milestones with its sustainability program. [www.minneapolis.org](http://www.minneapolis.org)

## MGM Springfield to Open in August



**SPRINGFIELD, MA** — Expanding its presence on the East Coast, MGM Resorts International will open the doors to MGM Springfield, New England's first integrated luxury resort and entertainment destination, on August 24, 2018. The resort will commemorate the city's rich history through the preservation and reimagining of its most storied buildings. Visitors can experience venues such as the First Spiritualist Church, Springfield Armory and Chandler Union Hotel — where Presidents Polk and Buchanan both stayed — in an entirely new way. The boutique-style five-story hotel will feature 250 eclectic guest rooms inspired by the historic significance, iconic architecture and literary legacy of its urban surroundings. The 8,000-seat MassMutual Center will serve as MGM Springfield's official entertainment venue and home for large-scale conventions and events with approximately 42,500 sf of meeting and event space. Other offerings include fine dining experiences, a 125,000-sf casino, spa, movie complex, bowling center, Topgolf Swing Suite, rooftop pool, retail and more.

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

## Galt House Hotel Joins Wyndham, Will Undergo \$80 Million Renovation

**LOUISVILLE, KY** — The Galt House, Louisville's largest hotel, is joining the Trademark Collection by Wyndham as an independently owned soft-branded property. The flagship hotel, which will begin an \$80 million renovation this June, becomes Wyndham Hotel Group's largest single addition in North America to date with 1,310 rooms. With its hotel roots dating back to 1835, today's two-towered Galt House Hotel, Trademark Collection by Wyndham features seven restaurants and lounges including Rivue Restaurant & Lounge, the world's only rotating rooftop bar, perched 25 stories high, and Jockey Silks Bourbon Bar, featuring more than 150 Kentucky bourbons and as-

sorted whiskeys. The hotel also boasts 53 meeting rooms spanning 130,000 sf of function space.

Upcoming renovations, including a new logo, will refashion the hotel's blended Midwestern spirit and Southern charm hospitality. Major overhauls include reimagining guest rooms and public spaces with fresh design, furnishings and finishes inspired by the food, bourbon, horses and colors of Kentucky, such as spring-green, saddle-brown, aged-barn red, thoroughbred-blue and jockey-silk orange. The hotel also will introduce fresh culinary concepts to all dining concepts including three new restaurants.

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

# Gaylord Texan Resort to Open \$120M Vineyard Tower

**GRAPEVINE, TX** — The sprawling Gaylord Texan Resort opened its all-new Vineyard Tower this month. The \$120 million project added 303 guest rooms — increasing the total number of resort guest rooms to 1,814. It also includes 86,000 sf of carpeted meeting space, bringing the total meeting space to approximately 490,000 sf.



The Gaylord Texan Resort is the third largest non-gaming convention/meetings hotel in the United States as measured by total self-contained exhibit and meeting space.

Rustic and refined, the first floor of the Vineyard Tower welcomes guests with a dedicated main driveway and outdoor garden terrace. Inside, the tower features 30,000 sf of carpeted breakout space,

generous prefunction space that is open to the second floor and a corridor to the existing portion of the resort.

On the second floor, the tower features expansive prefunction space as well as another large outdoor ter-

race overlooking the shores of magnificent Lake Grapevine. The second floor also houses the new 30,000-sf Tate Ballroom, named in honor of Grapevine's current mayor, William D. Tate. [www.gaylordtexan.com](http://www.gaylordtexan.com)

## Harrah's-Branded Tribal Casino Coming to Northern California



**LAS VEGAS, NV** — Caesars Entertainment Corporation has signed a definitive agreement with the Buena Vista Gaming Authority, an entity of the Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians of California (Buena Vista Tribe), to bring a Harrah's-branded facility to Northern California.

Harrah's Northern California Casino will be developed, owned and operated by the Buena Vista Gaming Authority. The 71,000-sf property is expected to open in 2019, and will include 950 state-of-the-art slots, 20 table games, one full-service restaurant and three fast-casual dining concepts.

The casino will be on Buena Vista Tribe reservation land in Amador County, just south of the town of Buena Vista, 5 miles southeast of Lone and 32 miles southeast of Sacramento. [www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com](http://www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com)

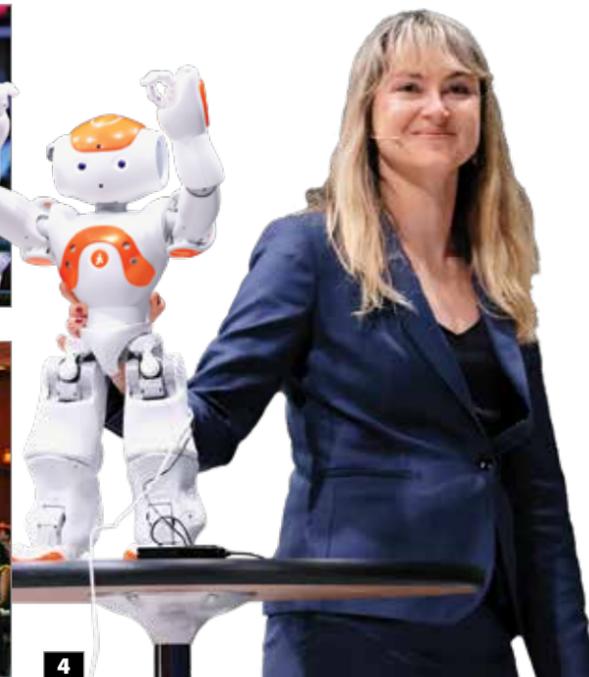
## Seattle Sees 8th Consecutive Year of Record Tourism

**SEATTLE, WA** — At its 2018 Annual Meeting in April, Visit Seattle announced record visitor volume, expenditures, tax contributions and travel-related employment for Seattle and King County in 2017 for the eighth year in a row.

Visit Seattle president and CEO Tom Norwalk and Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan welcomed more than 700 tourism and business professionals to Global Meetings Industry Day. Addresses were made by meetings industry thought-leader Michelle Mason, president and CEO of Association Forum and Robert Reid, National Geographic Traveler's Digital Nomad.

A total of 39.9 million visitors came to the city and county in 2017, up 2.6 percent from the previous year. Those visitors spent \$7.4 billion in the city and county in 2017 — an increase of 5.6 percent from the previous year.

[www.visitseattle.org](http://www.visitseattle.org)



Credits: 1-6 Zoetia Images; 7-11 Eddie Arrossi

**1-6** ASAE hosted XDP at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center. **1** Don Neal, founder & CEO, 360 Live Media. **2** Karl Kapp, EdD, director, Institute for Interactive Technologies at Bloomsburg University. **3** David Peckinpaugh, president, Maritz Global Events. **4** Heather Knight, PhD, Social Robotist. **7-11** PCMA 2018 Education Foundation Visionary Awards, Washington, DC. **7** Ron Kopcinski, CMP, owner, Peak Global Consulting — Meeting Professional Honoree. **8** Wanda Johnson, CMP, CAE, Endocrine Society CPO — Meeting Professional of the Year. **9** Phelps Hope, CMP, Event Designer of the Year. **10** Godwin Charles Ogbeide, PhD, MBA, associate professor of Strategy and Hospitality, IUPUI — Educator Honoree with PCMA board chair, Claire Smith. **11** Carrie Freeman Parsons, vice chair, Freeman — Supplier Honoree.

# EU's GDPR Data Privacy Regulations

## Understanding the Fine Print

Phelps R. Hope, CMP



### What You REALLY Need to Know by May 25, 2018

One glance at your news feed on your smartphone and, chances are, news of a data breach is in the recent slew of headlines from social media networks to credit bureaus to banks, and everywhere in between. Data privacy and protection laws are at the core of soon-to-be-enforced regulations out of the European Union (EU). Whether you are meeting in the EU or have EU citizens on your attendance roster at a U.S.-based meeting, the same precautions must be taken. If your organization has a plan in place, then you're ahead of the curve. For those organizations that do not, however, it's time to create one now. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) goes into effect on May 25, 2018 and will affect meetings and conventions that handle the personal information of EU citizens on a global scale by protecting the data handling and processing of citizens of the EU whether they are physically in the EU or attending a meeting or convention abroad. This means that any organization's meeting or convention that has EU citizens attending falls under the jurisdiction of the EU's GDPR penalties and fines, if this regulation is violated.

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO YOU?

There is a lot to be understood in the fine print of GDPR. This regulation not only focuses on how organizations control the personal data of EU citizens, but how they gain consent for that citizen's information as well. As a meeting planner, it's important to follow the guidelines by the book to avoid any fines or penalties from violations. An initial step is to ensure that the process provides an "elective" for attendees and prospective attendees to opt into and out of your communications or registration software. Samples (such as those

found on [www.gdpr4meetings.com](http://www.gdpr4meetings.com), hosted by Debi Scholar) might be:

✓ I understand and agree that a meeting planner will have my contact details for the purpose of planning meetings (such as hotels accommodations, transportation, activities, etc.) Please note that if this box is not checked, then we are unable to secure your logistics for attendance at the meeting.

✓ I understand and agree that a meeting planner will ask about dietary preferences and any special requirements that may be needed to plan a meeting.

✓ I understand and agree that a meeting planner will have my contact details for the purpose of registering me to attend a virtual or hybrid meeting (live or on-demand).

✓ I understand and agree that I may be contacted for a pre-meeting and/or post-meeting survey.

A non-response is no longer accepted as implied agreement, so there has to be a trail of proof that the participant elected to join the process and has the option to exit when



they wish. The participant also can ask for access to their data that you have stored, and if the participant has any questions regarding their data storage or future use of their data, then answers must be given within 30 days at no charge. Also, carefully analyzing and updating your current documents and contracts is a key next step to ensuring compliance to this regulation.

#### WHY IS CONSENT IMPORTANT?

Under the regulations of GDPR, the definition of what it means to obtain consent from meeting and convention attendees has changed. GDPR defines consent as any freely

*Your organization can be held responsible for the adherence of these new guidelines by any contracted third-party providers.*

given, specific, informed and unambiguous indication of the data subject's wishes. "While associations typically link to legitimate interests for contact and data exchange," said Brussels-based Alfons Westgeest, managing partner, Kellen, and international affairs advisor for EUROBAT and AMCA International, "a clear program illustrating how consent is obtained should be in place, along with a good software management plan." In addition to making sure that your company is in compliance with the regulations established in GDPR, conventions and meetings professionals also must give attendees the option to withdraw consent as easily as they can give consent to process their information.

#### WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATING GDPR?

Penalties for infringement are incredibly punitive, and can run up to two percent of annual global revenue (or between €10 million to €20 million, whichever is higher), for the most basic mistake. The point of the stiff penalties is to create a global requirement for all companies that digitally interact with citizens of the EU to protect the use and storage of the electronic data of those citizens. If we've learned anything from Facebook's recent data crisis, this is not a scenario you want to be involved in.

#### WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO PROTECT YOUR CLIENTS FROM VIOLATING GDPR?

The first step you should take is to seek legal counsel to ensure your company is in compliance when it comes to GDPR standards. This is the easiest way to remain transparent in the process of planning for GDPR's implementation. Once you've obtained legal counsel, identify the partnerships you have internationally so that you know which to develop a plan for first. Your organization can be held responsible for the adherence of these new guidelines by any contracted third-party providers that market, interact or store any data of citizens from the European Union. When it comes to creating your

plan for GDPR compliance, EU partnerships take priority because they are more likely to come in contact with EU citizens that are covered by GDPR's regulations. "It is European as a regulation directly applicable as of 25 May, meaning a harmonizing of laws across Europe rather than compliance per country," said Westgeest. It also would benefit your organization to only work with GDPR-compliant service providers and to designate a data and software protection director to act as a watchdog for breaches in compliance. The final step you can take to ensure compliance is to educate your organization and your clients on your compliance plan as a whole.

#### WHAT NOW?

If your company has already established a process for operating in compliance with GDPR, the hard part is over. If you have not, it's important to start planning now. For more information on the General Data Protection Regulation, visit [www.eugdpr.org](http://www.eugdpr.org) or [www.gdpreu.org](http://www.gdpreu.org).

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

# Creating Accessible Meetings

## by Implementing Inclusivity

Amy Cabe



### Making Meeting Hospitality More Hospitable

Education and networking meetings are the lifeblood of any association. We put meticulous thought into choosing the right city, the right hotel and the right educational offerings. What we may overlook in this process is accessibility.

Because many members of nonprofit associations pay their own way to an event, our industry must be proactive in providing useful information so that attendees can make informed decisions and have a clear understanding of the resources available. Inclusivity for people with disabilities is so much more than ensuring a hotel or convention center has an elevator or a ramp in place of stairs. It is incumbent on us to be prepared for a variety of circumstances and communicate our offerings to meeting planners well in advance.

#### BE HOSPITABLE

The bottom line is we talk a lot about hospitality in the association and events industry, but we need to be more hospitable.

Do you know which all-night pharmacy is closest to your hotel? Does your convention center have an emergency EpiPen and someone who knows how to use it? How do you make your event accessible to all?

This issue of accessibility is of such importance to the Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) that we created "Project Access: Accessible Meetings FAQs," a downloadable resource form that hotels, convention centers, CVBs and other DMOs can customize and share with meeting planners.

The document includes checklists designed sequentially from a guest's arrival at a destination airport to ground transportation, lodging, meeting venues and offsite venues. It also includes a resource list that DMOs can customize by listing contacts for state and local agencies.

What venues have staff members who know American Sign Language? Does the hotel restaurant offer a menu in Braille? Do the hotel guest rooms have roll-in showers or built-in benches? These questions may not apply to you, but they may help individuals decide whether to attend a convention.

#### BE PREPARED FOR ALL ATTENDEES

As director of convention and visitor services at Visit Spokane, I've seen the importance of planning and understanding accessibility issues. When the world's largest annual wheelchair sporting event rolled into our city nine years ago, participants benefited from months of preparation from our hospitality community, officials and citizenry.



Athletes at the 29th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Spokane, Washington.



Credits: Christopher Anderson/The Spokesman-Review

We had time to plan the logistics of transporting and hosting 630 athletes. Most of these athletes traveled with two wheelchairs, their coaches and entourages from the airport, to hotels to 17 separate sporting events in our region.

Visit Spokane worked closely with our transportation partners, venues and merchants to ensure we were a good host to everyone visiting for the 29th National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

We purchased and customized yardsticks and invited our partners to walk around their businesses to measure

the distance between shelves, tables, chairs and walls. We invited merchants to situate products at arm's length and avoid clutter. Understand what customers can see from a wheelchair at eye level, we advised.

I'm pleased to say that the Games provided Spokane with an opportunity to learn, to shine and to enjoy the pleasure of watching this unique event unfold. Planning for such an event requires a thorough process. There are many things to consider.

Former ESPA President Denise Suttle, CMP, fast-tracked the Project Access initiative after she and her team at Visit Albuquerque noticed an uptick in the number of questions that event planners were asking about accessibility — from how many roll-in showers hotels had on the property to the availability of rentable motorized scooters and wheelchairs.

"It occurred to me that ESPA should be at the forefront of this issue," Suttle said. "We're the people tasked with getting the answers — that's our job. So why not do some

*When it comes to accessibility, a lot of it involves awareness and asking the right questions. To truly help our industry, we needed to get input from all the stakeholders.*

Accessibility involves more than mobility. Some needs are hard to predict. Some spring up quickly and require immediate assistance. For example, an attendee who shatters his knee the week before a conference may need help finding the resources necessary to comfortably participate. He even may need help predicting what he needs!

#### THE ADA AND EVENT SERVICES

Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. It was the nation's first comprehensive civil rights law addressing the needs of people with disabilities. The law prohibits discrimination in employment, public services, public accommodations and telecommunication. Since then, however, there has only been one book and a subsequent white paper that addressed the issue of accessibility specifically for event planning.

#### ESPA'S ACCESSIBLE MEETINGS FAQs

When it comes to accessibility, a lot of it involves awareness and asking the right questions. That's why when we created our Accessible Meetings FAQs, we included event service professionals, as well as those who face accessibility challenges in their daily lives. To truly help our industry, we needed to get input from all the stakeholders.

homework up front and get this information? It's to our benefit and to our client's benefit to stop doing it piecemeal and to make sure the process is more comprehensive and inclusive."

ESPA is pleased to make this accessibility resource free to anyone who requests it. We need to share this information as widely as possible. Meeting planners and others may request a copy of the Accessible Meetings FAQs by emailing [info@espaonline.org](mailto:info@espaonline.org).

Our toolkit is an excellent starting kit for venues, but we realize we couldn't possibly cover every possible situation or circumstance the first time around. Our goal is to provide a framework and let venues figure out what additional services or concerns will be applicable to their potential attendees.

Please join us in making Project Access: Accessible Meetings FAQs an industry-wide resource. Together we can make a positive change! AC&F

Amy Cabe is director of convention and visitor services at Visit Spokane and current president of the Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA). ESPA is dedicated to elevating the event and convention services profession by preparing members through education and networking for their pivotal role in innovative and successful event execution. For more information, visit [www.espaonline.org](http://www.espaonline.org).



Credits: Zoetica Images



The event design firm Hargrove imagined and built a holistic, immersive event environment at ASAE's recent Xperience Design Project.

# Trade Show Floor of the Future

## Innovations That Drive Up Value for Today's Attendees and Exhibitors

In the world of association trade shows, it's all about getting people to engage with an organization's products, services and brand. It's the core philosophy behind using a trade show booth as a revenue generator and business development tool versus an expensive add-on that does little for an association's bottom line. So what role does the future design of trade shows play for associations? A big one, say the experts — especially as interactivity and tech-

By Maura Keller

nological advancements make way for memorable trade show experiences.

### MEETING AN AUDIENCE'S NEEDS

According to David Solsbery, vice president of creative services at Hargrove, the creator of environments for events, experiential marketing activations, expositions and exhibits, trade show attendees are embracing disruption. They are looking for experiences that are personalized and out of the norm.

"Show managers are keenly aware that to drive up attendee satisfaction they need to fully understand the personae of the people attending then create authentic experiences that meet attendees' expectations," Solsbery says. "Attendees are sophisticated but are also willing to be targeted through marketing efforts as long as the experience is authentic and they are kept engaged. Short attention spans mean they want and need to be surprised with fresh ideas like activations and experiential engagements."

ASAE, the membership organization of more than 30,000 association executives and industry partners, recently hosted their two-day Xperience Design Project (XDP), which drew 1,512 association professionals and industry partners to the event that featured a variety of innovative event engagement strategies and solutions. Hargrove was responsible for conceiving, fabricating and delivering the layout and design for all event spaces, decor, lighting, audio/video, run of show production and stage management, signage and setup. Hargrove imagined and built a holistic event environment that became an immersive experience for attendees.

As part of their role, Hargrove was tasked to find a solution that allows simultaneous presentations in one room. After much testing, trial and error, they came up with a group of technology solutions.

"First we decided on a center stage, but the question was, how do you have one moderator then five presenters?" Solsbery says. Their solution was a circular LED screen within a screen. The top screen was static for content and the center screen rose up and down so each presenter had a backdrop.



Credit: Hargrove/ForoBiceno

**"Attendees are sophisticated but are also willing to be targeted through marketing efforts as long as the experience is authentic and they are kept engaged. Short attention spans mean they want and need to be surprised with fresh ideas."**

David Solsbery  
Vice President of Creative Services  
Hargrove  
Lanham, Maryland

The Hargrove team's second challenge was sound. A standard audio system would not work, so the team decided to embrace a closed audio earbud system that ran on FM frequency. As attendees moved from session to session, they simply changed the channel.

"Attendees are embracing new ways of learning," Solsbery

says. Ignite-style talks, rapid sessions, work groups and exhibit hall pop-up presentations are some current trends that trade shows are utilizing to keep attendees involved and engaged.

"Attendees are embracing fresh learning environments like large, team-oriented learning experiences or consecutive sessions in one room with multiple speakers and learning groups," Solsbery says.

Lorelei Harloe, meeting planner and principal at LKH Communication, LLC, works with the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA), which offers extensive, free technical workshops as part of the annual NECA Show.

"For greater show value, attendees are embracing increasing educational spot-sessions on the show floor — mostly exhibitor-sponsored sessions, including presentation theaters, brief TED-type talks, fast-growing technology including virtual reality demonstrations, extensive free technical



Clay Lovelace  
VP of Design and Creative  
GES  
Boston, Massachusetts

**"Audience participation is big. The speaker can now engage the audience with smart devices... and feedback. In addition, digital content is very dynamic and a big departure from the days of static PowerPoint presentations."**

workshops, more interactive product display vehicles, local site visits to show-only events, and increased in-booth networking events," Harloe says.

Technology continually increases opportunities to engage with an organization, including livestreaming sessions/panel discussions; effective multimedia exhibit elements; virtual reality demonstrations; more interactive show websites for posting news, videos and floor/visit planning; and social media show pages for real-time communication.

### TODAY'S TRENDS

When it comes to trade show floor design, more and more associations are looking for the next "big thing" and one that leaves a lasting impression. Virtual reality fits that bill.

"Virtual reality is a great tool to keep your audience engaged," Solsbery says. "It provides a unique learning environment for attendees. You can take them anywhere and with a good design you can teach them anything. For now it is a bit

too expensive for large sessions and out of reach for many show managers. It takes a certain amount of creative and technical prowess to do it right."

Hargrove recently created a smart-city scale model where attendees could don virtual reality goggles that transported them into the smart city where they learned all about new city innovations. "It was the most popular attraction in the show," Solsbery says.

Virtual reality experiences can run the gamut, from virtual walk-throughs to virtual demonstrations including head mounted technology that heightens the way attendees experience video.

The majority of the booths today have a generic theme and design. Many associations employ standard, pre-fab booths using stock photography of smiling people and bland messaging listing the attributes of an organization. Nothing about these booths stands out or compels visitors to learn more. However, creating a theme that speaks to the target audience and differentiates the organization from all the others being promoted at the show increases the odds for more traffic.

Jennifer Hoff, CEM, president of Taffy Event Strategies, says that overall she is seeing continued emphasis on immersive and experiential marketing. Exhibitors and organizers are creating more digital experiences and integrating live components.

"Attendees are leveraging trade show mobile apps as the engagement opportunities in apps are enhanced," Hoff says. In addition to basic navigation of the show floor and setting the schedule, apps are providing networking, polling, gamification, chatbots, audio tours and other ways for attendees to engage with an event.

"Attendees are appreciating the opportunity to curate their own experiences," Hoff explains. "Technology has provided tools to enable a much deeper understanding of the attendees, as well as their needs and expectations with the events. Organizers will continue to leverage this data to engage attendees and enable them to better accomplish what they need to from their participation."

Hoff stresses the increased presence of virtual reality and augmented reality at events. The technology enables exhibitors and organizers to create experiences for attendees that were never before possible.

"The potential impact to change how events operate and engage with attendees using this technology is yet to be seen," Hoff says. "I've seen virtual reality used for education and product development — if you are an exhibitor at a tabletop or smaller event and you have a large product you want to showcase, VR provides a great platform to do this."

If you are at a large event, virtual reality can help provide

**"Future floor planning and design will offer more grouped exhibits that coexist by technology product and service areas for more cohesive and logical flow."**

Lorelei Harloe  
Meeting Planner and Principal  
LKH Communication, LLC  
Oakton, Virginia

an environment where attendees can engage with a product or service at a whole new level. Associations can show things they may never be able to through a static display, and it's intriguing to attendees.

"As with all technology that gets introduced in the events industry, it will continue to evolve," Hoff says. "Virtual reality was limited in execution when it first came out but we are seeing more applications, and augmented reality and projection mapping are expanding the application possibilities for larger crowds."

### CREATING CONNECTIONS

Creating a connection with the audience is paramount, and incorporating interactive elements within trade show design is key. Not surprising, interactivity within an exhibit booth is important to create a face-to-face connection and memorable experience for show attendees. To that end, exhibit booths now tend to be much more open and beckon the attendee into the space with LED displays, touchscreens, tablets and the like.

"Technology has transformed and enhanced the trade show experience in so many ways," Hoff says. "From the marketing experience where attendees are being marketed to based on their roles and needs to engagement opportunities enabling attendees to create the experience they want at an event. With polling to select locations, speakers and educational sessions, technology has provided attendees with a much greater opportunity to enhance their experiences at events."

Hoff also is seeing technology drive attendee engagement. In 2017, Taffy Event Strategies launched audio tours on the show app for Coverings, a tile and stone trade show.

"We wanted to provide an introduction to the show to new attendees as well as offer trends and technical information," Hoff says. "We used to have several live tours and introductory presentations for first-timers and the audio tours enabled us to replace these. Attendees can get the information at their own pace and they appreciate that."

Although incorporating tech interaction into your space



Credit: LKH Communication

can prove to be beneficial, it needs to have a defined purpose. For example, instead of focusing on the size of the monitors in a booth space, focus on what will be displayed on those touchscreens, and how it will create a meaningful interaction with show attendees.

Clay Lovelace, vice president of design and creative at GES, an event management company, says that today's general sessions and theaters are much more immersive with the latest lighting, projection and sound capabilities.

"Audience participation is big," Lovelace says. "The speaker can now engage the audience with smart devices, smart accessories and feedback. In addition, digital content is very dynamic and a big departure from the days of static PowerPoint presentations."

And as technological elements continue to play a role the audience experience, digital signage also is becoming commonplace with the convention facilities.

"This allows for more robust messaging and keeps a visually cleaner environment by limiting signage," Lovelace says. "It is also sustainable versus printed graphics."

Data collection also is becoming easier through interactive touch points, which means an association now can develop better metrics and leverage the information for meaningful improvements.

"Smart devices are now more relevant than ever and by connecting attendees to the show and to other attendees, we are

pushing and collecting information," says Lovelace. "All of this combined, technology is changing the rules and outcome."

### ON THE HORIZON

This much we know: Trade show managers will continue to rethink the exhibit hall. It needs to be a destination.

As Solsbery explains, this will help drive revenue and keep both exhibitors and attendees happy.

"Today many of the exhibit halls I see are a cacophony of exhibitors angling for attention," Solsbery says. "There is no cohesive brand presence and no destination other than the exhibits. The exhibit hall should be branded and managed like an amusement park. An overarching show brand should be present. The show management should show exhibitors that they are invested in their success, not just leave them alone to fight for themselves."

Harloe says that the trade show floor of the future will continue to add more educational content and exchange — moving from the convention program onto the show floor, and/or increasingly sponsored sessions that offer more opportunities for attendee engagement including brief presentations and more interactive experiences.

"Future floor planning and design will offer more grouped exhibits that coexist by technology product and service areas for more cohesive and logical flow," Harloe says. "And as immediate surveys continue to increase for basically everything we buy or experience, I also see more immediate surveying and feedback opportunities to improve both the overall show and the individual booth experience."

"For the greatest value for exhibitors and attendees, the future show floor will improve space planning with more cohesive planning, regular events and raffles to build pre-show excitement and encourage traffic throughout the floor, increased educational, interactive and networking opportunities," Harloe adds.

Anthony Baldini, senior account executive at Sterling Communications, says the trade show of the future could be replaced by virtual reality in ways that eclipse traditional video communications.

With the progress of VR and associated technologies including haptics, bio sensors, 3-D scanning and facial recognition technologies, a trade show can feasibly be held entirely in a digital realm.

"The cost savings and time-efficiency to be had from a digital

setup makes this concept attractive enough to lure businesses of all sizes, and the busiest of business professionals," Baldini says. "The reason a company would want to participate in a digital trade show is because traditional trade shows often carry high travel and materials overhead, and resources such as employee support and materials are an inexact science that aren't easily scalable. These problems are easily solved in a digital environment, where one-time setup of common digital assets is the primary expense."

Tactically, Baldini says that digital trade show exhibitors can simultaneously have a presentation mode always available when a virtual attendee "drops by." Meanwhile, a queue of one-on-one attendee meetings — face-to-face video chatting — can run on the side.

"This queue list, which is voluntarily joined by interested attendees, gives exhibitors the flexibility to bring in just the right amount of remote support simply by adding another representative into the portal," Baldini says. "This model eliminates booth reps standing around with nobody to talk to, while mak-

ing sure the most valuable executives are meeting with the highest-quality prospects first. AI already exists to make this mega-scheduling task a possibility."

Lovelace sees the trade show floors of the future having lots of open spaces for gathering and connecting, as well as boulevards that run through the halls to help drive traffic and create a more esthetic visual.

"The trade shows of the future will emulate school campuses through foundation business locations, quads, administrative and dining opportunities," Lovelace says. "Like city planners, we want to make each area on the show floor special and relevant to help drive a holistic experience and ensure each zone has value to the exhibitor and attendee."

In addition to high-tech initiatives and well-designed layouts, trade show organizers will be using captured data in a myriad of ways. Hoff believes data capture on the show floor through beacons and evolving immersive technologies, to understand attendee and exhibitor behavior, will continue to evolve.

"VR and AR technologies will develop and offer new channels for content as well as impact how we will experience show floors in the future," Hoff says. "The proliferation of technology, devices and apps will continue to transform the trade show landscape. We have evolved so much in the past five years from a digital and technological perspective, and I only see that continuing in the future."

**"Attendees are leveraging trade show mobile apps as the engagement opportunities in apps are enhanced. Attendees are appreciating the opportunity to curate their own experiences."**

Jennifer Hoff, CEM  
President  
Taffy Event Strategies  
Arlington, Virginia

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# Greening Your Gatherings

Planners Share  
Their Steps to  
Leaving a Smaller  
Carbon Footprint



By Sophia Bennett

**A**s concern about climate change and environmental degradation continues to grow, people expect entities they care about to take a leadership role in protecting the planet and reflecting their values. That's a big reason "green" has become such a buzzword in the meetings industry.

We asked professionals with experience planning environmentally friendly meetings to highlight the best ways to lower the carbon emissions and other detrimental impacts of an event. These tips apply to associations that are just starting their sustainability efforts as well as those looking to do more to help the planet. Many of their suggestions have saved their organizations money in addition to making their events more eco-conscious.

Although some of these steps require more advanced planning, there are many easy things planners can do to make significant changes at their next meeting. Any positive change for the environment, no matter how small it seems, is an important step in keeping our planet clean and livable.

"In the end, the problem is conventions do have a heavy footprint," acknowledges Anna Keller, director of convention services for the American Public Health Association (APHA). "All you can do is try to make it a smaller footprint."

#### VENUE SELECTION

Choosing the right venue is integral to lowering the environmental impact of meetings. Convention halls take a tremendous amount of energy and water to operate, and they often generate a high volume of waste. That's why finding a place that's actively looking to reduce its footprint makes such a difference.

In addition, "ensuring (the venue has) the knowledge and infrastructure to accommodate your requirements makes your job easier from the start," says Nancy J. Zavada, president of MeetGreen, a sustainable conference management agency. "Key vendors also serve as 'green team' members offering innovative solutions to environmental challenges, so enrolling them in the process is vital."

Securing an eco-friendly venue begins with your RFP, says Kimberly Smith, director of conference and events for the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. "I feel like I have to say that because your partners

**"Ask your suppliers how they can help you achieve the three Rs — reduce, reuse, recycle. ...It's going to make your conference more sustainable but it's also going to save you money."**



Kimberly Smith  
Director of Conference and Events  
Association for the Advancement  
of Sustainability in Higher Ed.  
Philadelphia, PA



Anna Keller  
Director of Convention Services  
American Public Health Association  
Washington, DC

**“(Eliminating shuttles)... gets rid of a lot of carbon emissions and congestion. It’s saved us a great deal of money. It can cost \$50,000 to \$150,000 depending on the city.”**

have to understand what you’re trying to achieve. In my RFP I make it clear that I’m looking for facilities that already know about sustainability and already have some practices in place. If I go to a LEED-certified facility I’m guaranteed they know how to make sustainable events happen. Otherwise we’d be paying to teach them.”

Nan Cluss, association manager for the Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association (PNCWA), says she only sends her RFP to conference facilities that are LEED certified or list their sustainable features on their website. “Find out before you sign on the dotted line what their standard practices are and what they’re willing to negotiate,” she advises.

The venues hosting upcoming PNCWA annual conferences get all or a significant amount of their power from renewable sources, such as wind or solar. They have systems in place to save water and lower the amount of waste generated at the facility.

“Ask your suppliers how they can help you achieve the three Rs — reduce, reuse, recycle,” Smith says. “If you can figure out ways to reduce your consumption, recycle your waste and rethink waste, it’s going to make your conference more sustainable but it’s also going to save you money.”

In addition to finding a sustainably minded convention center, make sure any accommodations you’re using have sustainability features in place. “We ask all of our hotels about green policies such as whether they have towel reuse programs and whether there are rebates involved for reusing towels,” says Keller. Hotels can be built to LEED standards, or they can apply for green certification through a program such as Green Globe, EarthCheck or the Sustainable Tourism Eco-Certification Program (STEP).

### FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Related to venue selection is looking for a site that offers a range of eco-friendly food options and green practices

around food service and waste reduction. “Healthy, local food has become a major trend,” says Zavada. This is partially because of people’s concern about the environment, and partially due to their interest in eating healthier. “Sustainable seafood, featuring local farms and low food miles all play a role.”

Charlotte Grant, marketing and communications manager for the World Cocoa Foundation, says her membership organization took steps to green the food service at their most recent annual partnership meeting in Washington, DC. “There was no disposable cutlery or glasses. Everything was served on actual plates. All the condiments were served in bulk, not in small packets that you had to discard. We incorporated local and sustainable food on the menu. We had no bottled water at the event.”

Keller asks all of her convention facilities to avoid using Styrofoam altogether and substitute metal flatware for plastic whenever possible. She requests that boxed lunches be delivered sans box. Not only does that allow participants to get exactly they want (and think they’ll eat), they don’t have to throw away those bulky single-serving boxes.

“I don’t use table linens in my meetings or dining spaces,” says Smith. That cuts down on the amount of laundry the facility has to do. However, it does mean she has to investigate whether the venue has high quality, unscarred stainless steel or wood tables before she signs a contract.

The food itself is as important from a sustainability perspective as what it’s served on. “Planners should talk with



their caterers about providing as many plant-based options within their menus as possible because we know having a plant-based diet is easier on the environment than meat,” says Smith. Her 2017 conference had an all-vegetarian menu and it was a huge hit. “A lot of planners think it’s more expensive, and the caterer will try to get away with that, but it can be negotiated. Lettuce does not cost more than a steak.

“I look for caterers who can make purchases that are third-party verified as being ethical and sustainably produced,” she adds. Certifications to watch for include Rain Forest Alliance, organic and fair trade.

Cluss tries to only order locally made beer and wine for events. “We try to consider the carbon footprint of where those came from, but it’s also about supporting local as much as you can in your choices for both foods and beverage consumption.”

Food waste has a significant environmental impact, so Cluss takes multiple steps to minimize it. She’s kept metrics on her association’s conference long enough that she’s developed a good sense of how many people will actually attend meals as opposed to enjoying time out with colleagues or sponsors. As a result, she never orders enough food to serve every attendee. It’s a nerve-wracking proposition, she admits, but it saves the association money and reduces food waste. She always has a backup plan for how to help people who show up for meals and can’t be served, but she’s only had to turn people away twice.

She also works with venues to arrange for food donations whenever possible. “Different states have different laws, but we’re always working with partners who aren’t hindered by laws to make sure any food that can be taken to shelters or other places is,” she says.

“Savvy planners are looking for ways to minimize waste and (are) getting very creative,” says Zavada. Some associations offer “Clean Plate Club” buffets where guests get a prize for cleaning their plates at the end of the meal. “We have seen chef cook-offs using imperfect produce and kitchen cuttings to make meals in a celebrity chef format.”

Practices such as these are good for any single event, but they also have larger, positive repercussions for the industry. “I think the more conference organizers ask for water to be served in jugs and reusable glasses for green practices, the more it will be embedded in the usual way hotels and conference venues do business,” says Grant. “It can really start a virtuous cycle, where if conference venues are asked to use these practices they’ll start making it their standard practice.”

### GO DIGITAL TO ELIMINATE PAPER

Another major change that eliminates waste and improves the attendee experience is switching to a mobile app. Most can hold the conference schedule, sessions and room assignments, speaker information, facility maps, attendee lists and more. Any materials that can’t be loaded on the app can be put on the organization’s website.

There is a cost to developing the app, but it’s often offset by savings on printing costs. There also can be some bumps with attendee adoption. APHA moved to a policy where people had to opt in to receive the conference bag and printed “program at a glance” document. Many people still arrived expecting to find those things, and APHA ended up running out. Next year, Keller says, they’ll be prepared to avoid that

situation, and hopefully more attendees will come ready to use the app.

“If you must print materials, use soy-based ink on post-consumer recycled paper and select a local printer,” says Smith. “Part of putting a conference in a city is showing local economic impact.” Patronizing local companies makes it easier to demonstrate that impact.

One place where it is difficult to eliminate paper altogether is name badges. Keller switched to all-paper badges so there’s no plastic holder to throw away afterward.

There are many other digital services that can lower an event’s environmental impact. APHA has shifted its marketing efforts to online platforms. “We started doing monthly emails to the attendees,” says Keller. “That way they get all the links

**“We try to consider the carbon footprint of where... (beer and wine) came from, but it’s also about supporting local as much as you can in your choices for both foods and beverage consumption.”**



Nan Cluss  
Association Manager  
Pacific Northwest  
Clean Water Association  
Hansen, ID

to the event website and the videos. It’s a much better way of communicating with attendees anyway.

“About 80 percent of our attendees register online,” she adds. “We still have some that have to send checks and do it on paper, but the 80 percent goes up every year.”

For the past three years APHA has produced a live, web-streamed version of its annual meeting. Thirteen sessions are broadcast live, including all of the general sessions. Registrants can watch the videos live or on demand. CE credit was available to people who complete an evaluation form afterward. It’s a great service for members, Keller says, but it also means people can gain valuable information without having to drive or fly to the event.

### TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is one of the biggest carbon generators at any event. While there’s not much associations can do to eliminate travel (other than offering video versions of events), they can eliminate some transportation once people arrive.

APHA has eliminated most of the shuttles for its annual meeting. “That gets rid of a lot of carbon emissions and con-



Nancy J. Zavada  
President  
MeetGreen  
Portland, OR

**“The first step should be developing a sustainable event policy to share with all your key stakeholders, venues and vendors. Let them know what is important to your association and what sustainable initiatives you are requiring.”**

gestion,” says Keller. “It’s saved us a great deal of money. It can cost \$50,000 to \$150,000 depending on the city.

“Sometimes it’s a little bit of a stretch because some people end up in a hotel that’s about a mile away and they don’t see it as walkable,” she says. “There’s an on-call shuttle service for people who have mobility issues.”

Placing conferences in cities with good public transportation or hotels that are within walking distance of the convention center can help reduce the need for shuttles. That’s not always possible in the cities where Cluss holds her conferences, so attendees are encouraged to carpool from the hotel. “We did biodiesel buses for our transportation for our tours this year,” she says.

#### REUSE WHEN POSSIBLE

Reusing items from event to event is a great way to decrease a meeting’s environmental impact. “We used electronic signage as much as possible,” says Grant. “When it wasn’t possible, we reused existing signage or used material that can be recycled.”

“You have to balance out your branding of the event with what can be reduced and go digital,” says Cluss. “Some signs are going to be different because you have new sponsors, but a few years back, any signs that could be used year after year we stopped making specific to that particular conference.”

Look to your decorator or general services contractor to see if they can design other materials that are reusable. “One thing we did to be a little more green was to come up with a registration booth design that we could use for two years,” says Keller. It consists of a fabric piece that stretches over a metal frame. When the metal structure is taken down, the fabric can be folded and used again.

In addition, any carpeting that’s put down in the event facility is made with a high percentage of recycled material. APHA’s vendor reuses it whenever possible.

“We set up a recycling center inside the exhibit hall where

people could leave any giveaways they didn’t want to take back with them,” Keller says. Those items were made available to people who did have a use for them.

#### GET MEMBER AND PARTNER BUY-IN

Your actions have an enormous impact on the environmental footprint of your event. But to really boost your reach, you need help from attendees.

“We did a whole marketing campaign of green tweets,” says Keller, which included tips such as bringing a refillable water bottle.

APHA also shared ways exhibitors could decrease their carbon footprint, such as not bringing as many printed handouts or giveaway items. Smith encourages exhibitors to use biodegradable shipping and packing materials.

Both Keller and Smith recommend looking for AV vendors that use equipment such as LED lights and staging solutions that are reusable and recyclable, or practices such as shutting down projectors when not in use so they don’t continue to draw energy. Again, Keller tries to work with local vendors whenever possible so she doesn’t have to fly people in for the event.

#### FIRST STEPS TOWARD GREENER MEETINGS

If your association hasn’t taken any steps to lower the environmental impact of your meetings, Zavada says it’s important to start simply. “The first step should be developing a sustainable event policy to share with all your key stakeholders, venues and vendors. Let them know what is important to your association and what sustainable initiatives you are requiring. Starting out, this doesn’t have to be an extensive list, but could include five to seven key initiatives which align with your association’s mission and values.” For instance, ask venues, suppliers and partners about their processes for recycling, water-wise menu planning, food donations or signage reuse.

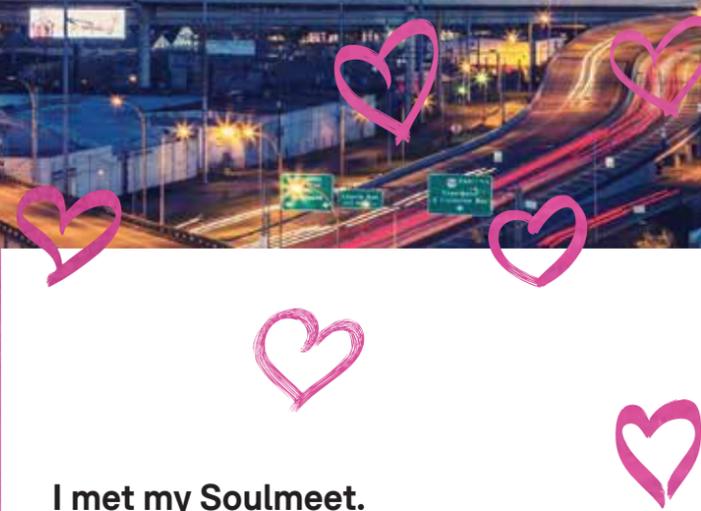
As you implement sustainability measures, don’t hesitate to educate members about what you’re doing. “We had a really wonderful volunteer committee that worked with us on some special events, and one of the things they did was put together some fact sheets about what we were doing to green our annual meeting,” says Keller. One discussed the eco-friendly features at the Georgia World Congress Center, the LEED-certified building where the meeting was held. Another described the measures APHA was taking to become a more environmentally conscious organization.

“Whenever we do something we don’t talk about it enough, so people aren’t really aware of it,” Keller says. That education is part of the effort to remind people about the importance of protecting the environment and what everyone can do to take part.

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It's important to understand what social media channels work best for different messages and what is needed to create audience engagement.

# It's All About the Buzz!

## Meaningful Social Media Marketing

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

By Sophia Bennett

**S**ocial media is a great tool for staying in touch with members, providing educational resources and building relationships with stakeholders. It's also playing an increasingly important role in marketing conferences, trainings and other special events.

"It's a key component of our clients' campaigns for driving registration pre-event as well as creating buzz during the event," says Julie Parsons, managing director of Fixation, a strategic marketing firm that focuses on associations. "It's safe to assume most (if not all) of your prospective attendees are using social media, making it a great opportunity to communicate with them — through organic content and paid advertising — in addition to the other channels you're utilizing as part of an integrated campaign."

However, "if someone thinks you can put a post up and say 'come to our conference' and provide a link to register, they're dreaming," says Neil O'Keefe, senior vice president of content and marketing for the Data and Marketing Association. "I think those days are long gone. It has to be engaging content."

As is true of any marketing effort, a social media campaign designed to boost event attendance must be well thought out and well executed. It starts with understanding your audience and looking at your existing event marketing strategy. From there, it's important to understand what social media channels work best for different messages and what types of content is needed to create that necessary audience engagement.

Add a budget line item for social media advertising. Most experts agree that boosting or promoting posts is a good way to extend the reach of popular posts. Then get ready to dive in and have fun.

### UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

Once you've identified the goals or desired outcomes of a marketing effort, your next step is to develop an understanding of your audience. Karen R. Baker, MTA, MA, a strategic and experiential marketing consultant, recommends focusing on the psychographics or lifestyle characteristics of your target population. "What do they do? What do they like? It's less about how old they are and how much money they make," she says.

Instead, focus on understanding the things that will catch the attention of people in your target market. What are their values and beliefs? What are their interests and hobbies? What traits do they share with other people in the same market? Use that information to narrow down what groups you will attempt to reach on social media and what messages will most appeal to them.

This process will help you narrow down which platforms to center your campaign on. When it comes time to begin advertising, it also will help you determine which psychographic groups to target. Most social media sites allow you to pick an audience based on interests and hobbies as well as demographics such as gender, age and location.

### WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA SITES WORK BEST?

Facebook is still the largest social media site, which means it has the broadest audience. But from a business and event marketing perspective, Baker isn't the biggest fan. "I think it's really good for what it was made for socially," she says. "But people end up rambling and doing paragraph-long stuff and people don't read it."

"From a paid perspective we find Facebook to be the most important platform," says O'Keefe. However, the asso-

"What got us doing... (Instagram) is we have an awards program that's global in nature, and it attracts some of the greatest agencies and creatives in the world."

Neil O'Keefe  
Senior Vice President of Content and Marketing  
Data and Marketing Association  
New York, New York

ciation gets a higher level of engagement on Twitter.

"I would say that Twitter is our primary channel for communicating information," says Duke Fanelli, chief marketing officer for the Association of National Advertisers. "That's how we share a lot of our news, whether it's content or event-related."

Instagram is becoming an increasingly important tool. "Using it as a means to promote our event is somewhat new in the last two years, but this year we're doing it with earnest," says O'Keefe. "We can show from the numbers that we're getting better engagement through Instagram than the other sites."

He believes Instagram works best for events with a significant visual component. "What got us doing it is we have an awards program that's global in nature, and it attracts some of the greatest agencies and creatives in the world," he reports. The ability to show their work and engage with them on Instagram made a lot of sense.

But any group that likes to take and share engaging photos can do well on the platform. "We use Instagram to have fun," says Fanelli. "We share photos of what's going on at events, what's going on with the staff, and when we attend member meetings."

Instagram has several features that make it challenging from a marketing perspective. "There's not an ability, at least

at our account level, to have a link directly to the event from the post," says O'Keefe. "You can do a link in your bio." There's also no easy way for a person to share a photo and associated post with their followers. But at a time when visual content is so important, it's often worth working around those quirks.

"One (social media site) I think people forget about is LinkedIn," says Baker. "When people are doing business events and conferences that are education-based, LinkedIn is still a really good resource. They have these tools including InMail, where you can send things straight into someone's inbox. They don't have to follow you."

Fanelli does some event promotion on LinkedIn, but he prefers to take a more social approach. "We encourage staff to post on their personal accounts to promote conferences and share what's happening in the organization," he says.





Fixation's social media campaign for the Specialty Food Association's Summer Fancy Food Show boosted registration from prior years.

**"We launched an advertising campaign on (social media) using creative that featured people eating specialty food. It was eye-catching and playful, with a punchy headline that made you want to learn more about the show."**

Julie Parsons  
Managing Director  
Fixation  
Bethesda, Maryland

Credits: Fixation

"We've found that to be fairly successful. Not everyone does, but those that do, reach audiences that we as an organization wouldn't be able to."

In the end, though, what social media channels will work best for your association depends on the behavior of your audience. Their needs and interests can vary greatly from industry to industry, says Parsons. "We recommend auditing and testing all channels to determine where to focus your investment."

### CONTENT: VIDEO IS KING

When it comes to promoting conferences and other events, there's widespread agreement that video is important. "This is probably no secret to anyone, but we've found video to be very valuable in terms of getting people to at least engage with us," says Fanelli. "We go out of our way to create speaker interviews and sizzle reels we can use to demonstrate what people get if they attend."

"I don't think I can stress enough that video is important," says O'Keefe. "In the last two years we've really stepped up the use of video." They cut content into segments of between 30 seconds and 1 minute 20 seconds for use in social posts.

Beyond video, O'Keefe promotes DMA's major conference by sharing information about major speakers. "A member is writing profiles on each of our key speakers, and we're posting those as blogs and sharing them through social. We're also working with influencers to spread those further. In ev-

ery one of those instances we're tagging the speaker's handle and their company's handle.

"This year there's a lot of key issues that we'll play off of," he adds. Many of their event promotions will focus on what attendees can learn about pending regulatory issues, key public relations messages and other topics that are on people's minds.

### PAID PROMOTION IS NECESSARY

"I think paid is definitely required now," says O'Keefe. "What I think is amazing about it is anyone can get involved. It's incredibly simple. It's also incredibly simple to spend a lot of money, but they do allow you to manage your posts and you can do it for as little as a few dollars a day."

Social media sites regularly change their algorithms to reconfigure which posts subscribers see. There's been a lot of concern that recent changes from Facebook in particular would result in a big decrease in organic or native traffic for many businesses, which would mean they'd have to pay if they wanted their posts to be seen at all.

However, Fanelli says he hasn't found that to be the case. "We use the paid component really just to give us a boost," he says. "I wouldn't say the organic is dwindling, but we do try to energize the (promotional posts) with some paid behind them."

That means associations are using boosted or promoted posts less to be seen by their loyal followers, and more to be

seen repeatedly or ensure their message is landing in front of its target market. Kiki J. Fox, president of the Association for Women in Events (AWE), says her organization recently added a small budget for social media advertising. "A lot of our events, such as our webinars, are members only. But if we have something come up that everybody can attend, such as an AWE board member speaking at an event or a meet-and-greet in a particular city, we'll give it a quick boost. It's nice to have that reassurance that it's hitting some of the audience you want to get."

One of the best things about social media advertising is that you can get real-time results for any campaign. "You can find out quickly if the visual or the ad or the graphic works," says Baker. Use that information to continue paying for the posts that are doing the best job of reaching your intended audience and inspiring them to take action.

When putting together a paid social media campaign, "make your message fun," Fox says. "Because it's on social media, you don't want to make it your standard advertising. People are there for a social reason, so you want to make it lighter and a little exciting. Showcase something about your event that's not on your website. Or highlight something fun about your show that makes people think."

### TIPS FOR BOOSTING ORGANIC/NATIVE ENGAGEMENT

While paid advertising is a powerful and popular tool, it may become less important if you really invest in your audience and message development up front. "Someone I'm working with now, we have not done any paid posts," Baker says. "We really honed in on the things I mentioned before — using good graphics, really honing the message, looking at the psychographics, using hashtags — then looking at platforms and where we're interested in being seen."

Another strategy for growing your organic or native reach is to plan virtual events. The Data and Marketing Association has had good luck promoting &THEN, its largest event,

**"...We've found video to be very valuable in terms of getting people to at least engage with us. We go out of our way to create speaker interviews and sizzle reels we can use to demonstrate what people get if they attend."**

Duke Fanelli  
Chief Marketing Officer  
Association of National Advertisers  
New York, New York

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Kiki J. Fox  
President  
Association for Women in Events  
Alexandria, Virginia



through regular Twitter chats with industry influencers. They typically take place in the summer, just as promotion for the October conference is ramping up. "We pull everyone together around three or four in the afternoon and have a conversation around key topics," O'Keefe says. "We find that drives significant engagement with social. We tie that into some type of announcement or price change (such as a discount code) with the event, and that usually leads to a big spike in ticket sales."

A Twitter chat or similar effort can be a good way to get yourself in front of your intended audience before you start promoting your conference, which is important, Baker says. She works with many brands that are frustrated because no one is responding to their event posts. Oftentimes the reason is people don't know anything about them or what they have to offer. "People need to be used to you being part of the conversation. Posting when we have something to say instead of being part of the conversation continuously isn't as effective."

Another way to become known to your audience on Twitter and Instagram is to use industry hashtags or common hashtags for "days" such as Motivation Monday, Wednesday Wisdom and Throwback Thursday. Hashtags do a great job of getting your posts in front of more eyeballs. Liking or commenting on people's posts also helps them connect with the users behind the handles and begin building knowledge and trust.

It's also vitally important to tag speakers, companies, sponsors and any other relevant stakeholders when you're posting about them on social media. When you tag someone in a post, they know you're talking about them. It makes it much more likely they'll share or retweet your message. Sponsors in particular love to be called out, O'Keefe notes.

Make sure you identify any unique hashtags used by the people or businesses you're tagging and include them in your posts. "If you have someone who's considered a celebrity in their industry, their fans may be looking them up via their hashtag and not their handle," Baker says. And if you haven't



Credits: 7Concepts



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**“Some planners are fearful of going into social media... I’m always an advocate of planners being part of the conversation. Nine times out of 10 they know the audience better than the marketers.”**

Karen R. Baker, MTA, MA  
Strategic and Experiential Marketing Consultant  
7Concepts  
Washington, DC

already, establish a hashtag for your event. In future years, potential attendees will be able to follow that thread and see how their peers benefited from what they learned.

### AN OMNICHANNEL STRATEGY

Consistency in messaging is vital to the success of any marketing effort. That’s a big reason DMA’s event marketing efforts follow an omnichannel strategy rather than a multichannel one.

“In a multichannel effort, you’re attempting to be everywhere but not necessarily connected across all channels,” says O’Keefe. “We want to create an on-brand experience across all channels. That includes our printed catalogs and brochures, print ads in magazines, social media, search engine marketing, search engine optimization and remarketing.”

Parsons’ team took a similar approach when marketing the 2016 Summer Fancy Food Show for the Specialty Food Association. “We launched an advertising campaign on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter using creative that featured people eating specialty food. It was eye-catching and playful, with a punchy headline that made you want to learn more about the show. This was part of a successful integrated campaign — including direct mail, email, search engine marketing and traditional media — that increased their buyer registration from the previous year and resulted in one of their most successful shows.”

Following this model and ensuring an event’s social media campaign is consistent will all other marketing efforts will lead to the greatest success. But one important thing to note is that this doesn’t mean you should post identical content to every social media platform. Your audience is likely to be slightly different between the various sites, which means dif-

ferent things will appeal to them. Identify what types of posts generate the most engagement on your Facebook page, and see how that differs from what earns retweets or shares on Twitter or LinkedIn. Messages on the different sites can be adapted to audience needs as long as they’re consistent with your overall branding.

### USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO LISTEN ... AND TALK

Social media isn’t just about pushing your message out to potential participants. It can also be a rich source of information that will make people feel they can’t miss your event. The Association for Women in Events hosts regular Twitter chats and discussions in their private Facebook group. When a question generates high interest or a passionate response, “we know those are good discussions to continue,” says Fox. “It can help you see the trends that are popular and help you shape what you’re going to talk about at your conferences.”

When it comes to talking about your gathering on social media, Baker encourages meeting organizers to get involved and not leave the campaign entirely to the marketing department. “Some planners are fearful of going into social media because they’re always in the planning mode. But I’m always an advocate of planners being part of the conversation. Nine times out of 10 they know the audience better than the marketers. They have really good insight into the audience because they’re the ones actually on the ground. And who knows better than the people on the ground?”

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# Working With AMCs

## Building Success Into the Association & Management Company Relationship

One of the most important decisions an association must make is who will manage the organization and what will that management look like?

Will the management company provide the executive director or will the executive director come from within the organization or elsewhere? What, exactly, will the management company's duties consist of? How many hours will the management company put in each week? How much can the association afford to pay for the work it wants and how much does the management company need for the work it performs?

It sounds straightforward enough. But the association-management relationship is a complex one, not only in terms of computing time and costs but also in terms of personalities on both sides and mutual understanding of expectations and goals.

### MANY OPTIONS

John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE, president & CEO of ASAE, the association for association professionals and industry partners, emphasizes that there is no one right path to a successful relationship.

"There isn't one formula. Rather, there are a number of management company models that work depending on the association," he says. "Some association management companies (AMCs) are turnkey and run the whole thing. Sometimes the association board has a CEO or executive director and they want the AMC to do some things but not all things. The formula works when everyone is clear on expectations."

Russ Lemieux, senior vice president with Kellen, an association management company, believes the best association/AMC relationships are characterized by two things: "First, a management team that listens carefully and is constantly attentive to the needs of association members and stakeholders, as well as the trends of the industry or profession represented. Second, a board of directors that provides strategic input and direction, works with management to establish priorities and clear expectations for results, and trusts management to execute the plans necessary for success."

Given that a management company is likely a major line item in any association budget, it's important for associations to fully understand what AMCs bring to the table.

Lemieux says AMCs typically provide three important things: strong leadership to keep the organization dedicated

to its mission while working with elected leaders to establish and work toward a clear vision; flexibility to quickly adapt to an association's evolving needs for programs, services and staffing in a dynamic world; and business acumen focused on organizational growth, prudent expenditures and operational efficiencies.

Graham points out that AMCs can benefit smaller associations in particular. "AMCs typically bring built-in expertise and experience," he says. "They provide smaller associations with the ability to get high-quality staff even if the association's budget wouldn't support that if the association tried to hire on its own — bringing in a CFO rather than just a bookkeeper, for example. An association's executive director (ED) may work full-time but maybe the finance and marketing people don't. That's the beauty of the model. AMCs allow smaller associations to hire a level of expertise available on a full-time basis that they could not otherwise afford."

### THE CHALLENGES

Issues related to time, money, communication and unforeseen developments could potentially derail the association-AMC relationship.

"What you run into is that you have boards that are knowledgeable about their industry or profession but have little knowledge about how to run an association," Graham points out. "So they may expect more from the AMC than the AMC can deliver. It's important for both parties to understand the roles, expectations and outcomes that everyone can achieve and at what cost."

AMCs, Graham says, "want to provide the most of what they think the association can afford. Associations can pay a stand-alone staff rather than an AMC but they'll get less. It's really a matter of trading price for expertise and how much the association is willing to pay for that expertise. It becomes a question for the association volunteer group to decide how much they value expertise and how much they can pay. There's a continuum of price/expertise and services," Graham says.

There are also challenges with terminating and starting relationships. Barbara Ramsay Orr, president of the Society of American Travel Writers, which now works with Kellen, faced that challenge and learned hard lessons in the process.

"One of the dangers, and one our organization faced in the past, is relying too heavily on the management company. When we switched to Kellen as our new AMC, processes,

By Christine Loomis

"AMCs typically bring built-in expertise and experience. They provide smaller associations with... high-quality staff even if the association's budget wouldn't support that... on its own."

John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE  
President & CEO  
ASAE  
Washington, DC



history and backup never made the transition, and the new management team had to reconstruct and reinvent many of the mechanics of running the organization. Just being aware that professional relationships change and even terminate has been an eye opener. We have an excellent relationship with Kellen and there is a firm understanding that the fundamental building blocks of our society are clear, transferable and solid.”

Another issue is that the relationship might put too many cooks in the association kitchen, so to speak. “The more pure the relationship, the easier the relationship is to manage. If you have a CEO and a board and an AMC, that almost means two bosses, which is more challenging,” Graham notes. “If you have just a board and AMC, that’s purer and easier. The less pure the relationship, the more likelihood there is of miscommunication.”

It’s not enough just to communicate. The communication has to be consistent. “Inconsistent communication between management and association boards and leaders can lead to lack of awareness and trust,” Lemieux notes.

Perhaps most important, everyone has to be on the same page. “A lack of mutual expectations related to priorities and success measurements can lead to frustration on the part of management and volunteers,” Lemieux says. “And lack of organizational focus, e.g., trying to be too many things for too many stakeholders, dilutes association resources, which hampers operations and program execution yielding less-than-desired results.”

Association management companies and the associations they manage are in many ways different animals, so it’s easy to understand why so many challenges exist. From the association perspective, it’s a challenge that management companies often do not fully understand the association’s industry or culture.

“Another pitfall is the AMC’s potential lack of familiarity with the specific culture of your unique organization,” Orr says. “While they may manage other similar organizations, each one has its singular focus and style.”

Lemieux sees a benefit in becoming more knowledgeable about a client’s industry. “Clients want us to have an intimate understanding of their industries and professions — trends, challenges, opportunities. We take pride in not only becoming knowledgeable and informed but also taking a leadership role in representing client interests before the media, government bodies and other influencers.”

For Orr and her organization, that’s a positive. “As for becoming knowledgeable about our organization, Kellen has invested in getting to know us and we have gotten to know them. Our executive director has regular and frequent communication with the board, participates in monthly executive conference calls, attends our board meetings and conferences, and has forged personal and professional connections with

both our board members and our society members. They know most of our quirks now!”

### VALUE PROPOSITIONS

From the AMC perspective, associations don’t always understand the value of what management companies provide, including how to drive success.

While it may be true that AMCs don’t always know every facet of an association’s industry, and that can be difficult for associations, Graham points out that what AMCs do know is the business of managing an association. The critical components of that are not specific to any one industry but rather to best practices in management and relationships.

“Powerful results in terms of delivering value to association members are best achieved with the mutual commitment of management and association leadership to a transparent relationship based on trust. Passion is critical to success, but useless without efficient and effective processes and procedures,” Lemieux notes.

Graham comes back to the paradigm of price vs. expertise and services as well as structure. “The AMC has to manage expectations and if I were an AMC, I might wish that the association board was more knowledgeable and better understood that paradigm. It becomes harder if the ED is not part of the management company but rather part of the association itself. The ED is acting as a filter so that could be a good filter or a bad filter.”

Regardless of an association’s particular quirks and challenges, Lemieux says a strong collaboration between management and the association leadership works across all industries. AMCs bring broad management knowledge and expertise to the collaboration.

“Tech sector, health care, transportation and other dynamic,



**“Clients want us to have an intimate understanding of their industries and professions — trends, challenges, opportunities.”**

Russ Lemieux  
Senior Vice President  
Kellen  
Atlanta, Georgia

fast-growing industries come with the challenges of rapidly changing environments and competition for stakeholder attention and resources. The need for programs and services, and effective marketing of these, is paramount,” he says.

“More mature and/or shrinking industries face the challenge of staying relevant and, in some cases, having a viable business proposition for the association. In these cases, prioritizing what’s most important to the industry and allocating resources appropriately is critical, as is providing leadership to help associations reinvent themselves to re-establish relevance.”

Graham points to the specific makeup of an association’s membership and how AMCs can help. “Industry and trade associations can be challenging when you have players at different levels. Think of homebuilders. You have the huge companies and then you have the guy who builds a few homes a year. That variance makes them harder to manage.”

Associations comprised of middle managers may be harder to manage because boards and members don’t yet have leadership and broad management experience. “Nursing associations are harder to manage than physician associations,” Graham notes. “A membership made up of human resources personnel is harder to manage than one comprised of industry executives.”

These associations, however, can benefit greatly from the leadership and broad experience of an AMC.

### THE RIGHT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE RIGHT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

What also helps is an experienced executive director, whether from within the association or the management company, with the right skill set.

A good ED has “leadership characteristics and is not egotistical but able to recognize that their job is to serve the organization,” Graham says. “Knowledge of how to manage the association and association experience from different organizations is important, as well as the ability to bring people together to reach a conclusion and the ability to communicate externally and internally, both orally and in writing.”

For Lemieux, it’s “leadership skills, experience, good judgment, intellectual curiosity, diplomacy and listening skills.”

But for true success, an association’s board must be tasked with bringing many of the same skills to the table along with a clear understanding of their role in the overall success of an organization. Because the specific makeup of boards, especially volunteer boards, changes often, maintaining consistency and focused purpose can be challenging for AMCs and executive directors.

Lemieux says that the best qualities for board members are, “business experience along with strategic thinking skills, collaborative skills and acceptance of the need to reach and publicly

**“...There is a firm understanding (with our AMC) that the fundamental building blocks of our society are clear, transferable and solid.”**

Barbara Ramsay Orr  
President  
Society of American Travel Writers  
Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois



support decisions based on consensus — even for decisions that he or she did not support in the boardroom.”

Graham notes that board members must understand their duty of loyalty to the association rather than to themselves or one constituent group. “They must understand their fiduciary role, which is to be a good steward of the association’s assets. They have to understand how to provide adequate resources to do what the association needs to do. If fundraising is a goal, they need to help with that to accomplish the mission. If they’re a dues organization they need to have the right dues in place.”

Additionally, he says, “Onboarding is important for new board members and ongoing onboarding is important since most volunteers don’t do this type of work every day. Without good orientation and training, they don’t succeed because they only know what they know.”

### THE TECHNOLOGY FACTOR

If there’s one element in today’s market and economy that can make a difference for associations, whether they’re struggling with relevance or thriving, it’s technology and the associated ROI it helps deliver. The very reason members join associations has shifted in recent years, and associations have to react and adjust. With their broad perspective across multiple industries, AMCs can help associations do just that.

“Members no longer join associations merely to ‘support the industry’ and socialize with industry peers. They join in order to receive clear value that will help them as professionals,” Lemieux says. “It started well before five years ago, but the biggest evolution has been a significantly increased and healthy focus on ROI for the individual member, and establishing and

tracking metrics to continuously measure an association's delivery of value to its members and to the industry/professions it represents."

In today's world, that delivery of value is very much tied to technology. "Today's association members need information that is accurate and timely to support their companies and careers. Investing in robust technology solutions, and the resources to manage them, that meet this demand is a must for all associations today," Lemieux says.

In part, it's about engagement, which impacts an association's relevance and can affect membership numbers. Technology changes the dynamic between an association and its members.

"You need to have up-to-date technology," Graham says. "You can't be relevant without the systems in place that allow members to engage. Most associations are organized to provide benefits to members. Technology changes the equation. It allows the member to create the experience he or she wants to create with the association and not the other way around. Technology allows more of a cafeteria model so people can pick and choose when and how they want to engage."

Graham sees information at the center of this change. "In the old model, members joined associations largely to have access to information critical to their industry, which they couldn't get any other way," he says. "Thirty years ago, associations had the information and you had to join to get it. Now, information is free all over the place. What associations can do is package that information in a way that's more valuable to members. The only price tag is how fast they can get it and aggregate it."

Associations today, he says, must be able to provide what members want faster than they can get it themselves and all in one place. "That's the value proposition for associations — the right architecture for their website, the right taxonomy, the right content management system and content distribution system. Every day. Not just at the annual meeting.

Smaller organizations might be challenged to provide what's needed at an affordable cost, but that's where an AMC can help. It can provide it because it's doing so for multiple clients."

That's not to say it's easy. "Technology is probably the most difficult aspect of managing an association these days. It's expensive and most associations have to put a lot of resources into technology, which is evolving all the time. What's current today won't be current tomorrow," Graham notes. "You maybe don't want the first iPhone that came out and you may not yet need the X, but you should have the 7 or 8."

Generational preferences play a role, too. "Millennials for sure expect their association to be as technologically savvy as they are. They expect you to have a good website," Graham

says. "But you have to play in both camps. It's not mass customization. What boomers and millennials want is different and both groups need the technology to customize it the way they want to."

In the old model, Graham says, everyone paid the same and got the same services but only 15 to 20 percent of members would ever use the services. "Today, that number goes way up because people can use technology to engage. Now it's less expensive for members to engage with their association because they do it on their phone. That means you need PD (professional development) on video, you need webinars and you need these available on multiple platforms."

One thing that hasn't changed: Associations are still about connecting and networking. "They're more about community than education," Graham says. "We used to think the opposite. Certainly one byproduct of the community is education. But you don't have to attend a meeting to get educated. On the other hand, you can't network online as well. Millennials want that face-to-face connecting as much as any other member."

#### CREATING POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Another thing that hasn't changed is what a successful association-management relationship looks like and can achieve.

"At the end of the day," Graham says, "the most successful relationship is when outcomes all want are achieved at the right price. That's the sweet spot. The association believes it's getting great results for a price it can afford and isn't being overcharge. The AMC believes it's achieving what the client wants and is getting the price it needs for the services provided."

For Lemieux, perspective plays a role. "When association leaders view their AMCs and management teams merely as vendors of commoditized services, many opportunities are lost. With our association partners, where there is truly a strategic partnership between management and leadership, we've together advanced — and in some cases even saved — industries. With the core fundamentals of strong communication, mutual commitment and trust in place, these relationships literally last decades and transcend changes to industries, evolving staffs and leaders."

To build the best possible relationship and create positive outcomes, Orr offers this advice to association leadership: "Ensure that the lines of communication are clear so that your executive director knows who to contact for membership questions or who to speak to for financial ones. Invest in building a close relationship between the executive board and the primary employees in the management firm who deal with the business of your organization. And be self sufficient so that should you have to move to a new AMC, you can do so without losing your organizational history or having to rebuild your processes anew." AC&F

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Planners for the USA Science & Engineering Festival understand young families' needs, providing them with plenty of exciting activities.

# Family-friendly Convention Destinations

## A Sampling of Fun Cities With Serious Drawing Power

By Maura Keller

One surefire solution to sagging attendance is to choose a popular vacation destination that will appeal to the whole family. Time-pressed parents will appreciate the chance to blend quality family time into a business-related trip and fully experience all that the destination has to offer. There are many convention cities large and small that should be on every planner's family-friendly wish list, offering historical, educational and just-plain-fun attractions and activities for association groups to work some and play some. Here's a sampling of fun cities that association planners have found offer some serious drawing power.

### WASHINGTON, DC

The wealth of museums, monuments and other historical sites in our nation's capital will certainly entice the 25,000 attendees of the American Geophysical Union's (AGU) 2018 Fall Meeting in DC to bring their families along.

Notes Lauren Parr, vice president of meetings for the Washington, DC-based AGU, "Washington, DC, provides a terrific opportunity for families to enjoy all that the city has to offer and for earth and space scientists to connect with not only their disciplinary communities at the meeting, but also

the larger global science policy community located in the DC region," Parr says.

An important factor in AGU's selection of DC, is that the meeting is the kickoff celebration of their centennial year and the opportunity to host where the organization is headquartered.

"DC is home to a large community of affiliated science organizations like the Carnegie Institution for Science, National Academy of Sciences, Geological Society of Washington and others," Parr says. "Many of these organizations are planning public lectures and other events to coincide with the AGU Fall Meeting."

In addition, AGU is hosting an "AGU Night at the Museums" for conference attendees and their families while they're here. They are partnering with the American Museum of Natural History, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the National Air and Space Museum and the National Museum of American History to host programs and an after-hours open house. Many AGU member scientists have contributed to exhibits for the Smithsonian, especially at the Air and Space and Natural History museums.

"We're looking forward to celebrating those scientists and their contributions during this event," Parr says. "We're of-

fering a slate of field trips that includes a multiday visit to Shenandoah to explore the unique geology there as well as opportunities to visit NASA Goddard and other locations that are unique to D.C.

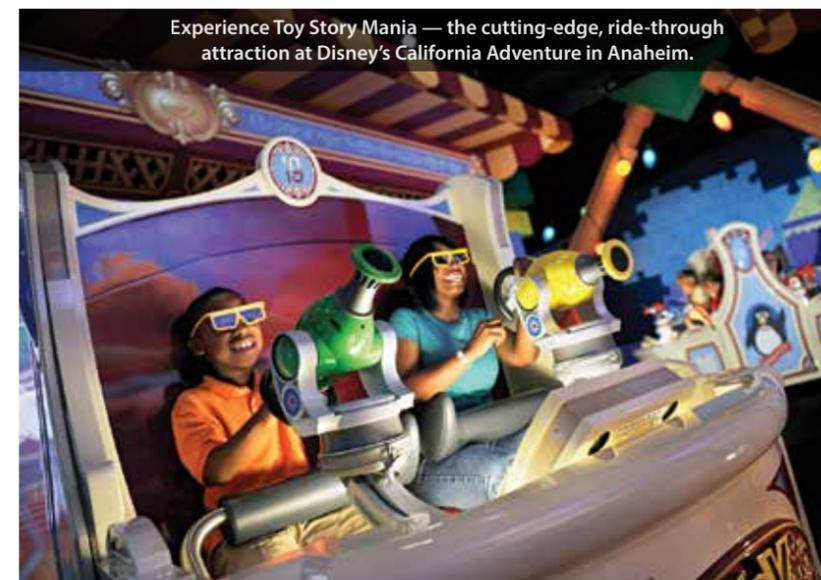
"AGU's Fall Meeting is a family-friendly event," Parr says. "We're one of the few meetings that allow children onto the exhibit floor and into the meeting itself. AGU does this because we understand that work-life balance for our scientists is difficult and often, for parents or caregivers to attend, the family comes along too."

According to Megan Cumming, vice president of operations at Linder Global Events, who helped organize the USA Science & Engineering Festival, Washington, DC provides access to many major companies, organizations and lawmakers, and continues to be a vibrant and expanding metro area.

"We consider the DC metro area to be a crossroads for multiple major cities and a large population of young families within a short distance away," Cumming says. "The festival understands the needs of young families."

Washington, DC, is teeming with museums aplenty for all age levels and interests. Science-oriented meeting and event attendees can enjoy the National Air and Space Museum on the National Mall, which offers daily programs involving science experimentation. Kids are welcome to make and fly their own paper airplane, look through a real telescope with astronomy experts, take in a show at the Planetarium, climb in an aircraft or ride a simulator.

Kids will also love uncovering the secrets of espionage at the International Spy Museum, which features numerous experiences. Kids can learn how engineers construct architectural wonders by building an actual arch or truss using soft blocks in the Great Hall of the National Building Museum.



Experience Toy Story Mania — the cutting-edge, ride-through attraction at Disney's California Adventure in Anaheim.

"We're one of the few meetings that allow children onto the exhibit floor and into the meeting itself. AGU does this because we understand that work-life balance for our scientists is difficult."



Lauren Parr  
Vice President of Meetings  
American Geophysical Union  
Washington, DC

And at the National Postal Museum, kids can create a stamp using their own design, write and mail a postcard, sit in the cab of a postal truck, ride in a stagecoach and sort packages like people in the mail room.

Of course, no trip to Washington, DC would be complete without experiencing the National Museum of American History, which features a wealth of interactive exhibits for kids and adults alike.

### ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

Anaheim is known as a popular destination for family travel, and in July 1018, Destinations International, formerly Destination Marketing Association International, will be there hosting its annual convention. Destinations International is making a big push for attendees to bring their families this year and will have programming and events specifically geared to attendee's families, including a movie night at the Grand Plaza for the kids.

The Anaheim Convention Center (ACC) reigns as the largest exhibit facility on the West Coast, having hosted large, well-attended events in more than 1.8 million sf of function space. Recently the ACC underwent a \$190 million expansion, creating 200,000 sf of additional leasable space between two levels that will be used as exhibit, ballroom or meeting space, allowing the convention center to accommodate a wider range of events.

A climate-controlled pedestrian bridge provides access between the existing facility and expansion. In addition, a sweeping 10,000-sf balcony takes advantage of Anaheim's Mediterranean climate, giving opportunities for outdoor gatherings.

Families visiting Anaheim as part of a convention will enjoy Disneyland Park. At Disney California Adventure, families can explore seven exciting lands with entertainment showcases such as World of Color, seasonal celebrations and transformations throughout the year and the all-new attraction Guardians of the Galaxy.

Disney aside, Knott's Berry Farm has evolved into



Mike May  
President  
Brightspot  
Irving, Texas

**“The company encourages family attendance by reimbursing their mileage and adding family-friendly receptions for spouses and children. Their business meeting agenda may even include one free day to see the local sites.”**

cluding links to discounted attraction tickets, visitors guides and a free mobile app. We also worked with some of the local attractions to offer discounted tickets specifically designed for our attendees via our event website.”

An airport shuttle discount also was offered so that the association could make the visit as affordable as possible for partners and kids to join attendees for an extended stay.

“The Orlando hospitality community was very supportive of our attendance-building approach by focusing on the city as a fun and family-friendly destination,” says Kyle. “Orlando has successfully hosted meetings and families for years — a lot of resources and initiatives are already in place so that planners won’t have to start from scratch when looking for amenities to include in their programs.”

Orlando World Center Marriott, located in not only the No. 1 meeting and convention location in the U.S., but also the most visited destination in the nation, entices large groups with more than 450,000 total sf of state-of-the-art special event space (almost all on one level) and the nation’s largest pillar-free ballroom.

However, the resort provides the perfect “twofer” trip, encouraging travelers to bring their families along for activities and experiences including the Falls Pool Oasis, where guests can enjoy a 104-step slide tower with two 200-foot winding waterslides and one 90-foot speed waterslide — among the tallest and fastest resort slides in Florida.

The resort’s Kids Activity Center at the Falls Pool Oasis features Legoland-themed events and Gatorland animal appear-

a world-class theme park, water park and hotel. The venue offers three mild-but-wild attractions, including Coast Rider and Surfside Gliders. Families can take a stroll back in time on the streets of Ghost Town where they may encounter a real Knott’s Cowboy shootout.

And just over the Orange County line is Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, where attendees can get up close and personal with a variety of marine animals.

Convention attendees and families also can enjoy Huntington Beach by taking a private surf lesson or walking along the pier and watching the locals tackle the big waves. The Balboa Fun Zone on the Balboa Peninsula is a Newport Beach nook featuring quaint shops and ice cream stands. Families can enjoy doughnuts or breakfast croissants at the famed Dad’s Donut Shop & Bakery, then rent a wave runner, go parasailing, head out on a whale-watching tour or take a spin on the Ferris wheel.

## ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Whether an intimate group of 20 or large convention of thousands, Orlando has the space to meet the needs of not only attendees but also the families they bring along. With the Orange County Convention Center, one of the largest convention centers in the country, offering 2.1 million sf of exhibition space and more than 118,000 rooms across the destination, Orlando offers a plethora of options for meeting planners looking to surprise and delight all. What’s more, Orlando is home to some of the most identifiable attractions in the world, including Universal Studios and SeaWorld.

Lesley Kyle, CMP, founder, president and CEO of marketing and meetings company OpenMindWorks Inc., planned a three-day conference in Orlando with concurrent educational sessions, networking opportunities and a trade show for a well-established international association.

“Sponsors, exhibitors and attendees who wouldn’t normally travel with their families planned vacation time before and after the conference,” Kyle says. “The Orlando CVB has an outstanding website chock full of trip-planning resources, in-



Fireworks show — poolside at the Orlando World Center Marriott.

Credit: Orlando World Center Marriott

ances by alligators and snakes, as well as the Mermaid Academy — where children experience life underwater with a tail.

Orlando World Center has been named by Forbes as one of the “world’s coolest hotel pools.” It’s easy to see why. There are three large screens to display sports or movies overlooking the main pool, a splash pad and a DJ booth.

In addition to Orlando’s world-famous theme parks, other key Orlando “must see” attractions for families include Madame Tussauds Orlando and Sea Life Orlando Aquarium, both of which are complemented with a variety of dining and shopping venues. Ripley’s Believe It or Not! also is a great venue where families can enjoy hundreds of interactive, fascinating displays.

## BRANSON, MISSOURI

Mike May, president of event planning company Brightspot, says Branson, in the rib cage of middle-America, is within driving distance for 90 percent of convention attendees. “While many meeting planners would prefer to fly, these attendees are happy to drive because they can bring along family members for a work-cation getaway,” May says. “The company encourages family attendance by reimbursing their mileage and adding family-friendly receptions for spouses

**“From immersion into our country’s history to theme parks, wine tours and proximity to the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean...(Greater Williamsburg) is truly a fantastic destination.”**

Nikki Abig  
Global Account Executive  
Conference Direct  
Greater Williamsburg, Virginia

and children. Their business meeting agenda may even include one free day to see the local sites.”

As May explains, in Branson, a company’s event can be the “big fish” event of the week and local venues can be more flexible than Las Vegas, Orlando and other metropolitan markets. And Branson arouses the curiosity of invitees who may have visited other tier-one cities, so an unvisited destination offers new experiences.

According to the Branson Convention and Visitors Bureau, meeting attendees love coming to Branson. Attendees tell planners that the Branson area is a favorite meeting destination for a number of reasons: the central location, the breathtaking natural setting, the abundance of activities — and the fact that their family members love to come along.

In fact, the Branson Convention Center is located at the heart of downtown and the Branson Landing, giving conference attendees and their families hundreds of fun things to do within a few square blocks. Whether they are staying at the Hilton Branson Convention Center hotel, the Hilton Promenade or the nearby Best Western Plus Landing View Inn &



Flying-high with Adventure Ziplines of Branson, a favorite family destination.

Suites, families who have “come along for the ride” will be at the center of the excitement in downtown.

In addition, there are number of unique attractions located nearby, including the Branson Scenic Railway, Parakeet Pete’s Waterfront Zipline and Steampunk Balloon.

Also outside the convention center is a trolley stop, where visitors can catch a free ride to other parts of downtown and the Branson Landing.

And Branson is home to the 1880s-themed amusement park Silver Dollar City and the White Water waterpark. Silver Dollar City recently announced the “World’s Fastest, Steepest and Tallest Complete-Circuit Spinning Roller Coaster” with the spring 2018 debut of Time Traveler. In addition, Branson boasts unique museums including the Titanic Museum Attraction, The Butterfly Palace, Hollywood Wax Museum and Ripley’s Believe it or Not, just to name a few.

And the Branson Mountain Adventure Park is home of the Runaway coaster. This unique, family-friendly thrill ride takes riders along 5,000 feet of track, down hills, around corners and through two 360-degree horizontal loops. Riders can choose to go at full speed for maximum thrills or use a personal braking system to travel at a more moderate pace and enjoy Branson’s natural beauty and spectacular views as they descend the mountain.

America’s Fun Park is scheduled to open in May 2018 to bring another affordable family attraction to Branson. Reminiscent of a classic state fair midway, this park features carnival games, midway rides and a food court.

## GREATER WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

Nikki Abig, global account executive at Conference Direct, loves recommending Greater Williamsburg to her clients who are looking to incorporate family-friendly aspects to a conference or meeting experience.

“Williamsburg is truly a fantastic meeting destination,” Abig



Lesley Kyle, CMP  
Founder, President and CEO  
OpenMindWorks Inc.  
Carmel, New York

**“Orlando has successfully hosted meetings and families for years — a lot of resources and initiatives are already in place so that planners won’t have to start from scratch when looking for amenities to include in their programs.”**

Even after 400 years, a visit to Jamestown is still an adventure, but not as challenging as it was for settlers of the first permanent English colony in America in 1607. At Historic Jamestown, site of the original 1607 settlement, families can explore the Glasshouse to learn about America’s earliest industries, see ongoing archaeological discoveries of the fort and view thousands of artifacts unearthed, on display in the Nathalie P. and Alan M. Voorhees Archaearium.

Named for the most beautiful theme park in America for the past 27 years, Busch Gardens in Williamsburg offers fun for the whole family. Families can enjoy feeling the rush aboard one of the venue’s thrill coasters or at one of the park’s KIDSiderate attractions.

“Greater Williamsburg offers amenities similar to first-tier cities but at a much better value,” says Dominique Holt, associate director of conference sales and marketing, Visit Williamsburg. “Not only are we a historical destination, we also offer adventure, thrills, unique dining experiences and much more. It’s no surprise that meeting planners report that the attendance rises when they meet here. Williamsburg is one of North America’s most popular vacation destinations, and our unmatched combination of attractions and activities will delight delegates and their families.”

### BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

As far as cities go, Boston offers the best of both worlds: Exceptional convention facilities and a wealth of family-friendly activities that will keep both attendees and their children entertained for days.

Boston’s Freedom Trail links 16 historically significant sites along a 2.5-mile urban walking trail. Near the trail visitors can experience the Faneuil Hall Marketplace. Built in 1742, Faneuil Hall was home to merchants, fishermen and meat and produce sellers. Nowadays families can enjoy unique shops while indulging in the worldwide cuisine.

While the Freedom Trail offers abundant opportunities for education and exploration, the Boston Public Market features a wealth of pushcart vendors and a new indoor year-round public market, complete with dozens of permanent vendors.

Ideally located in the Seaport District, the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center is also conveniently located to several “must see” family friendly attractions. The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum offers visitors the chance to relive this historic event through an interactive setting. Nearby, the Boston Children’s Museum entertains even the youngest of attendees, and the New England Aquarium offers an up-close-and-personal glimpse into the region’s marine life.

AC&F

says. “The hotels and resorts offer the options various group types need and the experience and entertainment opportunities for attendees are unmatched. From immersion into our country’s history to theme parks, wine tours and proximity to the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean, the area is truly a fantastic destination.”

As the world’s largest living history museum, Colonial Williamsburg allows families to travel back in time and immerse themselves in an 18th century city to gain a new perspective on the American story. Guests of all ages can meet the nation’s founders, enjoy period stories, and even try their hands

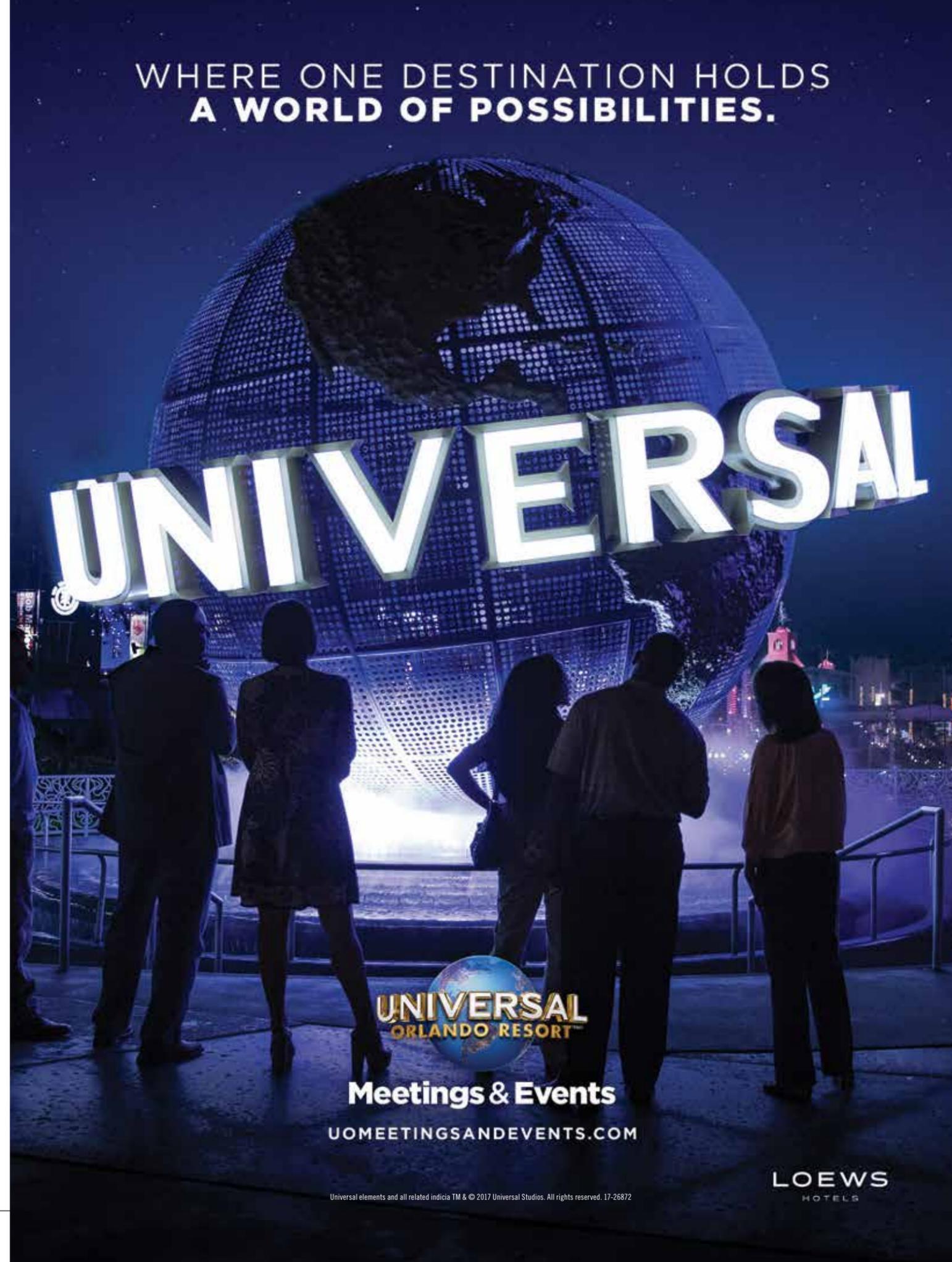


The Christmas Tavern Illumination at Colonial Williamsburg.

at historic trades and games, with a focus on fun for young revolutionaries.

To meet the needs of convention attendees, Colonial Williamsburg has six unique hotel properties offering something for everyone. With 48 meeting rooms, 67,000 sf of function space and stunning outdoor venues, everything a planner could need is close at hand, plus guests have access to all the exceptional resort facilities Colonial Williamsburg has to offer. All of the properties have access to many resort amenities and are conveniently located near historic downtown and Merchant’s square, a unique shopping and dining destination.

Credit: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation



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View of The Diplomat Resort & Spa, from Hollywood's Intracoastal Waterway.

Credit: The Diplomat Resort & Spa

# Stepping It Up in the Sunshine State

Elevate the Experience in These Fabulous Florida Destinations

“Association meeting” and “luxury” may not fall trippingly off the tongue, at least not in the same sentence. But some planners who see their annual events rapidly growing are finding it’s worth stepping it up a bit, not only for a memorable attendee experience, but for that key element when last-minute changes crop up: flexibility.

“This was the most expensive conference we’ve ever produced — partly because of more people, partly because this is not a budget destination,” says Sean Gibbons, CEO of The Communications Network. But for the annual conference of communications professionals at nonprofits and major foundations such as Ford, Gates and MacArthur, “It was worth the extra expense. Lots of people in the network work in difficult circumstances in different parts of the world, and we wanted to show our appreciation: give them respite and rest, and help them feel a little taken care of.”

By Sara Churchville

## MIAMI ICON

Nearly 800 attendees sought that respite at the Fontainebleau Miami Beach last September. “There is only one Fontainebleau: iconic, rich with history, magnificent,” Gibbons says. He also appreciates that the hotel is “a sustainable institution that aligns with our values.” For attendees, living out those values included in some cases coming in early for a day of service. Hurricane Irma had passed through two weeks before the conference, and “given the nature of who we are, the timing felt right, to be able to bring business into the city and offer an opportunity to give back.”

Community activity included cleanup for Zoo Miami, working in shelters in downtown Miami and welcoming local university students and at-risk high school students to participate with social media and practicing journalism skills.

“Impeccable” is how he describes the Fontainebleau staff.

“They work with tremendous precision and good cheer. The staff anticipates and resolves issues; they are highly skilled, emotionally intelligent problem solvers.” He says there was no negative feedback from attendee surveys; two out of three attendees rated the experience as “excellent.” “The Ai Weiwei chandelier and art in the hotel was a big hit,” he says. Chez Bon Bon, the onsite bakery, also regularly competed with the provided smoothies. And the single most popular destination? The gym.

## BEACH DIPLOMACY

“Do you know how difficult it is to have 17 board members happy?” Soraya C. Regalado, ACSR, executive manager, Latin American Association of Insurance Agencies, says rhetorically. She’s managed to keep them happy by consistently returning to the 1,000-room Diplomat Beach Resort for the association’s annual convention. The hotel is large enough to accommodate her group — this past August’s convention drew more than 2,000 attendees for a trade show and continuing education classes — yet detail-oriented enough to meet the exacting standards of executives who often travel. “The staff goes out of their way to make your event the best; they treat you like you are their only client. To me, there’s no greater service than that,” Regalado says.

She first experienced the Diplomat in 2005 as an attendee and was impressed by how smoothly things went, even though the city was expecting a hurricane. Since her first trip, both Hollywood itself and the Diplomat have undergone some facelifts. “The last one has been most amazing; the lobby area, especially.” She says attendees were pleased with how much room there is to “network and mingle and hang out.”

The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees has also had ample opportunity to compare and contrast over the years. Decades ago, “we held our meetings and conventions regularly at the ‘old’ Diplomat — before it was torn down and rebuilt,” remembers MaryAnn Kelly, assistant to the editor at IA-TSE. “We had a meeting at the Diplomat in 2016 just before they started renovations. When we returned a year and a half later, the transformation was breathtaking.” More than 1,000 union officers and representatives met for the general executive board meeting and quadrennial convention in July 2017 — the largest showing the association has ever had. The attendees commented on “how well everything was run, and I credit the hotel and its staff for that. The hotel is organized, well-equipped and provides endless possibilities with a signature touch.”

She had several detailed meetings with hotel department heads to review the plans for every meeting, reception and event. “They had suggestions from room layouts to banquet changes. They worked with me on pricing and how to get as much out of an event as possible when you’re on a budget. I truly appreciated their professionalism and patience,” Kelly says.

Regalado found that her convention has grown so much that,

“(The Swan and Dolphin) took time to learn about us, our background, how we felt about our past situations — to build the relationship and ease concerns.”



Dan LaBert

Executive Director, National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys  
Washington, DC

for the first time this year, “We sold out (our) room block super-fast and the hotel itself was sold out. It’s a nice problem to have!” Add last-minute registrants to the list, and “I’m constantly making addendums to events: food has to be changed, tables have to be added, centerpieces have to be ordered.” The Diplomat staff takes it all in stride, she finds.

## MAKING MAGIC FOR ATTENDEES IN ORLANDO

“We have a tough audience, solo practitioners,” Dan LaBert, executive director, National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys, says of his annual convention attendees. “When they close their office, that means no revenue for them.” As such, they expect a lot: a solid curriculum that improves their practice, provided in an easy-in, easy-out location. The May 2017 annual conference and trade show, complete with plenary and breakouts, set the expectation bar even higher all around: it was for the association’s 25th anniversary. Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort exceeded LaBert’s expectations, and ratings on post-attendance surveys from around 1,000 attendees and 100 exhibitors were higher than for the last three years, when the group met in San Francisco, Chicago and New York.

The Swan and Dolphin has a “fantastic reputation of working with associations,” he says of his decision to convene there. “They know associations have ebb and flow in their financial structure and create a win/win for themselves and the client. They treat every client better than other properties do; really put on the white gloves,” he says.

Case in point: “We lost over \$100,000 one year; after Hurricane Michelle in Miami, we had to cancel and lose revenue. The Swan and Dolphin was aware and sensitive, and found ways to make the annual convention rewarding for us coming off a challenging previous event,” he says. Not that the resort offered an incredible deal financially, but more that “they took time to learn about us, our background, how we felt about our past situations — to build the relationship and ease concerns. We have high standards, and they knew that, understood our vision and made it happen.”

The vision for the 25th anniversary involved a live concert in the exhibitor area, food trucks rolled in, an open bar and chang-



Evening reception for the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys at Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort, Orlando.

Credit: NACBA/Todd Buchanan

ing with Dale Chihuly and uses those play-of-light techniques in his designs.

Attendees looking for a sandwich menu from Chef Guy Fieri and over-the-top milkshakes can experience Planet Hollywood Observatory, which reopened last year after a \$30 million investment. The four-story emporium's most imposing feature is its 4,500-sf video wall with customizable displays. Among its five areas and 35,000 sf of potential meeting space are a second-floor outdoor space, Terrace, that can receive up to 250 attendees, with a further 250 just indoors at Terra; all told, the space can accommodate some 1,100 attendees.

For attendees who are up for some high-tech high jinks — not directly after meals — SeaWorld Orlando's first virtual reality roller coaster, Kraken, is now open. Make no mistake: this roller coaster is very real, as is the VR headgear attendees don once seated. An underwater adventure perfectly timed to match the various the swoops and dives of the coaster enhances the ride's dizzying effect.

### IT'S UNDER CONTROL

For planners who crave the opposite of a wild roller coaster ride, Marriott's Red Coat Direct program "allows the planner to be in complete control of the meeting from anywhere in the entire complex. Room temperature can be changed, coffee can be ordered, or an unscheduled break built in last minute... all without having to first contact an event manager," says H.V. "Skip" Shaw, Jr. president and CEO of the National Frozen & Refrigerated Foods Association, which has held at least five conventions at Orlando World Center Marriott since 1998. "They are part of our normal rotation," he says of the city and the resort. Last October, some 1,300 top executives in the industry converged on the resort, which offers 450,000 sf of event space and 1,883 rooms. Shaw notes that the planning included setting up more than 125 meeting rooms for the association's retailer and manufacturer members. "It feels like family when we return," he says. "There are so many long-term employees at the Orlando



Sharing a meal at the National Frozen & Refrigerated Foods Association Convention at the Orlando World Center Marriott.

Credit: NFRA

World Center Marriott that it makes our planning and execution seamless."

The resort "provides us with an ideal place for business meetings as they have endless experiences and amenities available on property including one of the world's coolest hotel pools, a championship golf course, full-service spa and fitness center, a number of restaurants and lounges and it's centrally located," he says.

Shaw says: "We always see a bump in attendance when holding our convention at Orlando World Center Marriott." In fact, the association plans to return for its 2019 convention.

### DESTIN FOR GREATNESS

"Alabama is challenged somewhat in the resort offerings that have a beach aspect, and our membership really wanted something on the beach," says Beth Witten, managing partner, Blue Turtle Creative. Her firm manages the Alabama Healthcare Financial Management Association's annual education and networking event, which last September welcomed 160 attendees to Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, a venue the association has been returning to for 10 years. "Hilton Sandestin has all the amenities — really nice rooms, beach, great meeting



Bonfire on the beach at Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa.

Credit: Hilton Sandestin

space. The staff is experienced and has great tenure and knows what our group expects, so we're not starting over every year with expectations," Witten says.

Over the years, the event has created traditions that attendees and sponsors cherish: a sand castle contest, a deep sea fishing tournament, golf, a themed dinner by the beach and, most notably, an annual fireworks show.

"(In a previous year) there was a drought, and the county decided they would ban fireworks. They've always been a traditional aspect of our event, so we worked with the staff, their civic partnership with tourism and the county, to say it was important for our group. They really went to bat for us, and in the end we were able to hold the fireworks," she says.

Witten finds attendees give "really high marks on food. Food is one of those things people remember — if you're feeding people well, that reflects on their whole experience of the conference."

**"The staff (at The Diplomat) goes out of their way to make your event the best; they treat you like you are their only client. To me, there's no greater service than that."**



Soraya C. Regalado, ACSR  
Executive Manager, Latin American Association of Insurance Agencies  
Miami, FL

She particularly notes how flexible Hilton Sandestin was with her room block: like many association planners, she's finding that attendees register later and later, even as overall attendance rises. "It's a testament to their experience in the conference world that they understand the ebb and flow of putting on a conference; they're not rigid. There's that trust — they're still respectful of attendees' pocketbook."

To relieve some of the overall financial burden for attendees, Witten negotiates to lower the daily resort fee; since she knows her annual dates, she contracts events over multiple years for more negotiating leverage. And the destination itself is easy on the attendee wallet in the sense that its location along U.S. Route 98 makes it an accessible drive; it's also 20 minutes from Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport, she notes.

"We have sponsors who every year sponsor the same items — fireworks, for example — and they know they'll be treated with great attention to detail, both from our side and from the staff side."

The nearby Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort prides itself on teambuilding activities for attendees; its 65,000 sf of meeting space can welcome up to 1,600, and the resort is adept at planning active group participation events including fun runs, and scavenger hunts, as well as fishing and stand-up paddleboard relays on the Choctawhatchee Bay.

Perhaps the standout feature of the new Henderson, a Salamander Beach & Spa Resort is its position right next door to Henderson Beach State Park & Preserve, where sea turtles still nest and the hotel actively cooperates with rangers to keep the space environmentally and turtle friendly, such as with specially designed lighting. For attendees, the 170-room hotel offers access to the park as well as two miles of private white-sand beach; an adults-only pool suitable for elegant events; 10,000 sf of meeting and event space; 20,000 sf of outdoor space including a Sunset Deck with sweeping views of the Gulf of Mexico; and the old-school ice cream parlor, Sprinkles.

### THE FOOD'S THE THING

When the American Veterinary Distributors Association held its annual conference at Ponte Vedra Inn and Club on Florida's

northeast coast in 2011, “our attendees loved the property and wanted to return,” says Jackie King, executive vice president, King Management Group Inc. Return they did, in May 2017 — 212 top-level executives and salespeople ready to learn and network. “It’s five-star, five-diamond level of service,” says King. “The rooms are set up in different ‘houses,’ with regular furniture you would have in your house; many rooms are oceanfront or ocean view.” The two-story houses are close to the ocean and the beach is not overdeveloped, “so you can walk up and down the beach for a long time, just gorgeous.”

**“There is only one Fontainebleau: iconic, rich with history, magnificent. (The hotel is) a sustainable institution that aligns with our values.”**

Sean Gibbons

CEO, The Communications Network, Washington, DC

Eighty golfers participated in a tournament at the Ocean Course, one of two courses on the property; a fishing excursion also proved popular. “Ponte Vedra Inn & Club was very flexible on adjusting meeting space for us for a new meeting that popped up,” she notes. Her tips for other planners working with budget constraints: “Try to get them to waive or reduce the resort fee.”

The opening event was held at the resort’s Surf Club Patio overlooking the ocean, and the closing event — which included contests, games, indoor buffet stations, outdoor bars and passed hors d’oeuvres — overlooked the West Putting Green. King found the attention to the overall flow impressive. She also appreciated the property’s willingness to work with her budget. The chef made suggestions for adjusting the established menu to use, for example, fish and produce that were in season. “We got very high marks on service and food and beverage from our attendees,” King says.

Food is also a strong draw for the Georgia Bankers Association. “Twice a year we go here; our people love it,” says Susan Kelley, senior vice president. This past September, about 50 attendees including spouses arrived at Ponte Vedra Inn and Club for two days to enjoy a reception and dinner on Sunday, a Monday morning meeting followed by golf or fishing and an evening reception and dinner. Her association has been coming for about six years and is scheduled to continue at least through 2019. “The food is wonderful, and I think that keeps a lot of them coming back,” she says, describing the grilled lobster and steak options and the Mayport shrimp as standouts, and noting the high server-to-attendee ratio. “It’s expensive, but they love it.” She works with the resort to provide lunches for golfers and fishermen, a buffet dinner one night, and a plated dinner the second.

Apart from the food, the bankers appreciate the uncrowded beach and the gym from which they can look out over the ocean

from a treadmill. “We call this nice place ‘home’ for our meeting site. The meeting facilities, beautiful landscape, beach and on-site golf along with wonderful food and service keeps us coming back,” Kelley says.

#### THE PALM AFTER THE STORM

Any property where all 309 guest rooms have been designed by Jonathan Adler isn’t going to be cut-rate, but this hasn’t deterred association planners from experiencing the Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, with its more than 30,000 sf of meeting space, including a nearly 10,000-sf ballroom indoors that can be divided into three equal rooms; and an oceanfront courtyard, a lawn and pool terrace for outdoor functions. Kirkland Event & Destination Services, a partner of the hotel, provided the décor for an event it hosted during the July 2017 annual meeting of the Florida Society of Association Executives. Paget Kirkland, president/owner, says, “The Eau Palm Beach being independently owned allows them the opportunity to say yes to those ‘out of



An evening’s event by the pool at Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

Credit: Kirkland Event & Destination Services, Inc.

the box’ requests, allowing us to really get creative.” One such request from the FSAE involved literally reconfiguring the box; specifically, the spa, which typically has “hanging chairs over a shallow pool of water. The client loved the space so much so we drained the water from the shallow pool and expanded the space, allowing them to do an amazing Moroccan-themed party in a great space,” Kirkland says.

#### KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

It isn’t every association that looks first to a private club that boasts its own island, but for certain events, the royal treatment may be just what’s called for. Ocean Reef Club opens its 144-room inn to nonmembers and offers 30,000 sf of indoor meeting space as well as several al fresco venues. A private air strip, marina that offers chartered dinner yachts, a nature center, a cooking school, two golf courses — one built into a wildlife sanctuary, various pools and 12 tennis courts are a sampling of the offerings.

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ROSENWALD

**Yael Rosenwald** was named senior sales executive at the San Francisco Marriott Marquis. She previously worked for Starwood Hotels responsible for citywide accounts at several San Francisco properties.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando, Florida, has named **Jennifer Barrett** as senior sales executive responsible for corporate and association business for the Midwest, West Coast and mid-Atlantic markets. She formerly was conference sales manager at the Hilton Orlando.

The Vancouver Convention Centre in Vancouver BC has welcomed **Michelle Leroux** as director of sales. Most recently, she held the role of director of sales and marketing at the Vancouver Marriott Pinnacle Downtown.

Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel has announced **Jennifer Lewis** as director of sales and marketing. She most recently worked as the director of sales and marketing for the Kimpton Hotel Monaco Baltimore.

The Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority has announced the addition of **Madeja Metcalf** as the regional director of convention sales, with responsibility for soliciting meetings and conventions throughout the Midwest. Metcalf, who will be based in the Chicago office, formerly served as



BARRETT



LEROUX



LEWIS



METCALF

sales and executive meetings manager for the Hyatt Centric Chicago Magnificent Mile.

Visit Seattle has named **Karen Johnston** as national account director, based in Chicago and responsible for Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, West Virginia, Canada and international markets. She was regional account director for Visit Tampa Bay.

The Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau recently promoted **Mallory Cappelli** to convention sales manager in the convention development department. She has been with the Bureau in a convention sales assistant role since July 2016.

Choose Chicago has promoted **Dawn Young**, CEM, to vice president of hotel sales. She most recently served as senior director of sales for the destination marketing organization.

Benchmark, a global hospitality company has appointed **Eric Gavin** as senior vice president sales and marketing. He was chief marketing officer for Salamander Hotels & Resorts.

**Scott Ward** was named director of sales and marketing for Benchmark's Santa Barbara Beach & Golf Resort, Curacao. He was previously interim director of sales and marketing for Benchmark's South Florida properties Beachwalk Resort in Hallandale Beach and Marenas Beach Resort in Sunny Isles. AC&F



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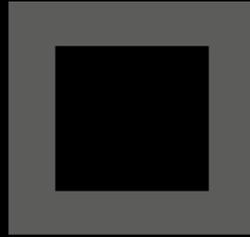
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