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PAGE 44

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APRIL 2018 VOL. 36 NO. 4 \$12.00

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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL

A Thoughtful Approach to Entertainment

Creative Strategies to Make Your Message Come Alive

PAGE 26

Play With Your Food!

Interactive F&B That Connects
Attendees to Their Meetings

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Orlando in Overdrive

A Meetings Mecca
Always on the Move

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TABLET VERSION**

Dana Graham, Associate Director, Corporate Events and Community Relations, Sage Publishing, with her music publisher husband, Leeds Levy, takes a diversified approach to event entertainment.



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Your dining table is brought to life with Le Petit Chef — an animated character who appears beside your plate. **PAGE 14**



Planners are offered so many things so often that the right thing to do can be confusing, especially for novices. **PAGE 32**

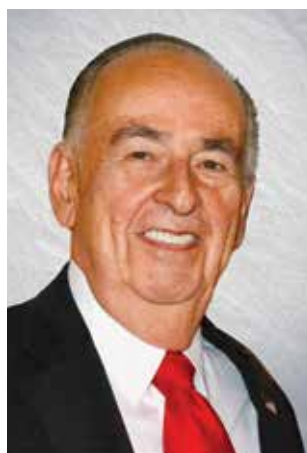


A corporate group event takes over the streets of New York City at Universal Studios Orlando. **PAGE 52**

Publisher's Message

Make Great Things Happen

The art of creating compelling in-person, shared experiences is more important than ever as the digital age forces us to rely more and more on remote connections that aren't very personal, satisfying, motivating or even effective. We've been singing the praises of face-to-face meetings and events for many years now. The Meetings Mean Business Coalition (MMBC) actively advocates for it with one powerful industry voice, reminding us that face-to-face meetings have \$845 billion in total economic impact. But it's planners who deliver the intangibles — the experiences



that fulfill MMBC's promise of "great things happen when people come together." Perhaps paradoxically, it's millennials, the digital native generation, who are at the forefront of demanding more opportunities to connect and collaborate offline. Sharing offline experiences online is important to them, too. Dana Graham, whose selfie graces our cover, knows this very well, as 49 percent of her company's staff are millennials. At one of her meetings, Graham, associate director of corporate events and community relations for Sage Publishing, set up a SoCalSelfie booth, which custom designs a photo strip template to complement the event theme, and then instantly texts and emails photos to the attendees. It was "one of the best

entertainment investments we have made in the last two years," she says, adding, "If I can add a little 'oomph' to an event that needs some life, I've achieved my goal." She's even sent attendees on a cattle drive — hard not to be fully engaged with fellow "cow-workers" while herding on horseback! Read much more about what's trending in entertainment on page 26.

Expectations run high these days to turn F&B into full-fledged entertainment too, with the goal of connecting attendees to one another and to the meeting's theme. In "Play With Your Food!" on page 14, learn how Bishop-McCann delighted Motorola meeting attendees with an interactive ice cream "shatter bar" to showcase the new Droid Maxx 2 mobile phone with shatterproof display. And read about a fantastical new way to make the dining table come to life with Le Petit Chef, a 3-D animated character who appears beside your plate and prepares your meal in front of you before you're served the actual dish.

Finally, on page 38, planners tell us how to "Break the Ice and Spark Collaboration" with in-person networking events. "As we start to see a younger generation coming in, their preference is to have more networking opportunities," says James M. Hobbs, senior director, global programs for Meeting Expectations. "I find that when people come together, they might have spent a week throwing emails around, but in a few hours, they can come up with really great solutions."

As MMBC says, "Great things happen when people come together."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Park MGM's Madison Meeting Center Serves Small Meetings in Las Vegas



The Madison Meeting Center's pantry.

LAS VEGAS, NV — As part of Monte Carlo Resort and Casino's transformation into Park MGM this spring, an innovative venue within the new meetings and conference space is now booking groups for this May and beyond. The Madison Meeting Center, the first of its kind in Las Vegas, will cater to customized meetings for groups from 10 to 50 people. The 10,000-sf, modern design conference center space will offer 10 flexible rooms able to accommodate varying layouts ideal for classroom-style training, certifications, product seminars, workshops and tailored events. The Madison Meeting Center will have two self-service lounges, ergonomic movable furniture with integrated power along with built-in audio-visual equipment, confidence monitors and rolling whiteboards. Increasing the center's appeal is the first Complete Meeting Package (CMP) offering on the Las Vegas Strip. The all-inclusive pricing allows meeting planners to pay a flat rate per attendee, providing convenience and cost-efficiency. With 80 percent of MGM Resorts' convention groups at 100 guest rooms or fewer, the CMP and Madison Meeting Center focus on providing small groups with innovative options. www.parkmgm.com

Coeur d'Alene Resort Upgrades Guest Rooms, Conference Center

COEUR D'ALENE, ID — The Coeur d'Alene Resort has elevated its gorgeous lakefront experience by completely upgrading all 338 guest rooms and suites. The resort also revamped its conference center. Guest rooms were updated with plush bedding; new workspaces with Wi-Fi and more plug-in options including bedside charging stations; new, larger 4K HD televisions; new living space furniture, carpet and wall coverings; modern

lighting; and remodeled bathrooms. The 32,000-sf conference, exhibit and meeting space was upgraded with a state-of-the-art illumination system, new wall coverings that improve overall sound quality, and new audio-visual and connectivity technology resulting in a faster, more user-friendly experience. New vibrant carpeting has been installed, and every seat has been replaced with more comfortable chairs. www.cdaresort.com

Gaylord Texan Resort to Open \$120M Vineyard Tower

GRAPEVINE, TX — The sprawling Gaylord Texan Resort will open the doors of its all-new Vineyard Tower in early May 2018. The \$120 million project adds 303 guest rooms to the resort's current 1,511-room inventory — increasing the total number of resort guest rooms to 1,814. It also includes 86,000 sf of carpeted meeting space, bringing Gaylord Texan's total meeting space to approximately 490,000 sf.

Once complete, Gaylord Texan Resort will be the third largest non-gaming convention/meetings hotel



The Vineyard Tower.

in the United States as measured by total self-contained exhibit and meeting space.

Rustic and refined, the first floor of the Vineyard Tower will welcome guests with a dedicated main driveway and outdoor garden terrace. Inside, the tower will feature 30,000 sf of carpeted breakout space, generous prefunction space that is open to the second floor and a corridor to the existing portion of the resort.

On the second floor, the tower will feature expansive prefunction space as well as another large outdoor terrace overlooking the shores of magnificent Lake Grapevine. The second floor also will house the new 30,000-sf Tate Ballroom, named in honor of Grapevine's current mayor, William D. Tate. The décor in the Tate Ballroom will pay tribute to the Texas Longhorn, which you can see in the glass-blown horns found inside of impressive chandelier and wall lighting. www.gaylordtexan.com

U.S. Travel Association Salutes LVCVA's Rossi Ralenkotter

LAS VEGAS, NV — The U.S. Travel Association recognized Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority



RALENKOTTER

(LVCVA) CEO Rossi Ralenkotter on the occasion of 45 years with the organization and innovating the tourism industry. The special recognition was delivered in March at a U.S. Travel board of directors dinner in Washington, DC. During his more than four decades with the LVCVA, Ralenkotter has become a travel and marketing visionary, developing the destination marketing organization into today's model for how convention and visitors bureaus operate and transforming Las Vegas into an international brand.

Ralenkotter began his career at the LVCVA in 1973 as a research analyst and transformed the organization into a research-based machine, driven by data and visitor feedback, that has now become the norm for destination marketing agencies.

Now a national leader in advocating for the tourism industry, Ralenkotter was named the inaugural chairman of the Department of Transportation's National Advisory Committee on Travel and Tourism Infrastructure. He was a technical advisory committee member of Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval's Southern Nevada Tourism Infrastructure Committee. He is a member of the board of directors for Brand USA and a past chair of the board of directors and current board member for the U.S. Travel Association. He recently completed his term as chair of the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board for the U.S. Department of Commerce and remains on the board. www.ustravel.org

Tips & Trends

5 Dining Rooms With a View

1. **SER Steak + Spirits at Hilton Anatole**, boasting a newly appointed executive chef and sommelier, offers three private dining rooms overlooking downtown Dallas through floor-to-ceiling windows.
2. Considered one of the most celebrated fine dining venues on Chicago's North Shore, **The English Room at Deer Path Inn** delivers British cuisine with a European flair. The Garden Room glass conservatory serves as an extension of The English Room offering panoramic garden views and serving as a venue for private dinners.
3. At **The Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbor, Miami**, three private dining rooms overlook the Atlantic Ocean through floor-to-ceiling windows. Sitting within the secluded enclave at the northern tip of Miami Beach, the flexible space is ideal for groups up to 250 and features access to a large outdoor terrace.
4. At the No. 1 thoroughbred race-track in North America, **Keeneland Race Course**, guests can enjoy a private dining experience or meeting at the Phoenix Room, which overlooks the picturesque Keeneland Saddling Paddock and Walking Ring, as well as one of the most photographed views on the property — the iconic Keeneland Sycamore tree.
5. Guests of **Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse Boston** can enjoy a delicious meal of high-quality steaks and award-winning wine selections while overlooking historic Liberty Wharf. Featuring harbor views and a sprawling waterfront patio, Del Frisco's Boston provides an upscale atmosphere complemented by elevated takes on classic steakhouse fare.



Why Planners Will Love Rosen's New High-tech Room Service



Rosen Shingle Creek.

ORLANDO, FL — Rosen Shingle Creek, Rosen Centre and Rosen Plaza are the first in Orlando to provide Sonifi Solutions' world-class in-room entertainment service, which includes interactive TV solutions and free-to-guest, over-the-top streaming via Staycast. Now, through Google Chrome Casting on Sonifi, guests can project thousands of apps — from Netflix and Hulu to YouTube and international apps — from their smartphones to their guest room flat-screen TVs, which avoids the need to disclose password information. Sonifi Solutions also will provide a new group messaging system that will allow meeting and event planners to send mass messages, photos and video to their entire room block. Additionally, guests can use the new technology to order room service and to make housekeeping requests. The system also provides functions such as in-room checkout. www.rosenhoteles.com

Jo Kling Steps Down From Landry & Kling Global Cruise Events

MIAMI, FL — Landry & Kling Global Cruise Events has announced that Josephine Kling, president and co-founder of the company 35 years ago, will be stepping down as president effective April 27. Kling and partner Joyce Landry have been trailblazers in developing cruising's corporate, incentive, meetings and theme cruise business. Kling said she plans to "invest more time in my personal life and direct my energy and curiosity into other worthwhile endeavors including life-long learning, perhaps helping kids at risk find cruise jobs. I loved educating clients about cruise travel, so perhaps I'll teach a cruise course and, naturally, keep traveling. My list of possibilities is endless." Going forward, Landry will assume the expanded role of president and CEO at the Miami-based company, which is undergoing a global expansion with new strategic partners and the addition of an outside sales team. Kling is most proud of her media relations and marketing efforts which put Landry & Kling on the map back in the 1980s before corporate and incentive buyers were on the radar of any cruise lines. And more recently, the company's digital marketing, ebooks and educational materials have helped Landry & Kling expand and continue to reinvent itself. landrykling.com



KLING

Sir Richard Branson Announces Purchase of Hard Rock Las Vegas.

MIAMI, FL — Virgin Hotels, the lifestyle hotel brand by Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson, has purchased the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. Plans are to rebrand and open the Virgin Hotels Las Vegas in the late fall of 2019 following a full renovation.

"Las Vegas has long held a special place in my heart," said Sir Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group. "Virgin Atlantic and Virgin America have enjoyed flying to Las Vegas for



Sir Richard Branson.

years and I've always known that Virgin Hotels could thrive there as well. I'm really looking forward to painting the town Virgin red."

The property, located just off the Las Vegas Strip, will continue full-service operations under the Hard Rock flag until it opens as a Virgin Hotels hotel. Guest rooms, restaurants and public spaces will undergo a facelift, expected to cost in the hundreds of millions, with the final product being a showcase of Virgin's signature sleek and stylish design with an eclectic mix of social spaces.

The hotel will feature 1,504 well-appointed Chambers, Grand Chamber Suites and Penthouse Suites; a 60,000-sf, fully renovated casino, multiple pools over five acres, world-class restaurants, lounges and bars, including new nightlife venues and the brand's flagship space, the Commons Club, as well as numerous meeting and convention spaces. virginhotels.com

JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort Completes \$320M Makeover

MARCO ISLAND, FL — Marking the third and final phase of a \$320 million makeover and brand conversion project that began in 2015, the JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort has completed their new Lanai Tower featuring 93 adult-exclusive guest rooms and suites and more than 100,000 sf of new prefunction and exhibit space. This is in addition to its expansive beach and other outdoor spaces for open-air events with waterfront views. The largest of Florida's Ten Thousand Islands, Marco Island is located on the Gulf of Mexico in Southwest Florida.

The Lanai Tower's meeting and prefunction space is found on the first three floors of the tower and features two ballrooms, five outdoor terraces and numerous breakout rooms. As the signature space in the tower, the 30,000-sf Calusa Grand Ballroom will be found on the third floor overlooking the Gulf of Mexico with 24-foot ceilings. Full-length windows bathe the prefunction space in natural light. The tower also will boast the 17,000-sf Banyan Ballroom on the first floor with 22-foot ceilings and a Sunset Terrace providing a vista of the beach and Gulf beyond. Apart from the tower, the existing 10,000-sf Palms Ballroom, located adjacent to the new Spa by JW, features 17-foot ceilings, faces the Spa lawn and is punctuated by dramatic waterfront views.

The resort's event planners are trained in the seven meeting purposes (Celebrate, Decide, Educate, Ideate, Network, Produce, Promote) to help businesses pinpoint the function that will best help them achieve their meeting goals and objectives. The resort's recreation team can create a wide variety of customized experiences for groups including high-energy team-building events such as sailing and shelling tours, wave-runner excursions through the Ten Thousand Islands, beach Olympics, rock-wall climbing, private yacht charters and more. www.marriott.com

Global DMC Partners Launches GDPR Education Initiative

WASHINGTON, DC — Global DMC Partners has launched their Global Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Education Initiative to foster awareness, education and global implementation of data protection processes within their partnership of over 65 independently owned DMCs. The initiative launched with an internal educational online seminar to ensure network-wide awareness of the regulation and to provide recommended action items for DMCs to work towards compliance. The GDPR Education Initiative includes plans for future educational webinars and a GDPR handbook to provide both DMCs and meeting planners with guidance.



CHAULET

"We know GDPR is of primary concern for many of our clients and the overall meeting planning community. As a global organization, one of our priorities going into 2018 was to build awareness and highlight the urgency of GDPR throughout our DMC partnership to ensure readiness before May 25, 2018," stated Catherine Chaulet, president of Global DMC Partners. "It is part of our ongoing focus to provide tools to both our DMCs and our clients to assist them in staying up-to-date on regulations and trends." Global DMC Partners' May 2018 Partners Meeting will provide the opportunity to collaborate on successful data protection processes that their individual DMCs have implemented since the launch of the initiative. In August, an interactive session at Global DMC Partners' annual client conference, Connection 2018, will provide another forum for meeting professionals to discuss best practices.

More on GDPR at eventscouncil.org/APEX/general-data-protection-regulation.



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By Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM

Budget-friendly Buffets With Massive Visual Appeal

If you shy away from buffets over plated meals, it may be time to take another look at all that buffets have to offer. In addition to giving attendees the freedom to select their own food and quantities, buffets allow guests to stretch their legs, socialize with each other and, when planned properly, add unexpected flavors and fun to the meal.

Event strategists know a little creativity goes a long way. Inspired presentation and preparation brings fresh appeal to standard foods, elevating diners' perceptions and enjoyment significantly while remaining within budget. Keep reading to find out how to give food a flavor makeover. With a bit of culinary creativity, you can make oatmeal (is there a more basic food?) sour cream and water colorful, fun and packed with unexpected flavor. Yes, sour cream and water are about to get interesting and delicious. Yep, I said it, delicious.

Gourmet Oatmeal

Let's start with one of the world's most tasteless foods; oatmeal. Beige in flavor as well as color, oatmeal is often

chunks, strawberries and flavored syrups offer additional variety and appeal.

Buffet-worthy Mash-up

On to our next buffet-worthy food makeover; mashed potatoes. An all-American favorite and staple, they are admittedly delicious but hardly exciting. With a little creativity they can go from "ho-hum" to "give me some." Sun-dried tomatoes, roasted garlic, caramelized onions, blue cheese crumbles, chopped parsley, sautéed mushrooms, chives, pancetta, basil pesto, olives, salsa — once you start thinking, you'll find the options are endless.

Give Ethnic Cuisine a Flavor Burst

Buffets are perfect for showcasing multiple ethnic cuisines, making them perfect for a flavor refresh. The next time you put out Mexican food on your buffet create a sour cream bar and add some zing to an otherwise unexciting condiment. Cilantro, lime, zesty jalapeño, chipotle, sriracha or sweet creamed corn add an unexpected flavor burst. As

“Inspired presentation and preparation brings **fresh appeal** to standard foods.”

viewed as something one eats only when either forced or when no other options exist. That's about to change.

Instead of the standard garnishes of brown sugar, raisins and cinnamon, why not add some pizzazz and create a gourmet toppings bar? Get creative and include sweet and savory enhancements. For savory, think: peas, pecorino cheese, cracked pepper, pistachios, sautéed mushrooms, bacon bits, scallions, salt and pepper and feta cheese. How yummy does that sound? Suddenly, oatmeal has an entirely new flavor profile and instead of being boring, is now colorful, packed with vibrant flavors, interesting textures and fun to create.

For sweet offerings think: dried cherries, chocolate chips, assorted jams, maple syrup, rock crystal sugar and almond butter. Candied walnuts, raisins, pineapple or apple

long as you're being creative, why not give some zip to your salsa? Instead of the traditional hot, medium, mild, offer mango, peach, roasted tomato with red peppers, pineapple and black olive cilantro?

Belly Up to the Dessert Bar

Dessert, considered the best part of the meal by many, also can get predictable. Until now that is. Replace ice cream with gelato and while you're at it, create a sundae bar complete with waffle and sugar cones. Toppings can edge out the main dish when they're delicious enough. Brownie bites, crushed chocolate bars, pretzels, Swedish fish, marshmallows, sweetened cereal (think Captain Crunch or Fruit Loops) and a myriad of other dry toppings are usually huge hits. Add hot fudge, peanut butter sauce, warm caramel, wet walnuts,



Nutella, whipped cream and a variety of fruit syrups. Strawberries, blueberries, pitted cherries, sliced bananas and granola offer healthier options for those trying to be good. With all those choices AND a dessert under it all, what's not to love?

Designer Water and Inventive Ice Cubes

Think you're done? Not by a long shot. What about adding some zing to your beverages? Even water can take on new twist with a bit of inspiration. By using clear dispensers instead of pitchers or bottled options, you set the stage for gourmet creations that are fun to taste and look at. Gourmet water bars are cost-effective, easy ways to steer attendees away from expensive cans/bottles. Customize their drinks and add variety in an unexpected place. Consider adding cucumbers, lemons, limes, orange slices or mint to water dispensers. Combine ingredients (cucumber and mint, for instance) to create new flavor profiles. Create a flavor of the day or swap out options as the day progresses, offering zingier citrus flavors as guests' energy fades.

Create iced tea bars using flavored teas, sweet tea, decaf tea and sugar-free tea as the foundation. Build on that with lemon and lime slices, cinnamon sticks and fresh mint. Go the extra mile and ask the venue to create ice cubes in the same flavors so they won't dilute the drink when they melt. Iced tea ice cubes, complete with either lemon zest or bits of mint frozen into them now make ice interesting! With something as simple as an ice buffet alongside your beverages, guests can create fun flavor twists to whatever beverage they choose.

Appealing Presentation

After you've thought through the food on the buffet, pay attention to the ways it is presented and served. For the beverages, why not add colorful straws, fun glasses and paper umbrellas for a bit of color and fun? Venues often have a variety of baskets, serving bowls and plates they can mix and match to add visual appeal, color and texture.

Artichokes, Brussels sprout stalks, lemons, oranges and eggplant are visually interesting in texture, color and shape. Ask the chef to create a visual feast using the foods being served on the buffet as part of the décor. Bonus tip: carry the food as décor theme to the tables with tall cylinder vases full of lemons/limes, different shaped pastas, apples in multiple colors, etc.

Attendees will be delighted with new flavors to sample and the ability to construct their own meals in a setting that is visually appealing. Remember: Strategic events are about creating goal-driven experiences, and engaging all five senses is a key part of that experience. New sights, tastes, smells, textures and the sound of laughter and happy conversation should all accompany a well-designed meal.

All of these options are examples of foods, otherwise ignored, being transformed into visually appealing, delicious and affordable options. Take it a step beyond and have attendees take photos of their creations, text their flavor combinations and name their unique concoction. Food is only as interesting as the people preparing it, so tap into your imagination and let the deliciousness begin!

C&IT



Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM

is Visionary, Entrepreneur and Master Strategist at Strategic Meetings & Events, created in 2001 to introduce the industry to the power of strategically planned events rather than those that are logistically driven. Now an international, multimillion-dollar, award-winning organization, SME is proof of the value of event strategy versus event planning. <https://strategic.events>

Join the Strategic Planning Movement! The Strategic Planning Movement's goal is to help the event industry and its dedicated professionals to evolve into a more sophisticated form of planner; specifically, strategic planners. Without this change, we will continue to exist in the darkness of the misconceptions around what we do, why events are held and our perceived value. By banding together and becoming strategic in our professional vision, brand and goals, we create the pathway to a brighter future, elevating the way we are perceived, illuminating the power of strategic events and the critical role we play in their creation. Join the Strategic Planning Movement at <https://strategic.events>.

By Jill Anonson

7 Ways to Revamp Incentive Travel

Your incentive travel destination — the same tried-and-true resort every year — revs up a mild amount of excitement on your team. The onsite giveaway hasn't really changed in a decade or so, but everyone could use another beach towel...right? And the flyers in the break room about the program get the job done, more or less.

The whole thing works well enough, and you seem to get some results. So why rock the boat? The answer: you could be getting a lot more out of your people. And you could be getting more out of your program.

If you're not paying close attention to the strategic de-

difficult to hit, yet still attainable. The strategy and profit lies in finding the sweet spot between "no problem" and "that's impossible!"

With a custom-crafted incentive travel solution tailored to your audience — and with strategy at the helm of your program — it's easier to get more out of your people.

2 Remember Incentive Travel Participant Demographics

Your people are all unique, with different motivators and unique interests. And younger generations are storming

“Document your trip. ...There's nothing more...motivating to the people who didn't make the trip than seeing their colleagues leisurely enjoying themselves on the beach.”

tails that make up your program — way more than just the destination and giveaways — you're missing an incredible opportunity to boost results.

Are you ready to take your incentive travel program from good to great? Take a deeper look at these seven actionable ways to revamp it and elevate the measurable ROI.

1 Get Strategic

At the core of every effective incentive travel program is a strategy. Being able to analyze and really get to the heart of the results of your program is imperative to its success. If you're looking to optimize the ROI, your strategy can't stay the same from year to year. It needs ongoing analysis — a thorough look into your goals and the steps needed to get there — to ensure consistent growth.

Think of it this way: if the same 10 people have been qualifying for your trip for the last decade, you're not pushing them hard enough. The target should be increasingly

into your office at breakneck speed. Does your incentive travel program reflect that?

According to a study from Eventbrite, 78 percent of millennial respondents say they would rather spend money on an experience versus a material possession. Travel is important to them, but only if it's on their terms. They're not always thrilled by rubbing elbows with the other participants. Likely, given the opportunity, millennials would rather rent a car and drive through the mountains of Hawaii than hobnob with coworkers on the beach.

It's all about choice — cast a wider net by giving participants the option of doing what they would prefer to do.

3 Consider the Whole Family

Incentive travel participants work hard for the privilege of going on the trip. That can mean missed Little League games and a lot of late nights at the office. For those reasons, your incentive travel trip isn't just for par-

ticipants. It's also for the spouses and kids who supported them along the way.

The option of a family-focused program, in addition to the more common two-person trip, is key to the many participants who hope to bring the whole family along. With this option, people who don't want to be with kids don't have to be. And, for those who do bring the kids along, provide camps, buffets with kids' food and more.

4 Consider an Incentive Travel Provider

Perhaps your incentive travel program has been run in-house for years. Someone books the plane tickets, and you rope in an intern to help set up hotel rooms and book restaurant reservations.

Clearly, there is a better way. A high-quality incentive travel provider can help with the logistics — travel, lodging and food — and then some. They have exclusive access to a host of private, high-class experiences that you couldn't get otherwise.

Dinner under Michelangelo's David in Florence, Italy? Can do. Backstage passes to the hottest entertainment? Check. Pit passes to a Formula One race? Sure thing! An incentive travel program provider, working behind the scenes, creates an unparalleled experience that you couldn't necessarily put together on your own.

5 Think About Gifting

Everyone loves to get a little gift in their hotel room when they arrive onsite. It's a great perk that really resonates with your participants, especially if it's a surprise. Yet unless that gift really hits home, it's liable to be left in the hotel room. If you've been a top sales performer and have been on the trip a number of times, there are only so many beach bags you can handle.

Ponder this: if you were going on this trip, what would make your experience better? Think outside the box — but not too outside the box. An unwieldy gift, however much the participant likes it, can get left behind.

Also, consider giving your participants an opportunity to pick their gift in an onsite experience. When they can

pick a high-ticket gift while their peers look on, there's a social element that can't be underestimated.

6 Give Back to Gain Emotional Connection

For many people, incentive travel means beaches, piña coladas and steak dinners.

But, for others — millennials especially — it means an opportunity to make a difference somewhere outside their backyard.

Volunteer experiences are growing in prevalence in incentive travel. Why? Because, as a recent *Time* magazine article noted, 65 percent of MBAs say they want to make a social or environmental difference through their jobs, and 70 percent of millennials say a company's commitment to the community has an influence on their decision to work there.

Work with a local charity at your destination to see what opportunities there are to give back. Whether that means helping out the environment, working with kids or something else, participants will walk away with a greater understanding of the world around them and an irreplaceable experience.

7 Focus on FOMO

Booking a photographer to document your trip can be a worthy investment. There's nothing more inspiring and motivating to the people who didn't make the trip than seeing their colleagues leisurely enjoying themselves on the beach. That's FOMO — fear of missing out. It's the social pull that drives your people, and it's something your event needs to succeed. Getting great photos of your attendees can be used in powerful communications leading up to your next event, building brand immersion and reiterating recognition throughout the year.

While revamping your program, keep in mind that there's far more to incentive travel than a destination. The opportunity is a chance to connect with and inspire your people along the way. Through these seven simple steps, you can create more strategic, authentic travel solutions that inspire growth, loyalty and ROI.

C&IT



Jill Anonson

is Events Solution Manager at ITA Group and has more than 20 years of experience in strategic incentive travel, event management and sales strategy. In her role, she is responsible for market definition, competitive research, business plan development and more while creating strategies and solutions that help ITA Group thrive. ITA Group creates and manages incentives, events and recognition programs that align and motivate people. Headquartered in West Des Moines, Iowa, ITA Group has operations in every region of the United States and award solutions for 75+ countries globally. Contact her at www.itagroup.com.

Food & Beverage

Play

Bishop-McCann highlighted Motorola's new Droid Maxx 2 mobile phone with shatterproof display, by creating an interactive ice-cream shatter bar.

Credit: Bishop-McCann

As corporate meeting and event patrons become food savvy and demand a wider range of flavors, unique food and beverage options are now viewed as a straightforward way to please attendees and keep them coming back for more.

Today's meeting and event attendees are looking for more in their food and beverage choices. They are seeking healthy, nourishing and wholesome selections, presented in a unique and eye-catching way to create a more meaningful experience.

According to Susan Harper, CIS, program manager at Bishop-McCann, today's experiential food trends mean meeting and event planners need to think outside the buffet line. "Menu selections and food presentation is one component of meeting planning

another means to engage with each other. Experiential learning and sharing encourages the formation and reinforcement of relationships, fosters teamwork and togetherness, promotes creativity, teaches problem-solving and organization, and it promotes social responsibility."

Go Local

One way to promote attendee engagement is to incorporate local specialties into all of the menus. Include brands such as community-specific craft beer or local dishes that celebrate a region's flair, e.g., paella or jambalaya in New Orleans.

"Locally sourced food is a huge one right now," says Kim Sayatovic at Belladeux Events. "People are looking to have items that are from the area.

the positive feedback and buzz. And with a few tips or tricks, the budget will also welcome it." Recently Harper incorporated an experiential food experience for an event for Motorola. To highlight Motorola's new Droid Maxx 2 mobile phone with shatterproof display, Bishop-McCann created an "Ice Cream Shatter Bar." Guests used custom placemats to select ice cream mix-ins, shatter them with a mallet, and then have their mix-ins folded into the ice cream flavor of their choice. "At another event, we challenged the W Chicago City Center to create an interactive Burrata Bar for a welcome dinner," Harper says. The result was a huge hit and the reaction was so positive that the hotel decided to add the station to their standard menu options.

"Every food experience is depen-

With Your Food!

Interactive F&B Experiences Connect Attendees to Their Meetings

By Maura Keller

that is often overlooked," Harper says. "At the same time, it is also one of the top experiences that your attendees will remember. Put in the time and research to make it exceed expectations."

Indeed, as Tracy Stuckrath, CSEP, CMM, CHC, at Thrive! Meetings & Events explains, the idea of attendees coming together for a meal seems the most normal thing in the world for event planners. It is a quintessential aspect of any event. However, there's a distinct difference between sharing a meal and making food together. "Simply sitting down at a banquet table with colleagues to get a pre-designed menu doesn't have the same bonding effect as cooking a meal with someone else," Stuckrath says. "By incorporating experiential food and beverage into the event, planners provide attendees

People are more health-conscious than ever, so having snacks that cater to that is always a good idea. This can be done with a yogurt bar with offerings of different flavors and types along with toppings."

Belladeux Events is based in New Orleans so Sayatovic and her team love pairing experiential elements with the menu. Crawfish boils are a regular favorite, as well as an oyster bar where attendees can learn to shuck oysters.

"We bring in food trucks as well. This can actually be a particularly fun surprise at the end of the evening, Sayatovic says. "I mean, who would ever turn down a beignet night cap?"

"Attendees appreciate the food quality, menu diversity and bringing a taste of the outside world into the meeting room," Harper says. "Clients will enjoy

dent on the chef," Harper says. "Great experiences are the result of a positive engagement and partnership between planner, CSM and chef. Challenge the chef with new ideas." Collaborate by having the chef create parts of the custom menu. Ask them: What have they always wanted to do? What new technology have they been eager to incorporate into an event?

One of the key ways to enhance experiential food and beverage events is by incorporating meeting themes or messaging within the menu selections, food displays and labeling. "And a new setting can refresh your attendees," Harper says. "Ask if there are unique areas to hold one or more of the daytime meals other than a meeting room. Is there a hotel restaurant that is closed during the day that can be utilized?"



Belladeux Events presented a beignet cake display and a learn-to-shuck oyster bar.

Kristin Healy, CMP, owner and creative director at Swank Events, says that food and beverage offerings are all about the attendee experience. In addition to the food being delicious, it is also important to consider current trends and how the food will be presented. **“Considering how attendees will interact with the food and how it will contribute to the attendees’ overall experience is critical,”** Healy says. “It will have guests talking about the event for months.” Healy is seeing a lot of create-your-own bars, such as tacos and mashed potatoes. “There is also a big focus on food presentation, such as a doughnut tower or wall,” Healy says. “We’re also seeing a shift from buffets to interactive food stations complete with a chef to create-your-own pasta dish.”

Swank Events has planned corporate events where they have had interactive food stations, such as a create-your-own hot cocoa station and coffee carts with several different flavors and toppings. They’ve also done cordial tastings, milk and cookies stations and popcorn bars.

“One of our favorites was from a



corporate party we planned that had a cannoli station,” Healy says. “It was a huge hit with the guests. We’ve also planned events with food trucks — from Mexican to burgers, cookies and dessert trucks to ice cream trucks. All have been a fantastic part of the event and one that keeps people talking.”

Refreshing Your Breaks

When it comes to breaks or refreshment services, meeting planners recognize that groups don’t just want healthful foods, as was the trend a few years ago. While they are still requesting the high-energy items such as hummus and vegetable shooters or energy bars, they also include a sweet and decadent element such as truffle lollipops or chocolate-dipped pretzels.

And when it comes to drinks, today’s attendees



KRISTIN HEALY

want to be entertained. They don’t want the average soda products. They want drinks such as lavender-flavored soda water, cucumber-infused water, garnishes such as muddled blueberries and mint or classic cocktails with a new twist. “Another major trend we’re seeing is the use of artisan cocktails, craft beers and organic and sustainable wines,” says Kala Maxym, founder of Five Senses Tastings, a Los Angeles-based special events company that designs experiential events based on fine wines and food. “These are very much front and center in today’s event industry, especially as the popularity of tasting events continues to grow.”

Many event planners are opting to feature a particular winemaker or distiller and have him or her attend the event and engage with patrons. “This is a great idea as it really creates a

brand intimacy that we haven’t seen before,” Maxym says.

Connecting Food and Meetings

Many of the clients for whom Maxym produces events say they want their guests to learn something. The goal is for attendees to leave with knowledge, new connections, and hopefully, a memory of this experience for months and years to come. “Our approach to achieving this is to purposefully engage as many of their senses as possible,” Maxym says. “Offering experiential food and beverages is a wonderful start, but I’d suggest taking it even a step further and connecting each element of food and wine with the story or theme of the



KALA MAXYM

event. **Experiential just for the sake of it is fine, but it becomes truly meaningful only when connected back to the actual purpose of the event or meeting.”**

“Technology will heavily impact the direction of experiential events,” Sayatovic says. “We’re seeing an increase in video mapping to add interactivity with lighting, for example. I’ve also seen companies have selfie stations that will use edible ink to transfer attendees’ photos onto coffee, cookies, etc.”

Harper suggests that meeting planners think of other ways to create synergy between technology, like a meeting app, and food experiences. For example, cater doughnuts from two top local doughnut shops for a morning break. Have attendees vote, via a mobile app, for their favorite. Other ideas include:

- Set breakfasts and lunch station style with interactive components — not just dinners.
- Highlight local food specialties and flavors throughout the menu — from the main courses down to the condiments.
- Incorporate a surprise tasting of local beer, wine or liquor during an evening reception.

Tips & Tricks

Susan Harper, CIS, program manager at Bishop-McCann says meeting planners should consider the following to make food and beverage experiences truly stand out:

- Take photos of restaurant menus and food presentations. Keep them in a file along with new F&B ideas and creative banquet menus.
- For special product orders, ask the hotel if they would prefer to order the items directly or have you place the order and charge a corkage fee to serve and plate the items.
- For breakfast, ask for sautéed spinach, sautéed mushrooms, diced tomatoes, shredded cheddar cheese and dried chives to be served on the side as mix-ins for scrambled eggs. This quasi-omelet station typically has no additional cost.
- Use Pinterest and subscribe to industry — MK



Credits: Bishop-McCann

Guests used custom placemats to select ice cream mix-ins, shatter them with a mallet and then fold those into the ice cream of their choice.



- Feature a pop-up dessert or ice cream station during the middle of the afternoon for a meeting instead of the expected coffee break.
- Offer action stations — i.e., have a chef rolling out and cooking pasta in front of attendees, giving them choices to pick their protein and toppings.
- Incorporate networking opportunities during daytime meals. For example, have 10 different colored lanyards and make attendees find other people to complete the color palette at each table. Or have a family-style picnic basket with conversation cards and a picnic blanket available for groups to explore outdoor areas.

Maxym has seen an extremely positive reaction to her company’s offerings. Attendees are particularly engaged if they can find a point of familiarity with an ingredient or a method of preparation. And guests are always interested to know whether the ingredients in their dish are sourced locally or from a small producer as it makes them feel more connected on a personal level.

“If they’re particularly interested in something, they are also always interested to know that they can

purchase it themselves, that it isn’t some ‘froufrou’ cheese that can only be found in the foothills of the French Alps,” Maxym says.

At Five Senses Tastings’ events, for example, they almost always have a chocolatier present. “Our guests love that they can go right up to that person and ask them about their process because, let’s face it, how many of us have ever actually made chocolate?” Maxym says. “People feel a deep connection to the elements of an event if they can see the faces behind the products they are consuming.”

That said, Maxym and her team like to strike a balance between familiarity and experimentation. They always start with a piece of music that most attendees have heard before, thereby encouraging a feeling of casual intimacy and comfort. The same goes with food and beverage. “Introducing a new product or flavor is great, but I’d recommend presenting just one or two per event or meal, allowing guests to focus on each one rather than becoming overwhelmed by too many new flavors,” Maxym says.

While experiential food and beverage stations are typically enjoyed by most attendees, there are two common decisions that planners need to

keep in mind when trying to incorporate this trend:

- Trying to make all of the food “experiential.” Unless it’s a food and beverage show, the food experience should be a highlight of the event. In addition to the fun food offerings, offer a traditional appetizer station, for example, where a guest can just grab cheese and crackers, etc.
- Consider the size of the event. Having create-your-own stations are generally not ideal for large events and can create long lines and negatively impact attendees’ experiences.

Sayatovic says that corporate meeting planners have to make sure to get to know the attendees and the type of event a company is looking to produce to ensure the experiential elements the planner suggests fit along with the company’s needs. “I have an extensive intake form to try and capture as much information as possible up front,” Sayatovic says.

Planners also have to know what is logistically possible when it comes to creative partners. “Say you want an aerial artist who pours champagne while being suspended from the ceiling,” Sayatovic says. “It sounds like a



Your Table... Animated

A new dining concept, based around the “culinary exploits of Le Petit Chef” presents, at your table, a 3-D culinary story using innovative technology created by Skullmapping and presented by TableMation Studios. Your dining table is brought to life with Le Petit Chef — an animated character who appears beside your plate and prepares each course you’ll be enjoying right in front of you, before you’re served the actual dish. Celebrity is the first cruise line, and the first company in the United States, to partner with TableMation Studios to offer this immersive entertainment and dining experience.

This storytelling venture represents the future of dining and will be featured evenings in Celebrity Edge’s restaurant — Le Grand Bistro — before being rolled out across the rest of the fleet. www.skullmapping.com

C&IT



Credit: Skullmapping

(Top) Le Petit Chef cuts down a broccoli spear to prepare dinner. (Above) The chef pulls a lobster on to your plate. (Right) Diners enjoying a 3-D culinary story.

great idea but a planner has to know that the venue has space and structural beams to handle something like that.”

Evolve on Down the Road

Experiential food and beverage is ever evolving alongside food trends, technology and social preferences.

Stuckrath does think experiential food and beverage offerings are trendy, but food and beverage are essential for life and regardless of the way we eat or what is in season, people will be intrigued to learn about it.

“Using these types of events not as just eating events, but as learning and networking opportunities will keep it alive as long as its fresh,” Stuckrath says.

According to Sayatovic, millennials continue to push the envelope when it comes to events, and she’s seeing

that guest experience is a major factor when planning. It’s no surprise that planners want them to feel engaged and involved with the activities at the party they are planning.

“Guests always love when we have an experiential element in a gathering,” Sayatovic says. **“It helps promote mingling, and it makes them an active participant instead of sitting on the sidelines.”**

Experts agree that the meeting and event industry is going to see even more opportunity to involve attendees with things like onsite cooking classes where they help prepare their meal with the help of a chef.

Ultimately, experiential food and beverage events will go mainstream as

the focus continues to be on the overall guest experience.

“Millennials want new and customizable food experiences,” Harper says. “Experiential food and beverage is the answer. And since millennials make up the fastest growing segment of the workforce — and thus attendee audiences — it is safe to assume that experiential food and beverage is here to stay.”

While exploring these trends one must also remember dietary issues. As Harper explains, the number of gluten-free attendees is still going up. Veganism is the fastest rising meal preference among millennials, and popular diets for 2018 include DASH, Mediterranean, Flexitarian, Keto, Whole30 and Mayo Clinic. **C&IT**



KIM SAYATOVIC



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SAFE OVERSEAS?

Security Experts Address Planners' Top Concerns for International Meetings

By Ron Bernthal

Corporate meeting planners, particularly those who manage large meetings abroad, are concerned about the safety and security of their attendees and staff more than ever following terrorist attacks in Paris, Nice, Brussels, Belgium, Barcelona, London and other European cities.

Along with attrition, room rates, transportation headaches and speaker fees, planners organizing meeting and incentive programs have always had to keep attendee safety in mind. But with the increase in domestic and international terrorism incidents over the past decade, security ranks at the top of planners' concerns, whether the event takes place in the U.S., Europe, Asia, South America or on a tiny Caribbean island.

"International travel raises a complex series of administrative, logistical and safety/security concerns," says Matthew J. Dumpert, senior director, security risk management at global security firm Kroll. "International threats posed by ideological extremism, unique and varying criminal elements, savvy defrauding schemes, dangerous traffic patterns, potentially unreliable infrastructure, emergency first responder capabilities/willingness, etc., are very real and not as easily recognizable overseas as they are at home."

Unfamiliar Situations

Dumpert stresses that for corporate meeting planners, staff and attendees, traveling to an international destination carries its own risks. "Each person possesses a limited bandwidth for dealing with new and emerging situations," says

Dumpert. "When we travel overseas, so many things are unfamiliar to us that a tremendous amount of bandwidth and mental capacity is taken up just living and operating in that environment. Street signs, language, culture, traffic patterns, food, etc., are all very new to us and take away from our capacity to recognize potentially dangerous situations, identify threatening actors and proactively avoid such dangers. Things as simple as misunderstood language, gestures and contact, cultural sensitivities, geopolitical differences and socioeconomic inconsistencies could all serve to aggravate an otherwise innocuous interaction, escalating a situation without our knowledge."

No matter the international travel destination, Dumpert says that "it's very important for meeting planners to spend some time seriously researching their destination, the culture, customs, criminal activity and transnational terrorism activity well before booking a trip. Oftentimes this can be overwhelming, but readers should know there are experts who can help in this endeavor. No matter where the destination, it's important to learn as much as possible beforehand to avoid complications, rather than leaving one's safety and security to chance."

Safety and Site Selection

As far as determining what destinations are safe or unsafe for international meetings, Dumpert says it is difficult to identify any location as categorically "safe" for organizing a corporate event. "There are a lot of factors that weigh into this equation. The overall threat environment facing the corporate entity will play a large part in this. Meaning, if the corporate entity is one of high profile or recognition, with a significant threat picture, there is a chance (the company) will have to take significant mitigation efforts no matter where they go. Also playing into this equation is the threat level borne by affiliation with one's industry. An otherwise 'safe' city may not be hospitable to an orga-

nization or group which may be highly controversial and/or perceived locally as less than desirable," Dumpert says.

Through Dumpert's experience advising corporate clients, he has seen with increasing frequency the evolution of organized crime, transnational terrorist groups and local criminal elements to operate in environments all over the world, and certainly in locales that were considered by many to be safe.

"When talking about a corporation's duty of care responsibilities, it's important to take each meeting, each trip and location, along with the staff and attendees traveling, and conduct a threat analysis or assessment each

lacks the capacity or lacks the willingness to assist in an emergency.

- Any location where the local medical community is unable to stabilize serious medical/trauma cases.
- Any area(s) currently harboring or providing refuge for members of internationally recognized terrorist organizations.
- Any area(s) currently embroiled in a civil war or warring factions, revolutions and/or coup attempts.

As recent tragic events in cities such as London, Paris and Barcelona have demonstrated, high-profile, wealthy cities in Europe are also targets for terrorist activities. Yet the rush to use

"Terrorist incidents, cyberthreats and local crime can and do happen in any country in Europe and Asia. The differences are how is the venue, your organization and local law enforcement prepared for them."



Paul Frederick, CPP, President
Hospitality Security Advisors LLC, Port Chester, NY

and every time. The threats faced by international travelers is greater now than it's ever been, and each operating environment presents unique difficulties and challenges," says Dumpert. "I believe it's far too complicated to identify certain areas as safe (or conversely unsafe) because the number, complexity and dynamic nature of threat actors on the international scene is constantly changing, evolving and adapting."

That being said, Dumpert also believes that there are some broad factors that may disqualify a corporate event in a given location, provided the business need doesn't outweigh the inherent risk(s). These disqualifying factors include, but are not limited to:

- An isolated environment where support personnel can't be easily reached.
- Any location where the local infrastructure is unreliable and presents a threat to one's safety or security.
- Any location where the local law enforcement, military or government entity responsible for the safety and security of tourists is unreliable,

"smart city" technologies also creates vulnerabilities if investments in digital technologies are not commensurate with investments in cybersecurity. Large cities in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and South America are making investments, in varying degrees, but security often comes lower on the list of spending priorities for cities with already stretched finances.

The consequences of neglecting cybersecurity could be dire. For example, if hackers were to shut down the power grid, an entire city would be left in chaos. This prospect is something city officials now need to plan against, and meeting planners need to be aware of cities that are not doing enough to battle cybersecurity.

The 2017 Safe Cities Index not only includes four categories of security — digital, health, infrastructure and physical — but, in a nod to the increase in security threats around the world, has added six new indicators and expanded the index to cover 60 cities, up from 50 in the previous Safe Cities Index of 2015.

The index's key findings show that



Tokyo, although it has a slightly lower score in infrastructure security since 2015, is still the leading world city in terms of safety, with very strong scores in the digital security category and in health security. Overall, however, general security ratings are falling rather than rising. Among large cities, Madrid and Seoul have increased their security scores, while other large cities have seen their scores fall since 2015, including New York, Lima, Johannesburg, Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta.

While Asian and European cities remain at the top of the Safe Cities list, including Amsterdam, Hong Kong, Osaka, Singapore, Stockholm, and Zurich, unfortunately cities in the Middle East, Africa, and some Asian cities can be found at the bottom of the index, including Cairo, Dhaka, Ho Chi Minh City, Karachi, Manila, Tehran and Yangon.

Although corporate planners may feel more safe and secure holding events in American cities, it's notable that no U.S. city except San Francisco made it into the top 20 "overall security" category. The U.S., however, performs best in digital security: Of the top 10 cities in this category, four are in the U.S., Chicago, Dallas, New York and San Francisco.

For corporate meeting planners wishing to organize events in the world's safest countries, the top five, according to the 2017 Global Peace Index, are Austria, Denmark, Iceland, New Zealand and Portugal. The five most dangerous countries are Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. A good source for current information on possible threats in specific international destinations is the U.S. State Department's website <https://travel.state.gov>.

Advice From IMEX

Organizing and hosting international trade shows with and for the corporate meetings industry is also dependent on good security, and has its own concerns. "Security is one of the largest priorities for our industry

as we always want our attendees to have as safe and enriching an experience as possible as they learn, do business and connect with one another in destinations around the world," says Carina Bauer, CEO and president of the IMEX Group. "With IMEX hosting shows on two continents each year, we con-



"We also need to rally around pushing globally recognized and agreed-to standards on security through efforts like the EMSSI (Exhibition and Meetings Safety and Security Initiative), launched at IMEX 2016."

Carina Bauer, CEO and President
IMEX Group, East Sussex, U.K.

sider security not only a must-have as organizers, but also an incredibly important topic area for learning and information sharing.

"First, we always work hand in hand with our venues to create as much safety confidence as possible for our guests and staff, whether it is an international or domestic meeting," says Bauer. "Messe Frankfurt in Germany and the Sands in Las Vegas both have very strong security policies, technologies and teams. Messe Frankfurt (home again to IMEX Frankfurt 2018, May 15-17) features an innovative Operation and Security Center (OSC), which unites all safety-related functions, services, communications and technical operations under one roof. We also work beyond the venues themselves. For example, last year with IMEX America 2017 happening days after the tragedy in Las Vegas, we worked closely not only with the Sands but with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority and Las Vegas law enforcement personnel as well."

Bauer continues, "Secondly, we use the strong education platforms at the IMEX shows to get meeting pros talking about security best practices in a very open and constructive way. At IMEX in Frankfurt 2018 for example, Pete Murphy (currently with Priavo Security and Angelique Lecorps, and a former member of the U.K. Special Forces) will lead a session on the planning attentions we

must pay in today's elevated security climate," says Bauer.

"Finally, at the IMEX shows and beyond, we need to continue to use our incredibly strong sense of community in the meetings industry to stay vigilant, resilient and unified. This certainly shone through strongly in the imme-

diate and caring circle our industry formed around the Las Vegas community and meetings industry with #VegasStrong at IMEX America last year. We also need to rally around pushing globally recognized and agreed-to standards on security through efforts like the EMSSI (Exhibition and Meetings Safety and Security Initiative), launched at IMEX 2016, for example."

Geographic Risk Assessment

Another security expert says that the differences regarding safety and security planning between European and Asian meeting destinations are the types of risks groups may encounter. "In Asia, natural disasters are more prevalent than in Europe, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones and volcanic activity, which requires pre-thought and purposeful knowledge of the timing of the meeting," says Paul Frederick, CPP, president of Hospitality Security Advisors LLC.

"There is a season for cyclones in Asia — there is even a predicted rainy season — but earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions are not predictable and require an organization to have a risk tolerance for the possibility of such an event, which requires trained and practiced crisis and emergency planning.

"Terrorist incidents, cyberthreats and local crime can and do happen in any country in Europe and Asia," says Frederick, a 30-year veteran in hospitality

safety and security, who led the global safety and security organizations for both Hilton Worldwide and Starwood Hotels and Resorts. "The differences are how is the venue, your organization and local law enforcement prepared for them. In light of recent times, a meeting planner can no longer assume venues, hotels or countries are safe, based on no previous incidents.

"A risk assessment is necessary for any location and should include the purpose of the meeting, agenda topics, offsite events, where are your attendees traveling from, and an analysis of data from past incidents in the venue, city and country," says Frederick. "Corporate meeting planners organizing an international event should do a risk assessment first, and then update based on current facts closer to the opening of the event. Situational risks can change from the date that you selected the venue, to the time you will kick off the meeting, e.g., political unrest, government elections, terrorism, pandemic, etc. ...Communication to your attendees

"Hactivists are another type. Depending on the subject matter of your conference, you may find that there are hackers that just don't like your company or your industry and look to cause disruptions."

Alan Brill, Senior Managing Director
Cyber Security and Investigations, Kroll, Secaucus, NJ



identifying the risks and recommendations how to mitigate them is crucial."

Frederick recommends that planners use an excellent resource for assessing hotels overseas, such as the Hotel Security and Safety Assessment Form available on the U.S. State Department OSAC website <https://www.osac.gov>.

Internet Safety and Data Security

Data security is no small thing. Be sure to look into your privacy rights — or lack thereof — in the country you're visiting. More than that, make sure your devices are secure. Ensure that any important documents are double-encrypted, make sure you lock your de-

"I believe it's far too complicated to identify certain areas as safe (or conversely unsafe) because the number, complexity and dynamic nature of threat actors on the international scene is constantly changing, evolving and adapting."

Matthew J. Dumpert, Senior Director, Security Risk Management
Kroll, New York, NY

vice when you're not using it, and use your corporate VPN (virtual private network) whenever possible. Also, use the most secure network option available. It doesn't hurt to play it safe.

"First and foremost, it's imperative for meeting planners to understand that all meetings, conferences and conventions are considered targets by cybercriminals," says Alan Brill, senior managing director, cybersecurity and investigations at Kroll. "It doesn't matter what the subject matter of your meeting/conference is. Both you as a planner and your corporate attendees are targets. The 'bad guys' are generally in a few categories.

"Cybercriminals are looking for any-

nately, paying the ransom doesn't guarantee that you will actually get a working code to regain access to your files. Another new tactic is to get malware loaded onto your machine that carries out virtual currency mining, the process by which some virtual currencies (such as bitcoin and Monero) are created. This can slow down your machine and can continue to plague you even after you return home!"

Brill says that there are many other types of cybercriminals, and meeting planners need to be aware of these other threats as well. "Electronic espionage criminals are after your company's information. They are looking for non-public information that they can use to buy or short your stock. Nation-state actors are looking for information that can benefit their nation's companies, sometimes including your direct competitors.

"Hactivists are another type," Brill continues. "Depending on the subject matter of your conference, you may find that there are hackers that just don't like your company or your industry and look to cause disruptions. In all of these cases, I'd suggest that organizers take the lead in reminding meeting attendees that no matter where they are, in cyberspace, it's a dangerous world."

Brill suggests that corporate meeting planners consider the following tips:

"A virtual private network (VPN) is your best friend," Brill advises. "A VPN is a service that encrypts transmissions to and from your computer to the VPN site. Many companies have internal VPNs. In other cases, there are many organizations that can provide you with the software and accounts to establish a VPN

from your laptop, tablet or smartphone to a secure site in your home country, and at very modest cost. A VPN is probably the best cybersecurity investment you can make when you're organizing international meetings and events.

"If a VPN is your best friend, your worst enemy is generally anything with the words 'free Wi-Fi.' All too often, criminals actually set up these sites in order to get you to connect, and if you have weak security, the criminals can watch your transmissions, and if they are not encrypted, they can steal your information, or even change it," said Brill.

"Fake Wi-Fi sites can look just like the real thing in a hotel or coffee shop. My recommendation is not to connect through sites outside of your hotel that you can't verify. And even in your hotel, your first move when connecting to the hotel's guest network is to start up your VPN. You should know that it's also possible to create a fake cellular tower to gain access to your cellular transmissions."



"Planners want to ensure that attendees have the safest possible travel and meeting experience to eliminate any distractions and risks that may be present at the host destination."

Linda J. McNairy, V.P. Global Operations and Shared Services
American Express Meetings & Events, Jersey City, NJ

Fear of Terrorism

Other risk factors when planning international meetings include terrorism. Acts of terrorism are nearly impossible to predict, which is what makes terrorism so frightening. However, some places experience more incidents than others. Be sure to check out the annual report published by the Global Terrorism Index, which ranks countries according to the impact of terrorism. According to the 2016 report, Iraq, Afghanistan and Nigeria were the three most at-risk countries during that year. Civil unrest, natural disasters and diseases are other risk factors, as is medical emergency considerations.

"As U.S. corporate planners work with global customers, whether they be U.S.-based customers welcoming international audiences into the U.S., or coordinating meetings being held throughout the world, their primary focus should always be on the attendee and stakeholder experience, which presents its own set of challenges," says

Linda McNairy, vice president, global operations and shared services, American Express Meetings & Events, American Express Global Business Travel. "This begins with your risk assessment of the destination as well as all paths to get to that destination. Planners want to ensure that attendees have the safest possible travel and meeting experience to eliminate any distractions and risks that may be present at the host destination. These may be ongoing concerns specific to a destination or may be situational, based on other events happening at a destination over the same dates as the meeting. At American Express Meetings & Events, we take a very consultative and fact-based approach to this process as there can be

perception issues that may or may not be real. For example, our team recently planned a senior level event in Dubai. Whilst the reality is that Dubai is a very safe country, we realized that there was a perception amongst some of the attendees and their families that due to the location in the world and areas of unrest surrounding, that safety could be a concern. To address this, we utilized the communication process to relay facts and information about Dubai that created excitement and also addressed any concerns around perception that may have existed."

Establishing a Safety and Security Program for Travelers

Before your trip begins, it's important to establish travel guidelines. Your team needs to be on the same page, having discussed any potential threats you may run into in your travels. Here are a few more key steps you should take in order to ensure maximum safety and security:

Medical Precautions. There are

plenty of medical matters to take care of and that can be handled in advance of travel. For one thing, you'll want to ensure that each traveler receives any necessary vaccinations. You also should encourage travelers in your group to look into whether the prescriptions they use are permitted in the country where they will be traveling. Carry a letter from the prescribing doctor if you have any prescriptions for narcotics, and carry all prescriptions in their original containers. Speaking of original containers, it can be a hassle to refill a prescription while abroad, so advise your team to refill their meds before leaving. Also, be sure that each traveler learns which medical services their health insurance will cover overseas.

Security Risks and Responses. Take the time to inform your group about the area you'll be visiting. Have there been any security warnings on *travel.state.gov*? Does the country's website have any advice for travelers? If there's any civil unrest in the place you're visiting it's better to make everyone aware of it. Also, be sure everyone is aware of some basic safety tips: lock your hotel door, don't roll down car windows if a stranger knocks, don't go out alone at night, always tell someone where you will be going so you have someone watching out for you, etc. You'll also want to discuss responses to potential threats. Ensure that an evacuation plan is in place, and inform your team of meeting places in case people become separated. Tell your group who to contact if they lose their documents. Also, determine the trustworthiness of the police force in your area. Law enforcement in some countries is notoriously corrupt and particularly troublesome to foreigners. **C&IT**



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Afishal's visually impactful style of electronic dance music perfectly expressed the Lennox program's theme: "Can't stop, won't stop."

A Thoughtful Approach to Entertainment

Creative Strategies to Make Your Message Come Alive

There are many advantages to theming a meeting or incentive. From an attendee's perspective, a theme makes the overall event more memorable, even if that theme is only expressed in a slogan that appears on banners, brochures, napkins and the like. From a planner's perspective, a theme affords a sense of direction for many aspects of the program, from site choice to activities to décor. And given the dizzying amount and variety of options for entertainment, a theme can helpfully guide the planner in that department as well.

By Patrick Simms

Lennox International, a Richardson, Texas-based HVAC com-

pany, has long been incorporating well-articulated themes into its national sales meetings as well as Lennox LIVE (leadership, innovation, vision, education), a multisite series of customer-facing events. The themes inform the choice of entertainment, which is sourced and produced by Lennox's longtime creative partner, The Producer's Lounge, a full-service event production company in Addison, Texas. Lennox "really puts time and effort into their events," remarks Leigh Ann Vernon, owner/executive producer. "A corporate event is a major piece of a company's messaging, and sometimes companies don't put the time into it that it really needs, because it does take a lot of time and executive focus."

Lennox's messaging is encapsulated by a phrase tagged to the event, and Vernon seeks out entertainment acts that are in sync with the phrase. "Last year, our theme was 'Can't stop, won't stop,' and we had a DJ/drummer that I sourced from the U.K., Afishal, and he had an LED drum kit that was fabulous," says Vernon. Afishal's visually impactful style of EDM (electronic dance music) perfectly expressed the program's slogan. This year's theme for Len-

"My goal...is to create an experience for the attendee from the moment they get their invitation to the moment they are traveling back."

Leigh Ann Vernon
Owner/Executive Producer
The Producer's Lounge, Addison, TX



nox LIVE, "Fuel the disruption," was supported by David Wilk, a corporate emcee with an improv comedy style that "disrupts" the usual approach to hosting corporate events. A founding member of Four Day Weekend Comedy Theater, Wilk traveled with Lennox LIVE to Phoenix, Dallas, Orlando and Mashantucket, Connecticut.

Festivalization

While a single entertainer or emcee can embody the spirit of a corporate event, entertainment is increasingly being decentralized and spread throughout the venue to create a festival-like experience. While considered a trend, the "festivalization" of corporate events is a familiar approach for Vernon. "We've been doing that for a couple of years," she notes. "My goal as executive producer is to create an experience for the attendee from the moment they get their invitation to the moment they are traveling back to tell their families what they saw and did. We've done a lot in the ballroom: bold colors, more messaging, LED lighting, fun costumed people, stilt walkers...to create that festival atmosphere. (The performers) are even out in the foyer, walking attendees in."

Among the latest entertainment features adding to the feeling of immersion is the hologram, which can also serve an educational function in the case of product holograms. "A couple of years ago it was too cost-prohibitive, but now at reasonable costs you can have a hologram that can be anything you want it to be," Vernon says. "Last year, we had a show with beautiful butterflies and we had children running, trying to catch these 3-D butterflies: The children were real, the butterflies were not."

Scary-Oke and SoCalSelfies

Another company that takes a diversified approach to event entertainment is Thousand Oaks, California-based Sage Publishing. Founded in 1965, the company publishes more than 1,000 journals and 800 new books each year. "We use a variety of entertainers/entertainment depending on the event," says

Dana Graham, associate director, corporate events and community relations with the company. Graham's team sources entertainment primarily for Sage's annual sales meeting (about 200 attendees) and annual company picnic (about 600 attendees). "The entertainment we book ranges from balloon artists to musicians to teambuilding activities. We even hosted a Scary-Oke (karaoke) contest for employees during our annual

"It's not just entertainment for entertainment's sake. ...What is the audience going to get out of it?"

Sharon L. Schenk, CMP, Director
Conventions and Event Management
CCA Global Partners, Manchester, NH



Halloween Hullabaloo party. It was a fun way to hear talented employees sing in front of the whole company."

A cost-effective entertainment element that can promote a festival atmosphere is the SoCalSelfie photo booth, "one of the best entertainment investments we have made in the last two years," Graham notes. "Their 'booth' is a large iPhone that takes a succession of photos and prints out the photo strip. They simultaneously text and email the photos to the guest. It has revolutionized the event photo process for us, and it's fun, too. SoCalSelfie custom designs the photo strip template to complement the event theme, and they provide fun props for the guests to use as well." Younger attendees seem to especially enjoy the process. "We have so many millennials that work here (49 percent of the staff) and this appeals to them. It makes my life a lot easier because people are so used to having everything they need immediately, I am able at that party to give them something immediately and then later we circle back."

Graham takes a wide-ranging approach to event entertainment, going beyond generic ideas such as hiring a band or comedian. She simply seeks to "make a splash with the entertainment budget I have. If I can add a little 'oomph' to an event that needs some life in it, I've achieved my goal."

And there are indeed many ways to make that splash: Sage attendees have embarked on a cattle drive at a sales meeting in Tucson, Arizona (arranged through Destination Conference Services) and ridden aboard the Land Shark, an amphibious vehicle, during a global meeting in Santa Barbara, California (arranged through AlliedPRA). The Land Shark tour "was a totally new experience and they loved it. The attendees from India, London and Asia had never seen anything like this. Rather than having minicoaches transport them, I wanted to shake it up," Graham explains.

The Element of Surprise

The surprise value of entertainment should not be underestimated: Participants tend to remember those experiences even more, and that makes the overall event more memorable

by association. Sharon L. Schenk, CMP, director of conventions and event management for Manchester, New Hampshire-based CCA Global Partners, gives an example of an entertainment choice that had that kind of impact. "This past summer we had our convention in Salt Lake City, and for Carpet One (the convention includes both Carpet One Floor and Home and Flooring America/Flooring Canada programs) we did our closing event at Olympic Park," Schenk relates. "That was six months before the Winter Olympics, and we got to see the potential future Olympians. They were called the Flying Aces, and they did a performance for us at the end of the evening. Our people loved it. So that was an opportunity to take advantage of something that's local; it hit every demographic in our audience and part of the payments that we made for that entertainment went to support the park. They knew they were going to meet Olympians, but they didn't know what the performance was going to be. It was certainly different than anything they'd ever seen before."

The unexpected experience was underscored with a follow-up six months after the convention, when members who had attended received a message: "Remember when you saw these guys in Salt Lake City? Well, four of them are going to the Olympics."

"We always have our eyes open for something new, something trending, when it comes to entertainment," says Schenk. "But it's not just entertainment for entertainment's sake; we've really got to weigh the value for our members. Is it really worthwhile for us to spend this money? What is the audience going to get out of it?" An act that delivered a strong return on a reasonable investment was a country music quintet called Spencer's Own, who played CCA Global Partners' Carpet One convention one year. The group's lack of widespread popularity at that point effectively made them more affordable. "They're on the country music charts now, but when we hired them



"Comedians are a tricky one; they don't appeal to everybody."

Ira Almeas, President
Impact Incentives & Meetings
West Orange, NJ

people didn't really know who they were," says Schenk. "Eventually, people are going to say, 'Hey, we saw them when'" they were rising stars.

Going Local

Other strategies for saving money on entertainers include hiring local acts or touring performers who happen to be in the destination at the time of the event, thus saving airfare and lodging costs for the act. CVBs and DMCs are good resources on these options.

Ira Almeas, president of Impact Incentives & Meetings, also suggests purchasing non-exclusive entertainment. "If it's a smaller group with a small budget, you can buy into an existing show, so you do dinner and a show," he says. His company has taken that approach with tango performances in Argentina. Such local acts can have the added effect of expressing the culture of the destination; for various incentive programs, Impact has partnered with flamenco dancers in Spain, river dancers in Ireland and so on.

In selecting these acts, "we always go by destination, demographic and budget," Almeas notes. "So there is a system we go through to vet the entertainer; we don't just say, 'I'd like to have Charo perform.'"

Vernon emphasizes that audience demographics "are the key, because not everything resonates with all audiences. Just as an example, we had an awards evening in Vegas and we had the Rat Pack perform for us. Half the audience loved it, and half the audience said, 'Who's the Rat Pack?'"

Broad Appeal

The challenge, of course, comes with audiences of a highly varied demographic, in terms of age and/or culture. One solution is to select an act with very broad appeal. As an example, Almeas cites KC and the Sunshine Band, which he hired for an incentive program staged by a communications company. "They're a '70s act, but everyone still knows a half a dozen to a dozen of his songs. If I said, 'Get Down Tonight,' most people would know who sang it. It's a global company (that held the incentive), and there were a lot of Latinos that knew his music even though he's not a Latino singer. We did it in the Bahamas and he's Miami based, so that helped with transportation and all of those details."

The band's music is very upbeat, and effectively set the tone for the incentive trip, which is what entertainment does for any meeting, Almeas adds.

Another approach to pleasing a mixed demographic is to provide "mixed" entertainment. CCA Global Partners' groups range in age from 30s to 70s, and the final night's entertainment for a convention this past winter consisted of "vignettes of Broadway songs, mostly Hamilton. It's hip-hop, but still Broadway," Schenk relates. ("Hamilton: An American Musical" details the life of founding father Alexander Hamilton through sung and rapped lyrics). "I thought that was a good mix for the audience," she says, adding, "When you've got that wide demographic you're not going to please everybody, but you do your best to find a happy medium in there."



"SoCalSelfie custom designs the photo strip template to complement the event theme, and they provide fun props for the guests to use as well."

Dana Graham, Associate Director
Corporate Events and Community Relations
Sage Publishing, Thousand Oaks, CA

Graham also does her best to select inclusive musical entertainment. "The process is hands-on as I personally prepare song lists/suggested songs," she explains. Sage's holiday party is not a Christmas party, and so "we are careful to avoid playing any traditional holiday music or using red and green in the décor."

"Past Sage Holiday Party themes have included Casablanca and An Evening in Oz, which was held in a hangar at the Camarillo Airport (in Ventura County, California), and the Magnolia Ball, which was held in a refurbished horse barn this year at the Hummingbird Nest Ranch (Santa Susana, California)." Though it is in a planner's nature to control the entertainment content along with all other

aspects of an event, he or she should be prepared for the occasional mishap. "For the company's Gone Fishing-themed annual picnic at Vasa Park last June, I was horrified when the DJ played Guns N' Roses' 'Sweet Child O' Mine,' which was not on the suggested setlist of family fare type music that I had provided," Graham relates. "The issue was quickly resolved. Whew!"

References

Apart from a careful consideration of audience demographics, due diligence in sourcing entertainment also includes getting references and actually seeing the performers in action, if possible. "Good reputation, good sound — we do not want to hire any musical entertainment or vendors that we cannot hear, see or research first," Graham explains, "whether it is in person or electronically via the World Wide Web."

Precon prepping is also essential for each act, especially those who will be speaking to the attendees. "We start our conversations with them one month to six weeks out, and our leadership are on the call and they give some direction," Schenk explains. "We do at least two, sometimes three calls prior to the program. We tell them the age demo of the audience, where they're from — our attendees are from small towns in the U.S. and Canada. They're usually from small towns; they're not big-city folk. Some (entertainers and speakers) are very proactive: They'll ask ques-



Credit: Randy Nolan Artists

Comedian/impressionist Dave Burleigh's one-man show "The Donald" pokes fun at the POTUS in a respectful, non-political way.

raising issues on the audience's mind that the management addressed in the meeting. The result was an engaged audience delighted with the puppet's inside knowledge of the organization and its sales team. The routine humanized management and reinforced key messages.

Fiala describes another program that really resonated with the audience. "For his presentation at Shanken Communications' Impact Marketing Symposium, Pete Carr, president of Bacardi North America, had us create a puppet that looked like Marvin Shanken, publisher of *Wine Spectator*, *Cigar Aficionado* and *Whiskey Advocate* among other titles. 'Mini Marv' interviewed Pete in the brash style made famous by real Marv. The audience was a who's who of the wine and spirits industry, and they loved it."

Feedback

While her team does not survey attendees on the quality



Credit: Corporate Sidekicks

To liven up a marketing symposium, Corporate Sidekicks created a puppet look-a-like for *Cigar Aficionado* and *Whiskey Advocate* Publisher Marvin Shanken (left) who interviewed Bacardi North America President Pete Carr (right).

of the entertainment post event, Schenk says the attendees do post comments on a Facebook group private to the company. But entertainers can expect feedback on their performance to also be shared via public social media, and their reputation can quickly heighten (or suffer) because of Twitter posts and the like.

Similarly, a planner's reputation in part depends on attendees' reaction to the event; and the entertainment component, like the cuisine, is one of those features that tends to color the entire experience. A thoughtful approach to sourcing entertainment is thus needed, especially given the number of considerations at play: the event's theme and destination, the festivalization trend, cutting-edge forms of entertainment like holograms, surprise value, the C-suite's preferences, audience demographics and, of course, budget.

C&IT

tions about the product, the going on now, and they'll in- their act or presentation). We don't have canned, inflexible presentations. Customization is essential to us and our audience appreciates the fact that our presenters have some knowledge of their businesses."

Making Fun Without Offending

Comedians may require the most prepping of any type of entertainer, in order to ensure their material does not exclude or offend segments of the audience. "Comedians are a tricky one; they don't appeal to everybody. That's the one type of entertainment that I've always steered away from," says Almeas. "There are topics that might offend people, or if you have an international group (the humor can be) lost in translation." Nevertheless, comedians have successfully entertained plenty of corporate groups. "We had Howie Mandel about seven years ago, and he went over quite well," Schenk notes.

Any comedy act that delves into the U.S. presidential realm must be especially careful to avoid controversy and not alienate or offend its audience. Randy Nolan Artists, a talent agency that specializes in entertaining corporate groups with U.S. president impersonators, successfully pokes fun in a respectful way without delving into politics or policies. Bill Clinton and George W. Bush impersonators played well with groups in the '90s and 2000s respectively. Now there's Donald J. Trump, a decidedly more challenging impersonation to pull off without stirring up controversy. But comedian/impressionist Dave Burleigh manages to pull it off. Burleigh and a group of industry professionals have teamed up to create a funny, "above the belt" one-man show — all about "The Donald." The material takes care to not step on any toes — on either side of the political aisle.

As with political humor, corporate entertainment that makes fun of the boss could backfire badly — unless it's a puppet doing the jokes. Entertainer Jack Fiala, founder of Corporate Sidekicks in Dayton, Ohio, uses muppet-like characters in humorous, customized skits for live events designed to resonate with a corporate client's issues or meeting objectives. For one corporate sales group, "Willie Sellmore" the puppet made fun of the boss and some known product glitches, humorously

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Are You on the Right Side of Ethics?

→ Let These Meetings Industry Pros — and Your Conscience — Be Your Guide

By Derek Reveron

Every industry faces ethics challenges, and meeting planning certainly is no exception. Something that looks like an incentive can be intended as a bribe. Planners are offered so many things so often that the right thing to do can be confusing, especially for novices.

Experts say several factors contribute to ethical lapses and quandaries including: not enough ethics education opportunities; industry guidelines are unclear about specific, ethically ambiguous situations; some planners, particularly those who are independent, have tighter budgets and may count on FAM trips, frequent flyer miles, hotel-stay points and other perks to defray expenses.



"I think our industry is far less ethical than it ever was because of high turnover, the complicity of vendors... and because many people believe they are underpaid and overworked and are 'due' the perks offered."

Joan Eisenstodt, Founder, Eisenstodt Associates LLC, Washington, DC

No wonder planners face ethics challenges as a routine part of their jobs.

According to Joan Eisenstodt, founder of Washington, DC-based Eisenstodt Associates LLC, a meetings consulting and training firm focusing on ethics issues, "I think our industry is far less ethical than it ever was because of high turnover, the complicity of vendors, younger and newer people who aren't members of industry organizations, and because many people believe they are underpaid and overworked and are 'due' the perks offered."

Sometimes the right ethical choice is clear, and sometimes it isn't. Sometimes the decision is ethically correct but gives the appearance of being unethical or at least inappropriate.

Ethics Education

Eisenstodt believes that more ethics education is needed to make planners aware of potential issues, especially those that fall into gray areas. "We need far more education now than ever," she says. "I think ethics needs to be on the agenda of every industry organization at every national, international and chapter meeting. If a national organization or chapter does one ethics program every few years, they believe it is okay."

Karen Kotowski, CEO of the Events Industry Council (EIC), offers a different assessment. "I think we do a fairly good job, particularly for the CMP community," she says. "Our Events Industry Council Manual 9th Edition is the primary study resource (for the EIC's CMP certification) and covers professionalism, ethical behavior, best practices, and how to develop and implement a code of ethics for your own organization."

The EIC has an enforceable CMP Code of Ethics, which says that planners shouldn't use their "position for undue personal gain and to promptly disclose to appropriate parties all potential and actual conflicts of interest." In addition, the code says planners should "actively model and encourage the integration of ethics into all aspects of the performance of my duties."

Questions about the EIC standards are included on the organization's CMP exam. According to Kotowski, "CMPs are required to read and agree to abide by the CMP Standards of Ethical Conduct on their initial certification application, as well as every time they recertify."

The EIC can remove certification from planners who violate the standards. "The process ensures a CMP receives due process and the procedures are consistently enforced if a complaint is made," says Kotowski.

Ethics Violations

Kotowski adds that the most frequent violations involve people who use the CMP designation after they fail to recertify. "A more infrequent, but equally serious occurrence, has been occasions where someone uses the credential who never earned it," says Kotowski. "We can't ensure ethical behavior. We can encourage, educate and enforce it if need be."

The Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) has its Principles of Professional and Ethical Conduct, which asks members to "avoid any and all conflicts of interest and advise all parties, including my organization, of any situations where a conflict of interest exists."

The PCMA principles also ask professionals to "refuse inappropriate gifts, in-

centives and/or services in any business dealings that may be offered as a result of my position and could be perceived as personal gain."

Some industry ethics experts say that industry standards provide general guidelines but aren't uniform, are infrequently enforced and don't cover many specific ethics challenges that planners commonly face.

According to Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM, CEO and master strategist at Bernardsville, New Jersey-based Strategic Meetings & Events, "If the industry were more strategic in how we planned and came together to form unilateral goals, standards and practices, we would be seen differently, treated differently, and better behavior on all sides would result."

Knowing Ethics Codes

But many planners aren't familiar with industry standards. According to Eisenstodt, "I think if you asked members of the various industry organizations when they last read the code for the organization for which they are a member or hold a certification, you'd find that few have."

Unfamiliarity with ethics standards is especially common among numerous people who plan meetings but aren't trained planners. "I think that the gap in awareness, if any exists, may be with those non-professional/part-time planners who are asked to plan a meeting, but it is not their day-to-day job," says Kotowski.

Kotowski believes that untrained, part-time planners are even less aware than professional planners of potential ethical pitfalls. "I would urge those non-full-time planners to use our EIC manual as a desk reference for these practices



"Our Events Industry Council Manual 9th Edition... covers professionalism, ethical behavior, best practices, and how to develop and implement a code of ethics for your own organization."

Karen Kotowski, CAE, CMP, CTSM, CEO, Events Industry Council, Washington, DC



and to become more professional in performing these activities that may not be their full-time job," says Kotowski.

Lamagna agrees: "Those who plan meetings aside from their full-time responsibilities often make the wrong decisions as they are not exposed to guidelines and ethics codes. The bigger problem is that the industry is too segmented. If we had a universal platform to stand on or required a licensing procedure for this role, then we'd eliminate enormous amounts of unethical behavior."

It's also difficult to curb unethical behavior because suppliers and vendors may have inadequate ethics standards or none at all. Suppliers may not be clear to planners up front about the intention of their perks and gifts.

According to Eisenstodt, "The piece of this that is not addressed is whether the vendor or supplier is complicit in any unethical behavior and, if so, how should it be addressed. Having seen clients fire planners who violated ethics codes with the complicity of vendors, and seeing the vendors continue working for their companies, means we have no real standards across the industry."

FAM Trips

Knotty ethics issues can result from FAM trips — expense-paid trips that hotels, venues and CVBs offer planners to acquaint them with properties and destinations.

Some planners accept FAM trips with no intention of ever considering the destination for a meeting. That's not ethical, says Lamagna. "If you know your client base will never go to a destination, don't accept the invite. These trips cost money and are investments in future business.

Be respectful of that. If you don't have business to share at that moment, but believe you may in the future, then consider going," says Lamagna.

How can planners who want to do the right thing ensure that personal biases don't influence their recommendations?

Lamagna offers the following advice: "I always repeat the mantra, 'it's not about me' with every component of a program from menus to gifts, flowers or wine selection. I remind myself that I am not the audience. I base my recommendations on the group's goals for the meeting, personality of executives and guests, budget, tolerance for travel, etc."

While FAM trips are a problem, some experts believe that other ethical problems are more common.

Perks and Gifts

Says Eisenstodt: "I think FAM trips are the least of our concerns. They happen less frequently. I think the issue of prizes at trade shows/hosted buyer events and even the hosted buyer events themselves are of far greater concern as are the gifts given, the undisclosed commissions, the hidden fees and so much more."

Indeed, many ethical issues stem from perks, rewards, points and gifts offered to planners or that they rarely request. Suppliers such as hotels and venues as well as CVBs bombard planners with perks such as hotel nights, airfare points, spa treatments, five-star dinners, limo rides, tickets to sporting events and concerts, and trips for family and friends.

It can be difficult for planners, especially novices, to decide when it's ethical to accept freebies. A perk may also be a bribe, or at least give the appearance of one.

Organizations, corporations and event stakeholders know that planners are offered perks. Still, not revealing the acceptance of the gifts could be unethical if the offerings favorably impact a planner's recommendation or decision about a property or destination. Even if a reward doesn't influence the decision, non-disclosure could give the appearance of being unethical if the perk is revealed later.

Lamagna offers the following advice for dealing with perks, points, rewards and gifts. "We give any gifts we receive to the client," she says. "For instance, a property awarded us a watch after the event. We had them send it to our client's CEO. If you are upfront with the client and they are okay with you accepting points, use them as a perk for employees."

Gray Areas

Many planners perceive some perks as gray areas. Here are two examples:

A hotel, vendor or other supplier offers an expensive dinner at a swanky restaurant: "Five-star dinners should not be the norm," says Lamagna. "That said, if a relationship has developed with a vendor who takes you out to celebrate or as a thank you, and you can separate that from 'owing' them something in the form of business in the future, then that may be okay. Nothing should ever be expected, done in excess or abused."

A hotel offers a room upgrade: "Accepting upgrades while on a site visit is not unethical but it is inappropriate," says Lamagna. "Upgrades offered onsite during a program should also be declined because the meeting is not about you. You are staff, not a guest. We put into



"There is no middle ground with ethics. Once you know something is happening that is unethical, it is incumbent on you to share the information...with the appropriate person and then step aside."

Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM, CEO, Strategic Meetings & Events, Bernardsville, NJ

our preshow notes that no one from our team is ever to be upgraded so there is a clear path for everyone to follow."

Should a planner who has accepted points and perks not recommend the hotel even if it is a good match for the meeting? Why? "When you have to start asking yourself these questions you are blurring a line," says Lamagna. "Focus on the client's goals and best interests, and be transparent in your behavior. That eliminates most challenges."

Eisenstodt agrees that transparency is the best course. "Destination, venue and vendor salespeople have quotas to make, and we all have been begged to get contracts signed," says Eisenstodt. "We have an obligation to know and disclose the criteria on which we base decisions. Discussing with an internal or external stakeholder the selection criteria means that one can be more objective, and show the objectivity in the decision-making."

The need for ethical behavior among meeting planners grows as more join the events industry. According to the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of meeting and convention planners will continue to grow 16 percent through 2018 — faster than the average for all occupations.

Expert Advice

Planners can take the following steps to increase awareness about ethics:

- Experienced planners should serve as ethics mentors to new planners, and newcomers should seek advice from experienced peers.
- Talk to a boss or coworker about a situation when the course of action isn't clear.

- Put the best interests of stakeholders and clients first.
- Be aware of how actions might be perceived and interpreted even if they are technically ethical.
- Planners facing an ethical dilemma should ask themselves how they would feel if their actions were posted on social media.
- Corporations that lack their own codes of ethics should create such standards.

Corporate Ethics Codes

According to Eisenstodt, "Most corporations, if not all, have codes of conduct/ethics. Of the corporate planners I know, all have said they are asked once a year to do an online evaluation of ethics issues. I have helped clients write specifics, using their overall codes, for their meetings departments so that individuals knew, for example, the value of gifts or meals or entertainment they could accept."

Kotowski offers advice on what the corporate codes should cover. "It would include their own specific practices and standards regarding how they interact with their clients and conduct their business," says Kotowski.

The codes also would cover company-specific "financial practices, how they report their activities to the client, transparency in billing practices and expectation of employee interactions with vendors and suppliers," says Kotowski.

Hold Peers Accountable

Planners should know and abide by ethics codes and hold their peers accountable for doing the same. Suppose a corporate planner finds out that

a peer within the same company has acted unethically. What steps should the planner take?

Eisenstodt offers the following advice: "It is generally thought that one should approach (not report) the person thought to have acted unethically based on the company's code and say something like, 'I think you did X and it seems like it might be in opposition to the company's code of conduct in section Y,'" says Eisenstodt. "Please tell me a bit more so I can understand how to apply the code to my own work."

Eisenstodt advises that planners talk to human resources when in doubt about what to do, or use the company's anonymous reporting system. "Use what works best and most comfortably for you. If the person believed to have acted unethically holds a certification, determine what you need to do and how to report the information to (the certifying organization). Do that only when certain of the information."

According to Lamagna, corporate planners have a duty to report ethics violations. "There is no middle ground with ethics," says Lamagna. "Once you know something is happening that is unethical, it is incumbent on you to share the information. If you are unsure and it is not your responsibility to follow up, share the concern, not an accusation, with the appropriate person and then step aside."

The right ethical decision isn't always clear, and planners may see the same situations differently. However, it's crucial that planners approach issues with a knowledge of ethics standards and a willingness to make the best efforts to apply them.

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Face-to-face at PCMA's 2018 Convening Leaders in Nashville, Tennessee.

Credit: Jacob Slaton

The Digital World Increases the Importance of Face-to-Face Networking

By Sophia Bennett

Social media has made us more networked than ever. It's easy to connect with people around the world from our desks and living rooms whether we're wearing a suit or pajamas.

But instead of replacing the need for person-to-person interaction, our digital world has made in-person networking events more important than ever. Even young people, who are the most familiar and comfortable with digital technology, crave the chance to meet people in the real world.

"As we start to see a younger generation coming in, their preference is to have more networking opportunities," says James M. Hobbs, senior

director, global programs for Meeting Expectations, a full-service meeting planning and association management company in Atlanta, Georgia. "These face-to-face opportunities create such dynamic and fulfilling outcomes. I find that when people come together, they might have spent a week throwing emails around, but in a few hours they can come up with really great solutions." They can also make new contacts, form new partnerships and perhaps even find mentors, which is vital for young professionals in particular.

Networking is often one of participants' favorite things about any meeting or conference,

and it can yield a number of positive results. "It's the most effective way to spark collaboration amongst employees, resulting in innovation across your company," says Amy Manzanares, senior vice president, events for LEO Events, a global events agency based in Tennessee. "When executed correctly, internal teams, who may typically work within silos, are encouraged to step out and develop relationships with peers and even superiors from an array of departments."

"The beauty of networking events is that they are easily adaptable," she adds. "They can be stand-alone or elements of a larger event. If you're looking to disrupt your typical meeting — which is oftentimes a smaller, individual gathering — transforming it into a networking opportunity will foster quality engagement between participants. If you're executing a larger-scale experience, including networking sessions can add a touch of personalization for your attendees through providing an outlet for their expressions and their voices."

There are many things planners can do to make networking events more exciting, entertaining and beneficial to attendees. But no matter what tack you take, Hobbs emphasizes that it's important to remain focused on providing attendees with a great experience. "There are so many wonderful and talented planners out there who might get bogged down with all the logistical details, but you can't forget about the overall experience and what it is you want your attendees to walk about with," he says. "Think about the creative aspects of it and give people a memorable experience."

What Makes a Good Networking Event?

If user experiences should be at the top of the planner's pyramid of priorities, what components should be in the underlying layers if planners want to create great networking events?

Who you're going to invite is the next thing to consider. "You've got to make sure you have the right mix of people that have similar interests and needs," Hobbs says. You need to have an audience that wants to talk about the same types of issues. Will your networking event invite people who have the same job function, such as human resources professionals or programmers? Or will you focus on people who are interested in an industry, such as tech, insurance or automotive?

Once you know who you're inviting, communicate details about the audience to invitees. "I

have found the best networking events happen when there is clear communication of the attendees who would benefit most from attending, along with the general purpose and content for the event," says Nancy Medoff, vice president of global sales at BCD Meetings & Events, a full-service global meetings and events company headquartered in Chicago.

"Networking events in conjunction with a large conference or meeting work well because there is a targeted attendee list," says Kelby Hicks, project account manager for Ashfield Meetings and Events, a full-service international meeting and event company based in Ivyland, Pennsylvania. "If you are planning a networking event in conjunction with a larger event, make sure it



2018 PCMA Convening Leaders amplifying their engagement in "Music City."

Credit: Jacob Slaton

is held in the first few days when excitement is still high. Stand-alone gatherings work well, but only if they have something to grab attention and attract attendees. This doesn't require grandiose ideas or an outrageous budget. It could be as simple as a local restaurant changing their menu and offering your attendees a chance to sample it before the general public."

Amanda O'Leary, HMCC, account manager, venue sourcing for Ashfield Meetings and Events, has a few more tips for stand-alone events. "Timing and location are key," she says. "Many networking events do take place after business hours, so it is important to remember travel time to and from the event. Pick a location that is centralized to your client base and provide a full list of vendors who will be in attendance."



James M. Hobbs
Senior Director
Global Programs
Meeting Expectations
Atlanta, GA

"These face-to-face opportunities create such dynamic and fulfilling outcomes. When people come together...they can come up with really great solutions."

"It's also important to remember to take the client's personal time into consideration," O'Leary says. "The most successful events are those in which the client can come and go freely, as opposed to a set schedule. Keep the event to a few hours where the attendees can come and go."

Breaking the Ice

One of the biggest challenges at networking events is actually getting people to network. "While working a room and making connections with unfamiliar people may come naturally to some, for most it's not that easy," says Manzanares. That means a big part of the event planner's job is to figure out how to make people feel comfortable enough to open up.

Providing some munchies and alcohol can be a big help. "Food is a great equalizer," says Hicks. "People are more comfortable when they have something in their hands. Food allows for natural conversation and gives you something to focus on when the conversation reaches a lull."

"The challenge for planners is to keep the food exciting and interesting, but at the same time easy to eat while mingling and chatting with people you're trying to impress," Hicks adds. "Try to not complicate the entire event by picking a menu that requires attendees to work for their food. Networking events are more casual and usually don't have a lot of seating, so any food selections should be something that can easily be eaten while standing or walking."

If possible, play some nice music during the event, Hobbs says. Tunes shouldn't be too loud, as they can hinder conversation. But something that will appeal to your audience, and blends easily into the background, can help create a party atmosphere.

"If you have the resources, creating a more intimate atmosphere can further encourage interaction among attendees," says Manzanares. "Using furniture to create a casual look and feel can result in major impacts on the consciousness by taking the high-stakes, down-to-business pressure off your attendees."

Next Step: How to Get People Talking

Furnishings and snacks can go a long way toward making people feel more comfortable. But what are some specific ways to get attendees talking once they have a glass of wine and are seated on a comfy sofa?

"You've got to be able to create a method for people to identify who they are and what products they work with," Hobbs says. "In the past we've done buttons with icons on them, and the icons designate what a person does as a professional or what kinds of products they use. It's creating that linkage between people so they can spot each other."

Another idea is to create more structured networking. At one of Hobbs' events, he created oversized placemats and put them on tables labeled with various themes. Meeting attendees were asked to sit at the tables with topics or themes that interested them. A moderator facilitated the conversation, and attendees took notes and jotted down ideas on the placemats.

"When you give people the tools they need to start dialogue, they come out with meaningful solutions to problems — or they meet some-



Conference attendees network in a conversation lounge — ideally sparking future collaboration.

one who could potentially help them in the future with a problem they're having," he says. Assigning people to help facilitate networking among event attendees can ease the transition into a new conversation. "At a recent conference, we used whiteboard signs so ambassadors could write topics that people showed interest in or signed up for through the event app," says Manzanares.

Apps and software solutions also can help break the ice among participants. Many meeting apps allow meeting registrants to create a profile, then search the other profiles to see who else is attending the meeting. "If people set up their profiles and identify their jobs and products properly, it really helps attendees find each other during the conference because it will match them up during the event and help them create that dialogue," Hobbs says. Or attendees



Amy Manzanares
Senior Vice President, Events
LEO Events
Franklin, TN

"The beauty of networking events is that they are easily adaptable. They can be stand-alone or elements of a larger event."

may choose to connect and initiate conversations on social media ahead of the event.

Technology can help people connect ahead of smaller events, too. If people RSVP on a platform where others can see who is attending an event, they can check out everyone's LinkedIn page or company bio to see if they want to connect with them. They can look at their posts to learn about their hobbies or interests, which can be a great way to determine what they have in common outside of work.

What's New in Networking: CSR and Other Opportunities

One of the big trends in networking events is tying them to a company's corporate social responsibility plan, or finding other ways for at-



Nancy Medoff
Vice President of Global Sales
BCD Meetings & Events
Chicago, IL

"A networking event can be anything — an interactive show, a sporting event. ...As long as there is an environment for discussion and collaboration, the sky is the limit."

tendees to give back to the community. Hobbs is working to put together a build-a-bike volunteer session for a future event. Teams of people with similar jobs would work together to assemble the bikes, which would be donated to an organization that serves low-income children.

"I recently attended an event where they incorporated CSR by having us pack school supplies into backpacks for children who are less fortunate," says O'Leary. "This was a great way to network and socialize while providing a service as well." She does add a word of caution, however: "CSR can be a great addition to the event, but only when clients are allowed to be paired up with vendors while working on a certain task."

Today's event participants crave gatherings that are more experiential in nature. A great way to make a networking event feel more like an experience is to add a theme. "(Recently) I was given the task of planning an event for 1,100 people in conjunction with a large conference in San Diego," says Hicks. "The conference and our event was scheduled for the middle of August, right in the heart of the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio. I knew I wanted to capitalize on that excitement. "With the Olympic fanfare and theme song playing as they walked into the rooms, our attendees were greeted with two giant screens livestreaming the Olympics. We had five different food stations, each representing food from the five Olympic continents (the Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia). Our guests loved it! They could mingle as they tried each of the different food stations. We had a GIF booth (complete with props) that our attendees thoroughly enjoyed. And we had the Olympics on in the background, which helped the flow of conversation."

Another option is to make a networking event something fun and out of the ordinary. "A networking event can be anything — an interactive show, a sporting event, a healthy activity such as a group fitness class," says Medoff with BCD Meetings & Events. "As long as there is an environment for discussion and collaboration, the sky is the limit."

More and more large events are creating networking zones where people can meet each other informally between meetings. Oftentimes these centers have soft seating and charging stations, which makes them a nice place for people to relax when they have down time. But they can be slightly more structured as well.

"You can do something as simple as putting puzzles and games on the table, so as people are going on their breaks, they'll sit down and work on a puzzle together and get to know each other," says Hobbs. "We also do little ad-hoc lightning sessions. I'll have big whiteboards out there and someone might put up a topic they want to talk about and when they'll be in that area to talk about it."

No matter what type of networking event you plan, make sure you follow up with attendees and get their feedback. "Asking attendees directly what they experienced as successes or failures sets you up to improve future events," says Manzanares. That may be the best thing you can do to craft successful gatherings in the future.

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Destination

Colorful Colorado

Vibrant and Unique Meeting Experiences Abound, From the Mile High City to Mountain Towns

By Christine Loomis

With its abundance of new restaurants, hotels and venues; sunny days galore; and an active, outdoor lifestyle that draws award-winning chefs as well as entrepreneurs and innovators in technology, medicine and a variety of other trending industries, Colorado is on the move. It's one of the nation's healthiest, economically strong and most desirable states, according to polls including the 2017 rankings by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Urban venues and far-flung mountain towns provide a dynamic combination for savvy planners. Here are just a few of them.

Colorado Springs

Colorado Springs doesn't play second fiddle to Denver. It has its own assets, including enviable growth and economic development paired with history, mountains, a training center for elite Olympic athletes and the presence of the United States Air Force Academy and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).

Among the city's well-known resorts is the inimitable Broadmoor, which opened in 1918. Yet it's not necessarily top of mind for incentive programs, as Eric Czerlonka, principal creative director with Czerlonka Productions, points out.

"It's not uncommon for my clients to immediately consider oceanfront locations for their incentives," he says. "However we've recently seen a shift in this pattern. I believe the trend is heading toward locations that offer unique experiences."

Czerlonka says the goal "is for attendees to leave thinking, 'Wow, that was amazing. I don't think I would have considered going there on my own.' We want to introduce them to different locations and experiences, and The Broadmoor and Colorado Springs deliver that. Where else can you host an event that allows your guest to meet and pet a coyote or a wolf?"



Kristin Grunewald, Senior Operations Manager
RMC, Denver, CO

"Denver and the surrounding area have unlimited opportunities for unique indoor and outdoor activities, sporting events, a plethora of hotels of every caliber (and)... optimal meeting space."

"The beauty of the resort," he adds, "its surroundings and the service are key to the success of the program."

Activities are another important element. "The Broadmoor offers luxury shops right on property, golf and amazing restaurants. The location makes several day-time activities accessible. Seven falls, the resort's private fly-fishing camp, Garden of the Gods and the Pikes Peak Cog Railway are just a few of the experiences that groups gravitate toward."

The Broadmoor's three Wilderness Experience properties: The Ranch at Emerald Valley, Cloud Camp and Fishing Camp provide a unique range of activities for teambuilding and incentive experiences. And in fall 2016, The Broadmoor opened The Estate House, a lavish 12,000-sf historic mansion designed during the 1920s that is perfect for small private parties and receptions. Overall, The Broadmoor features 185,000 sf of function space, including the 60,000-sf Broadmoor Hall and 62 meeting rooms.

Broadmoor amenities include three championship golf courses, a year-round tennis program, a Forbes Five Star spa and fitness center as well as 26 retail boutiques. There are more than 20 restaurants, cafés and lounges, including the Penrose Room, Colorado's only Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond restaurant.

Another plus for Colorado Springs and The Broadmoor is ease of access, whether groups fly into the Springs or Denver. "Transfers from Colorado Springs to The Broadmoor are very convenient and the close proximity allows you to manage transportation costs," Czerlonka says. "And for those who fly into Denver, we've found that the drive to Colorado Springs is one that is full of amazing views and our guests don't mind the 90 minutes to the resort."

Among the positives at The Broadmoor, Czerlonka says, are "the flexibility of our sales manager and ease of planning. In addition, our attendees loved the beehive on property. It's a fun place for attendees to go."

Czerlonka's group had daily general sessions and evening events at the resort. "We had plenty of space, which allowed us to be creative in our meeting sets. Wi-Fi was reliable, food wonderful and menus creative. You will not be disappointed with the service or product provided by the resort."

In the end, challenges were limited to client hesitation.

Fall foliage below the peaks of
Maroon Bells in Aspen, Colorado.

Credit: C2 Photography

"Colorado Springs should be on everyone's short list when sourcing properties and offsite locations."



Katie Sullivan, Event Production Director
Planitamaha, Omaha, NE

"The only challenge I faced was convincing my clients to consider the destination for an incentive," Czerlonka says. "Once I got them to The Broadmoor they understood it, and the rest was easy!"

Katie Sullivan, event production director with Planitamaha, a regional and national meetings and events company, is also a fan of Colorado Springs and The Broadmoor.

She says Kiewit Building Group loved it so much in 2017 they wanted to return for the 2018 meeting with 550 attendees. "Colorado Springs offers great airlift for some attendees. We also have a large population in Denver so it is easy for them to make the short trip south or for those flying into Denver to get to the property. By holding the meeting in the 'off season,' we are able to obtain amazing rates and an incredible overall experience for our attendees."

She calls Colorado Springs a "hidden gem" with options for every type of client or group. "Colorado Springs should be on everyone's short list when sourcing properties and offsite locations," she says.

"We worked closely with the U.S. Olympic Training Center for an offsite activity we organized. USOTC had amazing service and attention to detail helping us to create a custom day consisting of a tour, demonstrations, lunch and athlete interactions. Our visit was shortly before the Winter Olympics, an exciting time to be on the campus."

As for The Broadmoor, Sullivan calls it a "one-stop shop with great meeting space as well as lavish accommodations and endless entertainment options and activities at your

fingertips. Everyone we work with at The Broadmoor is beyond fantastic."

The Broadmoor is just one of the city's superb hotels. Colorado Springs is a dynamic destination with multiple lodging options for planners. Among them are also Antlers Hotel and The Mining Exchange, a Wyndham Grand Hotel & Spa. That's where Kara Lawrence, co-president and CEO of Alert Management Systems brought 110 attendees in November for the company's annual conference and training session for users.

"Our company is headquartered in Colorado Springs. Our business is software for the rental industry. We offer an annual three-day training event to gather clients from all over the country to see our new features, get training, network and vote on future enhancements for Alert Management Systems. We primarily hold the event in Colorado Springs because half our staff lives here, making it convenient."

Colorado Springs itself is part of the draw. "Many restaurants across the city have private meeting rooms for smaller gatherings, and we have top-notch hotels to accommodate large groups. For our group, it's important for our hotel to provide reasonably priced hotel rooms and for us to be able to hold our entire event within the venue. We need to keep everyone together for a cohesive function," Lawrence says.

"Since Colorado Springs is a smaller city compared to Denver or other large cities, we've found that the price of hotel rooms and catering for our event is very reasonable. We've quoted the event at different venues in Denver and our cost would increase substantially. We'd have to pass that cost on to our clients, which would be unpopular."

Lawrence says many of the attendees combine the event with a few days of vacation. "They visit our city's popular attractions, such as the Cog Railway to Pikes Peak, Garden of the Gods, U.S. Air Force Academy and the U.S. Olympic Training Center. Or they get in a few days of skiing in the mountains."

Lawrence attributes much of the success of the event to outstanding service provided at the host hotels they've used. "For the past several years, we've held our event at the Mining Exchange or Antlers Hotel in downtown. Both hotels have done an amazing job with managing our event's need for function space, room availability and meals. Our clients con-



Experiences such as Fishing Camp, along with its unique dining hall (l), are offered at The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs.

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tinue to come back every year, which is a testament not only to the success of our staff hosting a robust event, but the success of our host hotel." In recent years the conference has been located primarily downtown. "Our clients have enjoyed the quaint downtown, which has a fun nightlife. After hours, they've been known to frequent anything from Rendezvous Cigar Bar and Cocktail Lounge to Cowboys Country & Western Bar. While our attendance at early morning training sessions may be sparse, we're thrilled that our guests are enjoy-

"Many restaurants across the city (Colorado Springs) have private meeting rooms for smaller gatherings, and we have top-notch hotels to accommodate large groups."



Kara Lawrence, Co-president and CEO
Alert Management Systems, Colorado Springs, CO

ing themselves. Steps away from our host hotels, Colorado Springs offers a diverse selection of restaurants, shops and bars that aren't a part of our main event but are a popular attraction to our clients."

Next year, they're going to try a different area. "For 2018, we're moving our event to the new Great Wolf Lodge in the northern area of Colorado Springs," Lawrence says. "Outside the water park hotel, the area is home to fun attractions such as Overdrive Raceway, Summit Interquest Bowling and LaserTag, and many restaurants and bars. Our clients will be able to entertain themselves after our event has concluded each day."

All sessions of the conference are held at the base hotel, though small groups do hold dinners at local restaurants. "The restaurants in downtown Colorado Springs are easily able to accommodate our smaller groups of five

to 15, and we're always pleased with the food and service," Lawrence says.

Lawrence calls The Mining Exchange and Antlers Hotel successes. "Both hotels are downtown. This is very convenient for our clients who fly into Colorado Springs and don't want to rent a car because everything is in walking distance. The staff from the front desk to sales to catering has been absolutely delightful in all the hotels we've worked with. Their competence and professionalism shine a spotlight on Colorado Springs' capabilities as a destination for events."

The design of The Mining Exchange is a plus. "The hotel is a mining exchange from the old pioneer days in the West. The designers of the hotel took this into consideration and the old vaults and other interesting décor were left intact, which adds tremendously to the unique feeling of the hotel. The guest rooms are on the small side, but they're exquisitely appointed."

Lawrence says staff at both hotels has worked to make the event seamless for the guests. She says a primary concern is having enough hotel rooms to accommodate the group. "With a boutique hotel like the Mining Exchange, we were able to secure an overflow block of rooms at Antlers Hotel, walking distance to the Mining Exchange. Additionally, our group expects a discount from published rates since we're taking up a significant portion of rooms during the week."

It's also imperative, Lawrence adds, "that our group is served tasty food at a reasonable price. If the food leaves something to be desired, it reflects poorly on our company and our event."

Fortunately, the catering for both hotels has been good. "We're able to choose our menus in a reasonable amount of time ahead of the conference, and the Mining Exchange in particular went above and beyond when we had more guests than RSVP'd," she notes.

Wi-Fi is a critical element. "Business owners and managers attend our event every year, and it's important for them to be able to stay connected to their businesses back home. I can't

emphasize enough how important a good Wi-Fi signal is to our clients. Although it seems silly, our company is criticized in our conference evaluations if the Wi-Fi at the hotel is crummy," Lawrence says.

The company's decision-makers actually tested the signal at Great Wolf Lodge, so they know there are no issues for this year's conference.

Lawrence says that her biggest challenge is keeping the conference fresh in the same location year after year. "That's why we look at different hotels every few years. I've been working with this conference for 10 years and we're moving to our third hotel in the area. Fortunately, Colorado Springs is experiencing tremendous growth, giving us new opportunities to accommodate our large group."

Her advice to planners considering the area: "Don't forget to schedule some time in our beautiful city. Our natural beauty is unparalleled."

Denver

An astonishing 245 restaurants opened in Denver in 2017, some helmed by nationally and internationally notable chefs. Six hotels opened in downtown or the Cherry Creek neighborhood in 2017 and seven are currently on track to open this year, with more in the pipeline for this year and next. For planners, that means it's possible to return to the Mile High City over and over and still give attendees something entirely new.

Kristin Grunewald, senior operations manager with RMC (Resorts, Mountains, Cities), a DMC serving Denver and beyond, calls Denver an amazing city for corporate and incentive groups of all shapes and sizes.

"Denver and the surrounding area have unlimited opportunities for unique indoor and outdoor activities, sporting events, a plethora of hotels of every caliber, optimal meeting spaces and venues and so much more," she says. "Denver International Airport is centrally located in the U.S. with over 190 direct flight destinations and more than 1,500 flights per day. Denver is also a hop, skip and jump from the mountain towns for a great weekend hike or skiing in the mountains."

Grunewald notes that RMC helps with in-hotel and offsite



Sarah Heredia, Sales Manager
DSC, an AlliedPRA Company, Avon, CO

"Guests can enjoy a scenic gondola ride from Vail Village half way up the mountain to The 10th, a stunning mountain lodge that offers breathtaking views, amazing cuisine and a private fireworks show."

events from catering and décor to transportation, VIP services and manifest management to amenities for attendees. Activities are as diverse as fly-fishing and teambuilding.

If clients want it, it can be done. "One group was provided with arrival and departure transportation to and from DIA via specified manifest. They also required charging furniture at the host hotel to be branded with fathead logos. They had an onsite welcome reception where we provided Rocky Mountain chic décor along with local bluegrass entertainers."

On the second night, the group went to popular bar-and-game venue Punch Bowl Social for a casual, fun atmosphere, Grunewald says. "For that event, we managed the transportation for 700 guests, food-station menus and all of the games the venue offers."

Spouses had their own daytime activities, ranging from Board & Brush for DIY crafts paired with wine to Cherry Creek shopping tours. "The final night," Grunewald notes, "was a formal affair at the Denver Broncos' stadium. Guests had drinks and hors d'oeuvres on the field and went on private, behind-the-scenes tours. The event concluded with a formal dinner and band on the club level of the stadium."

For a group of about 1,200 arriving in May, Grunewald says RMC is providing 13 different tours highlighting Denver's top venues and tour stops. "Among them will be a beer tour at three local breweries and a history tour that will include the Molly Brown House, Union Station and History Colorado Center, among others. Another tour will take guests through Denver's art neighborhoods, and yet another will show off



Credits: ETC Creative Services LLC/C2 Photography



Sleigh ride at Pine Creek Cookhouse (l) and snowmobiling on Maroon Creek Road (above) in Aspen.



Vail Village at dusk.

Credit: DSC, an AlliedPRA Company

grandeur that is Vail and Beaver Creek — world-class skiing, luxury hotels, top restaurants and live entertainment plus activities that get people outside and into the mountains. Summer meetings come at a lower price tag than winter meetings. The weather is warm and the sky is blue. Bring your group to the mountains to re-energize and re-inspire them. Move breakout sessions outside and be sure to build in time for a teambuilding event or group activities.”

Among Vail and Beaver Creek’s assets, she says, are several luxury hotels and a large number of activities for groups. “Guests can enjoy a scenic gondola ride from Vail Village half way up the mountain to The 10th, a stunning mountain lodge that offers breathtaking views, amazing cuisine and a private fireworks show.” In terms of teambuilding, “Guests can participate in a customized teambuilding activity at 4 Eagle Ranch, a former 1800s homesteading ranch, followed by a chuckwagon barbecue.”

Beyond skiing, Heredia notes, “Vail and Beaver Creek are home to exceptional venues for performing arts. While our communities are small, our access to international performers for ballet and symphony and to A-list entertainers is incredible. We can provide exclusive meet-and-greet experiences at performance venues along with backstage access for corporate groups.”

A recent group was based at Hotel Talisa, one of the newest luxury properties with 285 rooms and more than 40,000 sf of space. “The welcome reception took place in the hotel’s well-appointed public spaces. Guests flowed between the Fireside Lounge and Living Room, enjoying a crafted Colorado menu that included many locally sourced ingredients. Following the reception, guests were invited onto the Gore Creek Terrance for s’mores and a tasting of locally distilled spirits while overlooking Gore Creek and Vail Mountain.”

Heredia’s advice to planners considering Vail is to “plan early in order to ensure the best group rates possible and build free time into the program so that guests are able to explore the mountain village and enjoy the many outdoor activities this destination has to offer.”

Fort Collins

Fort Collins, about 60 miles north of Denver, is the home of Colorado State University and has already experienced much change and growth.

In December, the Elizabeth Hotel opened in Old Town with a rooftop bar among its attributes. A 6,000-sf restaurant, Union, is set to open this year, while The Exchange, which will include restaurants, CopperMuse Distillery, shops and an open-air private plaza, is slated to launch this month. In February, the newly transformed Washington’s bar became the city’s newest music venue, with an impressive slate of performers already scheduled for 2018.

Wherever you set your meeting or incentive in Colorado, there’s a spot that will work for you and your clients. Take the time to explore the options and then surprise attendees with a setting they wouldn’t have thought of.

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our zoo, the Museum of Nature & Science and our botanic gardens. There will be something for everyone!”

Among the hotels opening this year in Denver are The Ramble Hotel and The Source Hotel, both independents launching this spring in the burgeoning RiNo (River North) Art District. A Staybridge Suites, Element Hotel by Marriott and Hilton Garden Inn will open in 2018, along with The Jacquard Hotel in Cherry Creek and Origin Red Rocks, set to open this summer in Golden, Colorado, near Denver’s famous Red Rocks Amphitheatre park and concert venue.

Restaurants of note to recently open include Ulteira, an intimate 50-seat restaurant in Union Station serving Spanish and Portuguese fare; Italy-centric Tavernetta near Union Station from the team at nationally acclaimed Frasca in Boulder; and Señor Bear, a pan-Latin eatery in the Highlands neighborhood, already on reviewers’ best-in-Denver lists.

Aspen and Snowmass

Among Colorado’s premier incentive destinations, Aspen and Snowmass continue to add to their collective offerings. In Snowmass, the Limelight Snowmass, a 99-room hotel scheduled to open this fall, will include a new restaurant and a children’s game area. It will provide ski in/out access to the slopes.

In Aspen, Hotel Jerome will add new event space in June totaling 735 sf and opening onto the courtyard. Also in June, Aspen Meadows Resort will launch a new pavilion, including an outdoor deck space, and the resort’s reception center will be renovated. W Aspen is slated to open spring 2019 with 88 guest rooms. The 12,000-sf rooftop bar and pool will provide a draw for groups.

Vail and Beaver Creek

Sarah Heredia with DSC, an AlliedPRA Company based in Avon, Colorado, points out that Vail and Beaver Creek have two unique seasons for corporate groups. “There is no ‘best’ time to meet in Vail or Beaver Creek. Each season offers an entirely different experience. Winter guests experience the

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Orlando *in* **overdrive**

A Meetings Mecca Always on the Move With New Experiences and Inspiring Spaces

By John Buchanan

No meeting destination in the U.S. is more popular with corporate meeting planners than Orlando. And that is true, in large part, because no other destination works harder to continually reinvent itself, or focuses more relentlessly on the key factors that are most important to planners.

Michael McMyne, vice president at Raleigh, North Carolina-based Ortho Dermatologics, a division of pharmaceutical company Valeant, has used Orlando multiple times in recent years. He also considers it one of the country's best meeting destinations. "I like destinations that present opportunities for small groups of attendees to go offsite and do interesting things that promote teambuilding and moments of personal growth," McMyne says. "And the city that comes to mind for me when I think of those factors is Orlando. That's why we've done numerous meetings there at numerous hotels over the last few years."

Maria Taylor, CMP, senior corporate events planner at Huron Consulting Group in Chicago, has been taking meeting groups to Orlando multiple times each year for more than 15 years. She has a 125-attendee meeting coming up in late April at the Four Seasons Orlando. "One of the main reasons my attendees and I like Orlando so much, and go there so often, is the climate, because at the times we host most of our meetings in Orlando, it's cold where our attendees are based. So for us, the warm weather is a perk. Another reason is that when we hold meetings, we require a lot of meeting space, including a lot of breakout space. And Orlando has a number of excellent properties that can accommodate us."

Both Taylor and McMyne cite Orlando's exceptional airlift as key factors in their loyalty to the destination.

"The airlift into Orlando is great," Taylor says. "There are many flights in and out for our attendees, and that makes it very convenient for our attendees. For example, we generally start our opening general session at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. And that allows many of our attendees to catch a morning flight in. And the same goes for the afternoons when we end the meetings. The Orlando airport is also very easy to get into and out of. The ease of getting through the airport is another factor that my attendees and I like about doing meetings in Orlando."

McMyne adds, "The airlift into Orlando was significant factor in our decision, and not only for its ease, but also because of the size of the airport, the number of air carriers who have a presence there is just tremendous. That means that the number of daily non-stop flights from around the country is excellent. And those flights also provide great affordability. The airport also provides a very good experience for attendees from the time they touch down to the time they board their transportation to the hotel."

Exceptional Hotel Inventory

Orlando enjoys another important practical benefit. Because it ranks as the No. 1 meetings and family vacation destination in the U.S., there's an exceptional range and diversity of hotel product.

Among the city's premier meeting properties is the Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort, whose two individual but interconnected hotels — the Swan and the Dolphin — comprise a total of 2,200 rooms, making it Orlando's largest meeting venue. Featuring 330,000 sf of meeting space and

"We require a lot of meeting space, including a lot of breakout space. And Orlando has a number of excellent properties that can accommodate us."

Maria Taylor, CMP, Senior Corporate Events Planner
Huron Consulting Group, Chicago, IL

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“When you do a meeting in Orlando... you know they are going to have an experience they’ll remember.”

Michael McMyne, V.P.
Ortho Dermatologies
Raleigh, NC

exemplary service, the hotel is perennially ranked as one of the city’s best meeting properties. Last year, Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin completed a multiyear, \$140 million renovation in which all of the resort’s 2,267 guest rooms received a facelift, as did the convention space and the lobby on the Dolphin side of the hotel.

Another of Orlando’s most popular and renowned meeting hotels is the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate. The sprawling and serene resort, which is acclaimed for its exceptional F&B and also its superb meeting support services, features three championship golf courses.

McMyne used the property in late January for a six-day, five-night annual Masters Summit sales meeting for 400 attendees. “I wanted a hotel that has a staff that will make my attendees feel like they are in a very small boutique hotel, but one that operates like and delivers the service level of a large hotel,” he says. “I also wanted a property that had modern meeting space that was equipped for interactive training. And Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate met all of those requirements.”

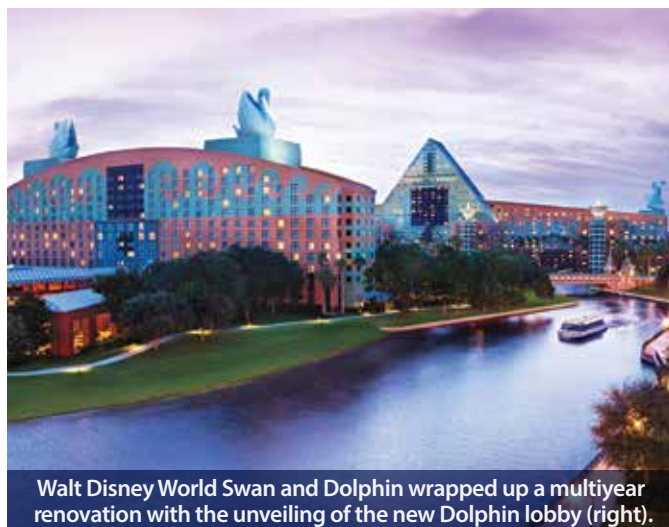
After his meeting, he had particularly high praise for the resort’s food and beverage offerings. “When you host meetings, the number one thing you get back on post-event surveys

is feedback about the food,” McMyne says. “And if the food is not good, that is always the biggest complaint about the meeting. For the meeting at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, I’ve never seen a group of attendees so satisfied with the food. And in addition to the quality of the food, that satisfaction also means the range of options and the amount of food. And the levels of attention to detail and the service were also phenomenal.”

McMyne also praised the hotel’s meeting space, housed in a stand-alone, state-of-the-art conference center. “It is fantastic,” he says. “And what makes it special is that they operate it as a conference center. But at the same time, it is still very convenient to the hotel. The space is fresh. The lighting is very good. And you really get a feel for Florida when you’re there. It’s a first-class facility, with great technology.”

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate provided what McMyne calls “a perfect balance of customer service, uniqueness in terms of its facilities and opportunities for us to conduct a truly first-class meeting on a reasonable budget. The property itself is great. But it’s the people who work there who were responsible for my choice. I never go to the same destination twice, back-to-back, but based on the quality of the hotel and the quality of the service, we’re now talking with them about going back.”

In fall 2017 Omni Orlando completed a \$40 million expansion project which added 23,000 sf of additional pool deck and recreational space, installation of Kissimmee’s only resort wave pool and a new 93-room property villa building. The resort’s Trevi’s Restaurant was redesigned to include an outdoor garden terrace and bar. The expansion also added 100,000 sf of expanded event lawn and conference center space at the



Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin wrapped up a multiyear renovation with the unveiling of the new Dolphin lobby (right).



Credits: WDW Swan and Dolphin Resort



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Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate's recent expansion included 100,000 sf of new space at the Osceola Conference Center.

Osceola Conference Center. The 862-room resort offers a total of more than 248,000 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting space, 36 holes of championship golf, the Mokara Spa and more.

Another resort-style property that receives high marks from meeting planners, and a lot of repeat business, is the Villas of Grand Cypress Orlando, a luxurious 1,500-acre resort whose accommodations include spacious Club Suites and elegant villas with up to four bedrooms. The property's world-class amenities include golf courses — the 27-hole North/South/East course and an 18-hole New Course that features classic Scottish links — designed by Jack Nicklaus. The facility also boasts an Academy of Golf training center. The property's Executive Meeting Center, renovated in the fall of 2015, offers four individual meeting rooms that total 7,200 sf of space and can be further divided into eight rooms. The meeting rooms surround an open atrium and overlook a scenic garden terrace. The property also offers 10,500 sf of outdoor event space.

Taylor has used Villas of Grand Cypress multiple times in the last several years. Her last meeting there was a four-day, three-night educational conference for 75 attendees in February. For the meetings she places there, the property is absolutely ideal, Taylor says. "For the programs we have hosted there over the last several years, we pretty much take over their entire meeting space," she says. "It's just perfect for those particular meetings. So it is a very intimate meeting for us. And we can brand the property as ours while we're there."

She highlights the resort's top-quality F&B as a critical factor in her loyalty. For the February meeting, the company

held all of its meals onsite. "The food and beverage is phenomenal," Taylor says. "We do an attendee survey after every meeting. And Villas of Grand Cypress always gets very, very high marks for its F&B."

But the level of service she and her attendees get there is even more important, she says. "The staff at Villas of Grand Cypress," she says, "is probably the best I have ever worked with."

Yet another of Orlando's popular meeting hotels is the 28-acre DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld. McMyne has used the property and he gives it a glowing review. Located at SeaWorld Orlando, the property features stylish guest rooms and offers complimentary shuttle service to the SeaWorld parks. It is also conveniently located just minutes from the best dining and biggest attractions. DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld also features a total of 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, which includes three individual conference centers, each with its own ballroom. The hotel recently added a new 20,000-sf Majestic Ballroom as a complement to its 11,840-sf Orange Ballroom, as well as a new lawn function space and outdoor Palm Promenade, divisible into four spaces, including a covered pavilion.

Another major meeting hotel is the Caribe Royale Orlando, featuring one-bedroom suites and two-bedroom villas. The hotel recently completed a multimillion-dollar makeover of its convention center, restaurants and public spaces, and opened the new Calypso Pool Bar and Grille. The hotel's signature restaurant is the AAA Four Diamond-rated Venetian Chop House, which serves exceptional steaks and seafood. The casual Cafe 24 is open 24 hours a day. Grand Caribe Con-



The Villas of Grand Cypress features a 7,200-sf Executive Meeting Center (right) and 10,500 sf of outdoor event space.



Credits: Villas of Grand Cypress

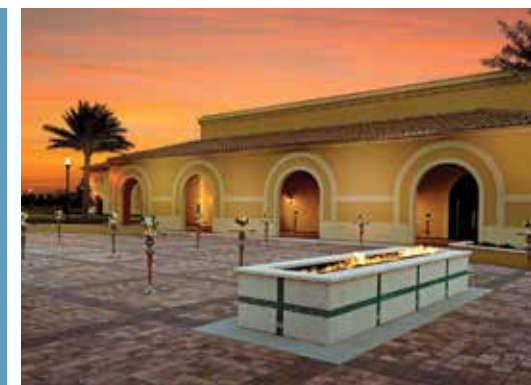
NEW MEETING SPACE THAT DEFIES CONVENTION.



With a \$40 million expansion, Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate now features new indoor and outdoor meeting space, event space, studio suites, a market-style restaurant and expanded pool areas—including Orlando's only resort wave pool.



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



MEETING SPACE

The Osceola Conference Center now features six new flexible breakout rooms with a fresh, sleek design, and a 6,500-square foot Grand Salon, designed for special events and weddings, highlighted by a Terrace and Patio that offers groups the option of an event lawn, fire pit and promenade, ideal for hosting outdoor evening events.

ACCOMMODATIONS

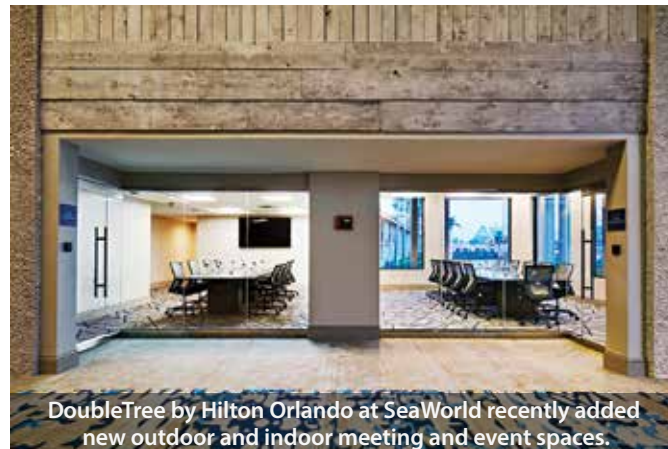
With 862 total guest rooms, groups have a range of choices from the deluxe and premier accommodations, luxury two and three bedroom villas, and the all new Sunset Lodge and Suites, a new three-story building comprised of 93 spacious, upscale studio suites and connecting guest rooms.

RECREATION AND AMENITIES

ChampionsGate is home to 36 holes of Greg Norman designed Golf and the David Leadbetter Golf Academy World Headquarters. In addition to superb golf, guests enjoy 15 sprawling acres of pools and recreation highlighted by Orlando's only resort wave pool. Ten on-site restaurants and a signature Mokara Spa round out the resort's amenities.

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DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld recently added new outdoor and indoor meeting and event spaces.

Credits: DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld

vention Center features a 40,000-sf Grand Sierra Ballroom and 26,000-sf Caribbean Ballroom, as well as 29 breakout rooms and two executive boardrooms. Post-meeting, attendees can unwind on a new 1.5-mile paved running and bike trail, the Island Spa or the two-story fitness center.

Universal Orlando's five onsite hotels — Loews Portofino Bay Hotel, the Hard Rock Hotel, Loews Royal Pacific Resort, Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort and Loews Sapphire Falls Resort — currently offer a total of 5,600 rooms. The Loews Meeting Complex — comprised of Loews Sapphire Falls Resort and Loews Royal Pacific Resort, which are connected by bridge — offers groups and planners 295,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 97,000 sf of outdoor space. Plus, all five hotels are within walking distance or a quick shuttle ride to the Universal theme parks and Universal CityWalk, the resort's shopping, dining and entertainment district.



"There is also always something new to talk about when it comes to the kinds of experiences you can have in Orlando. And our theme parks are a big part of that."

Fred Shea, S.V.P., Sales and Services
Visit Orlando

New Hotels

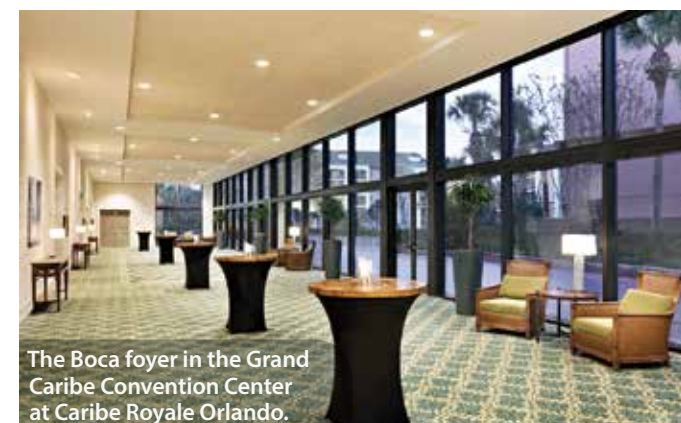
Despite the accolades its current hotel inventory generates, Orlando never rests on its laurels, notes Fred Shea, senior vice president of sales and service at Visit Orlando. A number of new hotels are now under development.

"Universal is building two new hotels, a 2,200-room and 600-room property, to join its multiple existing Loews-branded properties," Shea says. "The new hotels will be located on the site of the former Wet 'n' Wild water park located adjacent to the Universal complex. Once the new hotels are com-

pleted, there will then be total of 9,000 hotel rooms in the Universal complex."

One of those properties is expected to open in August: The new Aventura Hotel at Universal will feature a 16-story gleaming glass tower with 600 guest rooms, and the first ever rooftop bar and grill, Bar 17 Bistro, on Universal property.

A new JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort with 50,000 sf of meeting space will be completed in the early part of the first quarter of 2020 in the popular Bonnet Creek



The Boca foyer in the Grand Caribe Convention Center at Caribe Royale Orlando.



Credits: Caribe Royale Orlando



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The new Aventura Hotel at Universal will feature a rooftop bar and grill, Bar 17 Bistro (right).



Credits: Universal's Aventura Hotel

The Delaney Hotel, opening this spring, is a new 54-room boutique hotel in the SoDo — south of downtown — district of Orlando, and will offer unique high-tech conveniences for guests such as remote check-in, digital tablet-based concierge services in every room, smartphone room keys, and smart TVs.

Margaritaville Resort Orlando, a new waterfront destination resort, will feature 175 rooms, 1,000 Margaritaville-themed vacation homes and 300 timeshare units. A new dining and entertainment district is also planned, along with a 12-acre water park, a wellness center and more. It is expected to open this year.

Theme Park News

The thing that makes Orlando unique and empowers it to retain its status as the country's top family destination is its

famous theme parks. They also are a mecca for meeting and convention groups, as all of the major theme parks offer event planning and park buyouts for spectacular special events.

"One of the things we hear so often from meeting planners is their interest in the experience attendees will have in the destination," Shea says. "And that's a subject that we always have a lot to talk about when it comes to Orlando. There is also always something new to talk about when it comes to the kinds of experiences you can have in Orlando. And our theme parks are a big part of that."

"Universal is now adding a new 'Fast & Furious Supercharged' venue at its Universal Studios entertainment complex," Shea says. "It will take guests on a high-octane adventure into the world of underground racing, right alongside stars from the 'Fast & Furious' films."

Other new happenings at Universal include the recent opening of the water theme park Volcano Bay next to Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort. Inspired by various Polynesian islands and cultures, and anchored by the 200-foot "Krakatau," Volcano Bay is replete with a host of water-based thrills as well as after-hours private event options.

Universal Orlando also is offering new Meeting Enhancements including characters (such as the Minions), customizable performers and unique entertainment elements to engage attendees and help deliver specific messages and reinforce conference theming.

"There is also quite a bit of other theme park and activity venue news," Shea says. "Infinity Falls, a new rainforest river rapids ride, is coming to SeaWorld Orlando this summer, featuring the world's tallest river rapid drop."



Loews Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando.



Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando.

Credits: Universal Orlando Resort



Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando.



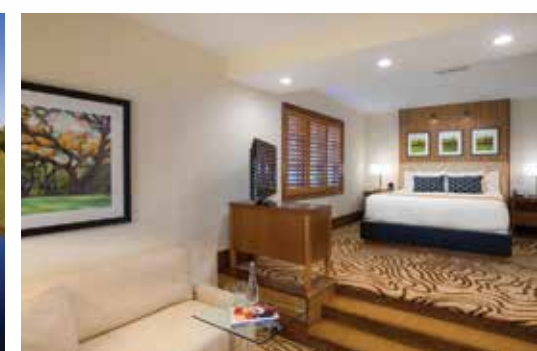
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Credit: JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort

The new JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort will debut in 2020.

SeaWorld recently debuted its Electric Ocean after-dark experience, featuring bioluminescent lighting and glowing sea creatures, music, fireworks and DJ entertainment. A customized experience can be arranged for groups. Also new at SeaWorld is the park's first digitally enhanced ride experience, Kraken Unleashed, a virtual reality (VR) roller coaster experience.

"The Great Lego Race VR Coaster will debut as the first (Lego) virtual reality roller coaster. It will open in place of the Project X roller coaster at Legoland Florida Resort, reimagined with a new story plus special effects," Shea says.

"Nona Adventure Park," he continues, "will be a new water sports park featuring an inflatable, floating obstacle course, with wakeboards pulled along by cables and a 60-foot climbing tower with a ropes course. The park is scheduled to open this summer in the Lake Nona area."

Dining and Entertainment

Over the past five years, the single biggest — and most important — factor in Orlando's growth as a meeting destination has been the steady evolution of its dining scene.

"Five years ago," Shea says, "we were getting complaints from meeting planners that there were not enough good restaurants in Orlando. Now that concern, that perception, is completely gone." Orlando, he says, is now regarded as a fine-dining destination.

That status is thanks, in part, to the James Beard Award-nominated chefs who now operate acclaimed local restaurants. Kathleen Blake owns and serves as chef at The Rusty Spoon in downtown Orlando. Brandon McGlamery serves as executive chef at Prato and Luma on Park in Winter Park, as well as Luke's Kitchen and Bar in Maitland. James

and Julie Petrakis are the owners and chefs at The Ravenous Pig in Winter Park and Cask & Larder at Orlando International Airport.

Orlando offers a spectacular offsite dining and entertainment complex, Pointe Orlando, located on International Drive near the convention center. Among its restaurants that are popular with groups are Cuba Libre Restaurant & Rum Bar, B.B. King's Blues Club, Maggiano's Little Italy, Lafayette's Music Room, Tommy Bahama and Taverna Opa, which serves acclaimed Greek food and fun.

What makes the Pointe unique, Shea says, is that it offers the opportunity to host a sophisticated dine-around program under one roof.

McMyne took advantage of that opportunity for his re-



Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

Minions greet meeting attendees at Universal Orlando, which offers a slate of Meeting Enhancements with characters and entertainment.

cent meeting. He used B.B. King's, Lafayette's and Tommy Bahamas. He also sent a group of 100 attendees to a buyout of Mango's Tropical Cafe, the Orlando outpost of the world-renowned Mango's that has been a mainstay in South Beach Miami for decades. In just a few years, the new Orlando location — known for its Latin cuisine, creative cocktails and high-energy Latin-themed entertainment reminiscent of Havana in the 1950s — has become one of the most popular offsite dining and entertainment venues in the city.

"The food at Mango's was fantastic," McMyne said. "The facility is beautiful. The entertainment is spectacular. And the service is great."



Credit: Mango's Tropical Cafe



Mango's Tropical Cafe features Latin cuisine and high-energy entertainment.

AN **ALL-NEW** PERSPECTIVE ON MEETINGS AND EVENTS

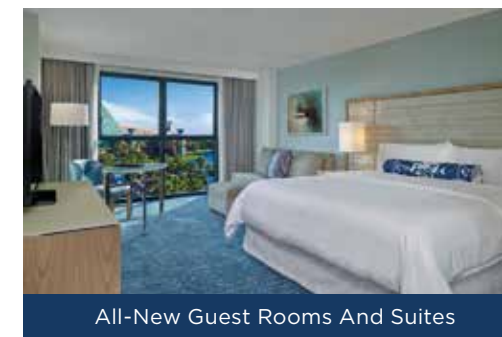


All-New Walt Disney World Dolphin Lobby

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby has undergone a \$12 million re-design, the final stage of a \$150 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort's history. It has completely transformed into a sleek, contemporary space featuring new food and beverage options and offer an inviting area for guests to relax or network. A recipient of the prestigious Meetings & Conventions Hall of Fame Award, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 331,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 86 meeting rooms, and 2,270 guest rooms and suites which feature the Westin Heavenly® Bed. Attendees can also relax in the luxurious Mandara Spa, indulge in one of our 17 world-class restaurants and lounges or enjoy our unique Disney Differences.



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Pointe Orlando in the convention district features a wide range of dining and entertainment options.



Credits: Visit Orlando

Entertainment and attractions outside the theme parks that are popular with corporate groups in Orlando include the Mario Andretti driving school and Topgolf complex. The new Main Event, located in Pointe Orlando near the convention center, is a 25,000-sf, multifaceted dining and entertainment complex that includes activities such as bowling and interactive games, including innovative virtual reality games.

Perhaps the most noteworthy, in terms of activities, is the explosion of “escape rooms” that has occurred along International Drive. Escape rooms pit teams of participants against one another to achieve escape from a “locked” space. They are becoming popular in several major U.S. meeting destinations, including Las Vegas.

New escape room venues in Orlando include The Escape Game Orlando, Escapology Escape Rooms Orlando, America’s Escape Game, MindQuest Live Orlando, The Escape Effect, Lockbusters Escape Game, Breakout Escape Rooms, and The Escape Company. “Meeting planners are always looking for something new and different to do,” Shea says, “and the fact that Orlando now offers an unparalleled range of escape room venues is something that really appeals to them. In addition to being a lot of fun, escape rooms offer a new and innovative form of teambuilding.”

I-Drive 360 is an entertainment complex on the International Drive corridor, which extends from Universal Orlando, down to the Orange County Convention Center and SeaWorld. I-Drive 360 is anchored by the Coca-Cola Orlando Eye,



The new Destination Lounge at the Orange County Convention Center.

Credit: Chad Baumer Photography

a 400-foot-tall observation wheel with enclosed passenger capsules accommodating up to 50 passengers each. The wheel can be rented out for special events. I-Drive 360 also features Sealife Orlando, a marine aquarium and Madame Tussauds wax museum, which is available for group buyouts.

Convention Center

Year after year, the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) ranks as one of the top facilities in the country. After an extensive, multiyear renovation and expansion project, it offers some of the newest and most sophisticated exhibit and meeting space to be found anywhere. It is also known as one of the most technologically advanced and environmentally responsible convention centers in the country.

Its latest offerings, Shea says, are a new Destination Lounge in the North-South Building and Vision Gardens, a hydroponic garden that raises produce for farm-to-table fare served in the facility. “People really like it,” Shea says, “because you can actually see the food being grown.”

Last year, a new pedestrian bridge that connects the West Building to the Grand Hyatt Orlando across the street made its debut. Also in 2017, the OCCC launched a VR-enabled 3-D interactive map, a system that allows meeting planners to virtually explore OCCC’s total of 7 million sf through 360-degree panoramic images, simplifying the search for ideal meeting spaces and breakout rooms.

And the convention center isn’t finished improving: Last summer OCCC officials announced a nearly \$500 million proposal to expand the convention center over a 4½-year construction timeline. The plan calls for building two new additions at the convention center’s North-South Building for a total of 800,000 sf.

Such constant evolution and improvement is what makes Orlando so popular with planners, McMyne says.

“When you do a meeting in Orlando, you know that you are going to be able to find a great hotel at a good price and that the airlift is going to make it easy for people to get there at a reasonable airfare,” he says. “And once they’re there, you know they are going to have an experience they’ll remember. And in those specific ways, Orlando is unlike any other U.S. city.”

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On The Move



PATIN

Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort & Spa just outside Austin, Texas, has announced **Erin Patin** as its new director of sales and marketing. She joins the property from Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa, where she was director of group sales.

Benchmark, a global hospitality company, has appointed **Eric Gavin** as senior vice president of sales and marketing. He returns to Benchmark following serving



GAVIN

as chief marketing officer for Salamander Hotels & Resorts.

The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club in Naples, Florida, has named **David Tyler** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and business development at Rumbling Bald Resort at Lake Lure in Asheville, North Carolina.

Mark Goodwin was promoted to director of sales, catering and conference



TYLER



GOODWIN

services for The Sea Pines Resort in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. He most recently served as director of group sales.

Caesars Entertainment has named **Lisa Gray Messina** as vice president of sales, responsible for leading the Caesars Entertainment sales strategy for meetings and events globally. She was most recently executive director, intermediary group sales with Hilton Worldwide in Las Vegas.



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