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Work Their Magic
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Great Fits for
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Event Tech
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Chicago
PAGE 52

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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

Las Vegas in High Gear

Corporate Group Business
Is Full Speed Ahead
PAGE 58

Top Foodie Destinations

Where Opportunities for Authentic
Culinary Experiences Abound
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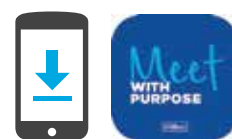
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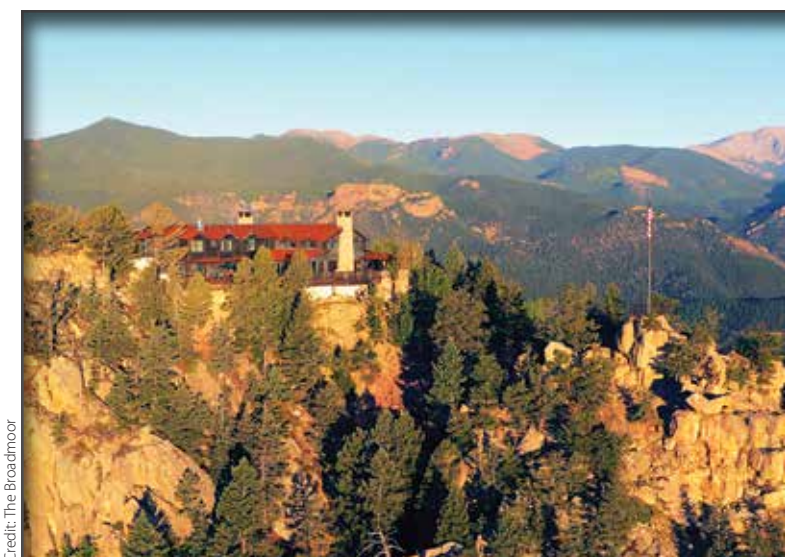
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Like genies, CVBs can provide planners with what they most want and need to deliver the "wow" factor. **PAGE 16**



The sky's the limit for successful small meetings at exceptional retreats such as The Broadmoor's Cloud Camp. **PAGE 26**

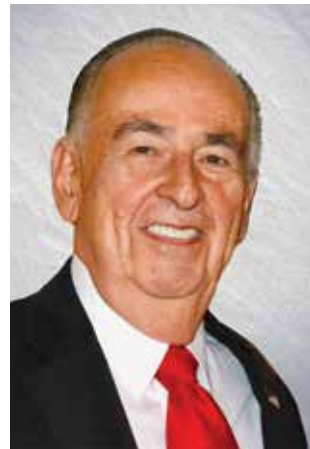


New Orleans is a foodie town and more, as Beachbodies Global Events discovered at their Leadership Ladder program. **PAGE 40**

Publisher's Message

New Year, New Possibilities

It's a new year with lots of exciting new possibilities in the realm of site selection, as you'll discover in this issue. When you make personal resolutions to improve in 2018, how about taking a new look at where your meetings are going? We're all about destinations in this issue, and the destination that is perhaps the most relentless in its pursuit of renewal and reinvention is Las Vegas. "Las Vegas in High Gear" on page 58 tells why the city that never rests on its laurels was named the world's No. 1 meeting and convention destination by the World Travel Awards.



"Not only do we already have more meeting space than any other city on planet Earth," says Chris Meyer, V.P. of global business sales, Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority, "but we're currently adding 1.2 million sf of meeting room space." No wonder corporate group business is running full speed ahead.

We also profile the best of Chicago on page 52 and feature the Windy City in our rundown of "Top Foodie Destinations" on page 40, where you'll savor unique, destination-specific culinary experiences that may make you want to banish the banquet for good. And read about some exceptional retreats that are great fits for small meetings on page 26.

In "Your Wish Is Their Command" on page 16, learn how to make the most out of partnering with CVBs, leveraging their local knowledge and wealth of resources for your meetings. Don Welsh, president and CEO of Destinations International advances the CVB value proposition: "CVBs can show advantages to a destination that a planner may not have been aware of and wouldn't find anywhere else."

Finally, this year, resolve to not get left behind in the tech realm, as our feature "Event Tech Update" advises, including learning about the brave new world of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). To that end, don't miss the Hilton Meet With Purpose ad on our inside cover featuring our first augmented reality ad that can bring specific pages to life with 3-D content visible on your mobile device. Follow the three steps listed at the bottom of this page, then go to the Hilton Meet With Purpose ad to experience this new, innovative technology firsthand!

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

Augmented Reality



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News & Notes

Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach Celebrates Grand Opening



Pictured at Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach's grand-opening ribbon-cutting ceremony are (left to right) Andreas Ioannou, Mayor Jack Seiler, Commissioner Barbara Sharief, Maria Elena Zapata, Jose Luis Zapata, Carmine Zayoun, Joe Berger, Chintan Dadhich, John Vanderslice, Julie Grimes, Pierre Heafey, Adam Gusk.

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL — Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach's grand opening included guests: Chintan Dadhich, general manager; Joe Berger, executive vice president and president, Americas for Hilton; John Vanderslice, global head of luxury and lifestyle brands for Hilton; Pierre Heafey, founder, chairman and president of Heafey Group; Jose Luis Zapata, developer; Julie Grimes, vice president of community outreach for Heafey Group; Carmine Zayoun, vice president of operations for Heafey Group, Miami; Andreas Ioannou, CEO of Orchestra Hotels & Resorts; and Barbara Sharief, Broward County Commissioner.

The 290-all suite, oceanfront resort offers four dining/bars, fitness center, abundant event space and 20,000-sf ocean-facing pool deck. www.hilton.com



MILTON

Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast Announces New CEO

MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST, MS — The regional destination marketing organization charged with promoting tourism within Hancock, Harrison and Jackson counties in Mississippi, recently announced Milton Segarra as its new CEO, beginning on January 8.

Segarra has more than three decades in tourism, corporate America and government experience, most recently as CEO of Meet Puerto Rico, the destination's convention and visitors bureau. While in Puerto Rico, he led a team of 29 and managed a budget of \$6.2 million. Segarra is also a member of the board of directors of Destinations International, its finance committee and is a Certified Destination Management Executive, CDME. www.gulfcoast.org

SITE Foundation Alters Approach to Meet Changing Needs of Incentive Travel Industry

CHICAGO, IL — Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Foundation has altered its approach to meet the demands of its members and the industry in an ever-changing global marketplace. SITE's updated mission: to create compelling content to inform business professionals of the bold results incentive travel produces, and to provide industry insights to further careers of current incentive professionals.

Three annual events — SITE Classic, SITE Nite Europe and SITE Nite North America — provide a majority of the Foundation's funding.

"Through this year's events...the Foundation raised over \$500,000 to enable continued investment to advance our mission, respond quickly to shifts in the marketplace and translate new intelligence into strategies that meet the needs of our customers and members," said Rhea Stagner, CIS, SITE Foundation president and division vice-president, sourcing and supplier relations, Maritz Travel — a Maritz Global Events Company.

Since July 2016, the Foundation has amped up investment to provide a regular cadence of valued incentive content. This year the Foundation unveiled Motivate — a dynamic online intelligence hub that serves as a repository of content for the incentive travel industry, centralizing all resources in a single, online location. Motivate features a comprehensive array of timely, relevant thought leadership content produced by the Foundation, as well as content created in collaboration with other organizations, sponsors and influencers.

For next year, the Foundation will invest nearly \$400,000 for new curriculum development. www.siteglobal.com

Tips & Trends

8 Trends in Events at Sea

By Jo Kling, President, Landry & Kling Global Cruise Events

Considering an event at sea? The timing couldn't be better! These eight cruise trends highlight key shifts creating excitement, opportunity and memorable moments — at sea and ashore — for group events.

- 1. Bringing the Outside In.** Fresh ship design concepts include: outward-facing furnishings and more indoor-outdoor spaces; infinity veranda accommodations with glass walls that open to the sea with a touch of a button; wrap-around promenades near the water with dining, entertainment and shopping venues; open-air lounges with retractable roofs that transform into evening nightclubs; use of greenery, atriums with glass walls and natural light.
- 2. Floating Hotels & Private Suite Enclaves.** More ships look like high-end hotels — without the hidden costs. Luxury hotel operator Ritz-Carlton will launch three cruising mega-yachts in 2019; upscale cruise lines are commissioning land-based hospitality designers to create inviting ship interiors. Suite enclaves on large ships offer "private yacht" luxury amenities and exclusivity with private-access pool, lounge and restaurant.
- 3. Motivating Millennials & Multi-Gen Groups.** U by Uniworld is the first river cruise brand for 21–45-year-olds, with communal dining tables and international DJs. Sports facilities include expansive aqua parks and sports complexes, top deck electric go-kart race track and open-air laser-tag course. European river cruises offer culinary walking tours, canoe and bicycle trips.
- 4. Technology That Rivals Land-Based.** New satellite technology and increased bandwidth are making cruise ship Wi-Fi access faster and more reliable; contemporary ships offer internet access or inexpensive social media packages for a daily rate. New cruise line mobile apps and wearable devices let guests track luggage, expedite embarkation/debarkation, chat with other guests and book excursions.
- 5. Wellness Programming at Sea and Ashore.** Locally sourced food provisioned from organic, sustainable farms; raw food menu created in conjunction with Hippocrates Health Institute; a wide range of vegan options with plant-based dishes and drinks. Healthy lifestyle programs include: Regent Seven Seas' Wellness Excursions (such as a tai chi class in a 19th century palace), paired with an onboard spa treatment; Seabourn's Spa & Wellness with Dr. Andrew Weil combines yoga, meditation and mindfulness seminars.
- 6. Authentic, Immersive Destination Experiences.** Exclusive "behind the scenes" events (such as a private concert at a Viennese palace); authentic cultural experiences ashore with local chefs, musicians and artists; immersive interactions with local families; new culinary excursions with chef-led market tours, cooking classes and meals hosted in private estates.
- 7. Luxury Yacht Expedition Cruising.** Notable new yachts include: Celebrity Flora (capacity 100), the first luxury vessel in the Galapagos to feature suites with infinity verandas; Ponant Explorers yachts (capacity 184) with infinity glass-edged pools and the first underwater observation lounge; Crystal Endeavor (capacity 200) expedition mega-yacht features butler-serviced suites.
- 8. Unique Meeting Venues.** Room configurations include: theater, classroom, boardroom or mini trade show setups; meeting venues come equipped with multimedia technology including plasma-screen TVs, AMF panels, sound and lighting, and more; conference centers can be converted into several smaller rooms; comfortable lounges with advanced technology and flexible seating; spacious theaters with professional lighting and sound (complimentary).

Since 1982, Miami-based Landry & Kling Global Cruise Events has provided cruise ship solutions and custom cruise planning for ship buyouts, incentive cruises, cruise meetings, music festivals, theme cruises and dockside ship charters for global events. For oceans of information, visit landrykling.com and shipcharters.com or call 800-448-9002.

IACC 'Meeting Room of the Future' Update

THE WOODLANDS, TX — The latest report from the groundbreaking IACC Meeting Room of the Future shows that meeting planners and conferees have rapidly evolving goals and great expectations. Consequently,

the IACC Meeting Room of the Future project will continue. The project is designed to transform the meeting experience through a global collaboration. Says Ellen Sinclair, Benchmark S.V.P. operations, and chair of the

initiative, "Our goal was to build a meeting room of the future, but we soon realized that meeting spaces are no longer confined to a room. Thanks to mobile technology, a meeting room can be...[anywhere]." www.iacconline.org/iacc-meeting-room-of-the-future, www.benchmarkglobalhospitality.com

News & Notes

IMEX Predicts Return to a Focus on People for 2018

FRANKFURT, GERMANY — Humanity in the world and in the meetings industry will be the central common theme to the key trends of 2018. After years when technology has

been revolutionizing the meetings industry, in 2018 there will be a return to a focus on people. Here are five trends, each with people at the heart of the issue, that

- IMEX believes will be clearly evident and highly influential in 2018.
- 1. Security.** In 2016 in particular, security became one of the greatest challenges of our time. Attendees and staff need to be assured that everything has been done to keep them safe.
 - 2. Anti-tourism, over-tourism and the impact of the sharing economy.** There has been an outcry from people who feel that too much tourism is damaging their communities and their lives. The industry must continue to strongly communicate the short and long-term benefits that meetings, events and incentive travel bring to a destination — both in terms of the high impact direct benefits, as well as longer term indirect benefits.
 - 3. Women in the industry — rising in prominence.** The rising importance of diversity, particularly around women in the workplace and career advancement, is important across all sectors, and the meetings and events industry is no exception.
 - 4. The new age of anxiety.** A survey carried out by MPI for IMEX revealed that only 5 percent of the meetings professionals surveyed felt no stress at work. Skift dedicated its recent annual big topic special edition to “Travel in the age of Permanxiety.” It is “a near-constant state of anxiety exacerbated by hyper-connected citizens using social media.”
 - 5. Life 3.0 — when robots are replacing humans at work, what will humans do all day?** Event professionals will need to continue to be sensitive to people’s interactions and needs.

IMEX takes place on May 15-17, 2018 in Frankfurt Germany. www.imex-frankfurt.com

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PCMA Snapshots



PCMA's Convening Leaders took place January 7-10 in Nashville, aka Music City, where more than 4,500 attendees learned how to “Amplify Engagement” during three days of thought-provoking sessions, networking events and learning opportunities. Deborah Sexton (4 right) steps aside on January 19 after 13 years as president and CEO of PCMA to start her own consulting firm. She is succeeded by PCMA COO Sherref Karamat, CAE (7, right). The 2019 Convening Leaders will take place in Pittsburgh Jan. 6–9.

By Debbie Wemyss

A New Year's Resolution: Be LinkedIn or Left Behind!

The start of a new year typically prompts a multitude of commitments and promises to one's self and business. Ever notice how some people manage to set themselves up for failure? Allow me to assist you in a sure-fire resolution that will put you on the fast track to improve your networking and your business. Now is the time to embrace LinkedIn as the powerful branding and marketing tool that it is. Many professionals have established a LinkedIn profile, but they don't know what to do next. Every member can benefit by doing a little bit more on the site.

What Is Important to Know About LinkedIn?

Here are a few stats from the LinkedIn Corporation Quarterly Reports, LinkedIn News and LinkedIn Blog:

- LinkedIn now has more than 530 million users in more than 200 countries.
- 3 out of 5 CEOs use LinkedIn on a regular basis, three to five times weekly.
- LinkedIn is the largest professional network on the internet.
- LinkedIn is one of the most effective platforms for lead-gen marketers.
- Professionals are signing up to join LinkedIn at a rate of more than two new members per second.
- LinkedIn has become an invaluable resource for the HR industry globally.

For a long time, the site was known as "the job seekers network." LinkedIn does earn more than 60 percent of their annual revenue from their Talent Solutions and the HR industry. But with all statistics aside, here is the real message: Every business needs to network. Every business needs contacts. Every business needs to continue to grow. LinkedIn enables all members to grow an incredibly valuable network of connections that will either lead you to business or become your business later.

Get Started

Initially, establish a LinkedIn profile that has the most professional presence possible. This is, after all, the world's largest professional network. Your goal should be: I want to be found on LinkedIn. People go to Google to find people, products, services, talent and everything else. If you have a LinkedIn profile, it might appear at the top of searches if you have what is known as a keyword optimized profile. The person searching will be taken right to your profile if they are a member of LinkedIn. Otherwise, they will be prompted to start a free basic membership to view your profile in its entirety.

Six Key Points to Consider

1. **Do you have a professional looking headshot?** Using anything other than your likeness in this field (graphic, logo, cartoon) will eventually cause your profile to be shut down! Doing so is against the LinkedIn User Agreement. Make your first impression a good one. Note: Selfies do not belong on LinkedIn — period.
2. **Do you have a Summary?** Yes, this requires writing, but it's a golden opportunity to share your story: what you do, why you're passionate about it and how you can help the viewer. Please remember to include a CTA (call to action) to make it easy for the viewer to reach you by phone, email or website.
3. **The Experience section should include your current work plus at least two previous positions.** Let the viewer know how you progressed to your current role/position — even if what you do now is totally different from the past work you have done.
4. **Skills.** Be sure to max out the 50 allowed. This becomes a glossary of keywords that can bring up your profile. It is appropriate to be a bit redundant with your list as you are guessing at how these keywords might be typed into the search field. Example: Nonprofit also can be listed as NPO, non-profit or not-for-profit. V.P. also can be included as vice president, etc.

“LinkedIn enables all members to grow an **incredibly valuable** network of **connections** that will either lead you to business or become your business later.”

5. **Include images and videos whenever possible.** These can be added to the Summary, Experience and/or Education sections and will help to increase the number of views on your profile. Videos are extremely effective in attracting attention. Keep them brief!
6. **Education.** The relevant year of your educational accomplishments is not a required field. Without the year entry, multiple school/college entries will be listed alphabetically.

It is always advisable to revise your Summary occasionally to keep it fresh. Be mindful of new advancements in your work, business or industry. Your Summary should tell the viewer just enough to pique their curiosity so that they want to know more.

Engage Effectively

The best strategy you can embrace, once your profile is es-

tablished, is to focus on consistently building your network with connections of value. Do this by striving to connect with people you know, like and trust. But also connect with members you do not know who can add value by their industry, connections or business. When someone you do not know invites you to connect, do not hit "ignore" without first spending a minute on their profile to seek value. Do you have mutual connections and are they trusted professionals? That is a plus. Does the person work in an industry within your target market? Might they know people that you need to know? Do they have lots of connections? I choose to ignore invitations on two occasions:

- No headshot = no connection
- Absolutely no synergy = no connection

TIP: When you choose to ignore an invitation it simply goes away and the initiator is not notified.

Inform and Educate

Your activity on LinkedIn also will help to determine your success on the site. Scan your home-page feed and look for posts that resonate with you. Like, comment or share them to help you and the originator be more visible to your network. When you post your own content, be sure you are educating and informing...not pitching! LinkedIn holds a world of prospective clients, but do yourself a favor and show restraint. As with in-person networking, you must engage with your connections, develop a relationship and earn their trust before you can offer solutions to their pain points.

LinkedIn groups, I believe, are the most underutilized feature of the site. The lead-gen aspect of groups is almost limitless. With more than 3 million groups, you surely will find several that cater to your target market. They offer an excellent opportunity to directly engage with a large audience. The amount of activity you do within groups will directly affect the number of views to your profile.

LinkedIn is a tool. And, like any other tool, it must be used to realize a return. With a focused strategy and about 20 minutes a day, you will not be left behind!

C&IT



Debbie Wemyss

After a 20-year nonprofit career in marketing, PR and fundraising, Debbie founded DW Consulting Solutions LLC to offer expert 1:1 and corporate coaching to utilize LinkedIn as a powerful branding and marketing tool. Contact her at 561-444-2265, debbie@dwconsultingsolutions.com, or visit www.linkedin.com/in/debbiewemyss or www.dwconsultingsolutions.com.

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By Doug McLain

Leveraging the Power of Live Meeting Content

The biggest and most profitable events in the world all have one thing in common. The Superbowl, World Cup, TED Conferences and many others have all grown their expansive following by sharing their content beyond the physical audience. These events extend their reach to national and even global audiences through content syndication to television, social channels and online.

With the technology accessible today, the same TV-style broadcasting achieved by the largest events in the world is available as a vehicle for your meetings, conferences and conventions. Cutting-edge advancements in video, audio and integrated communication technologies, such as webcasts, online events and livestreaming, have made it possible to do much more online.



Through Facebook, YouTube, company websites or even to 28 million home TV viewers across the U.S. via OTT (over-the-top) devices such as Roku, it's now possible to broadcast select content from your physical meetings to a global audience.

So, what are the real benefits of content syndication to a virtual audience?

- **Cost-effective.** Cost per acquisition of a virtual viewer is lower than that of your physical attendee, and the virtual event offers additional monetization opportunities for sponsorship or attendee packages.
- **Global reach.** Virtual extensions allow for people across the globe to attend the same event regardless of time zone or travel restrictions. This benefit could create efficiencies in the resources required to reach your dispersed audience.
- **Unlimited attendance.** While your physical event has space constraints, a virtual event allows you to host as many participants as you would like concurrently.
- **On-demand access.** Capturing your live content and making it available online extends the life of your content making it accessible and potentially "revenue generating" for as long as you desire.
- **Comprehensive analytic data.** One of the most advantageous aspects of virtual events is the depth and breadth of statistics you can gather by measuring and tracking participant activity using engagement tools such as participant polling, Q&A, document downloads, viewing preferences and providing comprehensive attendee activity data.
- **Drive attendance to your physical event.** Events that have a virtual extension see a 30 percent increase in physical event attendance the following year. Getting a taste of the buzz and excitement around your live event through a virtual extension acts as an advertisement to get more physical attendees the following year. Here's how you can begin to develop a strategy of putting your live physical events online:

1. **Identify your target audience.** Ensure you understand the exact audience that you would want to reach: employees, suppliers, company stakeholders, members, non-member targets. This will influence your decision regarding the format of your event and the promotion for the introduction of an online platform. Use your online events to generate interest in your physical events and create FOMO (fear of missing out) with highlight keynotes. People are more likely to believe things they've experienced, so why not make an online event part of your promotional marketing strategy?

not have the resources, choose an online event specialist company that offers the full white-glove services that can help you end-to-end. A successful online event will require some of the same skills that you employ for your physical events, and you need to account for the time and personnel resources or rely on an online events company to do it for you.

4. **Choose your platform.** You will need to choose an online event platform that provides you with the technology needed to achieve your goals. A great platform will

"Cutting-edge advancements in video, audio and integrated communication technologies... have made it possible to do much more online."

2. **Decide on a format.** Before you choose a platform for your online event, you need to decide on the basics. Is this going to be an online event with the recorded content from the event or a live hybrid event where the content will be shared live at the same time as the physical event? Define and decide on your goals of the event to facilitate communication exclusively to your membership or broadcast to an external audience for new membership acquisition. For existing membership, you can monetize the content (pay per view) or share selected content openly to help promote the amazing content available for an attendee coming to view it all. And be sure to decide on what kind of budget you can allocate up front so that you can support your goals and objectives.
3. **Get the right staff members on board.** Getting the right people involved from the start will make a huge difference. If your company is going online with events for the first time, assign resources to those on your team who can handle the project management, event configuration and promotion for your event. If you do

come with excellent services delivered around the entire process. It's important to partner with an online events partner who will support you, your sponsors and your attendees during the live event. Also look for scalable technology that is feature-rich and supports full integration with your existing presentation methods (fully virtual, hybrid livestreaming or pre-recorded held simu-live).

In Summary

A successful event takes careful planning and practice. There is a learning curve with online and hybrid events, just as there is for physical events. Your first event will be more challenging to plan than subsequent events, and each event will be a learning experience. The analytics data which your platform provides will help you prove the ROI and improve your future presentations. Your online event partner should be an experienced, dedicated online events partner that provides, of course, the best technology. But, just as important, your partner should provide you with advice and service guidance on best practices to leverage the technology for your audience, your objectives and your organization's maximized ROI. **C&IT**



Doug McLain

is Vice President, Sales, Southeast for INXPO, the Leading Provider of Online Events, Hybrid and Live Streaming Solutions for the Events Industry. He is a seasoned meetings and events professional with more than 30 years of experience in the events space, including sales leadership positions with Hyatt and Wyndham Hotels and Resorts. Prior to joining INXPO, he served as Senior Vice President of the Palm Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau, Discover The Palm Beaches. In his current role at INXPO, he is helping event professionals embrace digital extension and reach of their content to larger audiences. His unique physical and now online event experience position him as a true thought leader in the events industry. www.inxpo.com

Your Wish



Is Their Command

Let CVBs Work Their Magic for Your Planning Wish List

By Christine Loomis

Let's say you find an old lamp, rub it and a meetings genie miraculously appears, offering you three wishes to make your work life easier. First, cool. Who hasn't wanted a genie to come along at some point in life?

But more to the point, what would you wish for? Based on what we hear over and over from planners, the three wishes would most likely be for:

- More time to execute meetings.
- More help executing meetings.
- More ways to deliver "wow" within increasingly constrained budgets.

The bad news is there are no meetings genies. The good news? CVBs

come pretty darn close. Like genies, they can provide planners with what they most want and need. Unlike genies, no random finding of a lamp is required, they don't stop at three wishes, and they never disappear into thin air.

In fact, CVBs keep giving and giving the longer you partner with them.

Don Welsh, president and CEO of Destinations International, the association of CVBs and DMOs, says planners benefit greatly from CVBs in ways that can't be duplicated elsewhere — even with genies. He lists the top three benefits for planners who partner with CVBs as a gain in time, money and lo-

cal authentic experiences to elevate a meeting. These come not from magic but from a CVB's deep knowledge and experience, and a mandate to help planners succeed.

Local Knowledge

"CVBs save planners time and money and get best practices from the thousands of meetings that have been held in the destination before," Welsh says. "Also, a big trend is the community knowledge connection CVBs can provide. While this practice has been prolific for years in Europe, it is becoming even more valuable in the U.S. and

around the globe. CVBs can connect planners with leaders in the industry of the groups they represent or even inspirational members of the community who can inject authenticity into a meeting."

And the benefits aren't just for city-wides and large meetings. "Smaller meetings may benefit even more," Welsh says. "CVBs can share what they have seen other small groups do. They can also recommend out-of-the-box meeting spaces and experiences that help add that special extra dimension to make a smaller meeting something truly memorable."

It's important to note that CVBs and a planner's independent planner research are not mutually exclusive. Planners can and do learn a lot from researching on the internet, for example, and as they learn they begin to narrow down their destination and hotel choices. But why not benefit from a partner in a potential area, someone who really knows the destination and can provide up-to-the-minute news and highlights? The earlier you start the process, the more positive impact this relationship can have on your planning work and your meeting.

"CVBs can show advantages to a destination that a planner may not have been aware of and wouldn't find anywhere else," Welsh says.

That ultimately can help a planner make the most informed choice about where and when to meet. For that reason, Welsh recommends starting the process early. Communication,

he says, is key if planners want the greatest benefits.

Destination International's Christine Shimasaki, who authors a blog connecting meeting planners to DMOs and CVBs, offers an extensive list of reasons planners should form partnerships with CVBs in the destinations where they plan or might plan meetings, including RFP gathering and site selection, vendor connections and attendee marketing, in addition to deep knowledge and experience. For planners who don't yet take advantage of CVB services, Shimasaki emphasizes that these services are free — and there's no catch.

They're free to planners, she says, "because their services are already paid for. CVBs are non-profit organizations that represent hotels, meeting and convention facilities and a host of meetings service providers within a particular destination. Funded primarily by local hotel occupancy taxes, a CVB's main purpose is to attract tourism, meetings, conventions and events to their destination. Since they really want your business, it's well worth their while to provide a wide range of complimentary services to help you plan and execute successful events in their cities. So why not take advantage of the free services CVBs are offering?" she asks.

Symbiotic Relationship

Indeed. It's in fact critical to CVBs that groups experience highly successful meetings that wow attendees. It's part of their business structure to facilitate that.

Planners also want highly successful meetings and attendees who are wowed by a destination. It's a partnership made to order, and CVBs are willing to roll out the red carpet and offer every possible resource so that planners can execute the best possible meeting.

Unlike most things in the world, there really is no downside to planners

forging a relationship with CVBs. But the upsides are many.

Nell Nicholas, senior director, global sales, HelmsBriscoe, agrees that CVBs are valuable partners and notes they can be especially helpful at the front end of the planning process.



"CVBs offer a wonderful support system for all kinds of programs. (They) can be especially helpful at the front end of the planning process."

Nell Nicholas
Senior Director, Global Sales
HelmsBriscoe
Cornwall, CT

"I always work with CVBs unless the client knows the very one hotel they want to book at a confirmed destination," she says. "CVBs offer a wonderful support system for all kinds of programs. One of the key features I appreciate is that the CVB will tell me what citywides are taking place, which is key information so a client can make a determination about changing dates or destination if necessary. And conference-planning tools that CVBs offer really help my clients build out registration. For my larger conferences, the staffing either at the airport or at the hotel offering destination guidance for attendees goes a long way toward an overall happy attendee experience."

Nicholas says HelmsBriscoe typically has a dedicated CVB representative at many destinations. "This is so helpful. They know our business model and have a clear sense of what we at HB need to accomplish for a successful program in the destination. Of course, I especially appreciate all the assistance with site inspections," she adds. "It not only takes some of those tasks off my plate, but the CVB staff arranges a tight, efficient, well-planned agenda because they are the experts. My clients always appreciate that connection to the CVB for the added support they require."

"CVBs can show advantages to a destination that a planner may not have been aware of and wouldn't find anywhere else."



Don Welsh
President and CEO
Destinations International
Washington, DC

Offering 'Wow' on a Budget

Nicholas points to one specific event for which CVB assistance was critical and which resulted in huge benefits for her client. "Our incentive program

"Several CVBs offer financial incentives for groups, ranging from airfare reimbursement for site visits to a certain dollar contribution per room night."



Blue Janis
National Account Manager
Experient
Fort Pierce, FL

was extremely budget oriented and we needed to get creative with offering a 'wow' on a tight budget. Meet Puerto Rico, the island's official convention and visitor organization, offered sponsorship dollars toward this program that afforded us wonderful entertainment and added F&B that we could not have pulled off ourselves. It was a wow for everyone, and the attendees still talk about that opening reception two years ago. Thank you, Meet Puerto Rico, for giving us such a memorable evening."

For Melissa Jimenez, global events director with Reval, a New York City-based software and cloud-solutions company, her involvement with a CVB depends on the specific event. "If it's a smaller event or a trade show, I may not meet with the CVB. If I'm working on a larger multiday conference, I make meeting with the CVB a priority."

That said, she knows that a CVB's deep knowledge of its destination can make a difference in how an event is ultimately constructed, and she agrees that early connection is important.

A Range of Benefits

"The CVB is a great resource for verifying the information I have put together through my own research," she says. "Often, you can see on a map that an offsite destination is listed as a 20-min-

ute drive only to discover five minutes into the conversation with the CVB that your date and time of departure would turn that 20-minute drive into 40 minutes with traffic. They know their city well. That firsthand knowledge can only add to the organization and overall execution of your event. The ability to have a local sounding board and to course-correct early is crucial. I will often get flight reports, vendor recommendations and the off-the-beaten-path

suggestion for a little-known vendor that might not have a huge web presence but is a local fan favorite. Emily Smith, at the CVB in New Orleans, was masterful at this."

Then there's the benefit no planner wants to have to take advantage of but is still glad is available if need be. "Hosting an event with clients and colleagues can come with increased risk and exposure," Jimenez says, "if, for example, there is large-scale inclement weather, potential acts of terrorism and other contingencies that need to be considered. Having an additional local resource with connections to city agencies and additional vendors is another resource to rely on if needed."

Jimenez says that the special offers CVBs sometimes provide also can make a difference when selecting a destination. "CVBs will often run discounts or provisions you can take advantage of, such as a discount on a room or airfare. It varies from location to location, but those are particularly nice and I do take them into consideration when selecting a city."

Planner Wishes

While CVBs can be excellent partners, there are things Jimenez wishes CVB staff would better understand. "We all have to monetize our functions. Events are our passion but they are also a business. At times, having to keep

tabs of 'who recommended it first,' be it the CVB, a DMC or the vendor you found on your own, can be exhausting."

To CVBs she says, "Clearly state your expectation upfront when making recommendations so that there are no communication breakdowns for the planner who is navigating multiple parties while trying to get an event executed."

Jimenez often works with HPN Global, a company that facilitates sourcing for planners and can help establish the right contacts for planners within CVBs. "If it's a larger conference, I work with Rick Mandriota at HPN Global, and he always makes sure I get to meet with the CVB during my site visit. He usually screens the best person for me to meet based on my event criteria."

Blue Janis, a Florida-based national account manager representing Experient, says he always includes the CVB when sending out his RFPs, and believes that CVBs provide a wealth of resources to benefit planners as well as their clients.

"CVBs are typically available for providing or arranging transportation to and from the airport for the client site visit," Janis says. "In addition, they can



Melissa Jimenez
Global Events Director
Reval
New York, NY

give the client an orientation tour of the city, suggest restaurants and off-site venues. CVBs will also provide literature about the city for the client to distribute to attendees."

In terms of what CVBs offer that planners and clients can't get elsewhere, Janis echoes Jimenez, noting that special offers can make a difference.

"CVBs will often run discounts or provisions you can take advantage of, such as a discount on a room or airfare."

Top 7 Reasons Planners Should Partner with CVBs

- 1 It's free!** Would you turn down a free assistant? Think of the CVB as your assistant, paid for by someone else, who's capable of handling logistics and details you don't have time for, requires no training and already knows exactly what you want and need to execute a successful meeting.
- 2 CVBs have extensive, current knowledge of the destination.** They are the experts. Even if you've been there before, they know what's new and they know all of the latest offers and deals. They also know what major meetings are booked on the dates you're considering so you can adjust far in advance if necessary.
- 3 CVBs ease the RFP process.** Staff at CVBs can send out RFPs for you to the specific properties that meet your needs. No need to send out extras — they know which hotels will work for you and which will not. And they can help get timely responses back from those properties.
- 4 CVBs help with site selection.** CVBs often can provide deals to get you or your clients in to visit the destination and on efficient tours of the area and the hotels that meet your needs. They know all of the meeting spaces and venues — even those unusual or out-of-the-box venues that can make an event truly extraordinary.
- 5 CVBs offer community connection and the all-important experiential component.** CVBs can connect groups to the right local charitable organizations for CSR programs and to activities and behind-the-scenes or lesser-known experiences that allow attendees to really get to know a place. They also can bring a local, authentic element to a meeting by connecting planners with local experts and speakers within the same industry as the group or by recommending local experts who provide inspiration and information, often with a local slant, for those in attendance.
- 6 CVBs assist with meeting/attendee marketing and destination guidance.** CVBs want your meetings and events to succeed as much as you do. That's why many provide attendance marketing services, customized presentations, email blasts, custom web pages, promotional materials, citywide signage and help with itinerary planning for attendees who want to come in early or stay after a meeting. CVBs also can provide staff at airports and hotels to greet attendees on arrival and answer destination questions.
- 7 CVBs are the gift that keeps on giving.** Even if you have previously planned a meeting in a destination, you would have to do additional research to learn what's new, what new offers there are and more. Instead, just get in touch with your CVB friends and they'll tell you, no research required! — CL

"Several CVBs offer financial incentives for groups, ranging from airfare reimbursement for site visits to a certain dollar contribution per room night."

And it helps, Janis says, to have long-term relationships with CVBs. "Virtually all CVBs from larger cities know Experient — many, in fact, are partners — and are either deployed to Experient or they are deployed to the client's location. Since I always include the CVB in my RFP, they are automatically assigned."

One way in which a CVB's participation in planning a meeting paid off came when a CVB alerted Janis to a potential conflict. "One of my clients had decided on specific dates for its meeting in a large, popular city. When the CVB received the RFP, they called and warned me that those dates conflicted with a large citywide. The client was

firm on the dates, so as we discussed alternatives, my CVB rep let me know which hotels were not participating in the citywide and I was able to find a home for my client's meeting."

Attendees Benefit, Too

Planners and clients are front and center when it comes to partnerships with a CVB, but Welsh points out that attendees benefit, too, and when a CVB can help make a meeting successful, it's a win-win for all.

Alluding to the trend of ever more experiential meetings, Welsh says, "People attending meetings now expect to experience a destination."

No stakeholder is in a better position to make that happen than the local CVB. "This is a chance for CVBs to help a destination shine and make

a meeting attendee become a repeat customer who can bring friends and family back to a destination again and again," Welsh says.

Which brings up another important point: Do planners who have already booked a destination really need the help of a CVB the following year or the year after that when they bring the meeting back? Welsh believes they do.

"Even if a planner has planned a meeting in a destination before, it's still important to always check with the CVB. Staff at CVBs know what is new in the destination, can flag any current issues and events that may affect a meeting and can highlight new benefits or offerings a planner would not necessarily be aware of. It is not a 'one and done' with CVBs," Welsh emphasizes. "It's a continual partnership." C&IT

CVB DESTINATION SHOWCASE

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Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

A vibrant and dynamic global hub, Miami offers a stunning array of creative venue options for even the largest meeting needs, including the new Miami Beach Convention Center, coming in September 2018.

Located in the heart of South Beach, the new Miami Beach Convention Center will be a bright, glass-encased facility as innovative and tech-rich as it is beautiful. In addition to the 500,000 sf of ver-

spaces and enhanced infrastructure. Some of the recent additions to the city include:

• Brickell City Centre

The \$1.05 billion project by Swire Properties opened its doors in November 2016. Spanning 9.1 acres, Brickell City Centre includes a 352-room hotel, an open-air shopping center, two luxury condo towers, two office buildings and an entertainment center.

• Brightline

The new express train service will provide intercity travel in Florida. In early 2018, Brightline will begin service connecting Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach, with service between Miami and Orlando to follow in 2018.

• Frost Science Museum

The Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science opened its doors to the public in May 2017 at its new home in downtown Miami's Museum Park. The 250,000-sf facility combines a planetarium, aquarium and science museum on one campus.

Endless Possibilities

Along with its world-famous weather and beaches, the city also offers nearly endless possibilities for entertainment and exploration. From unique hotel and dining experiences to culturally diverse neighborhoods and a thriving arts scene, Miami seamlessly blends the benefits of a sophisticated international destination with the natural beauty of the tropics. And it's easy to get to, with Miami International Airport (MIA) offering more than 400 flights from around the globe daily and serving more airlines than any other airport in the U.S.

These are just a few of the memorable and magical highlights awaiting any meeting planner thinking of Miami. Visit MiamiMeetings.com to learn more. **C&IT**



Citywide Facts & Features:
Guest Rooms: 55,394
Hotels/Resorts: 426
Meeting Space: 1.2 million sf
Convention Center FYI: Located in the heart of South Beach, the new Miami Beach Convention Center will open in 2018. This innovative and tech-rich facility will feature 500,000 sf of exhibition space.

satile exhibition space and more than 180,000 sf of meeting space, the new Miami Beach Convention Center also will include a 60,000-sf grand ballroom and a 20,000-sf junior ballroom.

Each space will feature a terrace where attendees can step out, mingle and soak up the city's signature sunshine and ocean breeze. The new Miami Beach Convention Center also is environmentally friendly and LEED Silver certified.

What's New

Along with the new Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami continues to reinvent itself with new hotels, meeting



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Find 500,000 square feet of reimagined exhibit space, a 60,000-square-foot ballroom and 81 breakout rooms. The Miami Beach Convention Center is the perfect space for your business. **Unlimited possibilities coming in September 2018.**

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Long Beach, CA 90802
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www.visitlongbeach.com



Citywide Facts & Features:

Guest Rooms: 4,752

Hotels/Resorts: 27

Meeting Space:

Hotels: 219,000+

Offsite: 500,000+

Convention Center FYI: The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center features more than 400,000 sf of flexible exhibit and meeting space, including 34 meeting rooms; the 46,000-sf Pacific Room at Long Beach Arena; 224,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space; and the 3,000-seat Terrace Theater and 800-seat Beverly O'Neill Theater.

Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau

Long Beach, California — part beach town, part big city. Located between Los Angeles and Orange County, Long Beach offers the perfect combination of downtown sophistication with the beach vibe that has made Southern California famous. Over the past 15 years, Long Beach has invested more than \$1.5 billion in its downtown waterfront, transforming it into one of the most dynamic seaside destinations in the country.

Long Beach has nearly 5,000 hotel rooms citywide, with more than 2,000 rooms within an easy walk to the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center. Many downtown hotels offer panoramic ocean views, and there are accommodation choices for every preference and pocketbook; ranging from a historic ocean liner, singular boutique hotels and first-class business hotels, to family-oriented properties.

From the regal Queen Mary and spectacular Aquarium of the Pacific to a vibrant arts and culture scene, live music venues, nightclubs and more than 125

quality restaurants in an eight-block area around the convention center, Long Beach is the perfect destination. With more than 11 miles of sandy beachfront, inland waterways and bays, Long Beach is a watersports paradise. Those looking for offsite excitement can enjoy harbor dinner cruises, gondola rides through picturesque canals, beach parties with sun-and-sand activities, including beach volleyball, kayaking, paddleboarding and sailing.

Getting to Long Beach has never been easier, with service from three major airports. LAX and Orange County airports are less than 30 minutes away. The Long Beach Airport is the Southland's "easy-in, easy-out" airport, just seven minutes from downtown. Long Beach Airport con-

sistently wins awards and praise for low fares, passenger services, beautiful waiting lounges, and top dining and restaurant choices. Long Beach Airport is the West Coast hub for JetBlue and also has service by Southwest Airlines, American and Delta.

Unique Meeting & Event Venues

The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center continues to innovate and improve its facilities to match the city enhancements taking place around it. Long Beach has become an innovative leader in creating "a new essence of meeting style," perfecting an open, comfortable environment where attendees can easily connect and collaborate.

Meeting and special event planners will find that Long Beach is also a leader in the creation of unique event facilities. The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center continues to expand its inventory of "turnkey" venues that allow a meeting planner to dramatically cut event costs while retaining the ability to creatively customize their events. With professional lighting and sound systems all built in, including extensive furniture and decorative choices, planners experience substantial cost savings in planning their events.

Long Beach's premier turnkey venue is the Pacific Room at the Long Beach Arena, which opened in 2013, revolutionizing the platform design for event spaces. The loft-style ballroom's 46,000 sf of customizable event space is complete with a floating tension grid ceiling and movable, floor-to-ceiling curtain walls to create just the right environment for any group. The Cove and the Terrace Theater Plaza are two additional outdoor turnkey event spaces that take advantage of Long Beach's 345 days of sunshine. The new Rainbow Bridge, a \$10 million elevated pedestrian walkway, provides a scenic shortcut between the convention center's east and west venues.

C&IT

SoCal's Newest Event Space The Cove



At the forefront of experiential trends, Long Beach's latest evolution can accommodate anywhere from 100 to 5,500 people within **40,000 sq. ft. of "wow"**. Introducing The Cove, a totally expandable outdoor street enclave that morphs into a high-octane atmosphere and embraces the food truck culture. With conversation hubs, encouraging networking, selfies, and just plain fun, it creates a connection that promotes a sense of community. Permanent LED stage lighting, renowned artist street murals, stylish furniture and much more **can save you up to \$100,000 in rental costs**. There is no limit to your imagination. The Cove allows you to make your next event **unconventionally unforgettable**.



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CVB DESTINATION SHOWCASE

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Citywide Facts & Features:

Guest Rooms: 102,000
Hotels/Resorts: 1,108
Meeting Space: 15 million sf+
Convention Center FYI: The award-winning Los Angeles Convention Center (LACC) is one of the most technologically advanced meeting and exhibition centers in the world with 720,000 sf of exhibit hall space.

Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board

The entertainment capital of the world, Los Angeles rolls out the red carpet for meetings and events, from intimate gatherings to large-scale conventions. As one of the world's most dynamic destinations, L.A. presents endless meeting possibilities that will keep attendees both engaged and inspired.

L.A. is a collection of more than 30 diverse neighborhoods brimming with unique experiences, acclaimed dining, endless entertainment and world-class attractions. And with nearly 300 sunny days, L.A. is the perfect meetings destination for pre- and post-getaways. Escape to Malibu, Marina del Rey or Venice and enjoy miles of stunning shoreline and the signature SoCal beach vibe. Create everlasting memories at Space Shuttle Endeavour at the California Science Center or Battleship USS IOWA.

A New Downtown

The pulsating heart of the city's core, downtown L.A.'s renaissance has created a walkable, dynamic urban center featuring scores of new and refreshed hotels. Discover energy at the anchor of the downtown experience, L.A. LIVE. Located adjacent to the Los Angeles Convention Center and STAPLES Center, L.A. LIVE features several event venues including the 7,000-seat Microsoft Theater; the 2,300-seat Novo; an 800-seat Premiere House; the Target Terrace, a space with skyline views; a 1,000-person-capacity nightclub and several restaurants. The region has seen a surge of new hotel inventory within the last year with stellar brands such as InterContinental, Hotel Indigo, Freehand, NoMad and more. Dining hotspots with alfresco seating, including Bestia, Baco Mercat and Redbird, are making waves in the ever-evolving culinary scene. A thriving

arts and culture scene, exceptional nightlife and several outdoor parks make downtown a thrilling setting for meetings and events.

Only in L.A.

From restored classic theaters to signature landmarks and everything in between, a robust collection of only-in-L.A. experiences allow for creativity to thrive. Myriad unique programming options include celebrity appearances, TV show tapings or real-working movie studios such as Warner Bros. Studio Hollywood, The Studios at Paramount and Universal Studios Hollywood. Relive moments created by Hollywood's biggest stars at iconic host venues such as the Microsoft Theatre, home of the Primetime Emmys, and Dolby Theatre, home of the Academy Awards. Take in a stunning Los Angeles sunset at The Getty Center or OUE Skyspace LA, perched nearly 1,000 feet above downtown. Customizable for groups of any size, these only-in-L.A. experiences deliver an authentic destination experience like no other.

Personalized Service

Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board provides personalized service to ensure a seamless experience when holding any meeting or event in L.A. As destination experts, L.A. Tourism serves as a comprehensive one-stop-shop whose No. 1 priority is to help planners make informed decisions and create experiences that are professionally rewarding and personally enjoyable.

L.A. Tourism has elevated the destination meeting process with Virtual Discovery L.A., an innovative platform designed specifically for meeting professionals. The most comprehensive virtual tour of any destination in the world, discover immersive 360-degree viewing experiences of more than 50 venues and locales across Los Angeles for free.

C&IT

MEET LEADING-EDGE INNOVATORS ON LAIDBACK BEACHES

MEET

Los Angeles™

Home to thought leaders and incubators like Snapchat, SpaceX and Beats by Dre, L.A. is one of the fastest growing innovation markets in the world. L.A. has unmatched access to talent and technology to move your company into the future. Even better, we'll help you produce the perfect event, from start to finish.

MEETLA.COM



Cloud Camp, one of the historic Broadmoor resort's three Wilderness Experiences, is an exclusive, private getaway for executive retreats.

Credit: The Broadmoor

Less Is More

The Sky's the Limit for Successful Small Meetings at These Exceptional Retreats

By Christine Loomis

Architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, pioneer of minimalist design and architecture, did not have small meetings in mind when he famously proclaimed that less is more. But he could have.

Not every meeting requires a 5,000-sf ballroom or room block for 400. That gives organizers of small meetings and executive retreats something

other planners can only dream of — an almost limitless supply of options in terms of hotels, venues and dates.

A small meeting can fit comfortably into a large hotel, of course, but can also be accommodated in boutique hotels, small conference centers, intimate resorts, ranches and spaces, such as private suites, condos and townhomes within some properties. That privacy

can be just the ticket for many high-level executive meetings.

Up in the Clouds

The historic Broadmoor resort has long accommodated groups on its main property. But the addition of the Wilderness Experiences — a collection of three remote, rustic venues with history of their own — expands options

“Location, quality of lodging, friendly staff and, of course, budget” all influenced the decision to meet at Cloud Camp. “Privacy was also important.”

Naomi Quispe, Manager, Corporate Administration
PCL Construction, Denver, CO

for private, secure and spectacularly located meetings.

Cloud Camp, set 3,000 feet above the main hotel at the top of Cheyenne Mountain, is in all ways the pinnacle of the wilderness experience. Accessed via a six-mile winding road and one entry point, it's supremely secure and private. And how you get there is an adventure in and of itself: Guests have the option to hike, ride a mule or go by Cadillac to arrive or depart the location. Up to 48 attendees can be accommodated in Cloud Camp's 15 rustic but well-ap-

pointed one- and two-bedroom cabins and seven lodge rooms and suites, but 20 to 32 is a better number for a buyout, given the intimacy of the experience, communal dining (the main lodge's massive communal table seats 32) and onsite activities. The Overlook, perched on the edge of the mountain, offers 1,500 sf of private event space in addition to space available in the majestic, art-filled 8,500-sf main lodge.

Though Cloud Camp is surrounded by Colorado's dramatic, humbling mountain backcountry, it's an all-in-

clusive experience, which comes with all the amenities, chef-driven cuisine and impeccable service for which The Broadmoor is known. No wonder it served as the ideal setting for Denver-based PCL Construction's May 2017 executive retreat. The group of 20 bought out Cloud Camp, just as it has for several years.

Naomi Quispe, PCL's manager, corporate communications, says, “Location, quality of lodging, friendly staff and, of course, budget” all influenced the decision to meet at Cloud Camp, about an hour and a half south of Denver. “Privacy was also important,” Quispe notes. “The resort was able to work with our budget and provide the privacy we needed.”

Due to Cloud Camp's mountaintop location, guests arriving by car valet park at The Broadmoor and take provided transportation up to camp. Quispe calls the camp's service phenomenal, saying nothing is overlooked.

“They took care of our luggage. They provided contact information for the onsite staff. If we needed something, they were on top of it. Everything worked just fine. The staff was great, the food was delicious.”

Quispe notes that the main lodge, built in the tradition of the great national park lodges, is huge, “So groups should be prepared to be overwhelmed with the beauty and history of it.” Among the highlights, she says, are Cloud Camp's museum-quality artwork and décor items — most from the private collection of Broadmoor owner and Colorado philanthropist Philip Anschutz — and the compelling multi-century history of the place, which staff readily share with groups.

Nothing is much of a challenge at Cloud Camp, Quispe points out, because staff is so on-task. Even the fact that cabins are spread out across the property is only a minimal issue. “Some folks had a longer walk than others,” she says, “but staff offered golf-cart rides for those who wanted them.”

Because Cloud Camp's location and other atypical elements make it unusual, Quispe encourages planners to do a site tour. “Make sure it's the right fit and



Credit: Playa Largo Resort & Spa

Key Largo but settled on Key Largo due to its accessibility to Miami (a major air hub only about an hour away), its ability to offer a secluded environment that would keep our guests together onsite for as long as possible (as opposed to losing them to a local nightlife scene) and of course, beautiful Playa Largo Resort.

"What stood out about Playa Largo," she continues, "was that it's brand new, meaning even if people had been to the Keys, it was unlikely they had stayed at this resort. The hotel is beautiful with an immediate 'wow' factor as you walk into the lobby to see the hanging chairs and backdrop of the blue waters and picturesque swimming pool. It definitely has a luxurious atmosphere,

The brand new Playa Largo Resort & Spa in Key Largo combines luxury with the laidback vibe of the Florida Keys.

inform the hotel of your must-haves and like-to-haves."

It has been exactly the right fit for PCL Construction. "Cloud Camp," Quispe says, "allowed for all — even the planner, me — to relax."

Down in the Keys

When Fiona Bailey, president of Fiona Bailey Events, was considering locations for the 2017 50-person corporate customer meeting of a European design firm, she chose Playa Largo Resort & Spa in Key Largo, Florida, an Autograph Collection hotel. The group met in October, well before the region's high season begins.

"My client was looking for a venue that was not necessarily 'well traveled to' by most of the participants, and we felt the Florida Keys offered that. People generally have a positive image that the Keys represent white sand/turquoise waters and a laid-back resort atmosphere. What it lacks in golf it makes up for in big-game fishing, and there's a great choice of other activities as well. We looked at Key West, Islamorada and

which was important for the profile of our guests. It was also on the bay side of the Keys, which offers more protection and, of course, the chance of spectacular sunsets.

"Bedrooms are finely decorated with many wonderful touches, from the straw sun hat to the driftwood 'do not disturb' signs. Autograph hotels particularly try to capture the local color and dé-

"and, of course, the option to include the Beach House, which has three bedrooms, a private pool and fenced-off access for the ultimate in seclusion for private meetings as well as an excellent backdrop for our welcome reception/mixer. We were able to use special lighting and décor to transform the Beach House into the company's corporate colors and have delicious food stations and entertainment."

Bailey believes the appeal of the location helped encourage guests to accept the invitation. "We had 100 percent turnout," she says.

Other than a small planning dinner at Skippers Dockside Restaurant, which Bailey says has "a great location, ambiance and food," all functions were on-property.

"We used onsite company Caribbean Watersports to provide two large catamarans for an afternoon sail on the bay. Guests could sail, kayak, standup paddleboard, parasail or snorkel from the boats. Onboard, we had drinks and snacks provided by the hotel, which were well received. The boat captains were entertaining and people really enjoyed a couple of hours' relaxation."

Bailey says the resort and area offer many more options, including scuba, big-game fishing and jet skiing, but the goal was relaxation, camaraderie and staying together on-property. One asset for that: "We offered guests access to two of the private poolside

"My client was looking for a venue that was not necessarily 'well traveled to' by most of the participants, and we felt the Florida Keys offered that."

Fiona Bailey, President and Senior Meeting Planner
Fiona Bailey Events, Los Angeles, CA



cor styles, and this was evident. There's state-of-the-art technology with iPad control systems, and the bathrooms are well designed with the most comfortable bathrobes ever experienced!"

Bailey also points to accommodation variety, e.g. suites and bungalows,

cabanas, which many took advantage of, and again, offered a perception of luxury and privacy."

About resort staff, Bailey says, "Marlie was our main contact for all things to do with the program in the planning stages, and Magalie took care of our



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The Restoration, a historic property in Charleston, South Carolina, offers unique spaces and customized services.



Credits: The Restoration

rooming list requirements excellently, considering we had a lot of extensions and advance arrivals. There was a great support team onsite, and it was never an issue trying to contact a department head to help move the program along."

Bailey describes the meeting facilities as well laid out and flexible. The group also used the resort's waterside restaurant, Sol by the Sea, for private group breakfasts, "a perfect start to the day." Additionally, she notes, "Pearson Technology and Keys Audio helped provide AV and décor enhancements. The hotel's complimentary Wi-Fi throughout was most appreciated. Catering was good throughout the event, and on the last night, the sun provided a magnificent sunset for our barefoot beach party."

Bailey highly recommends the Beach House. "Although it costs a little more, it has three beautiful bedrooms that help offset costs, and it's a good base for the planning team or sales staff to hold meetings privately or retire to later in the evening."

Although fall is still hurricane season, the group did not experience any weather problems. "This year, for the first time in many years, the Florida Keys did suffer

a direct hit," Bailey says. "But the hotel, apart from minimal damage to vegetation, stood up to the high winds due to its modern design and more protected bay-side location. Had rain been an issue, we felt we had solid backup plans to ensure a great experience."

Bailey has no hesitation recommending the Florida Keys as a destination, but does offer one piece of advice. "Make sure you leave ample time for transportation as there's only one road in and out of the Keys, and it has strictly enforced speed limits."

Rest and Restoration

Charleston, South Carolina, offers history, sophistication, culture, diversity, excellent dining and shopping, and a wealth of engaging activities on and off the water. Its hotels, some historic, some modern, are varied enough to meet any group's needs, and planners and attendees would be hard-pressed to find a more genuinely warm and welcoming community. The CVB staff goes above and beyond to help groups achieve their goals, and their tourism partners follow suit. The city practically defines Southern hospitality.

Connie Little, senior vice president, global accounts with Charleston-based Meeting Street Meetings, has worked with numerous small groups over the

The "elegant and comfortable" Allison Inn & Spa is tucked away amid the vineyards of Willamette Valley, Oregon.



Credits: The Allison Inn & Spa

years, booking them in Charleston and beyond. Currently, she's working with a legal firm on its fall 2018 Law Retreat with approximately 30 attendees.

"The location was decided on after researching several destinations with smaller (under 60 rooms), high-end hotels and resorts. The key factor became distance to an airport and room rates. Many destinations with the style of hotel this group likes were over an hour to a major airport. And rates were over the group's budget. The Restoration, a historic Charleston property with every modern amenity, was able to work within our budget."

"The feel and history of The Restoration was a big factor, along with the availability of a multi-bedroom luxury suite. This group enjoys relaxing casually in a private space after dinner. The full kitchen allows them to enjoy this space with snacks and beverages throughout the day, and the suite includes access to the rooftop terrace."

Little says The Restoration is not your typical hotel. "Grand suites, multiple buildings, great history, accommodating staff and amenities, such as custom

breakfast baskets delivered to your door, set it apart. Its location off Wentworth (Street) is also a draw. It's nicely tucked away but still in the pulse of downtown."

Privacy is also easy here. "Being able to secure the three-bedroom luxury suite ensures space for the group to relax privately and offers overnight accommodations for three attendees. Additionally," Little says, "multiple buildings and separate entrances and elevators provide a private feel, and the historic side separate from the newer buildings also creates a sense of privacy."

Little, says Karen Winn, director of sales, stands out among hotel staff. "She's eager to meet any request that makes sense for the hotel and group. You rarely hear the word 'no,' but rather, 'let me see if I can make this work!' She also recognizes the dynamic of her client, never selling or pushing something that doesn't make sense."

The only hiccup thus far in the planning process has related to spa treatments, but Winn had options. "Restoration offers few treatment rooms," Little notes. "But when this obstacle was presented, Winn offered up a solution of using some suites as additional treatment rooms."

Fall is a busy time in Charleston, especially over a weekend. If that's the preferred meeting time, Little advises booking early.

Gone to Oregon

On the other side of the country, DG, an executive assistant for a Pacific-Northwest medical facility, helped plan a strategic planning retreat for 25 participants plus their 43 guests. It was held in September at The Allison Inn & Spa in Newberg, Oregon, nestled in among the vineyards of Willamette Valley, where the group also met in 2016.

"The Allison is a perfect destination for our group as it's only two hours from our office. It's easy to get to, and we feel like we are a long way away from the hustle and bustle of work. The area around The Allison is beautiful and peaceful, which makes for a relaxing stay. The quality of the lodgings is spectacular, and everyone who attends feels

they are in a special place. Our board is composed of all volunteers, so we try to make them feel appreciated when we attend a conference or retreat, and they feel that way at The Allison.

While the group did not hold any functions off-property, DG says she and her husband visited the Cougar Crest tasting room in nearby Dundee, Oregon, in wine country. "The couple that runs the tasting room are delightful, the tasting prices were reasonable and the wine was delicious."

Wine country functions are a popular option with groups at The Allison.

In terms of the hotel's personnel, DG says, "The sales staff, particularly Nichole and Lori, are exceptionally professional and responsive — truly a joy to work with. If you are unsure what they can do or provide, just ask. They also make sure you're always in the loop on what's happening and what needs to be done. They make planning an event truly effortless."

Although privacy was not a pressing issue for this group, DG says, "At no time



"Grand suites, multiple buildings, great history, accommodating staff and amenities such as custom breakfast baskets delivered to your door set (The Restoration) apart."

Connie Little, Senior Vice President, Global Accounts Meeting Street Meetings, Charleston, SC

did we hear anyone in the rooms next to us, which is something you seldom find."

As for the meeting venues, DG says, "The AV worked perfectly throughout the retreat, and we knew Paul was standing by if we had any issues. We had 25 people in the meeting room, and everyone was able to use their computers, phones, etc. without issue."

are a nice number of menus to choose from for every meal and a wide variety of fresh, local foods included in the menus, so everyone can find foods they like and can eat."

DG describes the décor as elegant but comfortable. "You know it's nice but you don't feel intimidated by your surroundings," she adds.



Credits: 320 Guest Ranch

320 Guest Ranch near Big Sky, Montana, features Western outdoor adventures complemented by rustic event space.

Although the meeting rooms are at the opposite end of the building from the hotel rooms, DG sees it as a positive. "It's not a long walk. It's nice to have them separate so you don't have meeting-goers walking past your hotel room door at all hours."

The catering was also a positive. "The food was delicious and plentiful. There



Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

Small meeting and event spaces at the oceanfront Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa on Palm Beach Island include the Self-Centered Garden at Eau Spa (top).

There were no challenges with the destination or hotel, but the group did choose a busy weekend, meaning they weren't sure they'd get enough rooms. Fortunately, DG notes, "It all worked out perfectly as the hotel contacted me as soon as a room would come available to ask me if I wanted to book it for our retreat. They stayed on top of what we needed, and we were able to book all the hotel rooms we needed."

Her one recommendation for planners considering The Allison: "Give your attendees some time to explore and enjoy their surroundings when not in meetings. And take time to go wine tasting in the surrounding area."

Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch

Ranches can be ideal for small meetings, and many have conference spaces to complement all their traditional outdoor activities. 320 Guest Ranch is just such a place, located 12 miles from Big Sky and 36 miles from the West Yellowstone entrance to Yellowstone National Park, making it ideal for Oboz Footwear's 2017 sales meeting with approximately 50 attendees.

"Bozeman/Big Sky is an excellent place for a group like ours to meet because of all of the outdoor opportunities, a close international airport and our company is based in Bozeman," says Steve Lowry, sales and marketing coordinator. "Quick access to the mountains is very important to a hiking footwear brand like ours. We chose the 320 Ranch because of the ability to have an all-inclusive resort for our sales meeting attendees within a relatively short drive from the airport while still feeling remote."

Facilities, including the ranch's separate conference center, and the overall layout presented no issues. "The AV equipment is adequate, the catering is excellent with many locally

sourced ingredients, and the décor is what you would expect at a Montana ranch resort," Lowry says. "And though the resort grounds are expansive, if you pay attention when booking you can eliminate long distances from guest rooms to meeting rooms."

"We chose the 320 Ranch because of the ability to have an all-inclusive resort for our sales meeting attendees within a relatively short drive from the airport while still feeling remote."

Steve Lowry, Sales and Marketing Coordinator
Oboz Footwear, Bozeman, MT

Transportation can be a small challenge. "Rental vans and a solid schedule/plan allowed us to round up everyone at the airport and shuttle them to the ranch," Lowry says, adding that it's a good idea to have rental vans at the ranch. "That allows attendees to explore the surrounding area — Big Sky, Yellowstone, Bozeman — during breaks. Once at the ranch, you can feel a bit isolated without that option, though I'm sure the ranch would be glad to arrange rides.

"In fact," he says, "flexibility of the staff was a big stand out. When our morning schedule ran long, the staff was able to quickly move our lunch into the conference center. And when any of our attendees had special requests, the staff was responsive and happy to accommodate."

Oh! Palm Beach!

The oceanfront Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa in Manalapan on the island of Palm Beach, Florida, is an upscale and sophisticated retreat for both small and large meeting groups. The resort, which has received the Mobil Five Star Award for the past two years, boasts a 42,000-sf spa that has received the Mobil Five Star designation for three years running. The resort encompasses 309 guest rooms and suites in three towers and a total of 30,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event spaces.

Unique spaces for small groups include Stir terrace, which faces the Atlantic Ocean and features a fire pit with seating nearby; Breeze Ocean Kitchen, an oceanfront restaurant that also can be used for private receptions and dinners; and the Self-Centered Garden at Eau Spa, a lovely outdoor space ideal for receptions.

Eau Palm Beach has a dedicated

sales manager assigned to small meeting groups, promising to deliver VIP treatment.

This is but a tiny sampling of venues that perfectly accommodate small meetings. By embracing Mies Van der Rohe's philosophy, planners of intimate meetings and retreats open themselves up to options that larger groups could never consider and time periods during which many hotels could not accept large groups. Less is indeed more.

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How Millennials Are Changing Meetings

Planners Redesign Experiences and Content Delivery to Meet New Expectations

By Mark Rowh

The differences among generations are common points of discussion. Whether it's seniors confused by the priorities of grandchildren or supervisors baffled by the habits of their younger employees, there always seems to be some degree of generational divide.



In the current meeting space, this may be most apparent with the impact of millennials. As the influence of this group grows, planners are finding it necessary to meet new expectations.

After all, millennials now make up a sizable portion of the attendees at virtually any meeting. And while there is always danger in oversimplifying the characteristics of any one group, most millennials do share some traits that are causing planners to change old ways of doing things.

Of course this can be a two-way street. While planners may feel compelled to cater to the demands of younger attendees, the result can be meetings that are more rewarding for everyone.

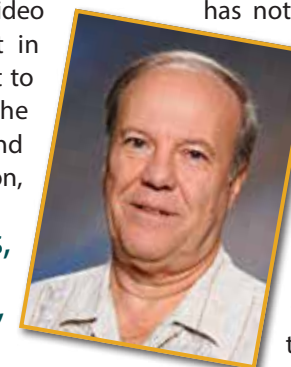
slam based upon cross pollination," Schuster points out.

Perhaps nowhere is the influence of millennials being seen more than in the delivery of content and overall communication.

"They were brought up in the age of digital media, and they want content in more innovative ways," says Nicole Marsh, CMP, DMCP, a partner with Imprint Group, a destination and events management firm with locations in Colorado and Florida. "Video is incredibly important in terms of how they want to digest information." She notes that invitations and follow-up communication,

"When millennials work with boomers, my experience is that it is a grand slam based upon cross pollination."

Bob Schuster, National Director of Conferences and Events
CMP Meeting Services, Ponte Vedra, FL



"Millennials have a lot to offer and perspective is refreshing," says Bob Schuster, national director of conferences and events for CMP Meeting Services in Ponte Vedra, Florida.

At the same time, combining insights from this group with the experience of others, such as baby boomers, can be especially productive.

"When millennials work with boomers, my experience is that it is a grand

not to mention program content, are best received and more often viewed in video formats.

"Programs became more educational and career-driven, as the bulk of the millennial generation is career-focused and moves from jobs with more frequency than the generation before them," Marsh says.

She recalls a recent meeting where a client switched from classroom seating

to a U-shape with lounge furniture so that all attendees could see each other and make the meeting more participatory.

Another client changed the goals and purposes of events to be more millennial-focused to increase attendance and engagement by that audience.

Sharable Moments

"We have found that they are looking for more experiential events rather than the same old seated dinners," Marsh says. "Station-style F&B, destination-specific food and beverage that is interactive and local or has a story behind it are even more well received." (See "Top Foodie Destinations" on page 40.) This means that event design should incorporate ways to include unique and "sharable" moments and opportunities for participants to talk about or share online.

"Many planners ask us for hot ideas on how they can continue to engage their millennial attendees," says Sira Butler, director of 204 Events, a Los Angeles provider of meeting and event rentals. "Like most people, millennials don't want to sit through long, boring meetings. They want to experience something new and that's share-worthy on social media." She has noticed that millennials respond

favorably to the addition of engaging items to their meetings and events, whether that is virtual reality, a creative display or seating setup, or simply better lighting and sound systems.

Typically, millennials want to attend meetings and events that provide a share-worthy "wow" factor, Butler says. In support of that goal, her company recently rented sofa seating for 150 guests of Damminger Productions for a special Netflix corporate event. There they hosted a 10-hour binge-watching marathon of "Stranger Things" leading up to the new season's premiere.

"This is an example of the company going above and beyond the normal theater screening to retain the attendance and attention of their millennial attendees," Butler notes.

The "look" of an event is becoming



photo booths to incorporating over-the-top branded displays or visually stunning décor into event design.

Some argue that while the influence of this group is growing, it's not entirely new.

Meeting Disrupters

"Millennials are disrupters to the way meetings have been planned for the past 10 to 15 years," says Chuck Moses, director of sales and marketing at the Kimpton Hotel Van Zandt in Austin, Texas. "The goal of a successful meeting is still the same, but how they plan for it and search the venue has completely changed." This may include crafting an RFP from a smart device. Or instead of a three-page proposal, they may prefer three compelling bullet points to capture their attention within the first 30 seconds.

At the Kimpton Hotel Van Zandt,

convenience and saving time, and the same principal can be applied for corporate meetings."

Gamon relates recent changes for a group that includes a substantial number of millennials.

"While they continue to book the same amount of rooms year over year, they began hosting general sessions at the Fox Theatre, an offsite historic institution in Atlanta, because they wanted to create an experiential, culturally significant meeting for attendees," he notes. He says combining a traditional hotel setting with nontraditional venues makes planning meetings more dynamic and flexible.

Similarly, booking alternatives to the big box hotels may be seen favorably.

"They want a ridiculously unique experience for their attendees and business travelers where the standard is

"We make presentations shorter. We repeat sessions multiple times...and we create activities that drive peer-to-peer conversation."

Brent Turner, SVP Solutions
Cramer, Norwood, MA

quirky on-property meeting and boardroom options are offered with millennials in mind. Each of its 11 dedicated meeting spaces is integrated with state-of-the-art technology and dynamic audio-visual, including top-level Wi-Fi and internet speeds. Guests can add musical elements to any meeting with features including music-themed games and dedicated playlists, curated by a director of music, that can be customized for every occasion.

Catering to millennial preferences and expectations has become the standard, according to Philip Gamon, sales manager for the Hilton Atlanta.

"Millennials have changed the way business is thought of completely," he says. "If you would have told someone 50 years ago that you can order groceries from a cellphone and have them delivered in an hour, they would have thought you were crazy. Millennials have created an unprecedented demand for

non-standard," Moses says. "From the lobby to the meeting space and the guest room, all of it should have its own unique personality."

The same goes for local attractions, according to Ally Brown, manager of specialty accounts at Naples Grande Beach Resort in Naples, Florida. "Local nightlife and restaurant options are a big draw," she says. "Planners should consider independent or boutique hotels with nearby local attractions when picking a meeting location."

Brown says the best way to spark a millennial's interest in any conference is to ensure that they will get an experience that they've never had before.

"Instead of promoting a meeting space with a traditional classroom setting, capture their interest with unique outdoor or modern in-suite meeting space options," she says. One-of-a-kind offerings are the ideal, with efforts to customize programs and presenting them as an exceptional,

4 Ways to Engage Millennials

Philip Gamon, sales manager for the Hilton Atlanta, offers this advice for meetings that appeal to millennials:

1. A top priority to appeal to millennials is originality. Traditionally, millennials' experience with meetings has been so structured; the same thing over and over again. Don't be afraid to plan a program that is unique to your group.
2. Have a point and objective to your meeting and stay true to your brand. Don't try to be like another company and do what they do and risk losing the concept of core values.
3. When CEOs and high-level executives mingle with staff after a speech or presentation, it creates continuity in culture from the bottom up and creates a sense of mutual respect.
4. Embrace technology, don't hate it. Don't ban phones in meetings, because people will have them out anyway. Instead, conduct live polls or interactive experiences that engage the audience.

—MR

unparalleled experience most likely to appeal to this audience.

A recent group Brown worked with wanted a Las Vegas theme for their main gala event. Rather than suggest a layout in a typical ballroom setting, she and her staff turned the entire lobby of their hotel into a Las Vegas-style casino, complete with slot machines, a craps table and poker. And when another group wanted to execute a cruise ship theme, plans included turning a ballroom into a 3-D cruise ship, complete with projections, sounds and visual stimulation to give the overall effect of moving on the sea.

"Experiences integrated with traditional meetings make millennials feel invested in the company and create a bond through memorable experiences."

Philip Gamon, Sales Manager
Hilton Atlanta, Atlanta, GA

Focus on Technology

As important as any consideration is attention to technology.

"Millennials revolve around technology and social media," Brown says. "They enjoy interacting in a group and value personal connections, typically preferring less formal networking opportunities." She suggests including plenty of casual happy hour events that allow them to document their experience with photos and share them on social media.

She also advises using email marketing to attendees and social media advertising along with direct mailing.

"Millennials are always attached to their devices so it's best to make sure that the conference website and registration is mobile friendly," she says. "And speakers should fully engage with the audience versus simply presenting a topic."

She tells of a recent conference where as the presenter spoke and went through slides, questions were posed to the audience who then responded using an app on their phone. The results were displayed instantaneously on the screen for all to see.

"This was by far the most engaging presentation that I have seen or been a part of in a while," Brown says.

Technology planning also should include Wi-Fi accessibility.

"It's a given that meeting attendees expect to quickly and easily connect to Wi-Fi," says Lisé Puckorius, CEO at the OLC Education and Conference Center in Rosemont, Illinois. "Millennials have grown up with connectivity so a venue that doesn't have it built in or has dead zones creates a negative perception." Planning also should include checking connectivity strength outside the venue.

"Millennials don't want to use up their data plan if they simply step outside for a breath of fresh air on a break," she adds.

Even something as simple as power supplies can make a difference.

"No one, including millennials, wants to fight over outlets to power up," Puckorius says. "Ask your venue how many and where power outlets are located so attendees have multiple options to keep their devices charged."

Networking and Noshing

Factors from networking opportunities to food also merit careful thought.

"Millennials are all about networking," Brown says. "Meeting new people definitely piques their interest." To this end, unique breakout locations and



small distinctive meeting areas should be considered as well as how food service is delivered.

"Millennials are accustomed to instant gratification at their fingertips," she notes. "Believe it or not, this affects how they expect to be served at events as well." She says planners may want to consider steering clear of passed hors d'oeuvres and go for action stations so attendees can grab food as they please.

"Healthier food items and creative presentation of food and beverage is expected," Puckorius says. "Cater to millennials' diverse tastes, by offering vegan, gluten-free and allergy-free options that are clearly labeled." She also notes it's important not to forget to accommodate other dietary restrictions or preferences.



Nicole Marsh, CMP, DMCP, Partner
Imprint Group, a DMC Network Company, Denver, CO

"They were brought up in the age of digital media, and they want content in more innovative ways. Video is incredibly important in terms of how they want to digest information."

Meetings Redesigned

"Many meeting agendas prioritize delivery of messages and attendee learning," says Brent Turner, S.V.P., solutions at Cramer, a Norwood, Massachusetts, agency whose services include meeting and event planning. "This means the resulting agenda ends up with attendees sitting passively in ballrooms for six-plus hours a day." He advocates instead keeping in mind that millenni-

ing space anywhere else in the venue. Then for post-lunch sessions, all seating could be removed so attendees can only stand at high-tops. Toward the end of the day, seating could be brought back and set up in fireside or round-table formats to drive peer-to-peer conversations."

"Just changing the variety of seating — while prioritizing more spaces for group and peer engagement —



Sira Butler, Director
204 Events, Los Angeles, CA

"Because millennials are a part of the 'visual age,' meeting planners should definitely consider incorporating experiences that are cool enough to share on social media."

als want to move, be self-directed and learn from peers.

"So we look at breaking up these traditional agendas," Turner says. "We take a page from TED Talks and make presentations shorter. We repeat sessions multiple times so attendees can break and choose when they want to learn specific topics, and we create activities that drive peer-to-peer con-

will embrace many of the expectations of millennial attendees," Turner says.

Keeping participants active seems to be a key. "Millennials want to contribute and be an active part in their learning at meetings," Puckorius says. "No more talking heads and listening to lectures for them." She notes that since millennials crave interaction, it pays to design meeting formats to include plenty of

opportunities for interaction among attendees and speakers. Likewise, options for content delivery should take emerging preferences into account.

"With dwindling attention spans, embrace and respect different learning preferences and styles," she says. "Quick, bite-sized content keeps learning retention and interest high." Also desirable: a mix of in-person speakers, interactive discussions or live videostreams.

In fact, anything that promotes convenience is likely to be a winner.

"With car service, food delivery and just about anything else available with a few swipes or clicks, millennials are used to convenience," Puckorius says. "And meeting location matters. Find a venue that is easily accessible from a major airport or transportation hub to make their travel to your meeting easier."

Discussing such matters in advance is always a good approach, according to Moses. "I think having a shoulder-to-shoulder approach with millennials works best," he says. "Whether you are a planner or a venue, it's better to have a fully authentic, non 'salesy' delivery come across with complete alignment."

Gamon focuses on the advantages offered by distinctive offerings. He advises when planning a meeting to ask yourself, would you rather have an experience or would you rather have a meeting?

"Experiences integrated with traditional meetings make millennials feel invested in the company and create a bond through memorable experiences," he says. "When you make an experience out of your meeting, people remember what they did." **C&IT**

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Site Selection

"We work with many national and international corporate planners...and want Chicago cuisine to be a theme of their events."

Molly Schemper, Co-Owner
FIG Catering, Chicago, IL

Top Foodie Destinations

Where Opportunities for Authentic Culinary Experiences Abound

By Ron Bernthal

For corporate meeting planners these days, food is not only essential to creating an entertaining and engaging experience for a private dinner for 50 or an incentive party for 500, but often a destination will be chosen because of its reputation as a foodie city. Menus are no longer an afterthought, no longer the once-routine choice of beef, chicken or fish.

As more attendees become savvy, health-conscious eaters, ready and willing to try new cuisine, meeting professionals must seriously include a destination's ability to provide a true culinary experience in their site selection criteria.

The foodie destinations below offer hotels, restaurants, unique meeting venues and a plethora of award-winning local chefs and mixologists. In addition, these destinations have nearby farms and farmers' markets to assure a steady supply of fresh produce, and local caterers and food and beverage directors whose expertise is organizing unique culinary events.

Chicago

"We work with many national and international corporate planners who bring in employees and customers from all over the world and want Chicago cuisine to be a theme of their events," says Molly Schemper, co-owner of Chicago's FIG Catering. "Whether it's focusing on the 'typical' foods one associates with Chicago, like pizza, Italian beef or the classic hot dog, or highlighting Chicago's ethnic neighborhoods, at FIG (For Intimate Gatherings) we always focus on sourcing local and sustainable ingredients so whatever the theme of the event, we try to create a menu that incorporates seasonal produce, locally raised meat, and organic dry goods and dairy. Our corporate clients tend to know and love this, too, and

often have our chef and/or bar manager step out to talk to the crowd about where our ingredients come from and why that matters.

"Last year we worked with Avalara (the tax prep software company) to produce an event for 50 of their Chicago clients at Greenhouse Loft, a lovely ecofriendly event venue right off the Kennedy Expressway, convenient to both downtown and O'Hare airport," says Schemper. "We created a 'Chicago Neighborhoods' themed menu, where we included neighborhoods like Argyle, Chinatown, Little Italy and Pilsen. The chef introduced the menu and talked about sourcing. They wanted something interactive and a gift for guests, so we also incorporated a cocktail demon-



One of FIG Catering's corporate events in Chicago.

stration and bottles of our in-house FIG bitters that guests could take home to create their own cocktails. Our bartender held small group sessions with the guests and created a cocktail called the Demetrio's Dilemma, with small batch bourbon from Ohio, ginger beer, lemon juice and FIG bitters, to order."

Miami

"I can say without reservation that Miami is now one of the most exciting and thriving eating destinations in the USA," says Karen Weiner Escalera, editor of miamicurated.com, a highly ranked food blog. "The Magic City's offerings go well beyond the famed Cuban restaurants that have been a stop on presidential campaigns.

"Peruvian chef Gaston Acurio at the Mandarin Oriental here started the

explosion in fine Peruvian cuisine, joining the dozens of top-notch ceviche venues that are the real thing. Many of the world's top chefs are represented here, including José Andrés, Daniel Boulud, Stephen Starr, Jean-Georges Vongerichten and soon Joël Robuchon," Escalera says. "Miami is seen not only as

a place where a top restaurant group that's on the move needs to be, but also as its first outpost in the U.S. to launch a new fine dining concept. Think Enrique Iglesias and tennis star Rafael Nadal's Spanish restaurant Tatel, which opened this year in The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach, or an investor group that owns the wildly popular Zuma and who launched the Pan Asian spot DOA."

Gloria Rojas, global events program manager for California-based Ruckus Wireless, says, "In September of 2017 we held our 'Big Dogs Conference' at the Loews Miami Beach property, an invitation-only event where Ruckus partners have the opportunity to interact with our execu-

tives and subject matter experts to exchange ideas, learn, make connections and gain a competitive edge. This 2½-day conference is held in a different city each year, and we had over 430 people attend our 2017 event."

Although Rojas says that food was not the main reason the event was held in Miami, it didn't hurt that the city, and the 790-room Loews property (which describes its dining venues as global cuisine infused with Latin flavors and seafood classics) was the perfect combination for the menu planned for the awards dinner. "The property has six wonderful restaurants, but with almost 500 dinner guests, we organized the awards dinner in the Americana ballroom," Rojas says.

"The buffet consisted of culinary options from around the Americas, includ-



Chef Michael Schulson's Monkitail at the Diplomat Beach Resort in Florida was named Best Hotel Restaurant.

ing Cuban, Mexican, Peruvian and other Latin American countries. The food at dinner was exceptional; all of our guests were very pleased with the overall presentation. One of our partners told me during the event that 'I'm usually not a fan of hotel food, but this is fantastic' so that was very nice to hear."

Fresh off a recent \$100 million transformation in April 2017, the 1,000-room Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, just north of Miami (part of Hilton's Curio Collection) is making a splash with two new restaurants. Chef Michael Schulson's Japanese-inspired Monkitail was recently awarded the Best Hotel Restaurant in *USA Today's* 2017 Readers' Choice Awards, and celebrity Chef Geoffrey Zakarian's Point Royal, a Coastal American restaurant, is getting raves for its raw bar and fish menu. The hotel also boasts 1,000 guest rooms and suites, 10 different culinary venues, and 209,000 sf of meeting and event space, the largest hotel convention space in South Florida.

Other exciting foodie venues that will appeal to planners include Los Fuegos, featuring the cuisine of celebrated Argentine chef Francis Mallmann. Located in the eclectic, pricey and popular Faena Hotel, the chef's grilling skills are on full display in the outdoor restaurant. Often credited as a leading force in the revitalization of the Miami River neighborhood, three-year old Seaspace continues to be one of the city's top waterfront restaurants. Chef Angel Leon's menu is inspired by Mediterranean and global influences. With 250 feet of private docking privileges, the restaurant offers stunning interiors and views of the Miami River and downtown skyline.



Credit: Nik Koenig

Los Fugeos at Miami's Faena Hotel features the cuisine of celebrated Argentine chef Francis Mallmann.

New Orleans

New Orleans is synonymous with Cajun and Creole cuisine. Barbecue shrimp, po'boys, jambalaya, gumbo, crawfish étouffée, beignets, muffuletta, and red beans and rice are all part of the city's rich cuisine, and prepared at

programs. "We did two parties back-to-back. Our Leadership Ladder Reception for 1,200 attendees was catered by Centerplate and held in The Grand Oak Mansion, and our Success Club Party took place throughout the entire venue for about 5,000 attendees." Beachbody

"New Orleans continues to be an amazing city for foodies, and a good choice for meeting planners wishing to incorporate culinary-related events into their programs."

David E. Rome, CMP, DMCP, Director of Sales
BBC Destination Management, New Orleans, LA



its legendary restaurants such as Brennan's, Commander's Palace, Galatoire's, Dooky Chase and Tujague's. Chefs such as Emeril Lagasse, John Besh and Donald Link have enhanced the city's reputation as a foodie destination.

Food & Wine magazine says that young chefs are shaking up the New Orleans restaurant scene in a big way, earning the city a spot on *Food & Wine's* top 10 food cities in the world for 2017. Some of the new restaurants in the city include Turkey and Wolf, Compère Lapin (Chef Nina Compton was *Food & Wine's* Best New Chef 2017), Marjie's Grill and Part & Parcel.

Mardi Gras World, an offsite venue also known as River City Venues, is located near the Mississippi River. This 300,000-sf space is the brainchild of Blaine Kern, who developed and designed many of the monumental Mardi Gras floats since 1932; he opened up

worked with BBC Destination Management, a Global DMC Partner, with My Social House handling the culinary end.

"The main objective behind our parties is recognition. Our coaches work all year long to build their businesses, and this is a way to recognize their hard work, celebrate their achievements and cut loose," added Holly Kasabo, senior manager for Beachbody Global Events. "The attendees loved the food trucks. When we start planning our events, we strive to showcase and celebrate the host city by making sure we have the best local flavors, sights and sounds."

New Orleans is more than just a foodie town, of course — it offers meeting and convention participants an experience that includes

history, music and a wonderful Louisiana atmosphere. "New Orleans is a great convention town and our attendees had a blast taking it all in," says Green. "We also held an Elite Reception at The Sugar Mill one night, where the theme was Voodoo Masquerade. We made sure to incorporate all the best tastes of the bayou like boiled gulf shrimp, chicken gumbo and lemon ice box pies."

The Sugar Mill is located directly across from the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center near the historic Warehouse District. The venue specializes in large corporate hospitality events, private conventions and trade shows. Their 22,000-sf main floor and the adjoining 15,000-sf landscaped courtyard can combine indoor and outdoor activities for up to 3,000 people indoors and 10,000 using the adjoining properties.

"New Orleans continues to be an amazing city for foodies, and a good choice for meeting planners wishing to incorporate culinary-related events into their programs," says New Orleans resident David E. Rome, CMP, DMCP, director of sales for BBC Destination Management, a Global DMC Partner. "One of the great culinary events for corporate clients include having noted chef Amy Sins use the Rib Room in the Omni Royal Orleans to show attendees how to make gumbo or bread pudding, the venue's signature dishes," Rome says.

"We also have the New Orleans School of Cooking here, which offers demonstration classes where guests cook their meal and pair it with wine and alcohol. Knowing the city as well as we do, we



Beachbody's Leadership Ladder program included a New Orleans-themed culinary event at Mardi Gras World.

bring in very unique New Orleans menu items, like a Café Du Monde food truck frying up beignets, the Drago's Firetruck charring oysters out of the truck, or a sno-ball station with a liquor bar for guests to add to their favorite flavor," Rome added. "We have talented bakers in town and have brought in Doberge Bites from Debbie Does Doberge, or a trufflemaker onsite from Bittersweet Chocolates, and we have partnered with James Beard Award-winning chef Donald Link to produce a couchon de lait (pig roast) in a South Louisiana swamp location. Groups love to see the pig on the rotisserie and of course enjoy all of the accoutrements like jambalaya, pork crackling, boiled crawfish, shrimp, potatoes, corn and sausage. Our goal is to show our guests what South Louisiana and New Orleans looks like through the eyes of a local."

New York City

Within the next two years, New York City will get two massive food halls, a trend that is happening in several big cities around the country. One of projects, yet to be named, is the Spanish version of Eataly, complete with wine and cheese bars, a tortilla stand and of course, endless tapas. Thanks to José Andrés and the Adrià brothers, the chefs behind El Bulli's famed molecular gastronomy, customers will be able to feast on authentic Spanish cuisine as early as fall 2018. The new foodie paradise will occupy 35,000 sf of indoor/outdoor space within the larger Hudson Yard complex, located in midtown Manhattan.

In early 2019, Anthony Bourdain's Food Market will open on Pier 57 along the Hudson River. Part of the pier will also be home to Google, which has signed on for about 250,000 sf of space, while Bourdain Market is expected to take up 100,000 sf on the ground floor and mezzanine levels. There also will be an 80,000-sf publicly accessible rooftop park.

Restaurant openings in New York are always highly anticipated, and the following venues, some within high-end business hotels, are definitely on the ra-



The Aviary is perched on the top floor of the Mandarin Oriental, New York.

dar of many corporate planners. Public Kitchen, Jean-Georges Vongerichten's latest opening, paired itself with the opening of Ian Schrager's Public Hotel. Public Kitchen sits on the ground floor of the impeccably designed hotel, in a 150-seat space and an outdoor patio. On the menu are dishes such as truffle pizza, rigatoni with basil-pistachio pesto, and smoked short rib with corn and potato salad.

Located on the top floor of the Mandarin Oriental hotel in Columbus Circle, The Aviary is chef Grant Achatz and partner Nick Kokonas' New York City outpost of the three-Michelin-starred Chicago restaurant Alinea.

San Francisco

Located on the Embarcadero, the San Francisco Ferry Building is densely packed with restaurants, shops and crowds of people. It's close to the Marin ferry, and a perfect venue for groups to spend a few hours, especially in nice weather. The Ferry Building is a foodie's paradise, brimming with organic, local, sustainable, artisan and just plain delicious culinary delights. Highlights include fresh oysters on the half-shell at Hog Island Oyster Company, tasty tamales at Mijita and juicy burgers at Gott's Roadside. The Slanted Door, an upscale Vietnamese restaurant, is also worthwhile. For dessert, it's a toss-up between Ciao Bella's rich and creamy

gelato and Miette's beautiful looking and tasty cupcakes.

Another treat for foodie groups would be the sprawling market held inside the Ferry Building on a Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday before 2 p.m. With scores of organic fruits and vegetables, prepared foods and baked treats, the huge market wraps around both the front and back of the building.

Seattle

Corporate planners easily can find excellent venues here for offsite dining or culinary field trips, including at the city's famous Pike Place Market; and Seattle is surrounded by some of the country's finest agricultural and livestock suppliers.

Located in Woodinville, the heart of western Washington's wine country just 30 minutes from Seattle, the Barking Frog is a highly acclaimed restaurant with innovative seasonal menus and an award-winning cellar of Northwest wines. The restaurant is adjacent to Willows Lodge, an upscale, 84 rooms/suites lodge that is well-suited for corporate events.

Also located within steps of Willows Lodge is the Herbfarm, a five-diamond restaurant that offers a multicourse dining experience rich in the culinary heritage of the Pacific Northwest. Each nine-course dinner is inspired by the season and accompanied by wine pair-

“I can say without reservation that Miami is now one of the most exciting and thriving eating destinations in the USA.”

Karen Escalera, Editor
Miami Curated, Miami, FL

ings. The day’s menu is finalized only hours before the meal to take full advantage of fresh ingredients at their peak, including produce and herbs harvested daily from The Herbfarm’s own kitchen garden. Local growers and producers provide wild mushrooms, heritage fruits, handmade cheeses and other rare treasures.



Credit: Ron Bernthal

Seattle’s famous Pike Place Market, in operation since 1907, is teeming with fresh, local seafood and produce.

Another outstanding Seattle-area restaurant is Westward, which *Bon Appétit* magazine named one of the best new restaurants in the U.S. Located on the shore of Seattle’s Lake Union, this rustic, wood building is hidden from the street by foliage, and shipbuilding and repair yards border the property at each end, a testament to the area’s still vibrant fishing industry.

The recently opened 220-room W Bellevue hotel sits on Lake Washington, 20 minutes from downtown, and offers several culinary options for corporate groups. The Lakehouse, showing a Northwest farmhouse concept, and Civility & Unrest, a speakeasy-inspired cocktail lounge; both venues from the James Beard Award-winning chef Jason

Wilson. The hotel also provides 10,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Baton Rouge

The city is ground zero for excellent Cajun and Creole food, with lots of new spots like Cocha and Kalurah Street Grill, both receiving widespread praise. Local radio talk show host Jay Ducote was a runner-up on Season 11 of “Food Network Star” and runs a taco pop-up called Government Taco that will finally get a permanent space in 2018. “Baton Rouge is really like a gumbo pot of all Louisiana cultures in one place,” says Ducote. “We get the Creole influences of New Orleans, the Cajun culture from Acadiana and the traditional Southern flare from the northern part of the state. It all converges here in Baton Rouge, where finding our own unique culture has been challenging in the past.”

The Boullia Babes Catering Company also does pop-ups and private functions, making incredible sandwiches like its “Sammich” of smoked turkey, capicola ham, Calabrese salami, Muenster cheese, house pickles, onion and lemon rosemary aioli on pressed French bread. One

“When we start planning our events, we strive to showcase and celebrate the host city by making sure we have the best local flavors, sights and sounds.”

Leah Green, Director
Beachbody Global Events, Santa Monica, CA

of the most popular downtown dining venues is Cocha, with a menu inspired by the married owners’ Venezuelan and Dutch backgrounds. Fried yucca root with avocado salsa and lavender lamb chops with grilled squash and honey herb sauce are just two of their excellent

creations. Other foodie and drink-worthy venues to consider include Zippy’s Burritos with frozen cocktails; and Tacos and More, featuring a row of cocktail-dispensing machines. Arrange to place your meeting attendees on one or more of the locally run food tours of Baton Rouge.

Tucson

Tucson is rich in heritage foods, with more “historic” food grown within 100 miles than any other city in North America, including black Sphinx dates, tepary beans and chiltepin peppers, to name just a few. Tucson is also home to Native Seeds/SEARCH, a 33-year-old non-profit seed bank and conservation organization dedicated to agrobiodiversity. Near downtown, Mission Garden is a living museum with four acres of dedicated Spanish Colonial, Tohono O’odham, Mexican and American food crops representing Tucson’s agricultural heritage, a great location for an offsite reception.

Many local caterers like to have fun with their corporate food events. “We have done a number of events where we focus on Southwestern flair and do a cooking lesson,” says Wendy Gauthier, the noted chef and owner of Tucson’s Chef Chic Personal Chef & Catering. “We had a group cooking lesson with the Young Leaders of Ratheon, where we had over 20 people come in, work in teams and make different dishes for them all to eat together at the end of the lessons. We made homemade tortillas, flan and other items. We have done events with themes like the ’80s for a group of around 100 people where

we made homemade snowballs, from-scratch marshmallows and set up a s’mores station inside so they could roast their own. Some corporations have us make food for them that does not have a theme, just really great food from local Tucson suppliers.” C&IT



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Event Tech Update

Stay Up to Speed So You Don't Get Left Behind

By Derek Reveron

Planners are gradually adopting a growing variety of event technologies, but are a long way from reaping the full benefits. As a result, experts say, they are missing out on ways to increase planning efficiency and improve the attendee experience.

According to a survey by Meeting Professionals International (MPI), more than 60 percent of planners agree that technology makes event management easier, but 92 percent say they aren't leveraging the technology.

Planners fail to get the most out of technology in part because of their anxiety about it. According to a study by etouches, a provider of cloud man-

agement software and sourcing solutions, nearly half of planners believe technology is a "pain point."

Fifty-six percent of planners are most worried about choosing the right content, while 51 percent are anxious about managing registration. Forty-four percent have the most angst about using technology to communicate with attendees onsite.

Get Over It

Experts say that planners must get past their apprehensions.

"Technology is impacting what we do in our industry," says James Spellos, CMP, president of Meeting U and ex-

pert and lecturer on event technology. "But sometimes we make the mistake of thinking only about the technology that's designed for our industry. We have to break that bubble and understand that this conversation really has nothing to do with technology itself. But it has to do with your creativity and how creative you can be in using these tools."

But first, planners must get past their "pain points," which stem from the following, according to the etouches study:

- Planners have negative experiences with technology and can't or don't want to keep up with the rapid advances.

- They fear new technology won't work and are turned off by its incompatibility with other platforms.
- They lack the time to learn new technologies.
- Many planners lack the budgets for emerging, cutting-edge technologies.

Slow Adoption

It's no wonder that planners are notoriously slow adopters of technology. But that may change eventually, experts say. After all, there was a time when planners only sporadically used basic social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Though many

planners now commonly use social media to engage attendees and market events, there are still those who don't. "Social media is a bandwagon that we need to have already been on," says Spellos. "We really shouldn't be having that conversation now, yet we need to because we still have people who are hesitant, resisting and not comfortable."

Planners shouldn't adopt a new technology just because it's new. The benefits differ depending upon the size and type of meeting, the attendees, goals and other factors.

Experts advise planners to choose a technology by asking questions such as the following:

- How does the technology help achieve meeting goals, engage attendees and increase learning?
- Can it increase planning efficiency, save time and money, and improve the attendee experience?
- Would it help manage onsite logistics, data and registration?

Here are some of the key established and emerging technologies that can help planners now and in the future.

Get Appy

Adoption of apps among planners is growing, largely because everyone uses a smartphone. One day, planners may be able to plan an entire meeting





“Social media is a **bandwagon** that we need to have already been on. We still have people who are **hesitant, resisting** and not comfortable.”

James Spellos, CMP
President, Meeting U., Bayside, NY

using mobile devices and apps. Apps are available for nearly every pre-meeting, onsite and post-meeting task.

Before meetings, apps allow planners to track and schedule tasks; reserve rooms and make restaurant reservations; submit RFPs; select properties and venues; and market meetings and conventions. Apps also allow attendees to search for parking, avoid delays such as road closings and reserve parking in advance.

During meetings, apps can register attendees and allow them to network; provide real-time program updates; and offer teambuilding activities. Apps can track attendee engagement, including the number of participants who attend meetings, sessions, activities and exhibitor booths.

Post-meeting, planners can use apps to survey attendees and create and analyze results.

Generate Information

Technology can be used during the entire planning process to generate a wealth of information about attendees. “It can help planners decide where to bring the next event, what sessions and topics were popular, what components of a meeting have to be changed, what are the most popular exhibits and attendance patterns. That’s critical information but planners are leaving it on the table,” says Spellos.

Apps are a primary way that planners can take advantage of omnipresent mobile phones. “Mobile is the name of the game today,” says Anthony Paola, CMP, managing direc-

tor, Travel Leaders Group, a Plymouth, Minnesota-based corporate strategic meetings management company. “It is important that any technology meeting planners and attendees use is mobile-friendly. For any offsite event, both attendees and planners are mostly on their smartphones, not their laptops. If corporate meeting technology can’t work with that, then its help will be quite limited.”

Some planners aren’t leaving it on the table.

Kelly Elliott, creative manager of Schaumburg, Illinois-based Total Event Resources, is using apps for several real-time purposes. “They are an essential component of nearly every event we produce,” says Elliott. “We use them to communicate information before, during and after events. We use them to engage audiences, foster collaborative learning and networking, generate lead retrieval and monitor continuing education requirements.”

Apps allow the collection of data and metrics that previously would not have been possible, and that enables the design of more impactful and memorable experiences.

Elliott cites an example. “We are currently working with a new corporate client to innovate and evolve their annual convention,” says Elliott. “Past survey results demonstrate that the majority of attendees want to be involved in the program more as active participants and less as passive observers. We are engaging the attendees prior to the event via a mobile app to gather information that will allow

us to make adjustments during the planning phase that will lead to more customized experience.”

During the event, Elliott will use technology during sessions via live polling, audience Q&A and competitive gamification that will involve attendees as content contributors.

Software Tools

The rapidly growing number of event software tools generally focus on the planning basics. Some tools are aimed squarely at professional planners and those who may fill the role but have other work titles.

Travel Leaders Group recently introduced such a tool called the Simple Meetings Optimizer. According to Paola, “Not everyone who plans meetings is a meeting planner. A small business might not be able to invest in a full-time planner, and even at a large company, meeting planners might work on only the largest events. This leaves non-specialists to handle the more simple meetings. But simple can be a bit of a misnomer. These events still require smooth execution and a good experience for attendees.”

The tool has a mobile website that doubles as an app and allows users to reserve hotel rooms; arrange transportation and food and beverage; send out schedules; and track attendance. Users also can track spending to keep meetings within budget.

Software providers also are trying to develop integrated software systems that handle planning functions from beginning to end. However, progress

“There was a fear that technology would replace **human elements**. (But) technology is bringing audiences together more than isolating them.”

Kelly Elliott
Creative Manager, Total Event Resources, Schaumburg, IL

is proceeding gradually because meetings, incentive programs and trade shows each have different needs.

That’s why some providers offer access to a suite of non-integrated systems that fulfill a variety of needs. Lanyon’s Active Network, for example, includes the following separate, non-integrated products: Starcite (sourcing and strategic meetings management software); RegOnline (attendee management); and Passkey (room block management). Cvent’s offerings include Crowdcompass (mobile event app); OnArrival (check-ins); and Elite Meetings/Speed RFP.

Livestreaming

Social media services such as Periscope, Facebook Live, Facebook Instant Video, Instagram and Snapchat are constantly upgrading their livestreaming capabilities, and more properties are offering the bandwidth to support its use during meetings and events.

Planners believe that technologies such as livestreaming, which allows

remote participation in meetings, breakouts, keynotes, general sessions, seminars, networking and most other activities, won’t lessen the importance of onsite meetings or threaten attendance. To the contrary, the technology helps to augment, not replace, in-person meetings because it provides another option for attendees and can generate interest in attending the in-person experience.

According to Elliott, “There was a fear that technology would replace human elements in live events. We have seen the exact opposite happen. Technology is bringing audiences together more than isolating them. It enhances live events and provides clients and planners with tangible metrics that are invaluable in determining the ROI and success of an event.”

Virtual Reality

Virtually reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are the future of meetings, experts predict. “We are seeing a rise in AR and VR use in events,” says



Elliott. “As the hardware and content become more cost-effective, we predict these will be a ‘must have’ and not a ‘nice to have’ for many of the events we produce.”

In addition, says Elliott, “AR and VR augment the aspects of a live experience by allowing attendees to engage in something that may not otherwise be possible because of cost or geographical constraints. It leads to a sharable, memorable experience that has a direct impact on ROI.”

VR promises to revolutionize hotel and venue selection by offering three-dimensional walkthroughs and experiences of options such as décor, lighting and seating arrangements. Best Western Hotels & Resorts, Starwood, Marriott and Shangri-La Hotels are among the many that offer VR.

Brandt Krueger, owner of Richfield, Minnesota-based Event Technology Consulting, asks planners to imagine the following:

“You walk into an empty ballroom on a site visit, put on AR glasses, and



“Mobile is the **name of the game** today. If corporate meeting technology can’t work with that, then its help will be quite limited.”

Anthony Paola, CMP
Managing Director, Travel Leaders Group, Plymouth, MN



“(Imagine) on a site visit, (you) put on **AR glasses**, and instantly have every configuration of chairs and tables overlaid.”

Brandt Krueger

Owner, Event Technology Consulting, Richfield, MN

instantly have every configuration of chairs and tables overlaid,” says Krueger. “You could walk through and see if crescent rounds might make the room too tight or use theater-style seating. Technical directors could walk into a room and instantly measure ceiling heights and see every electrical outlet highlighted for convenience.”

Exhibitors and destinations will increasingly use VR to market their services and products.

Spellos offers examples: “The British Columbia Tourism Board put out their second version of its VR film ‘The Wild Within’ to promote tourism in its area,” says Spellos. “The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) is using its Virtual Reality Companion app to showcase attractions. Suppliers and exhibitors are using it to showcase their products, services and exhibit space. They can send out portable cardboard VR viewers.”

Augmented Reality

Augmented reality (AR) will become more popular as technology improves its compatibility with hand-held devices. “AR will become a huge part of how we do business because we will be able to bring it right to the person’s mobile device,” says Spellos. “That engagement level that we know is so crucial becomes an even more important part of the (AR) experience.”

Spellos offers an example of how planners will be able to use AR. “People never decide which breakouts they want to attend until they get there, and you have cardboard signage with

the speaker’s picture and information,” says Spellos. “What if you put your phone up to the sign and up pops a 30-second video of the speaker and the subject of the session?” That’s possible to do now, Spellos adds.

Krueger cites another example of AR use at a conference with 2,000 attendees at the Gaylord Opryland.

“The keynote’s presentations were combined with animation and video to utilize the entire canvas of displays, and the latest in digital media servers was used to keep all the video and presentations in-sync,” says Krueger. “The client also presented a live demo of Microsoft Hololens (a VR technology), which we successfully patched into the video system, allowing the audience to see what the user was seeing.”

Wearables

Events are gradually adopting wearables such as technologically enabled registration badges that allow attendees to avoid long waits in check-in lines for sessions and exhibitions. Beacons located in meeting rooms and exhibition floors scan the wearable devices and immediately register attendees.

Wearables, when synched with an app, can record a range of meeting data. The devices track attendance at meetings, exhibits, sessions and breakouts, allowing planners to gauge the success of events in real time. The devices also can track attendee satisfaction levels, attendee traffic flow and the most popular topics discussed.

Wearables also make network-

ing easier. Attendees can exchange information confidentially and decide what information to share about themselves. People can swap information anonymously simply by pressing their badges.

The wearable technology Loopd, an etouches platform, connects wearable smart badges with an app and an analytics function in the cloud.

Loopd can track attendee movements onsite, allowing planners to determine which functions, seminars and exhibitions are the most popular. Loopd also tracks the vendors that attendees meet, and encourages networking by suggesting others who may have similar professional interests and reasons for attending.

Educate, Educate

Adoption can improve only if planners educate themselves about technology by reading, networking with peers and asking questions of experts.

According to the MPI study, planners wish they had more training in most areas of technology, including mobile apps, registrations, livestreaming, social media, audience response systems, websites and survey platforms. Those who do will be most successful at driving attendance through improved onsite event experiences.

As Spellos emphasizes, planners must actively explore uses for meeting technology or get left behind. “You can’t wait,” says Spellos. “By the time you bring it to a committee and have them talk about it, four new things have already been developed.” **C&IT**

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The Best of Chicago

The Windy City Wins Over Planners and Attendees With Amazing Venues, Restaurants, Attractions and Midwest Hospitality

By Christine Loomis

A prime perspective of the Chicago River, where guests can embark on an architecture river cruise.

Chicago may get a bad rap from some (wimps) when it comes to weather. Sure, there's wind and cold, but that's a non-issue for meeting planners and attendees.

To start, the Windy City is No. 3 on the list of best convention cities in the United States. It's also the 2017 Restaurant City of the Year as voted by *Bon Appetit* and the 2017 Best Big City in the U.S., according to the readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* (see "Top Foodie Destinations" on page 40). Modis, a global IT and engineering staffing agency, named Chicago the nation's top tech hotspot of the future. The city's individual hotels, restaurants and attractions routinely garner accolades and awards of their own, and Choose Chicago, the city's CVB, has comprehensive tools and programs for planners, whether it's an executive meeting for 10 or an event for thousands.

There are more than 110,000 guest rooms in the Chicago-land area and almost 40,000 hotel rooms in the central business district, to say nothing of McCormick Place, one of the top convention centers in the nation. In short, the city has everything it takes to make meetings successful and to give planners plenty of choices.

Nina Cardillo, general manager of the AlliedPRA Chicago office, puts it this way: "Typical corporate events experience programs with higher than usual turnout in Chicago due to the attraction of the destination. Attendees may come for the meeting but they'll stay for the vast array of things to do and see." Cardillo lists meeting space; world-class attractions; culture; and a diverse range of venue selections, accommodations and sightseeing offerings as among the city's assets.

While airlift is a major concern in many destinations, Cardillo says Chicago wins on the transportation front, too. "Centered in the heart of America, Chicago is a convenient airline hub with two first-class airports with over 80 carriers within an hour of downtown Chicago. O'Hare International has been named the best airport for 14 years running, also known as the world's busiest for flight operations, making the destination easily accessible for local and international travelers. If flying isn't in the works," she adds, "Chicago is within a day's drive for more than 46 million people, again adding to the appeal of the location for corporate events."

"Attendees may come for the meeting but they'll stay for the vast array of things to do and see."

Nina Cardillo, General Manager
AlliedPRA Chicago



When it comes to culture, Chicago is no one-trick pony, which gives it appeal for national and international groups alike. "Chicago is home to more than 1,800 foreign-based companies," Cardillo notes. "Robust international business helps shape the city's culture and expand its global presence. And



A variety of event areas at the Field Museum of Natural History can accommodate from 50 to 15,000 attendees.

with over 77 diverse communities offering their own distinct vibe, culture, attractions and cuisine, meeting attendees will appreciate the city's distinctive art, history and languages."

Unconventional Venues

Cardillo believes Chicago's unique and unconventional venues are a big draw for planners and attendees alike. "The Adler Planetarium offers a beautiful backdrop with three distinct theaters and stimulating exhibits with up to 60,000 sf for large group gatherings, and the terrace patios offer some of the city's most amazing skylines. 360 Chicago, formerly known as the John Hancock Observatory, competes for dramatic views combined with its newly added special-event space on the 94th floor, accommodating groups of up to 600. If larger space is in order, the impressive and massive 1.45-million-sf Cinespace Chicago Film Studio should inspire guests to earn their 15 minutes of fame."

When a large blank canvas for an opening-night reception or final-night gala is desired, Cardillo says Veriport fits the bill. "This 10-acre site in Chicago's Illinois Medical District boasts a 30,000-sf hangar with three large bays that open to a five-acre tarmac. The raw space is easily transformable and lends itself to well-over-the-top concepts. A clear tent allows attendees to view the breathtaking skyline as a backdrop to the event and will eliminate any concerns about the chilly Chicago weather. Water venues are abundant as well for private corporate events, from luxury vessels to specially fitted private



Credit: Carasco Photography

The landmark Chicago Cultural Center is home to many unique event spaces including two with stained glass domes.

yachts set to cruising along Chicago's River and Downtown Lakefront Harbor."

America's Best Restaurant City

As for the city's justifiably lauded restaurant scene, Cardillo says, "Chicago may be referred to as the 'Second City' next to New York, but it refuses to play second fiddle when it comes to dining experiences. A gourmet dining epicenter, the Windy City is better known as America's best restaurant city, with its several local specialties. Moving beyond the deep-dish pizza or classic Chicago-style dog, guests can immerse themselves in every imaginable food craving with unforgettable culinary experiences at Michelin-starred restaurants."

Among the restaurants Cardillo and her staff may tap for functions and events: Spiaggia, which Cardillo calls a "must-dine" destination for locals and visitors alike; RPM Steak, in the River North neighborhood; Lena Brava, latest labor of love from Chef Rick Bayless; Gibson's, an institution in the Gold Coast neighborhood; Swift & Sons in Chicago's former meatpacking district; and Chicago Firehouse Restaurant, housed in the 1905 Romanesque Revival building that was once home to Engine Company 104 of the Chicago Fire Department.

Cardillo adds one critical culinary note about eating Chicago's famous hot dogs: "No ketchup!"

Attractions and Adventures

Some of Chicago's most famous attractions are also the most popular for functions and attendee experiences, including Second City Improv Theatre, the 95th floor of the Hancock Center and the renowned architecture riverboat cruise.

Planners may not know, however, that Chicago also offers outdoor summer adventures. "During the warmer months, guests can try their hand at sailing lessons on Lake Michigan, kayaking on the Chicago River and biking down the lakefront path," Cardillo says. "And there's no doubt Chicago is known for its sports and even more so for its colorful fans. Home to the World Series Champion Cubs and iconic Wrigley Field, guests can appreciate a baseball game at a private Wrigley rooftop while eating a Chicago hotdog, or an event along the sidelines at Soldier Field."

And when the Windy City is a "winter wonderland," Cardillo adds, "there are more than 40 world-class museums to explore. The Art Institute of Chicago is home to vast collections, which

include the most Impressionist works outside of The Louvre; but art museums are just the start of what the city has to offer. From the Field Museum's treasure trove of natural history, to more than 32,500 animals at the Shedd Aquarium to star gazing at the Adler Planetarium, the list is long and wide."

Additionally, AlliedPRA can arrange a customized Grand City Tour.

More Accolades and Attributes

Nicole Lavin, general manager of destination management company Hosts Chicago, points out another of Chicago's many awards as one of the Top 10 Cities in the United States as ranked by CNN Travel. She, too, lauds the city's embarrassment of riches when it comes to boosting attendance.

"Nearly 40 million people visit Chicago annually. We boast some of the country's best music, theater, restaurants, festivals, art, attractions, sporting events and more. Our cuisine is unbeatable. Chicago has world-class convention facilities, easy and efficient public transportation and distinct, cultural neighborhoods waiting to be discovered. Simply put, it's easy to fall in love with the Windy City."

One thing Chicago knows how to do, Lavin says, is host a get-together. "We have world-class hotels, spacious convention centers, historic buildings, elegant theaters and beyond — many of them with a view of our spectacular skyline. McCormick Place, a famous Chicago landmark, offers the largest amount of exhibition space in North America, with over 2 million sf"

And of course, that's not all. "Want to see the Windy City from all different perspectives? Then the land, air, water tour is for you. You'll hear the history behind the Wrigley building from the architectural river cruise, experience travel like a local on the El and soar about the city skyline in a helicopter," Lavin notes. "And everyone wants to experience the city's bustling food scene, especially Chicago's famous deep-dish pizza. The neighborhood pizza tour takes guests throughout the city to experience the best deep-dish of the city."

Chicago also has more for sports fans than its best-known teams. "In 2018, the Laver Cup will pit six top European players against their counterparts from the rest of the World in tennis as you've never seen it before at the United Center," Lavin says.

She, too, gives thumbs up to Chicago's varied warm-weather



The historic Hilton Chicago completed a \$7 million meeting space renovation in fall 2017.

Credit: Hilton Hotels & Resorts



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“Hotels, bars and restaurants are embracing the long winter with retractable roofs, and now inflatable domes are popping up throughout the city.”

Nicole Lavin, General Manager
Hosts Chicago



er assets. “Summertime in Chicago — the 100 days that locals look forward to every year! The city is alive with packed patios, the bustling lakefront, packed rooftops and, of course, street fests. Cheers echo from the ‘friendly confines’ of Wrigleyville throughout Lakeview, beer gardens are filled with crowds desperate to have the token patio seat and scents from delicious outdoor dining waft through each neighborhood.”

Tailored Shopping Experiences

But Lavin also points to a value-added use of another of Chicago’s most notable assets — excellent shopping — for meetings and incentives. “Take your employees shopping,” she says. “Our team is becoming specialized in tailored shopping experiences. For a recent software client, we secured a semi-private shopping experience in the Nike store located on Michigan Avenue, where guests enjoyed cocktails and hors d’oeuvres while being outfitted by Nike specialists with the latest in athletic gear. The client was thrilled with the daytime event because it offered a unique experience that provided employees with a customized takeaway item that reminded them each time they wore it how appreciated they were.”

The program was part of an incentive trip, but Lavin says this type of event works for other types of meetings, too. “The tailored retail programs are really good for client entertainment as well, or capabilities launches, to ensure high attendance numbers.”

And that’s what it’s really about. “These types of tailored experiences encourage participation,” she says. “Clients are consistently challenged to provide their guests with the next best experience to ensure strong turnout. When you offer something unique like a personalized retail experience, you are more likely to have higher attendance numbers, ensuring quality time with your employees or top clients.”

For planners considering a Chicago-based meeting, Lavin has a couple of suggestions. “Yearly conventions and city-wides are something to keep at top-of-mind when planning a meeting in Chicago. Many of these take up all of the hotel spaces in the city. The Choose Chicago Convention Calendar is a great resource when planning!”

And that infamous Chicago winter weather? “Don’t fear the cold!” Lavin says. “Hotels, bars and restaurants are embracing the long winter with retractable roofs, and now inflatable domes are popping up throughout the city. The domes can fit several guests in comfy chairs and accommodate a small table. Who says rooftops aren’t cool (or hot) in the dead of winter?”

Hotels On the Move

Not surprising, things are always changing in Chicago. Ace Hotel Chicago made its debut in the West Loop neighborhood in August with 159 rooms, two restaurants and 9,000 sf of meeting space, and a handful of hotels wrapped up renovations. Hyatt Regency McCormick Place completed a \$13 million restaurant renovation, while The Gwen Chicago recently upgraded its rooms and public spaces. Hyatt Regency Chicago added 12,000 sf of meeting space to its already expansive 228,000 sf, and Best Western River

North Hotel spent \$4.5 million, infusing its spaces with pops of color and a contemporary vibe.

The historic 1,544-room Hilton Chicago, on Michigan Avenue across from Grant Park, completed a \$7 million renovation in fall 2017. The newest revamp enhances the third-floor meeting spaces and Salon C in the Stevens Meeting Center, leading to the finalization of an all-encompassing \$150 million renovation and restoration initiative. The third floor is home to seven separate meeting rooms, accommodating up to 850 attendees. Salon C, which spans 28,000 sf, is one of four event spaces in the 115,000-sf Stevens Meeting Center. Other renovations completed as part of the overall \$150 million renovation include the 10,080-sf Continental Ballroom, 600 accommodations and the 5,000-sf Conrad Hilton Suite, the largest suite in the Midwest. The Hilton Chicago offers a total of 234,000 sf of versatile meeting space, including the Grand Ballroom, which has hosted every United States President.

The 1,641-room Palmer House, a Hilton Hotel, is America’s longest continually operating hotel and is located in Chicago’s Loop where business and finance districts intersect with the-



A classroom setup at the Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center Hotel.

ater, dining, shopping and cultural arts. The hotel’s 130,000 sf of meeting space, all of which has been fully renovated, includes four ballrooms, 77 breakout rooms and 16,909 sf of exhibit space with floor-to-ceiling windows.

In all, Hilton boasts more than 30 full-service, luxury hotels in the Chicago market, from suburban locations to city center. Currently, Hilton is offering meeting groups a free morning coffee break or free evening cocktail reception for meetings booked by February 28, 2018 and actualized by December 31, 2018 (www.hilton.com/coffeeorcocktails).

More Cook County Options

Chicago isn’t the only meetings gem in the region. Cook County is the second most populous county in the United States. It stretches northwest and southwest of Chicago and includes two of the region’s stellar meetings destinations, away from the city yet within easy reach of downtown Chicago and O’Hare International Airport.

Tinley Park

Located southwest of downtown and just over 40 miles from O’Hare International Airport, Tinley Park, in Chicago’s Southland, is home to the Tinley Park Convention Center with 70,000 sf of event space, 58,000 of it contiguous. Its 35-foot ceilings give exhibitors a lot of flexibility, as do the 21 breakout rooms of various sizes and the fact that the convention center is connected to 202-room Holiday Inn Tinley Park. Another 600 hotel rooms are located nearby.

Tinley Park has its own dining and attractions, and all that downtown Chicago offers is only 30 miles away.

Schaumburg

Another town with a convenient hotel-convention-center pairing is Schaumburg, one of Chicago’s northwest suburbs. The Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center Hotel is just 15 miles from O’Hare International Airport, giving planners a break on pricey Chicago transportation costs and attendees less time in airport shuttles. Schaumburg is about 30 miles from downtown Chicago.

The hotel and convention center provide planners with 148,624 sf of total space, 42 meeting rooms and capacity for more than 6,000 attendees, making it ideal for Connecticut-based Design-2-Part shows, one of the nation’s largest design and contract manufacturing trade shows. The May 2017 event attracted 2,200 attendees.

“The Schaumburg convention center is the perfect fit for our show,” says Jerry Schmidt, president of the company, noting that the key features that work so well for them include “easy access to the highways, free parking, column-free exhibit space and a large ballroom, all connected to a full-service business hotel.”

All show events were held at the Schaumburg Renaissance Hotel and the convention center. “We produce a two-day trade show with a large exhibitor reception, Schmidt says. “The catering department does an excellent job with our reception, which includes entertainment, an open bar and hand-passed appetizers for more than 300 guests. Having everything under

“I moved our show (to Schaumburg) from St. Charles, Illinois, in 2007 and...our show has doubled in size and attendance.”

Jerry Schmidt, President
Design-2-Part Show, Prospect, CT



The elegant Grand Ballroom at Palmer House, a Hilton Hotel.

one roof — seminar rooms, ballroom, hotel, convention center — makes it much easier to manage a successful show.”

In addition, the city of Schaumburg itself has benefits. “It has easy access to the Chicago manufacturing market without having the high prices and traffic issues of downtown Chicago,” Schmidt says. “I moved our show from St. Charles, Illinois, in 2007 and since that move our show has doubled in size and attendance. It’s one of the best business decisions I have made in the past 10 years.”

Itasca

Nearby Itasca, Illinois, is another convenient northwest suburb just outside of Cook County, located 27 miles from downtown Chicago and 17 miles from O’Hare International Airport. Among Itasca’s meetings-friendly venues is Eaglewood Resort, the area’s go-to for groups looking for a resort setting for business meetings and conferences close to Chicago.

The 295-room resort, which received a \$7.7 million renovation in 2015, offers more than 37,000 sf of IACC-certified function space as well as onsite planning services. Set on 106 wooded acres, Eaglewood combines its conference facilities with plenty of nature and a multitude of activities to keep attendees engaged and onsite before and after meetings. The resort has four restaurants, a 6,017-yard golf course and 10,000-sf spa, to say nothing of a six-lane retro bowling alley, bocce ball court, an Olympic-size pool, and fitness classes and equipment for all levels. Everything planners and attendees need is in one place.

In addition to being a short drive from Chicago, Eaglewood is also under four hours drive time from Indianapolis, Madison and Milwaukee, and 6.5 hours or less from Minneapolis, Des Moines, St. Louis and Detroit.

Whatever the size of your meeting, whatever your parameters for conference venues and goals might be, one thing is sure: Chicago and the surrounding area offer whatever you want, not the least of which are a central location, two airports and renowned dining.

But Cardillo points out something else planners should take into consideration, too. “Chicago,” she says, “is a city that embodies Midwest hospitality.”

C&IT

Destination

Las Vegas in High Gear

As Meetings Infrastructure Grows, Corporate Group Business Is Full Speed Ahead

By John Buchanan

In December, for the fifth consecutive year, Las Vegas was named the world's No. 1 meeting and convention destination by the World Travel Awards.

Despite such accolades, the city never rests on its laurels, notes Chris Meyer, vice president of global business sales at the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority. Meyer and LVCVA are currently focused on expanding the city's already vast and solid base of domestic corporate meeting and incentive business. And although awards are flattering, Meyer says, it's bottom line results that keep LVCVA motivated and on top of its game.

"We're now seeing group business from virtually every sector of the U.S. economy," Meyer says. "And we're also seeing growth in major sectors of the economy, like the agricultural industry. We're also seeing growth in city-wide corporate meetings, which we define as using three or more hotels."

That growth is being supported by significant and ongoing capital investment in meetings infrastructure. The Las Vegas Convention Center, promoted as the most technologically advanced facility in the country, is adding a new \$1.4 billion building that will deliver 1.4 million sf

of new space, including 600,000 sf of additional exhibit space, and will serve as the high-profile nerve center of the Las Vegas Convention Center District. The new complex is expected to open by late 2020, in time for the 2021 Consumer Electronics Show.

Meanwhile, a number of major hotels are expanding their meeting space. "Not only do we already have more meeting space than any other city on planet Earth," Meyer says, "but we're currently adding 1.2 million sf of meeting room space."

Among the major projects underway, Meyer says, are a

\$165 million doubling of the space at MGM Resorts' Aria Resort & Casino to 500,000 sf; a \$130 million expansion of the conference center at the MGM Grand; and expansions of the meeting facilities at the JW Marriott and the new Park MGM, formerly the Monte Carlo, which opened a conference center in December.

Stephanie Arone, president and general manager of Activity Planners Inc., one of the city's top destination management companies, says that such dedicated evolution of the destination is a major reason for its dominance in the corporate market. "The continuous expansion and



Lip Smacking Foodie Tours takes groups of up to 100 participants to five of the top restaurants on The Strip.

Credit: Lip Smacking Foodie Tours

improvement of our facilities is a major factor in our success,” Arone says. “That also means that we continuously increase the diversity of what we offer, and that also makes us very attractive to corporate clients. And then there is just the breadth of the meeting infrastructure we offer. It is second to none in terms of options and quality.”

A Dedicated Customer

Healthcare technology provider NextGen, based in Horsham, Pennsylvania, typifies the kind of corporate meeting client Las Vegas attracts today, for the very reasons cited by Meyer and Arone. NextGen has been using Las Vegas for its annual five-day, four-night November user conference, which draws an average of 3,300 attendees, since 2005, says director of marketing Lynn Belanger.



The Mob Museum offers scavenger hunts in which participants find answers to questions about organized crime.

Credit: The Mob Museum

“One of the primary things that keeps bringing us back to Las Vegas is the partnerships we have established in the destination, particularly with MGM Resorts International,” Belanger says. “We have used and do use a number of their properties, including Mandalay Bay, The Mirage, MGM Grand and Aria Resort & Casino, for different types and sizes of meetings. When we started looking for a hotel partner in Las Vegas back in 2005, we did an exhaustive search. And we chose MGM Resorts because of the culture of their company and the way it fits the culture of our company.”

NextGen’s fierce loyalty to Las Vegas and MGM Resorts is also related to the fact that in post-event surveys, attendees consistently express their enthusiasm about coming to Las Vegas and their admiration for MGM proper-

ties. “The destination and the hotels consistently get high marks,” Belanger says.

For the last four years, she has used the sprawling Mandalay Bay resort complex as the venue.

“We like the easy access from the sleeping rooms to the hotel’s convention center,” she says. “We also like the fact that within the Mandalay Bay complex, we can offer our attendees accommodations at different price points. We use three of the individual properties within the complex — Mandalay Bay, the Delano and Luxor. We also like the variety and quality of the restaurants Mandalay Bay offers under one roof.”

Both Mandalay Bay’s room product, and food and beverage are exceptional, Belanger says. “Another thing we like very much about Mandalay Bay is the quality of its convention services team and the flexibility they can offer us. Because we

“One of the primary things that keeps bringing us back to Las Vegas is the partnerships we have established in the destination.”

Lynn Belanger, Director of Marketing
NextGen, Horsham, PA

have been back for four years in a row, it’s very important to us to create something new and exciting each year. And their convention services team has always helped us accomplish that. We work very closely with them to create an entirely new experience each year, including the customization of our menus and the creative use of the different venues within the hotel. And in general, when it comes to service overall, MGM Resorts is second to none. They are a committed partner.”

Not Just for Big Meetings

Although the size of NextGen’s annual conference is typical of many of the corporate meetings Las Vegas attracts, LVCVA’s Meyer stresses that the city also wants, and welcomes, small meetings. For years, the perception has existed among some planners that Las Vegas only gets excited about large meetings. But that is not true, Meyer says. “To the extent that



The new interactive entertainment venue Esports Arena opens early this year.

Credit: Allied Esports



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Credit: Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas recently completed an expansion of its meeting and convention space.

perception exists, I think it comes from two things," he says. "One is the notoriety we get because of all the big meetings we host. But the other reason people hear that is because some of our competitors like to say that. But it's simply not true. We welcome small meeting business and we get a lot of it. For example, 78 percent of the meeting business MGM Resorts International gets for its 14 properties is for meetings of less than 200 attendees. That's a good indicator of how strong we are in the small meetings market."

Last year, Meyer adds, Las Vegas hosted more than 22,000 meetings, and many of them were small, hosted by orga-

"The strong value proposition is alive and well in Las Vegas, and it's only going to get better, because we have an explosion of new meeting space coming online over the next year or two."

**Chris Meyer, V.P. of Global Business Sales
Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority**



nizations that return year after year for some of their most important events.

Regardless of the size of a meeting, one of the key reasons so many companies use Las Vegas regularly is the value it offers. "The strong value proposition is alive and well in Las Vegas, and it's only going to get better, because we have an explosion of new meeting space coming online over the next year or two," Meyer says. "And that is going to create more competition, which is going to drive more value. The value we offer is another of the factors that have made us so successful. And in the future, that will be more true than ever. But the other thing corporate planners like is the range of hotel options we offer at different price points."

Dining and Entertainment

Yet another factor in the popularity of Las Vegas is its unparalleled dining and entertainment scene. "The constant evolution of our culinary scene is another thing that has driven our success as a meeting destination," Meyer says.

And the dining scene continues to be dominated by the largest population of celebrity chefs anywhere in the world,

Arone notes. "Every celebrity chef wants to have a flagship restaurant in Las Vegas," she says.

Among the new restaurants she favors are "Food TV" chef Robert Irving's Public House at the Tropicana. "It's a real hidden gem," Arone says. "It's his first restaurant, and it basically serves pub fare like pulled pork and tater tots. It offers a very casual environment and it's available for buyouts." Another new eatery she likes is the new Las Vegas outpost of red hot Sugar Cane. It's well known because of its flagship location in Miami.

Meyer also points out that precisely because Las Vegas offers such a sensational culinary scene, a very innovative new dining-related activity provider has popped up. That's Lip Smacking Foodie Tours, which takes groups of up to 100 participants to five of the top restaurants on The Strip or in the newly rejuvenated downtown section of the city, according to the tour's Founder and President Donald Contursi. Guests enjoy immediate seating (at often very crowded places), tastes of three or four of the signature dishes at each restaurant and a guided walking tour that uses "insider" information to explain the unique stature of Las Vegas as a place.

"We have had tremendous feedback from meeting planners who've taken a Lip Smacking tour," Contursi says. "The evening is often the highlight to their meeting or incentive trip. That's because we offer a truly unique experience that also means attendees can enjoy an environment that avoids the distractions, such as wrangling for a reservation or jockeying for the best seats in a crowded restaurant. At Lip Smacking Tours, we create a private, customized gourmet dining experience and walking tour that includes VIP treatment."

Activity Trends

Just as it tends to set new trends in fine dining, Las Vegas is also regularly on the cutting edge when it comes to new and different kinds of activities, Arone explains.

Among the cool new things coming online now, she says, is the Esports Arena in the location of the former Lax nightclub at the Luxor Hotel & Casino. Opening in early 2018, the

Intrigue Nightclub lagoon at Wynn Las Vegas.



Credit: Barbara Kraft

Reno-Tahoe

Although Las Vegas gets most of the attention when it comes to meetings in Nevada, the state also offers another destination that in its own way is charming and compelling — Reno-Sparks and nearby North Lake Tahoe.

"The key points we like to make, in selling ourselves to the corporate meetings market," says Mike Larragueta, vice president of sales at the Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority (RSCVA), "are that we offer good meeting infrastructure and a variety of product, including everything from gaming to non-gaming hotels and resorts. We offer hotels ranging from 200-room boutique properties to uniquely themed resorts to large convention hotels. We also promote the convenience of the destination. Everything, including the airport and access to Lake Tahoe, is within close proximity. And most of all, we promote our outdoor activities, from hiking and biking to golf and skiing. Reno-Sparks and North Lake Tahoe, are just spectacularly beautiful places."

Given the elements of its appeal, Larragueta says, the RSCVA has begun to promote the destination more aggressively to the corporate market. Its sweet spot for corporate meetings and incentive programs is surprisingly broad, ranging from as few as 10 hotel rooms to several thousand.

Meeting Properties

Among its most well known meeting properties are the Grand Sierra Resort, which is a former MGM Resorts property that features more than 2,000 rooms; the Peppermill Resort, which has served meeting groups for 46 years; and the



Credit: Reno Sparks CVB

1,382-room Nugget Casino Resort, now operated by Marnell Gaming, which developed the M Resort Spa Casino in Las Vegas. "The Nugget is currently undergoing a significant renovation and upgrade that is really focused on groups," Larragueta says. "For example, they're adding new restaurants and renovating their public space. The Nugget is located in Sparks, which is basically connected to Reno, and it will become a significant player in the corporate market."

Reno's largest property is the 4,100-room complex that includes a trio of hotels — the El Dorado, Silver Legacy and Circus-Circus, also formerly owned by MGM Resorts. "Each property has its own dedicated meeting space, and the company also operates the Reno Ballroom venue, which is located right outside the Silver Legacy, with 30,000 sf of high-ceiling, multifunctional space," Larragueta says. "It's a beautiful facility and it includes an onsite kitchen."

Reno's public convention facility is the 500,000-sf Reno-Sparks Convention Center, which features 380,000 sf of exhibit space and 120,000 sf of meeting

space. Plans are now underway, subject to approval by Nevada state legislature, to add another 300,000 sf of space.

The destination also features a trio of unique offsite venues: the Reno Event Center, located downtown with 60,000 sf of event space and a seating capacity of 6,500; the National Bowling Stadium, which features 72 lanes and onsite catering; and the Reno Livestock Event Center, which hosts equestrian events such as the Reno Rodeo.

Larragueta also stresses that RSCVA also represents North Lake Tahoe, which includes the world-famous ski resort Incline Village, the Hyatt Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa & Casino and Crystal Bay Casino resort.

The big surprise for meeting planners who come to the area for a site visit? "The range of things the destination offers, and the quality of the product we offer," Larragueta says. "They are also very pleasantly surprised by the friendliness of the destination. We welcome corporate groups with a lot of enthusiasm, and we deliver excellent value."

— JB

venue "will combine the best of interactive entertainment and Las Vegas nightlife," according to Allied Esports, the world's leading developer of "esport" venues. "The venue will be absolutely unique," Arone says. "It will look and feel like a Las Vegas sports book, but offer interactive video games that are highly engaging and a lot of fun. And instead of betting on games, attendees will compete against one another, in a very cool venue."

Another fresh and innovative activity that is currently

trending with corporate groups are "escape rooms," Arone says. "Escape rooms are a tremendous innovation. They're popping up all over the place, and they offer a range of themes and story lines. They're basically a new form of teambuilding opportunity. Imagine a staged room, where you're put in with a small group of fellow participants. You're given a puzzle, and you're given a certain amount of time to solve the puzzle and escape the room. They're very engaging and a lot of fun."

The Mob Museum, the National Museum of Organized Crime



Caesars recently announced plans to develop Caesars Forum, a 550,000-sf conference center.

Credit: Caesars Entertainment

and Las Enforcement, offers scavenger hunt teambuilding events. Participants scour the museum's three floors of exhibits to be the first to discover answers to provocative questions about the history of the ongoing battle between organized crime and law enforcement.

Electronic scavenger hunts also are wildly popular at the moment, Arone says. "They allow attendees to get out of the hotel and move around the city, and again, they are highly engaging and interactive. And everything is within walking distance because of the way Las Vegas is laid out around the Strip." Scavenger hunts, she notes, also are perfect for corporate meetings because they can also be tailored to corporate goals or interests, such as a new product launch or annual business objectives.

Property Happenings

Wynn Las Vegas plans to keep groups returning with several improvements, including the new \$1.5 billion Wynn Paradise Park, which will begin phase one construction by January 2018 and is scheduled for a 2019 completion. The park will include a 1,000–2,000-room hotel tower and 260,000 sf of beachfront meeting and ballroom space overlooking a 20-acre lagoon with water sports activities, a 4,000-foot boardwalk and a white sand beach. Additionally, Wynn will offer more upscale shopping outlets with the construction of Wynn Plaza, a 75,000-sf Strip-front expansion scheduled for completion during the first quarter of 2018.

The Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas recently completed an expansion of its meeting and convention space with the reopening of the 28,000-sf Artist Ballroom. The newly expanded Artist Ballroom can be divided into eight separate and flexible configurations. Ceiling heights in the new space reach up to 22 feet for optimal exhibition use. The property has added nearly 18,000 sf of meeting and convention space, new exterior



The new Park MGM will feature a 77,000-sf conference facility when it opens later this year.

Credit: MGM Resorts International

and David Morton.

Other Hard Rock venues include the upscale 14,000-sf Vanity Nightclub, which can be reserved for private events and can accommodate from five to 5,000 depending on the seating requirements. In addition, Hard Rock has partnered with Hudson Group, the largest travel retailer in North America, to introduce six new retail shops totaling 14,500 sf.



"We continuously increase the diversity of what we offer. ...And then there is just the breadth of the meeting infrastructure. It is second to none in terms of options and quality."

Stephanie Arone, President and General Manager
Activity Planners Inc., Las Vegas, NV

Caesars recently announced plans to develop a 550,000-sf conference center in Las Vegas, named Caesars Forum, featuring the two largest pillarless ballrooms in North America. When completed in 2020, it will feature 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, equivalent to more than five football fields and will be located east of the Las Vegas Strip with bridge connections to Harrah's, the Linq and the Linq Promenade.

By the end of 2018, MGM Resorts will complete a \$450 million project to transform the 21-year-old Monte Carlo Resort and Casino into Park MGM, replete with a brand new 77,000-sf conference facility. Offering both non-traditional spaces and flexible design, Park MGM is designed to fill an unmet need in Las Vegas for small groups, while also offering beautiful spaces for groups of up to 5,000 attendees. **C&IT**

signage along Paradise Road and the relocation of the fully functional Business Center. Hard Rock Hotel now boasts a total of nearly 110,000 sf of contiguous meeting and convention space.

The Hard Rock Hotel's capital expenditure campaign, which began in 2015 and was completed last spring, featured the expansion of the Convention Center, a complete makeover of the 11-story, 640-room Casino Tower; a complete redesign of the famed Center Bar; and the addition of the acclaimed MB Steak, a wholly owned dining experience created by recognized restaurateurs, Michael



BREAKOUT

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On The Move



DAVIS-PETIT

Julie Davis-Petit was named director of sales and marketing for Stonewall Resort, a Benchmark Resorts & Hotels property in Roanoke, West Virginia. She previously served as task force director of events, sales and marketing for Benchmark.

Tulio Baruch was named director of sales for Grand Ve-



BARUCH

las Los Cabos in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing for Andaz Mayakoba Resort Riviera Maya.

Ernie A. Arias was named senior vice president of sales and business development at The Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC. He formerly served as area direc-



ARIAS

tor of sales and marketing at Park Hyatt New York.

Lorena Chappell was named director of sales and marketing for Hotel Contessa, a Benchmark Resorts & Hotels property in San Antonio, Texas. She was most recently director of sales and marketing for the Sheraton Austin Georgetown Ho-



CHAPPELL



RYAN

tel & Conference Center of Georgetown, Texas.

Todd Ryan was appointed regional director of sales and marketing for Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants' 16 mid-Atlantic area hotels. He most recently served as area director of sales and marketing in eastern Canada for Starwood Hotels & Resorts. **C&IT**

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Opening late spring 2017 through fall 2017, the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate will add new meeting space, a spectacular wedding venue, outdoor event space, room accommodations, a market-style restaurant and expanded pool areas—including Orlando's only resort wave pool. With the completed expansion, there will be more ways to defy convention and even more reasons to celebrate.

GUEST ROOMS: 862
SUITES: 71
INDOOR MEETING SPACE: 248,111
LARGEST MEETING SPACE: 28,800
MEETING ROOMS: 48
THEATER CAP: 3,200
BANQUET CAP: 2,400
CLASSROOM CAP: 2,000
EXHIBIT SPACE: 72,000



MEETING SPACE

An additional 100,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space will be added, scheduled to open this fall. The Osceola Conference Center will feature six new flexible breakout rooms, with a fresh, sleek design. Also included, a 6,500-square-foot Great Room, designed for special events and weddings, and the Great Room Terrace and Patio offers the option of a grand lawn, fireplace and promenade, ideal for outdoor events.

ACCOMMODATIONS

In addition to the 769 guest rooms and luxury two and three bedroom villas, additional accommodations will be added this fall. A new three-story building will consist of 93 spacious, upscale guest rooms. This will bring the resort's total guest room count to 862.

DINING AND F&B

Eight on-site restaurants are available, including our new Market-Style restaurant.

SPECIAL AMENITIES/INCENTIVES

In early summer 2017, expanding the already impressive 15-acre recreation area, Omni Orlando Resort will unveil 24,000 square feet of additional deck space, Orlando's only resort wave pool, 16 additional private cabanas and an expansion of the kid's pool area and water slides. ChampionsGate is also home to the Greg Norman designed National and rejuvenated International Course, and the David Leadbetter Golf Academy World Headquarters.

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