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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

Staying Ahead of the Curve

Top Independent Planners
Meeting High Expectations
PAGE 34

Are You Covered?

Protect Yourself and Your
Meeting From Legal Liabilities
PAGE 46

GDPR Compliance Drives New Conversations

PAGE 10



Credit: Al Chaudhri

(Right) Dahlton Bennington, CMP, CMM, Director of Meetings and Incentives at PROfound Planning, with longtime friend and business partner Ruth Hanks, Global Sales/Group, Mandarin Oriental.

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In This Issue

VOLUME 36 NO. 5

MAY 2018

FEATURES

- 16 Coastal Cachet**
Business-friendly Beach Resorts — the Best of Both Worlds
By Christine Loomis
- 22 Is There a Doctor in the House?**
A Planner's Prescription to Maximize HCP Attendance
By Patrick Simms
- 28 Value Destinations**
Land Great Deals and Experiences That May Fly Under Your Radar
By Derek Reveron
- 34 Staying Ahead of the Curve**
Top Independent Planners Meeting High Expectations
By Patrick Simms
- 40 Where Business Meets Pleasure**
These Premier Theme Parks Check All the Boxes
By Ron Bernthal
- 46 Are You Covered?**
Meeting Planning Liability Looms Large
By Maura Keller

DESTINATIONS

- 52 Las Vegas**
Stellar Meeting Experiences On and Off The Strip
By David Swanson
- 60 Miami in Motion**
The City Is Growing, Developing and Ramping Up Its Experiential Quotient
By Christine Loomis

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Publisher's Message** **6 News & Notes**
- 7 Tips & Trends** **9 Snapshots**
- 10 Perspective**
GDPR Compliance Drives New Conversations
By Marty MacKay, DMCP
- 14 Perspective**
A DMC's Perspective on Sustainability
By Jane Scaletta, CIS
- 66 People on the Move**



Credit: Ellen Dallager

A 14-foot high interactive sculpture is a popular selfie station at the Greater Columbus (Ohio) Convention Center. **PAGE 28**



Credit: Caesars Forum

The groundbreaking for Caesars Forum in Las Vegas is set for the second quarter of 2018 — a \$375 million project. **PAGE 52**



Credit: Diego Texeira

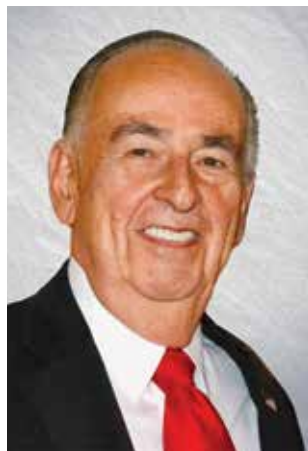
Medical Specialties Distributors' 2018 Innovation & Technology Conference was held at the Fontainebleau Miami Beach. **PAGE 60**

Publisher's Message

Staying Ahead of the Curve

The pursuit of professional excellence is a continuous process, and essential to the endeavor is taking opportunities to learn from industry mentors, such as the independent meeting professionals featured in this issue.

Meeting high expectations and delivering ROI for corporate stakeholders is a tough enough assignment for in-house planners. But independent planners have to figure out how to summit this learning curve all over again for each



new client — and be able to provide a full range of services and demonstrable results for every type of event, whether it's an incentive program, board meeting, trade show, etc. That demands a great breadth of strategic expertise — as exemplified by Dahlton Bennington, CMP, CMM, who graces our cover. Dahlton, director of meetings and incentives at PROfound Planning based in Dania Beach, Florida, is a 20-year veteran of corporate meeting and incentive planning who leads a number of Fortune 500 companies' meetings and incentive programs. "Being able to identify learning opportunities and determining ROI on programs is probably the No. 1 thing (clients are) looking for," she

tells us in our independent planner feature. "At the end of the day, it's about looking at meetings as a strategic tool that leadership of organizations can use to accomplish their goals."

Planner education is invaluable in this regard, and Dahlton notes that MPI's Certificate in Meetings Management is key. The CMM focuses more on the "strategic approach to meetings and what one needs to do to accomplish goals and objectives through meetings and events." Keeping up with technology is a huge part of the process. "It's constantly evolving," she says. "(Clients) are looking for us to have that experience, as they don't necessarily know what to ask for." As every planning pro knows, along with such high expectations comes high accountability.

Industry involvement is another integral part of a meeting professional's education and success, and Dahlton is a leader here, too. As a six-year Incentive Research Foundation Trustee, Executive Board Member and now strong supporter, Dahlton focuses on education and continues to be an advocate for the incentive industry.

For sage advice from Dahlton and other veteran independent planners who model planning excellence, turn to "Staying Ahead of the Curve" on page 34.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harvey Grotzky". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Harvey Grotzky
Publisher

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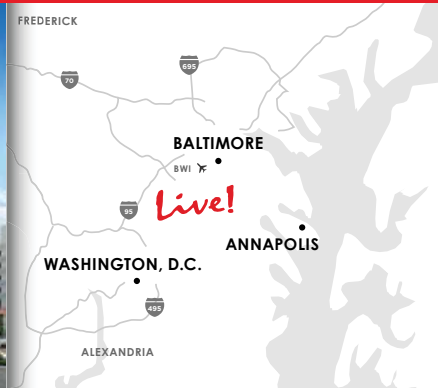
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MGM Springfield to Open in August



SPRINGFIELD, MA — MGM Springfield, New England's first integrated luxury resort and entertainment destination, will open on Friday, August 24, 2018. The resort will commemorate the city's rich history through the preservation and reimagining of its most storied buildings. The boutique-style five-story hotel will feature 250 eclectic guest rooms and 42,500 sf of meeting and event space. Large-scale events will be hosted at the 8,000-seat MassMutual Center. Other offerings include fine dining experiences, a 125,000-sf casino, spa, movie complex, bowling center, Topgolf Swing Suite, rooftop pool, retail and more. www.mgmspringfield.com

New IRF Study: Reward Program Value & Evidence

WASHINGTON, DC — To help businesses maximize the effectiveness of their IRR programs, the Incentive Research Foundation has released Award Program Value & Evidence, a summary of the advantages of non-cash rewards and an examination of how businesses are measuring the program benefits.

The study discusses the role of recognition in IRR initiatives and the broad benefits of cash and non-cash rewards. It then provides an overview of academic research that explains the psychology behind why non-cash rewards are so effective. Award Program Value & Evidence concludes with a discussion of the measurement of the benefits of IRR programs. Key findings and takeaways:

Advantages of non-cash rewards:

- People tend to make utilitarian purchases (e.g., groceries) when given a cash reward. Non-cash rewards (e.g., fun experiences, splurges) can create lasting memories and positive associations.
- According to "The Ikea Effect,"

people put more value on tangible rewards that they have to work toward.

- Non-cash rewards have a trophy value. They are highly visible, and it is more socially acceptable to talk about merchandise or a trip than to brag about a cash incentive.

Measuring incentive, reward and recognition programs:

- Clearly defined, measurable objectives are among the most important success factors in IRR programs.
- Metrics for tangible benefits include decreased staff turnover, increased productivity, sales, revenue, market share, gains in customer satisfaction and customer acquisition.
- While more difficult to measure, metrics for intangible benefits include employee presenteeism and satisfaction.
- An effective ROI analysis compares the full costs of an incentive program to its gains — both tangible and intangible. www.theirf.org

Hilton Santa Barbara Beachfront Resort Debuts

SANTA BARBARA, CA — The Hilton Santa Barbara Beachfront Resort, formerly known as The Fess Parker, a DoubleTree by Hilton Resort, has undergone a complete renovation, with all 360 newly remodeled guest rooms stylishly appointed with ocean and sky-blue tones, driftwood inspired interiors, private balconies or patios.

The hotel offers more than 40,000 sf of flexible space — the largest amount of meeting and event space in the region — ranging from newly renovated indoor/outdoor venues and spectacular outdoor locations. The semi-enclosed Plaza Del Sol boasts 180-degree views of the ocean and a connecting rotunda, perfect for beachside conference gatherings, and the Grand Ball Room and Foyer can host large-scale, indoor events for up to 600 guests.

Centrally located, the landmark property is walking distance from downtown Santa Barbara and easily accessible to Santa Barbara Airport and the Santa Barbara Amtrak Station via complimentary shuttle service. The newly modernized property continues the legacy established by the Fess Parker family while paying homage to the resort's rich history, stunning location and the unique culture of Santa Barbara.

Dining options include locally sourced California cuisine at The Roundhouse and the iconic Fess Parker Wine Tasting Room. Amenities include Spa del Mar, a heated outdoor pool and whirlpool open year-round, 24-hour fitness center, as well as access to authentic local experiences such as a Bike, Bites + Brews tour, horseback riding tour, wine tasting, golf and tennis. www.hilton.com

Tips & Trends

Have You Tried Chatbots?

You may have a few questions regarding Chatbots, the AI interfacing platform for event attendees. It can be difficult to navigate new technologies as they appear and how to best utilize their function in our marketplace. Luckily, we've created the below primer to get you started.

What are Chatbots?

The short answer is that Chatbots are a text-based communication concierge that are programmed to answer simple questions and directives during an event. These questions can be as easy as "What time is dinner tonight?" to more complex requests such as "Can you send me an agenda for Thursday?" Based on the programming up front, it can anticipate guests' needs and be an extension of your team to offload some of the questions that generally tie your team up during an event.

Why use them?

It will free your team up from answering too many repeat questions from guests. It also will be an added element of connection and interaction with guests, as they will never be without a personal attendant to their every question (well...almost every!). Further, if a question comes in after hours or early in the morning, a guest will not have to stress about finding the answer they need — when they need it.

For reference, IMEX Frankfurt's Frank answered a whopping 3,600 questions during one of the busiest times for the IMEX team. Think of the possibilities — having a team member who never forgets, never sleeps and does not require overtime pay!

How do you use them?

The easiest application of Chatbots is through text



message communication. Having your Chatbot connected through texting means a mobile agent is not restricted to a web browser. And, as we know, hotel Wi-Fi being shared by thousands of guests can be a recipe for disaster. By enabling SMS functionality through your Chatbot, attendees now have an agent at their service to answer any text they may send off at any hour of the day.

Chatbots work best with simple commands or questions, as the front-line programming of this AI technology means that there is little wiggle room for improvisation. Chatbots track at around 70 percent success on their first response. With most guests losing their agendas or curious about a guest speaker, these questions can be easily answered by the Chatbot's personalized and customized service to the program.

Are there drawbacks?

As with any new technology, integration and adoption has to come from your staff first. We recommend that staff members know the ins and outs of the product, but also the limitations of Chatbots. There will be questions the AI will be able to answer, yes, but it will not replace the experience of a 20-year veteran. Further to the point of adoption, by uploading as much info into the AI's database up front and doing the heavy work early, you will get more out of the bot later.

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Caesars to Develop Luxury Resort in Puerto Los Cabos

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Entertainment Corporation announced plans to open a non-gaming Caesars Palace resort on beachfront property along the coast of Puerto Los Cabos, Mexico.

The \$200 million luxury beachfront hotel will be developed by Grupo Questro, one of Mexico's preeminent developers with more than 30 years of experience. Caesars Entertainment

will manage the property and receive a licensing and management fee.

The non-gaming luxury beachfront hotel will feature 500 rooms and suites, a 40,000-sf convention center, a 25,000-sf full service spa, three fine-dining restaurants, an array of amenities including an entertainment venue, pools, cabanas, fitness center, tennis courts and access to the two signature golf courses. The property is in the Puerto

Los Cabos Tourist Corridor and the San Jose del Cabo resort city on the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula.

Puerto Los Cabos is a prime market for the expansion of Caesars in North America. The number of airline passengers into the market has risen 40 percent since 2015 with the majority coming from the United States and Canada, followed by Mexico. www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com.

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

LOUISVILLE, KY — The Galt House, Louisville's largest hotel, is joining the Trademark Collection by Wyndham as an independently owned soft-branded property. The flagship hotel, which will begin an \$80 million renovation this June, becomes Wyndham Hotel Group's largest single addition in North America to date with 1,310 rooms. With its hotel roots dating back to 1835, today's two-towered Galt House Hotel, Trademark Collection by Wyndham features seven restaurants and lounges including Rivue Restaurant & Lounge, the world's only rotating rooftop bar, perched 25 stories high, and Jockey Silks Bourbon Bar, featuring more than 150 Kentucky bourbons and assorted whiskeys. The hotel also boasts 53 meeting rooms spanning 130,000 sf of function space.

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



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Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City Announces Grand Opening



ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — The highly anticipated Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City has announced a grand opening date. "The Grand Opening of Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City will set the tone for a new era of entertainment in Atlantic City. Our 500-million-dollar, newly reimagined property will offer something for everyone and we're thrilled to welcome our first guests in June," stated Hard Rock International Chairman & CEO, Jim Allen.

The music-inspired hotel will feature dynamic culinary experiences, superstar performances, sporting events, a beach bar and a spectacular casino complete with more than 2,100 slot machines and 120 table games. The entertainment lineup set to kick off this summer will include A-list talent and performances, such as Amy Schumer and Friends, Florida Georgia Line, Kid Rock plus over 50 shows and events booked for the new casino resort. www.hardrockhotelatlanticcity.com

Snapshots



1-3 The SITE Incentive Summit Americas, now in its third year, took place April 5-8 at Montage Deer Valley, Park City, Utah. The exclusive, invitation-only event brought 120 incentive travel professionals to Utah for a long weekend filled with education, networking and destination immersion. **4-6** More than 170 attendees attended Destinations International's CEO Summit, which took place April 23-26, 2018 in Southampton, Bermuda. **4** (L to r) Alastair Jack, Bermuda Tourism Authority; Sean Masters; Billy Kolber, founder, HospitableMe; Kevin Dallas, president and CEO, Bermuda Tourism Authority. **5** (L to r) Destinations International Chair Tammy Blount-Canavan, FCDME, and president and CEO of the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau; Claire Shipman, women's leadership expert; and Destinations International President and CEO Don Welsh. **6** Don Welsh (third from left) with representatives of DMO services company Simpleview (l to r) Greg Evans, V.P sales and account services; Ryan Georgie, CEO; Richard Reasons, president; Cara Frank, V.P marketing. **7-9** The Global Business Travel Association Foundation's 21st Annual Gala Dinner was held March 19 at Grand Hyatt New York. Attendees networked with industry peers during an evening of fun, fabulous food and entertainment.

Credits: 1-3 SITE; 4-6 Destinations International; 7-9 GBTA

By Marty MacKay, DMCP

GDPR Compliance Drives New Conversations Between Clients and DMCs

On May 25th, the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) becomes enforceable and the magnitude of its implications for the meetings industry is indeed huge. So many aspects of our people-focused business include collecting — and sharing — personal data about clients and event attendees. Names, addresses, phone numbers, birthdates, emails, preferences and more are needed for airport manifests, tour registrations, restaurant reservations, recreation safety waivers, etc. We reuse data from prior events to prepare for the next. We keep in touch via email marketing. All of this and more will be impacted by GDPR's requirements to obtain specific consent from individuals regarding how their data will be collected, managed and stored or deleted. At the core, GDPR is driving new conversations between clients and Destination Manage-

- Does that consent include providing the information to our subcontractors?

Questions Clients Should be Asking Their DMCs:

- What are your Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for securely transmitting data?
- How does your DMC identify and close data control gaps? Or more specifically, how is data securely transferred across all parties involved in our event?

These conversations need to occur at the very beginning of building of a program since the most important aspect of GDPR compliance is consent. This means consent from event attendees that their Personally Identifiable Information (PII) will be shared with event suppliers, including the DMC who will also

“We should not expect initial **GDPR compliance** to be easy or simple.”

ment Companies (DMCs) to ensure compliance. Our team at Hosts Global is diligently preparing our DMCs worldwide for these critical conversations and compliance requirements. As we prepare, we want our clients to rest assured that their people's data will be handled securely, but we need everyone's cooperation to get there — including our clients, so we wanted to share some insight on the conversations and challenges ahead.

New Roles and Responsibilities Require New Client Conversations

Under GDPR, the client/DMC relationship now encompasses the roles of Data Controller (client) and Data Processor (DMC). As such, we have new responsibilities to each other, requiring new conversations to ensure we stay on top of our respective data chains and provide exemplary experiences for our guests.

Questions DMCs Should be Asking Their Clients:

- Have you requested consent from your attendees to send us their personal information?
- How will you be sending the data? Is your method secure?
- Are you sending us more data than you have asked consent to send?

be passing along elements of guest's PII to their subcontractors.

Many of our clients also require registration websites for their events. It is important to make sure you are working with a GDPR-compliant registration provider.

Questions to Ask Your Registration Provider:

- Have you ever posted your privacy policy on a client's registration (e.g., website/registration forms) website or email that is sent from your tool? If so, is this the default mode?
- Have you ever posted your marketing links or “powered by” on a client's registration website or email that is sent from your tool? If so, is this the default mode?
- Does your registration website or email that is sent from your tool use cookies or tracking mechanisms and for what purpose? Is data obtained through cookies, etc. sold or shared data with data marts or any other third-parties without express consent from the client?

It's a lot to wrap your arms around. Ultimately, continuous, open communication and prudent processes will undoubtedly pave the way to a smoother GDPR transition.



Common Myths

“GDPR is specific to EU citizens and my group isn’t from the EU, so this doesn’t affect me”

How can you tell? At Hosts Global, we understand that we don’t (and can’t) know the citizenship of all our event attendees. So, we’re taking a holistic approach to protecting each individual’s data and will work to universally apply new SOPs to every attendee — not just Europeans — going forward.

“I don’t do meetings outside of the United States, so this doesn’t affect me.”

Unfortunately, that isn’t true. If you handle meetings anywhere across the globe where you have EU citizens attending, you must adhere to the GDPR regulations for protecting their privacy.

Expect Hiccups and Hurdles

We should not expect initial GDPR compliance to be

easy or simple. We all store so much data that we never think about. Having to confront legacy data systems, clean them up and manage them in new ways is a monumental undertaking. I know this all too well. Our own Hosts Global website is undergoing revisions to ensure it is GDPR compliant ahead of the deadline. We have work ahead of us. Every time we get one thing done, something else pops up. But we persevere. Temporary hassles spurred by GDPR are far outweighed by the long-term benefits of better data protocols. After all, it’s all about providing our clients and their attendees with the utmost in care, protection and service.

Trust as the New Currency

Though GDPR is a product of the digital age, its success — indeed all of our successes — depends on the enduring, timeless value of effective communication and trusted relationships. We look forward to driving these new conversations with you.

C&IT



Marty MacKay, DMCP

is president, Hosts Global’s Alliance of DMC’s. Marty has spent her entire career mastering the event world. Her professional background began on the client side, where she learned the event business from the ground up while working at a leading fortune 500 company. Since joining Hosts Global in 2013, she has more than doubled the size of the Alliance and introduced best practices and standards across the membership. Marty is the president of ADMEI and leader in the hospitality industry’s focus to drive emergency preparedness.

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Notes FROM THE COAST

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-Joshua

Notes FROM THE COAST



(Who do you want to tell?)

Jane Scaletta, CIS, DMCP

A DMC's Perspective on Sustainability

Click, send — another proposal for DMC services is on its way to a client. I look up from my keyboard and it's a beautiful sunny day in paradise. It's hot already, and Spring has barely started — it's going to be a long hot year. I reach for my glass of water and the sun streaming in from my window hits my glass and the water comes alive, sparkling and dancing. I take a long sip and I'm thankful we have a water cooler in the office to save on using plastic water bottles. Every effort we make in our office toward sustainability is a positive one. From repurposing the many sheets of paper we use for each client's program to recycling our ink cartridges is a step in the right direction in sustainability. It reduces waste. But mostly, we share our passion for sustainability with our clients by offering them ideas or options on ways to leave less of a carbon footprint on our destination.

Should that matter? It does matter and it's time to pay attention to why. I am a Positive Impact Ambassador on SITE's Sustainability Committee. **SITE's goals are to:**

1. Create a committee of like-minded sustainability advocates representing SITE's global footprint.
2. Develop a sustainability charter for SITE to be launched at the annual conference in Bangkok in 2019.
3. Identify how to integrate sustainability into future education certificate programs for SITE.
4. Integrate sustainability into each SITE and SITE Foundation event that is offered to our members in 2018.
5. Create monthly educational content to support this priority and our members.

What does sustainability mean in the MICE market? It is an enduring and balanced approach to social progress, economic activity and environmental responsibility. We need to remember and commit to the three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental and economic.

Why is sustainability important? The short answer, according to Positive Impact, a not-for-profit that provides education, resources and inspiration, is that sustainability makes good business sense.

Positive Impact shares the top five reasons sustainability is identified as positive for business. Sustainability is important because:

1. It will save you money.
2. It will attract key talent to your business.
3. We have limited environmental resources.
4. Your customers care about making a difference.
5. You have a brand to protect.

The tourism and hospitality industry generates the largest waste footprint wherever it goes. Events take a heavy toll on our resources, society and the environment. They can generate significant waste, put a strain on local resources like water or energy or even ignite tensions in local communities.

DMCs, hotels, supplier partners, destinations and companies are seeing the benefits of sustainability and are taking action to implement sustainable practices.

Many DMCs today practice and implement sustainability in their business model and seek to work with other suppliers who practice these same actions. Destination Nashville's Carol Norfleet, CMP, DMCP, has a client who puts sustainability in the

“We share our **passion for sustainability** with our clients by offering them ideas or options on ways to leave less of a carbon footprint on our destination.”

forefront of everything they do, and their goal is ZERO waste when they meet. They made a commitment to the environment by embracing local farms and seasonal foods, reducing vehicle traffic to their event, and designing no-waste décor. They use paperless invitations, ride-share discount codes, local breweries and donate leftover food to Open Table Nashville.

AlliedPRA Hawaii's Robert D. Lowell says they worked with a client that took their CSR event to the next level allowing the attendees to give back to the community, while inspiring volunteerism and a spirit of cooperation. They brought 350 volunteers from the comfort of Ka'anapali and put them to work, getting dirt under their finger nails, planting Ulu and Coconut trees and native ground cover; quite literally reforesting the former food-forest of west Maui. In a year from now, there will be a forest of fruit producing trees!

The Effort Is International

In 2016 the UN developed 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) to transform our world. The SDGs were created to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind, by 2030. Considering that the UN had declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, it was a good time for luxury hotels to get on board — and many have.

U.S. Hotels like EAST Miami of Swire Properties have created a focus on sustainability. The EAST Miami hotel's water pressure system has been regulated in order to reduce water use, protect against water loss from surprise leaks and increase energy efficiency. As a guest, you won't feel or see the difference. However, the impact this has on the environment is notable. The hotel also relies on a "collect and reuse" policy for rain water to be used as a source for the cooling tower and landscaping treatments throughout the property.

As I lived in Grand Cayman in the Cayman Islands for many years, I was delighted to see that they have opened their first LEED Silver-certified resort, the Seafire Resort & Spa, kitted out with recycled and sustainable materials. The LEED certification is an internationally recognized green building certification program.

In the DMC industry we realize that sustainability is paramount for our future, and while sustainability is growing, there needs to be more education, more commitment and more action to keep the momentum going.

We can all make a difference if we focus on sustainability (social, environmental and economic) and our future. Have you thought about how you can make a difference?

- Do your clients identify a minimum percentage of resources used at each event, for example, locally sourced food?
- Are your resources in the office 100 percent recyclable or sourced ethically?
- Do any of your suppliers implement sustainable practices?
- Do your clients plan and allocate resources to minimize food production, like knowing how many attendees will eat at an event, to minimize waste?
- Do you have any eco-friendly facilities that use renewable energy-powered infrastructures?
- Do you encourage your clients to have recycling bins throughout their events?
- Are you doing away with plastic name badges and printing them on seed paper instead?
- Do the hotels or venues you utilize collect the leftover food to distribute to a social center or food bank?

Ovation Global DMC's Hugo Slimbrouck says they have over a decade of dedication to sustainability. He works with his clients on creating a sustainability strategy with a vision, goals and key performance indicators. They work closely with the community to help reduce waste and propose projects to make an event carbon neutral.

How are you improving your levels of sustainability?

- ✓ Are you aligning your company culture with sustainability at your events?
- ✓ Are you saving costs by going local, or green or managing waste?
- ✓ Are you creating innovative ideas and experiences to get attendees involved?

The most important thing to remember is we can change the world, one person at a time, and if we focus on what we want our future to look like and how we want to leave our world to future generations, every action toward sustainability is positive. **C&IT**



Jane Scaletta, CIS, DMCP


is general Manager, AlliedPRA Orlando, Inc. Jane is both a Positive Impact Ambassador and a member of the SITE Sustainability Committee. Jane Scaletta grew up in Jamaica, attended boarding school in England and moved to the U.S. in the late 70s. Jane has worked in travel and tourism for more than 30 years in the U.S. and Caribbean. She works for one of the largest DMCs in the U.S., AlliedPRA.

Site Selection

Coastal Cachet

Business-friendly Beach Resorts Offer
Planners the Best of Both Worlds

By Christine Loomis



Kauai Marriott Resort & Beach Club boasts a spectacular setting on Kalapaki Beach in Lihue.

Beaches and business are not mutually exclusive. In fact, everything that leisure vacationers love about beach destinations holds true for meeting attendees and planners too.

When a hotel combines its meeting and function space, business amenities and business-focused services with a desirable beachfront location, it offers the best of two worlds to meeting groups, and the likelihood that registration goals will be met or exceeded. Sure, business comes first — but who doesn't want to conduct business with sun, sand, ocean breezes and maybe a palm tree or two?

There are business-friendly beachfront properties from one coast to another. Here are just a few of the best beach destinations to consider.

Hilton Head, SC

Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated holds its annual RBC Heritage Customer Entertainment event, coinciding with the PGA tournament of the same name on Hilton Head, South Carolina, that it has sponsored for more than 40 years. The Omni Hilton Head Resort is a perfect property for this event that includes 450-plus attendees.

"Over the course of our sponsorship of the event, we've utilized each of the major resort properties on Hilton Head. We are currently in year two of a five-year deal. The Omni offers a great location and great meeting space for our hospitality needs," says Kimberly Williams, event coordinator with the company.

"It's a family-friendly location with wonderful beaches and agreeable weather, and the Omni Hilton Head Resort is a beautiful property with oversized and newly renovated rooms, and the staff is great. Our guests love the flexibility of beach access," she adds, although the group doesn't hold any official functions on the beach.

It does, however, hold dinners for various attendees at different restaurants on the island.

Among those at the resort who go

above and beyond are Lory Lachapelle in sales and Robin Weiss in conference services. "They and their respective teams were instrumental in our choice of the Omni," Williams says.

The group uses the resort's ballroom for hospitality. Williams says she also has made use of the Wi-Fi for in-

"Ocean views give a strong sense of place, so it keeps you in the environment."

**William Davies, Managing Director
Muse Events Management, Lehi, UT**

ternal networking needs, worked with a décor company to assist with soft seating and recreational items in the suite and utilized onsite AV for children's programming.

She adds that there were no challenges to speak of, "and anything we might have experienced was handled quickly and without incident to our satisfaction."

Her only advice to those considering the Omni is to "share a complete 'big picture' of your program to allow Lory and her catering team to give you the absolute best service possible."

Hawaii

Across the continent, on the island of Kauai, William Davies, managing director of Muse Events Management, found an ideal beach location for the 2017 LifeVantage Master Incentive Trip. The group of 340 gathered at Kauai Marriott Resort & Beach Club in May.

"Hawaii as a whole is a good option for incentive trips as it's safe and usually on someone's bucket list. The cost of hosting an event on Kauai can be a little higher than other islands and availability of flights is a bit limited; however, the scenic nature of the island and slower pace captures the North American ideal of a tropical lifestyle."

The group explored the entire island. "We traveled around the island both in Lihue and south to Port Allen

and Poipu," Davies says. "We visited Kiloohana Plantation for a luau, which was a true authentic experience. The hotel's location is ideal as it was only 10 minutes from the plantation, making transfers very quick."

The island and resort met the group's needs. "The destination of Kauai is ideal

for smaller groups," Davies says. "Planners should choose a trusted DMC to be put in contact with strong vendors. In addition, Kauai Marriott Resort is part of Marriott's Convention & Resort Network (CRN), which recently expanded and now has eight properties throughout Hawaii, giving planners more options in a highly sought after destination."

All meetings were held at the Marriott, and Davies notes that the group only went off-property for some dinners and activities. In terms of the resort's beachside location, Davies says it has what he was looking for.

"I was seeking a true Hawaiian experience and Kauai Marriott Resort was able to offer that. The resort is close to the airport and features a complimentary 24/7 shuttle, which is very convenient. It's also located in Lihue, a perfect location as it has consistently sunny weather and the landscape is quintessential 'Hawaiian.'"

He calls the setting on Kalapaki Beach spectacular. "The view of the water and mountains on the far side is the perfect guest room view. And ocean views give a strong sense of place, so it keeps you in the environment. There's also a small shopping area located along the beach within a short stroll from the resort, which showcases the local community."

Because the goal of this trip was to keep attendees together, the resort's layout was very effective. "The hotel



Credit: Omni Hilton Head Oceanfront Resort

Omni Hilton Head Oceanfront Resort.

has an open layout with large lounging areas and one central pool," Davies says. "I wanted everyone to be together as much as possible for strong team building."

The staff also worked to meet the group's needs. "Honestly, there are so many people to mention," Davies says. "From the start, the sales team was amazing. Dana and Lori took the time to learn about our group and program, and from our first site-selection trip we knew this was the right fit. We knew the resort would be the perfect partner to work with us on this event. The banquet team was incredible, and Jackie led her team very well."

"Everyone on the engineering team was also outstanding. They came to the aid of our volleyball game when they saw it was a struggle to keep the barriers together. They jumped in and came up with great solutions to help."

At that moment, Davies says, we knew we had a lifetime partner in Kauai Marriott Resort.

"I also don't want to miss the opportunity to call out John in valet," he adds. "I took the time to stop and listen to some of the interactions he and his staff had with the guests, each of whom they called by name. They knew each of their cars and were genuinely interested in where they were going, and even took the time to give suggestions. The customer service level was definitely at an all-time high."

Davies points out that the resort works well for groups of all sizes.

"Inside the hotel there are numerous options for the size of groups the hotel can accommodate. The meeting space

is top-notch, the oceanfront luau garden is very pleasant, and being right on the beach with the expansive views is beautiful. The staff has the planner and group in mind at all times and will do whatever they have to in order to bring your vision to life. They make our job easy."

In addition, Davies says, "Marriott's CRN, which has grown to more than 100 properties across the US, Canada, the Caribbean and Mexico, provides planners with strong tools to efficiently and successfully execute meetings and events."

He mentions the Meetings Imagined Inspiration tool as just one asset, plus "virtual site visits and a new website, to name a few."

Even upon reflection, Davies says of the experience on Kauai, "There weren't any real challenges in the program. We came in with changes and the hotel offered options best suited for our group."

"The Omni Hilton Head Resort is a beautiful property. ...Our guests love the flexibility of beach access."

Kimberly Williams, Event Coordinator
Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated, Charlotte, NC

Even the process after the program, with settling and billing, was exceptional. I really can't find enough good things to say about the staff and hotel. My group and I are delighted to encourage everyone who's thinking of hosting an incentive trip in Hawaii to visit Kauai and Kauai Marriott Resort, and to explore Marriott's Convention & Resort Network's other properties as well."

The Bahamas

Tom Hillmer, senior vice president and account executive with Creative Group, found SLS Baha Mar in the Bahamas to be the perfect beachfront location for a client's April 2018 meeting with 100 attendees.

"This particular client wanted something 'new and different,' and has never

taken their program to The Bahamas. Recently opened Baha Mar resort in Nassau offers a fresh, new experience, with the convenience and accessibility of The Bahamas," Hillmer says.

"The Bahamas has great airlift from the United States and is one of the more quickly accessible island experiences being only a short 40-minute flight from Miami. It also has an extensive infrastructure for meetings and events, including transportation providers, recreational activities and local venues unique to the destination. Additionally, the Nassau airport is a beautiful new facility with all the modern amenities of any modern U.S. airport."

Moreover, Hillmer continues, "The Bahamas have done an outstanding job with the training and familiarization of their local people to know how to exceed the expectations of the group-travel industry — so much so that it was explained to me that the country now has a specific academic curriculum to prepare those interested in a career in the local hospitality industry. It defi-

nately showed during my recent visit to the destination."

As for Baha Mar itself, situated along Cable Beach, one of Nassau's most famous beaches, Hillmer says, "The Baha Mar resort is one of the newest things to open on an island destination and the property is nothing short of spectacular."

The resort will ultimately have three hotels. Two, the Grand Hyatt and the SLS where Hillmer's group stayed, are currently open. The Rosewood is slated to open in June.

"There is not only a hotel for every group of every size, but each hotel offers different price points for different group budgets," Hillmer says. "And the properties share a variety of resort amenities and facilities. Guests can stay in one hotel but have access to multiple

recreational and dining experiences, which a guest could never get if staying in just one property elsewhere.”

Hillmer says there was much about SLS Baha Mar that made it the right choice for his group. “Everywhere you look, no expense was spared to ensure a unique and upscale experience for all guests. And given the overall design and size of the resort, function space is incredibly convenient and accessible. Most interior function space is on the lower level, just steps from the hotel tower’s elevators, and outside function space is conveniently located throughout the grounds.”

Throughout Baha Mar are facilities and amenities that guests of all the hotels can access. “The spa and casino are impressive facilities, representing high-end luxury in every detail,” Hillmer says. “The restaurants are all outstanding, offering a variety of culinary experiences from Italian to Mediterranean to Asian. Guests can dine in any restaurant throughout the resort and charge it back to their room.”

Lastly, he says, “I was unbelievably impressed with the quality of the service and the warmth of the staff throughout the entire resort. Everyone I encountered was friendly, knowledgeable and took great pride in ensuring a memorable experience. Their care for their guests really made an impression on me.”

Hillmer was also impressed with what Grand Hyatt Baha Mar offers, al-

though he chose the SLS. “Meeting space at the Grand Hyatt is proportionate to the size of the 1,800-room resort. The Hyatt’s extensive and very impressive conference center is located adjacent to a covered outdoor walkway and offers impressive function space capable of accommodating very large groups,” he notes.

When asked what planners should

know about Baha Mar, Hillmer responds, “They should know that the physical property is very impressive, its offerings are extensive and, as important, it is supported by an outstanding group of employees who take personal pride in ensuring that the physical luxury of the resort is backed up by luxury service, ultimately ensuring an overall outstanding experience. Meeting planners can be tough critics; this resort will definitely exceed expectations.”

rience that will truly ‘wow’ guests, this new resort will definitely bring renewed attention to the Bahamas.”

The Caribbean

It’s no surprise that Caribbean beaches are popular with North American planners. Each island has its own vibe and allure. Some are beach-centric, their gentle coastlines encircled by

“Meeting planners can be tough critics; (Baha Mar) will definitely exceed expectations.”

**Tom Hilmer, Senior Vice President, Account Executive
Creative Group, Schaumburg, IL**

know about Baha Mar, Hillmer responds, “They should know that the physical property is very impressive, its offerings are extensive and, as important, it is supported by an outstanding group of employees who take personal pride in ensuring that the physical luxury of the resort is backed up by luxury service, ultimately ensuring an overall outstanding experience. Meeting planners can be tough critics; this resort will definitely exceed expectations.”

Additionally, he says, “In a world where meeting and incentive hosts are looking for what’s ‘new and different’ that their guests have yet to experience, while always looking for a good value, Baha Mar is worthy of serious consideration. With great air access, reasonable price points and an overall resort expe-

sugar-soft sand. Others feature rugged cliffs and jungles creeping up towering mountains. Some islands exhibit decidedly British influence while others are distinctly French, Spanish or Dutch. For planners the question is, “What’s your vision of paradise?”

Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic delivers miles of stunning beaches cradled between graceful palms and the postcard-perfect Caribbean Sea. Jill Filipiak, executive assistant and event planner with Gemalto Inc., planned the company’s Elite Club gathering for 70 at Club Med Punta Cana in May 2017 and the beach was definitely a factor in choosing Club Med.

“Our guests love the relaxation the sun and sand bring. It is one of our main factors of choice each year.”

Beyond the beach, Filipiak says they chose the 553-room resort for several reasons, but two in particular stand out. “The Zen Oasis at the resort is by far the most amazing space/rooms of any resort we have been, and this includes the Four Seasons Maui. It’s a true ‘wow’ factor for our guests. Additionally, the grounds — meaning the landscaping, beach, and overall look of Club Med Punta Cana — scream the perfect Caribbean location.”

The group held all functions onsite. “With plenty to choose from on location, there was no reason to host off-site,” Filipiak says. “We used the resort’s AV, décor, catering and staff for two



Credit: SLS Baha Mar



Credit: Club Med Punta Cana

Club Med Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic.

evening events, a welcome cocktail reception and a farewell dinner. Both took place on resort property but not in meeting space," she says, "as this was a pure all-vacation incentive."

In addition, the group had a hosted excursion that departed directly

Like the Wyndham, much of Puerto Rico is open for business.

Florida

A state that's 441 miles long, 361 miles wide and surrounded by water on three sides is bound to have an

"Our guests love the relaxation the sun and sand bring. It is one of our main factors of choice each year."

Jill Filipiak, Executive Assistant, Event Planner
Gemalto Inc., Belcamp, MD

from the resort beach. "Two catamarans pulled right up to the beach. Our guests boarded for an awesome four-hour cruise and amazing lunch!"

To those who might consider Punta Cana a "second choice," she says, "I can assure you that as a leisure incentive this resort has the whole package."

She also has high praise for her convention services contact at the property. "She really stood out. She pulled my entire event together seamlessly." And though Filipiak felt it was a bit of a challenge that the resort's meeting and events coordinator was not onsite, she says, "The onsite person made the entire situation better."

In the final analysis, she adds, "Club Med Punta Cana is a great Caribbean destination with amazing beaches, amazing room choices, amazing amenities to offer and it does a great job with conventions onsite."

Just to the east of the DR lies Puerto Rico, which suffered immensely in the unforgiving hurricanes of 2017. Today, it's well on its way back. Many of the island's top resorts have reopened, in-

abundance of beaches — 1,200 miles of beaches to be exact, and 1,800 miles of coastline. The challenge for planners is choices. On Florida's Atlantic coast,



Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort on Florida's Emerald Coast.

Credit: Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort

evocative destinations include Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach and Daytona. Along the Gulf, there's Naples, Sanibel, Sarasota and the miles of beaches that make up Clearwater and

St. Pete. To the north, the Panhandle is known for brilliant blue-green water and sweet beachfront towns from Pensacola to Panama City, including the resort area of Sandestin.

The one thing true for all of these areas is that they're ever evolving, with a goal of getting even better.

Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort recently announced a \$2.7 million renovation of the 15,000-sf Linkside Conference Center, a venue ideal for groups of 10 to 1,200 and featuring a 5,500-sf ballroom, four breakout rooms and a boardroom. The center offers sweeping views along Choctawhatches Bay. In addition to indoor venues, planners can book the resort's lawns, marinas, docks, terraces and beach venues.

In St. Pete Beach, Sirata Beach Resort announced a \$15 million renovation that includes a full redesign of the current 30,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and function space, all 382 guest rooms as well as pools and dining venues. Renovations to the meeting spaces are complete, with remaining renovations set for completion this year.

From coast to coast and in every ocean and sea, beach resorts bring

groups the best of all worlds — a place to do business, to relax, to network and to revel in the natural beauty created wherever water, sand and sun come blissfully together.

C&IT

GO

GRAND
PRESENTATION
SPACES.

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GRAND HYATT BAHAMA MAR

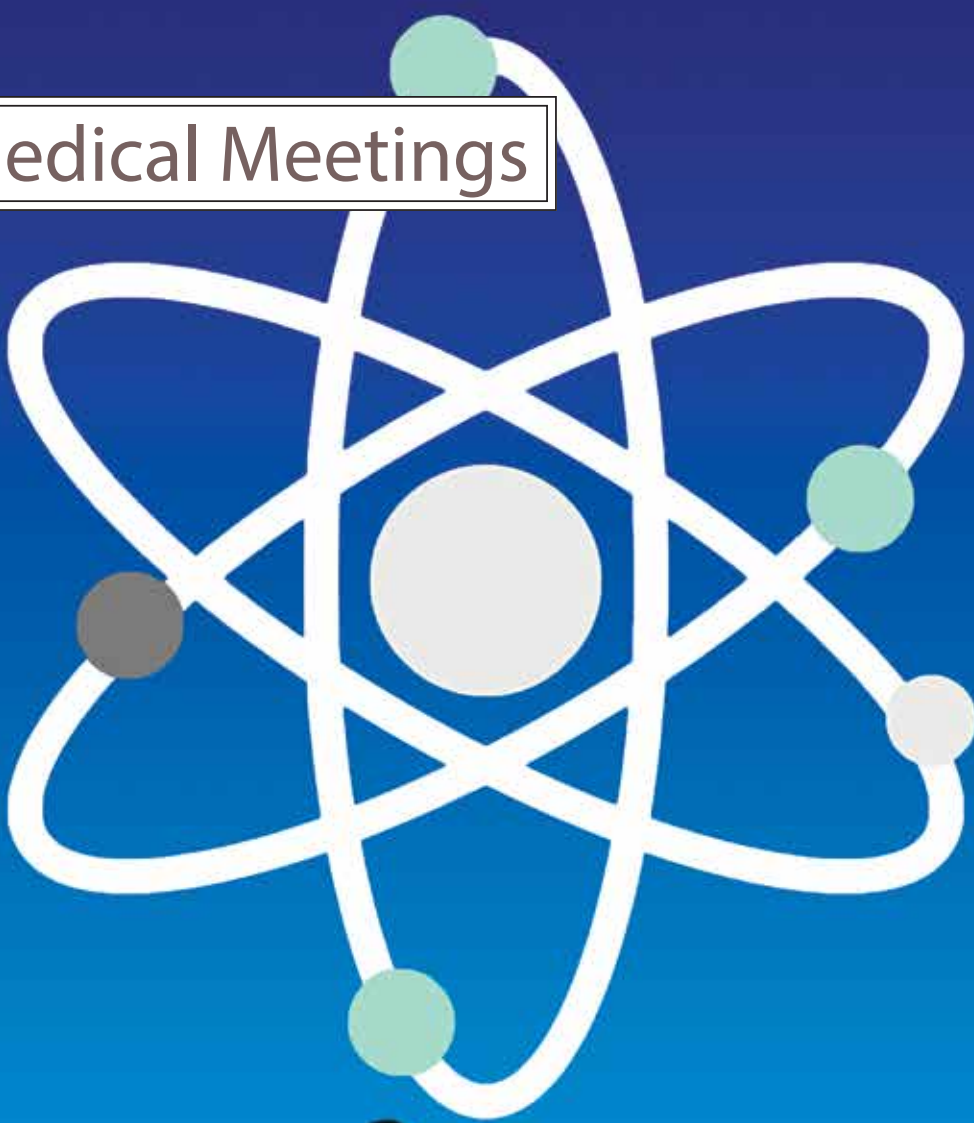
Grand Hyatt Baha Mar isn't simply another meeting and events location — it's an experience that reflects the very heart and soul of The Bahamas. With over 200,000 square feet of event space, exquisite cuisine and breathtaking tropical views, your event, big or small, will be nothing short of spectacular.

For more information, contact a sales manager at 242.788.7344. Or visit bahamar.grand.hyatt.com

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Medical Meetings



Is There a Doctor in the House?

A Planner's Prescription to Maximize HCP Attendance

By Patrick Simms

Health care professional (HCP) attendance at life sciences company meetings has been healthy over the past several years. According to a recent white paper by compliance management solutions company AHM, "Promotional Speaker Programs Are Going the Distance," FDA approvals were fewer in 2016 and public reporting of Open Payments data was in effect, yet HCP participation in face-to-face programs remained relatively robust. The study spanned five years, up to and including 2016, and revealed that "2016 had the highest average number of attendees per program, and over the past five years, venue-based programs have seen the highest increase in average attendance."

If reporting under the Sunshine Act was ever detrimental to HCP participation, today it is simply par for the course and not likely to affect attendance. As Dan Tarpey, HMCC, vice president, sales and marketing, Meetings & Incentives Worldwide, observes: "Now that Open Payments and spend reporting have been in effect for close to five years, many HCPs have become accustomed to the changes and treat the changes as part of the norm for attending a meeting. When in the past we may have seen effects on HCP meeting attendance, HCPs continue to realize the value of attending meetings as it relates to their practice and continued medical education."





“We work with our clients to review and alter the meeting agenda to keep the critical presentations at the face-to-face meeting.”

Katie Koziol, CMP, HMCC
Director, Client Services
Ashfield Meetings & Events
Ivyland, PA

A Multipronged Approach

To ensure the draw remains robust, life sciences companies need to adopt a multipronged approach to maximizing HCP participation. That includes more than offering targeted educational content: strategic site selection, well-designed networking opportunities, program duration and date, and technological enhancements such as apps and virtual extensions all factor into how attractive the event will be to potential HCP attendees. Combined with proper marketing, a program that checks all those boxes stands the best chance of delivering stellar attendance numbers.

Like all busy professionals, HCPs are looking for ease of travel whenever possible. Indeed, that is among the primary site criteria, according to Tarpey. “HCPs’ time is extremely valuable, so when sourcing destinations for meetings with HCPs, we tend to look for major airport hub locations that have many direct flight options,” he says.

Katie Koziol, CMP, HMCC, director, client ser-

vices with Ashfield Meetings & Events, a specialist in health care event management, observes, “Some clients are particularly interested in airport properties to reduce the transfer time from the airport to the city center.” The “abundance of business hotels” in first-tier cities is also key, Koziol says. The variety is especially important given that many medical meetings utilize an amount of function space that is disproportionately large relative to the number of rooms in the block: More hotels means more of an opportunity to place such a program.

“To find availability for our meeting with the sleeping rooms and meeting space needs, it’s essential we consider the amount of four-star properties in these cities,” Koziol adds.

Four stars may be the cutoff for many programs, however. “There is sensitivity around hosting a meeting with HCPs at five-diamond/star or resort-like properties, so first-tier urban properties with excellent airlift tend to be more popular,” Tarpey explains.

Location, Location, Location

In terms of popular cities for these programs, Mandy Archer, HMCC, senior director, operations and strategic accounts with Infinix Global, provides insight into which ones are proven draws: “Last year, Dallas was the one that we (most) used. Other primary destinations that we look at are Orlando and Miami because of weather. San Diego is a fairly popular one, and Chicago is a very high ranker for us.”

Some cities have strong medical communities, and the resources can be a value-add for certain life sciences meetings. Orlando International Airport, for example, is near Lake Nona Medical City, a 650-acre health and life sciences park.

Phoenix, Arizona, has invested more than \$5 billion into its urban core, which includes the 30-acre Phoenix Biomedical Campus. Located just blocks from the Phoenix Convention Center and accessible via the Valley Metro Rail system, the campus includes the 33,000-sf Center for Simulation & Innovation at the University of Arizona, one of the largest simulation facilities housed within a U.S. university. The appeal of having such facilities on hand depends on the nature of the meeting, however.

“The strength of the local health care industry is not usually a factor, unless the program is specifically designed to draw those attendees,” says Tarpey. “For example, a dinner program would rely more on the availability of local attendees than a multiday investigator meeting.”

Key opinion leaders (KOLs) often reside in these communities, and that also may be a reason for choosing the city. According to Archer, "Some of our meetings could be driven where some of (the client's) KOLs are located, if they do want to get a KOL to speak at the meeting."

Timing Considerations

No matter how logistically convenient the destination is, the draw will be compromised if the program duration and/or dates are inconvenient. "The duration of an event is an important factor to consider," says Tarpey. "Too short of an event and it may not be worth the HCP to travel; too long of an event and the HCP may be out of the practice too long. Events that provide the perfect balance between these two factors see the most HCP attendance. The duration of these events is typically two to three days, but certain types of meetings, such as advisory boards or investigator meetings, may be shorter." As to the time of the meeting, "most HCPs prefer to travel closer to weekends in order to minimize the impact on their practice," Tarpey observes.

Archer adds, "You have to be considerate of time with family, that's always very important. Major holidays, school starting back, spring break — those are all times that we try to avoid. Some programs are driven by a very firm date (for example, to coincide with a drug going to market), so you don't have much flexibility. What we try to do is focus it toward a weekend. I've even seen meetings over Easter weekend."

Motivational Marketing

Once site and dates are determined, the marketing plan can begin to take shape. The main principle to observe is to clearly communicate the event's value proposition to the potential attendee. "It all comes down to a unique and personalized message to each potential attendee type, and then communicating those messages across various channels," says Tarpey. "When helping our clients with conference marketing, we find it is key to leverage meeting stakeholders, educational speakers and sponsors to help market the meeting, as well as use more traditional channels such as print and email marketing."

HCPs should be informed on all the details of the agenda and topics. "This is a key motivator for most HCPs, as they like to know what will be discussed and also have the opportunity to submit questions and topics they want to hear about," says Koziol.

In general, they are less interested in popular keynote speakers not specifically tied to their industry, unless that speaker has very relevant insights to share. "While it makes sense to increase the attendee's experience with 'big name' speakers, when consulting our clients on meeting design, we always look back at the objective and purpose of the meeting," Tarpey explains.

"A big name speaker may fit the objectives as long as the topic is related closely to the content, industry or challenges at hand. We would lean toward recommending a top name speaker from the industry who can share relevant and useful information as opposed to a top name motivational speaker who would simply add to the value of the event. We also feel that real-life patient stories have more of an impact on the ROI for the HCPs. This type of storytelling allows for HCPs to connect their work more with the educational value of the event, since it is what drives many of them into the profession."

Networking Opportunities

The marketing communications also should emphasize the networking opportunities at the upcoming event, which is the second most important reason (after education) that HCPs attend. Of course, the meeting then has to deliver on the promised opportunities, and it takes more than just designating a "networking hour" in the agenda.

"The best approach to connecting HCPs is to have a focus and understanding on what types of connections are most valuable to the HCP and other attendees at the meeting," Tarpey advises. "Depending on the meeting objectives, networking can focus on HCPs connecting with other HCPs to help build relationships that ultimately enhance the services they are providing to patients. On the other hand, networking opportunities could focus on HCPs connecting with services providers that can enhance their practice and help them better serve their patients."

Facilitating networking within specialties is also key to connecting participants most effectively. "Specialty is very important," says Archer. "They want to sit down and speak with a KOL that is an expert in their specialty. So usually we have separate groups or breakouts that are specialty driven. Oncology is a bit harder because there are so many subsets to oncology, but when you're looking at neurology or cardiology, those are usually very specific already."

"HCPs continue to realize the value of attending meetings as it relates to their practice and continued medical education."

Dan Tarpey, HMCC
V.P. Sales & Marketing
Meetings & Incentives
Worldwide, Caledonia, WI



“Companies are starting to realize you can’t replace a face-to-face visit. Those that tried to do virtual two years ago are coming back to the face-to-face.”

Mandy Archer, HMCC
Senior Director, Operations
and Strategic Accounts
Infinix Global, Plano, TX

Age Demographics

Similar to most fields, the medical profession is seeing more and more young practitioners, and that changing attendee demographic can inform certain aspects of meeting design, such as the inclusion of apps and gamification. The shift is a slow one, however.

“If you’re looking at a large conference like ASCO (American Society of Clinical Oncology Annual Meeting) or the (American College of Rheumatology Annual Meeting), then you’re going to see a lot more millennials, especially from the pharma companies themselves,” Archer notes. “But as far as the physicians, we’re still looking at people with 15-plus years of experience. We’ve seen people in their 80s at meetings, so we do have a wide array of (ages), but mostly baby boomer and up.”

Tarpey confirms this age distribution among participants. “The age demographics in medical meetings still tends to lean toward the baby boomers and (Generation) X as opposed to the millennial generation,” he says. “However, this shift will continue to occur as time goes by and more baby boomers retire and more millennials start to practice.”

Tech Tools

So at this point, the inclusion of meeting apps, polling, audience response systems and gamification is not primarily driven by an influx of millennials, but rather by the intrinsic advantages of these tools. “Mobile apps, in particular, continue to be a mainstay at most events, when it makes sense for the program to utilize a mobile app,” says Tarpey. “When engagement and enhanced networking or learning is part of the objective, gamification, polling and audience response systems may also be utilized. When recommending technology for meetings, we first look at the meeting objectives to determine if the technology will provide a better ROI, and then we will consider adoption as it relates to attendee demographics.”

Archer observes that audience response systems have been especially advantageous where the attendee base is international. “You’ve got language barriers and someone may not be comfortable asking a question in front of an audience. (An audience response system) really makes the session more interactive because they’re finally putting questions out there anonymously, which they were afraid to ask before,” she explains. Participants

who had a more rewarding experience at the sessions thanks to such a tool will likely be more motivated to attend future meetings.

Virtual Content

The next best thing to in-person attendance is virtual participation, and the medical meetings sector is realizing the advantage of including virtual content. Busy HCPs sometimes simply can’t travel, but still want to engage with the event. Or, they may only be able to attend part of the event in person, and want to supplement that learning with on-demand content from days they missed.

“We work with our clients to review and alter the meeting agenda to keep the critical presentations at the face-to-face meeting, and identify which presentations could be presented virtually or pre-recorded prior to the meeting,” says Koziol. That strategy, says Tarpey, “is also likely to increase in-person attendance for upcoming meetings, since attendees who view online recognize what they are missing by not being there in person.”

In addition, virtual viewing patterns can be tracked, and those analytics can support future content choices. The downside may be the quality of engagement with the content. “My honest opinion is that physicians are probably paying attention to 40 percent to 50 percent of the content in a virtual meeting; they’ve got so many distractions,” Archer says. “We have found that we are not able to engage their attention in a virtual meeting like we can face to face. Companies are starting to realize you can’t replace a face-to-face visit. Those that tried to do virtual two years ago are coming back to the face-to-face.”

Life sciences meeting planners can do much to ensure that the upward trend in HCP attendance identified by AHM continues in 2018 and beyond. Strategies include picking highly accessible cities and properties, avoiding dates when attendance may be weaker, condensing the schedule just enough to make participation practical, marketing key content to specific HCP segments, structuring effective networking sessions and incorporating tech tools that streamline and enhance the experience.

Content is certainly king when it comes to drawing HCPs, as it is what delivers the most ROI. However, a holistic approach that includes engagement through content along with other best practices is more likely to result in record-breaking attendance. **C&IT**

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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Site Selection



The Greater Columbus (Ohio) Convention Center features a 14-foot high interactive sculpture that has become a popular selfie station.

Value Destinations

Land Great Deals and Experiences in Select Cities That May Fly Under Your Radar

By Derek Reveron

Value is the lifeblood of meetings. That's why destinations of all sizes compete fiercely to offer value by building new hotels, convention centers and meeting venues while renovating and expanding existing ones. New attractions, restaurants and entertainment options are part of the efforts.

Small and mid-size destinations are stepping up attempts to vie with larger competitors by increasing value. The efforts are succeeding in some destinations, which are attracting more meetings and increasing occupancy rates, while gaining recognition as top value destinations.

MeetingSource's "Top 25 Convention Cities in the USA for 2018" include Cincinnati, Charlotte, Norfolk, Austin, St. Paul, Salt Lake City and Providence in the medium category. Cities in the small category include El Paso, Madison, Chattanooga, Tempe, Portland (ME), Raleigh, Tacoma and Silicon Valley. MeetingSource ranked 163 cities by hotel affordability, ease of access, safety, walkability, promotional appeal and weather.

We've picked out several more destinations that, no matter their size, aren't shy about touting their value.

Jacksonville

Visit Jacksonville's website leads with its value, saying "Visit Jacksonville and its partners offer incredible value. Take advantage of our Value Season from June through December to realize great offers such as free convention space, discounted room rates and much more."

Jacksonville was the only American

"Columbus tends to surprise attendees. ...It is bursting with things to do and places to go. Attendees love the big-city vibe with the small-town charm."

Kate Wagener, Sr. Education Conference Coordinator
Nationwide Children's Hospital, Columbus, OH

city on Lonely Planet's "Best in Travel 2018" list of the world's "Top 10 Best Value Destinations," ranking No. 9. Lonely Planet cited Jacksonville's affordable hotel rates, beaches, park system and family-friendly food scene.

New properties include the Hyatt Place Jacksonville, scheduled to open later this year at The Strand at St. Johns



Friendship Fountain in downtown Jacksonville.

Town Center, a new 45-acre development featuring retail outlets, restaurants and apartment homes. The Hyatt Place will offer 160 guest rooms and 3,000 sf of meeting space. Other properties include the Omni Jacksonville, the Jacksonville Marriott, the Sheraton Jacksonville and the 963-room Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront (110,000 sf of meeting space) located near the Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center.

Columbus

As with many destinations, Columbus depends partly on regionally based companies that attract attendees locally and nationwide.

Last year, Columbus-based Nationwide Children's Hospital held a three-day meeting at the Hilton Downtown Columbus for 300 employees and other attendees from around the world. It was the first time this group has met at the property.

The Hilton Downtown's meeting



space played a big role in choosing the property. "The meeting space and amenities provided were more than sufficient for our group's needs," says Kate Wagener, CTA, senior education conference coordinator, Nationwide Children's Hospital. "The conference rooms vary in size and are all located near each other, making the overall ex-

perience easier on our participants when navigating through the hotel."

The Hilton Downtown's location also was an advantage. "It's located within walking distance of two of Columbus' most vibrant neighborhoods — the Short North Arts District and Arena District," says Wagener. "Both locations give attendees many activity options including local restaurants and bars, and some of the city's many art galleries."

Wagener says that more planners are discovering what she already knows about Columbus. "It is affordable, walkable and accessible," she says. "Columbus tends to surprise attendees who come in with a preconceived notion of it being a small town with little to offer. In actuality it is bursting with things to do and places to go. Attendees love the big-city vibe with the small-town charm."

Columbus may be a small town, but it is taking dead-aim at attracting large meetings, and it is yielding results. The city expects to attract a record number of conferences and visitors this year.

According to Experience Columbus, the destination booked a record 508,859 room nights in 2017. This year, Columbus expects to attract 28 large citywide conventions — a 17 percent increase over 2017.

Columbus officials hope the recently expanded Greater Columbus Convention Center (GCCC) will help attract larger events. The \$140 million project added 137,000 sf of new space and refurbished 800,000 sf of space.

Additional hotel rooms are coming near the GCCC. *The Columbus Dispatch* recently reported that city officials will announce plans to expand the existing 532-room Downtown Hilton by adding 468 beds, an 18,000-sf ballroom, and 42,000 sf of meeting and conference rooms. Plans call for the expansion to start later this year and conclude in late 2021.

According to Wagener, "The renovation of the GCCC as well as the many hotels located within walking distance make choosing Columbus an easy decision for meetings. Columbus is an

extremely accessible, centrally located city with the airport only ten minutes from downtown."

Charlotte

Value is top of mind at the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority (CRVA). "In Charlotte, budget-friendly accommodations and a variety of meeting spaces gives you the flexibility to plan an event your attendees will remember for years to come," says the CRVA's website.

Charlotte is also collecting its share of kudos. The Queen City was included in *USA Today's* "Top 50 Best U.S. Cities" in which to live. Meanwhile, Charlotte is becoming more meeting-friendly. The city expects to add over 8,000 new hotel rooms through 2020, including 2,130 rooms this year alone.

Other major improvements include a \$110 million expansion of the Charlotte Convention Center (CCC), which will feature additional breakout and



Credit: Charlotte Convention Center

Rendering of the Charlotte Convention Center expansion, expected to debut in 2020.

meeting space totaling 50,000 sf. There also will be a newly constructed pedestrian bridge connecting one wing of the CCC to the 700-room Westin Charlotte Hotel. The project is scheduled to start in spring 2019 and be completed in December 2020.

Milwaukee

Visit Milwaukee's website calls out a big-city competitor while chatting up its value. "We'll tell you how we're a naturally thrifty bunch and refuse to pay Chicago prices," says the website.

Value is one reason why Milwaukee



Credit: Visit Milwaukee

The distinctive Milwaukee Art Museum.

is cited in last year's destination rankings. *Conde Nast Traveler* included Milwaukee as one of six "Cities to Watch." *Travel + Leisure* named Milwaukee the No. 6 "Most Underrated City in America" and the "No. 10 Friendliest City in America."

Milwaukee hopes to attract more meetings and events with a larger Wisconsin Center (WC). The Milwaukee Center District is considering proposals to expand the WC after a consultant hired by the district recommended that the facility add 215,000 sf that would include a larger exhibit hall and ballroom, more meeting space and 22,000 sf of food and beverage outlets.

Currently, the WC offers 265,835 sf of exhibit, meeting room and banquet hall space, and connects via skywalks to the 729-room Hilton Milwaukee and the 481-room Hyatt Regency Milwaukee.

Santa Fe

Santa Fe offers spectacular desert and mountain vistas, and 2,500 hotel rooms. "As far as hotels, we have more than 10 years ago, and most have gone through renovations," says Marcia Skillman, owner, Destination Services of Santa Fe Inc. "Every year there are new restaurants and exhibits to see. I would cite the town's walkability; the amazing culture; museums and restaurants; and outdoor resources like hiking and skiing."

Topmost among meeting spaces is the 72,000-sf Santa Fe Community Convention Center. There are also dozens of nearby properties including the Eldorado Hotel and Spa, which can

host groups of up to 700, and La Fonda on the Plaza, which accommodates up to 600 people.

An intangible value is derived from meeting in venues that reflect a strong sense of place and local culture. Planners will find that at the luxury Inn & Spa at Loretto, an architectural recreation of the Taos Pueblo and national historic landmark in the heart of downtown Santa Fe. With Native American-inspired décor and warming fireplaces, the 12,000 sf of indoor and outdoor spaces showcase original artwork provided by local galleries and artists.



Credit: Inn & Spa at Loretto

Cultural value is high at the Inn & Spa at Loretto in the heart of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Santa Fe's unique offsite meeting venues include four museums, which have interior and exterior meeting spaces, and the Santa Fe School of Cooking, which can host teambuilding cooking events.

Santa Fe's development as a meeting destination is now attracting groups from outside the region and the United States. "We get groups from all over the world," says Skillman. "I just did a site visit with a group from Norway that is coming next year. As far as American groups, we have a lot of interest from Midwest and East Coast groups. I have groups of every size. Last month I had a seven-person incentive group. This summer I have several that are in the 600 range."

Santa Fe is attracting larger groups in part by overcoming perceptions about the destination. "Some people think the remoteness of Santa Fe is going to be a problem, but once they come for a site visit they change their

minds," says Skillman. "I think planners are attracted to the small-town feel and sense of friendliness they get in Santa Fe versus going to a big city where they are just another group."

Oklahoma City

Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau says "its 16,000 hotel rooms, affordable rates and friendly atmosphere make it an ideal location for any size meeting, from a corporate conference of 25 people to an international convention with 20,000 delegates."

The mainstay of Oklahoma City's meeting space, The Cox Convention Center (CCC), features 100,000 sf of exhibit space, a 25,000-sf ballroom, 21 meeting rooms and a 15,000-sf arena, all connected by a skybridge to the Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention Center Hotel. A total of about 1,600 hotel rooms are located with a few blocks of the CCC.

In addition, The Oklahoma City Council recently approved a design for the city's new \$288 million Oklahoma City Convention Center (OCCC), *newsOK* reported. Construction could begin by June this year for a mid-2020 opening.

The proposal calls for a 200,000-sf exhibit hall; 45,000 sf of high-tech meeting rooms on three levels; and a 30,000-sf ballroom. Plans also call for construction of a 600-room Omni hotel adjacent to the OCCC that will offer 50,000 sf of meeting space and two restaurants. A skyway will connect the Omni to the convention center.



Rendering of the new Oklahoma City Convention Center, which will break ground this summer for a mid-2020 opening.

"I think planners are attracted to the small-town feel and sense of friendliness they get in Santa Fe versus going to a big city where they are just another group."

Marcia Skillman, Owner

Destination Services of Santa Fe Inc., Santa Fe, New Mexico

Memphis

The Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau touts the city as "both accessible and affordable." Memphis is enhancing its value further with a \$175 million expansion and renovation of The Memphis Cook Convention Center (MCCC) that will be completed in the fourth quarter of 2019.

The project will increase the MCCC's total number of breakout rooms to 52, and add upgraded wall finishes along



Rendering of the Memphis Cook Convention Center's expansion, to be completed in 2019.

with a newly constructed exterior pre-function concourse to the 125,000-sf Main Exhibit Hall. A new skybridge will connect the MCCC to the 600-room Sheraton Memphis Downtown Hotel with 16,000 sf of flexible function space.

Fort Worth

Fort Worth also is racking up its share of national accolades. Last year *Conde Nast Traveler* named Fort Worth among the six "U.S. Cities to Watch."

The destination's 13,477 total hotel rooms, including 2,622 located downtown, are helping to attract larger groups.

Nation's Best Sports (NBS), a Fort Worth-based purchasing organization that provides services to sporting goods retailers, holds five meetings an-



Fort Worth's Cowgirl Museum.

nually in the city ranging from 175 to 2,850 attendees.

The meetings use a range of downtown hotels and are held at the Fort Worth Convention Center (FWCC), which offers 250,000 sf of exhibit space, 60,000 sf of meeting space and a 28,000-sf ballroom.

NBS has held meetings in Fort Worth for about 50 years and benefits fully from its strong relationships with the FWCC, hotels and Visit Fort Worth. "As a repeat customer, we have an advantage," says Angela Mooney, NBS corporate secretary and event manager. "We have great relationships with all of our event colleagues including the FWCC and their service providers, hotel properties, restaurants and Visit Fort Worth. All of our partners know us and our attendees, which creates a great sense of family for our group."

Above all, NBS receives top value. "We are very pleased with the rates we receive from all event venues, including hotels, restaurants, etc.," says Mooney. "Compared to other larger cities, Fort Worth is extremely competitive."

Cincinnati

Cincinnati is gaining recognition as one of the nation's up-and-coming

“We are very pleased with the rates we receive from all event venues. ...Compared to other larger cities, Fort Worth is extremely competitive.”

Angela Mooney, Corporate Secretary, Events Manager
Nation’s Best Sports, Fort Worth, TX



Credit: Cincinnati USA

Cincinnati’s Duke Energy Center recently completed a \$135 million expansion.

destinations. The city ranked No. 5 on Lonely Planet’s “2018 Best in the U.S.” list, No. 5 on *The New York Times*’ “Best Places to Go in 2018,” and earned a spot on the American Express Essentials’ “2018 Trend Destination Hot List.”

According to Mike Laatsch, interim president and CEO of Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau, “It’s evident that Cincinnati has caught the nation’s attention, and is being recognized as a world-class, must-visit destination. The Cincinnati region is thriving, with an impressive amount of development either completed or in the works, and a community that takes pride in supporting and showing off its assets.”

Improvements in Cincinnati’s meetings infrastructure include a recent \$135 million expansion and renovation of the Duke Energy Convention Center (DECC), which now offers 200,000 sf of exhibit space; a 40,000-sf Grand Ballroom and 17,400-sf ballroom; and 30 breakout rooms. Plans also call for construction of a new headquarters hotel. The property will add to the over 3,200

hotel rooms that now exist within a short walking distance of the DECC.

The improvements come as studies by the Cincinnati USA Convention and Visitors Bureau show that the DECC needs at least 100,000 sf of additional exhibition space to compete with its primary rival destinations for meetings and conventions. Competitors can host up to three events simultaneously, and an expanded DECC would allow Cincinnati to do the same.

Birmingham

Located near the Appalachian foothills, Birmingham is a hip, cosmopolitan city with plenty of Southern charm and cuisine.

Birmingham’s meeting venue variety is led by the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex, which offers 350,000 sf of exhibition space that includes 90 meeting rooms as well as a 19,000-seat arena and two theaters with a total of 4,000 seats. The complex also includes two hotels.

Other venues include the Harbert Center, which seats up to 400 guests. The Bessemer Civic Center offers a 13,000-sf Main Hall and three meeting spaces. In addition, the Workplay entertainment complex includes a per-



The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

formance theater with cabaret-style seating for up to 500 guests.

Birmingham’s notable historic sites include a Civil Rights District, which is a federal national monument that encompasses sites in the downtown district that were instrumental in the 1960s civil rights movement. The district includes the 16th Street Baptist Church, Bethel Baptist Church and Kelly Ingram Park.

San Jose

Earlier this year, Team San Jose launched a new website and created a new consumer brand: Visit San Jose. The website will promote the San Jose McEnergy Convention Center — the largest convention facility in Silicon Valley, with 550,000 sf — to potential clients. The site will also include new content and images, as well as engagement tools and a focus on mobile users.

Meeting planners have different ideas about value depending on a group’s budget, meeting needs and goals. They determine value by exam-



Credit: San Jose McEnergy Convention Center

San Jose McEnergy Convention Center.

ining factors such as food and beverage costs; rates for sleeping rooms, meeting rooms and venues; convention center and CVB concessions and services; and vendor prices. Other factors include air travel costs, accessibility and entertainment.

And even when landing a great deal seems harder than ever in today’s challenging seller’s market, there are still plenty of value opportunities to be had when planners are willing to explore worthy destinations that may fly under their radar.

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Planners



PROfound Planning's Dahlton Bennington (left), director of meetings and incentives, and Marissa Torres, manager of meetings and incentives, in New Orleans.

“**Learning** opportunities and determining **ROI**...is probably the **No. 1** thing (clients are) looking for.”

Dahlton Bennington, CMP, CMM

Director of Meetings and Incentives, PROfound Planning, Dania Beach, FL



Staying Ahead of the Curve

Keeping Up With Technology and Client Expectations Gives Independent Planners a Leg Up

By Patrick Simms

Successful businesses stay abreast of how client expectations evolve, and meeting planning companies are no exception. What today's clients desire from external planners has moved in the direction of both technological and strategic consultation. Meeting technology, from apps to smart badges, develops so rapidly that many client companies, even those with internal planners, lack the time to research the latest tools that may ben-

efit their events. Regarding strategic consultation, the assistance that third-party planners can provide is quite varied, ranging from cost control to event design to ROI measurement.

What Drives Event Design

Dahlton Bennington, CMP, CMM, director, meetings and incentives with Dania Beach, Florida-based PROfound Planning, has her finger on the pulse of these strategic needs.

“We really can handle everything from **A to Z**.”
As a result, “we **don’t say no** very often.”

Deanne Bryan

Vice President, Event Management
CRG Events, Seattle, WA

“Being able to identify learning opportunities and determining ROI on programs is probably the No. 1 thing (clients are) looking for,” she observes. “From a procurement standpoint, I would say they are definitely looking for us to assist in cost avoidance. We are purchasing higher volumes of (products), so we can get better deals.” In terms of event design, “I would say they’re looking for opportunities to be more socially responsible. That’s more of a focal point than sustainability, which is important but I don’t think it’s in their top five driving factors.”

Of course, the event design side comprises much more than brainstorming a philanthropic element for a program. Site selection is an integral part of event design, and involves what

Deanne Bryan, vice president, event management with Seattle, Washington-based CRG Events, calls “scenario planning.” “If we want to have the meeting in DC versus L.A., what does that look like? We consider the different labor unions, for example.” Third-parties can bring to light financial considerations that help to weigh the different scenarios. “It’s not just collecting supplier invoices, plugging it into a spreadsheet and then helping to process some of the payments,” Bryan says. “What are some of the geopolitical factors that would shape the budget? What is the financial model? Is this a break-even event? If so, what do we need to do to implement that? It’s having those types of conversations.”

To provide this kind of consultation, event-planning companies must appreciate the strategic role that a given meeting is playing in their client’s organization. “At the end of the day, it’s about looking at meetings as a strategic tool that leadership of organizations can use to accomplish their goals,” says Bennington. “If the goal is to go from a \$3 billion to \$5 billion company, they’re going to do that by merger or acquisition, penetrating accounts further to bring in revenue, etc. How they do that is by having meetings with their sales team to give them the tools to penetrate accounts further, or using meetings to integrate the cultures of companies that they’ve now acquired with their own.” For indepen-

dent planners who want to provide strategic input, MPI’s Certificate in Meeting Management is an ideal educational background. Compared to the CMP, Bennington feels that the CMM focuses more on the “strategic approach to meetings and what one needs to do to accomplish goals and objectives through meetings and events.”

On the technology side, third-party expertise is equally valuable. “Whether it’s apps, registration tools, audience response systems, etc., technology is a huge trend and something that is needed in almost all meetings across the board,” Bennington observes. “It’s constantly evolving. They’re looking for us to have that experience, as they don’t necessarily know what to ask for.” According to Bryan, some of CRG Events’ clients are looking for her company to have proficiency with “collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams or Slack,” and more broadly to automate processes whenever possible. “We’re moving toward a culture of automation and constantly (asking questions such as): Why are we delivering this in a Word document? Is there a newsletter format? What other tools exist that can make this process faster?”

To deliver value on that front, CRG Events has a team that acts like a knowledge-sharing committee on the latest tech products. “They sit in on demos and go to conferences to actually see the technology implemented,” says Bryan. “Then they bring ideas forward in our department meetings, keeping us abreast of new and emerging suppliers. We can then make a strong recommendation to our client. We also send planners outside of our industry a couple times a year; for example, we recently sent someone to SXSW to experience that event from an attendee perspective. And they said (the festival) had this cool networking technology that might be worth implementing on our client’s show. So we can bring that to our client, and they know we’re out in the field doing research.”

The technology initiative can also dovetail with other trends, such as staying paperless to support sustainability and attendee expectations to that effect. Longtime planner Marsha S. Reynolds, CMP, president/owner of Atlanta, Georgia-based Reynolds Meeting & Event Management, has been implementing meeting apps for about five years. “I’m paperless these days with meetings and it’s really a good feeling. People are used to getting a mobile app, not a program book.” With many

presentations shortening to a TED Talk format and Q&As becoming more prominent, the app can include an audience response feature as well as presenters' slides for attendees to review beforehand, Reynolds adds.

Reynolds' immersion in meeting technology is not only a reflection of an industry trend, but also of her clientele. "They're all on the corporate side, and 90 percent in the technology industry. That's our core business, including user meetings, sales meetings and incentive meetings," she explains. Such companies naturally want app-facilitated meetings, given their attendee demographics and the tech-savvy image they want to uphold.

Specializations That Carry Weight

The tech specialty is part of Reynolds' overall skillset, and each independent planner or event management firm must seek to define that skillset and the specialties it includes. The result is clarity on one's industry niche and specific value proposition. Bennington considers her personal specialty to be organization and project management. "The majority of my clients are looking for project management and managing not only my team but their internal teams as well," she says. As a company, PROfound Planning's specialization is incentives, including the ability to benchmark the design and effectiveness of a client's incentive program versus those of similar clients. Her team feels a "great satisfaction in conceptualizing a program that will drive performance in an organization, implementing it, and looking at the individuals whose performance has improved because of the recognition," Bennington says.

Among CRG Events' specialties are site searching, contracting and budget management. "We have a site search and contract specialist who sits underneath event management, and we also recently launched a budget program," Bryan explains. "We're definitely seeing an unmet need and an opportunity with some of our clients to demonstrate some fiscal leadership as far as managing large-scale budgets. So we moved some people from the finance team to our event management side, and they work alongside a lot of our project managers. They own the budget and work on our client-specific budget management tools. They help to drive conversations around how to translate the money into attendee experiences."

Creating a brand experience for attendees is the specialty of Schaumburg, Illinois-based

Total Event Resources, led by President/Chief Creative Officer Kathy L. Miller. Describing the company as a "live event agency," Miller says her team's focus is on messaging and branding. "What we're really doing with our clients is storytelling with experiential meetings and events, so I feel like that's our specialty, as opposed to, say, milestone events. We create the exposure and the experience they need about their brand. We can do logistics all day long, but it's really about looking at the big picture and going beyond the logistics to their vision." One client, for example, wanted to show their attendees how technologically savvy they were, and Miller's team needed to "bring that theme to life." In addition to changing the registration process to self-check in, Total Event Resources "created an Innovation Center for them that carried that message in all areas of the conference."

Creating a 'Full Service' Company

Along with having one or more specialties, many event management companies bill themselves as "full service." But what exactly does that popular phrase mean? To some, it means being able to handle many kinds of meetings, including "incentive programs, board meetings, roadshows, trade shows, customer evaluation boards, and dare I say company picnics," says Bennington. To others, "full service" signifies the ability to manage the entire lifecycle of a meeting, "conceptualizing it, aligning with the organization's strategy, managing its implementation and then reporting on the results and the ROI of that program," she explains. Being versed in all these stages clearly requires a variety of skills. Bryan gives a few examples: "Our business model is such that we offer registration, finance, housing and event management, project management, budget management, site searching and contracting — we really can handle everything from A to Z." As a result, "we don't say no very often; when RFPs come through the door we really can adapt our business to meet the client's needs."

A full service company in either sense — proficiency with a variety of meetings or with the lifecycle of the individual meeting — has a certain advantage for the client. Namely, the



“I’m paperless these days with meetings and it’s really a **good feeling.”**

Marsha S. Reynolds, CMP
President/Owner
Reynolds Meeting & Event Management,
Atlanta, GA



client can reduce the number of third parties they deal with, perhaps to a single partner. For example, they would deal with one company for both their incentives and board meetings. Similarly, they would work with one company for their site sourcing and their post-event evaluations. This saves some of the time involved in meeting with multiple third parties for different events or components of a single event. That one partner also comes to know the client and their attendees on a deeper level. "It enables us to really get into their culture and ecosystem and to understand what that client is all about," Bryan says. "The more that we can work with them, the more we can adapt to their needs."

Given the marketplace advantage of being full service, or something close to it, many event management companies seek to build a team that can live up to that billing. The team's sheer amount of experience is one important aspect. PROfound Planning, for example, has a

team of 17 full-time professionals with over 300 years of combined experience. At CRG Events, "we have a lot of tenure," says Bryan. "At our retreat there was 150 collective CRG years within my department, and 77 percent of that from senior managers." But the importance of experience and tenure does not preclude the junior planner from contributing to the organization. Bennington appreciates "the creative, excited newcomer to the industry that has their eyes wide open and sees the world with nothing but opportunity. They might not necessarily have all the experience in the world to manage the whole team, but their fresh perspective I think is invaluable." At CRG

Events, "we have lots of millennials and recent graduates," says Bryan. "They're the pipeline to innovation. They're constantly asking why we're doing things a certain way. That's how we stay fresh and nimble in this industry that's changing all the time."

Apart from experience, the full service team must have a multifaceted skillset. "Our operations manager has found a lot of diverse people to add to our team, including those with AV backgrounds, theater art backgrounds, and English majors who are incredibly effec-

tive communicators and have deep relations with suppliers," says Bryan. "So we have a very well-rounded staff right now, and it's growing." For example, the company is continuing to build out its project management side with staff members who are certified PMPs (Project Management Professionals). As an example of staff specialization at PROfound Planning, Bennington cites a team member who "calls herself the 'Queen of the Curb'; she has phenomenal skillsets in managing transportation for large groups of people. I feel that if you surround yourself with people that are like you, you're doing yourself a disservice," she adds. "You need to surround yourself with people that are different and can offer different viewpoints."

Total Event Resources currently has 12 full-time employees who "understand the vision of our company and the vision of our clients and their brand," Miller describes. "They have an entrepreneurial spirit and are passionate and immersed. They come to me and say, 'I want to spend this amount of money to go to this conference, this is what I'm going to get out of it and here's what I'm going to bring back to the agency.' They want to grow professionally and personally." Team members include a creative manager with expertise in experiential design, a former hotel industry professional who understands contract legalities, and even a former chef. Overall, the team is "very well traveled personally, and that's part of the skillset I look for," says Miller.

Standing Out in the Crowd

Self-promotion is an indispensable skill for all third-party planners, given the challenge of distinguishing themselves from numerous competitors. With this in mind, Miller has marketing initiatives in place. "We've keyed into those clients that we believe would be a good fit for us, and we're getting out there to let those people know who we are because there is so much more competition than when I started this agency 22 years ago," she says. The best marketing impact often comes from satisfied clients, she adds. "We have some great evangelists that are clients of ours; some have made video testimonials. You're only as good as your last program, and I think we've built a great reputation." The basis of a long-lived reputation is adaptation to the strategic and technological needs of today's meetings. In short, third parties must evolve with their clients.

C&IT

"You're only as good as your last program, and I think we've built a great reputation."

Kathy L. Miller

President, Chief Creative Officer
Total Event Resources
Schaumburg, IL

A woman with dark curly hair and glasses is smiling and clapping her hands. She is wearing a colorful, patterned top. The background is a vibrant, abstract swirl of colors including pink, orange, blue, and purple, set against a black background.

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Site Selection



It's all business in the boardroom at Disney's Grand Californian Hotel & Spa. (Right) "Together Forever – A Pixar Nighttime Spectacular" lights up the sky over Disneyland Park.



Credits: Disneyland Resort

BUSINESS

PLEASURE

Although some corporate planners would not consider theme parks as a first choice for hosting a meeting, event or incentive, others understand that today's larger theme parks are like small cities, complete with hotels, shops, restaurants, parking and transportation options — even event planning services — making them the perfect choice, especially for corporate events where families are welcome.

European Success Story

The logic of using the parks for corporate events can be seen more clearly using Europe's Euro Disney, the continent's most-visited tourist attraction with 14.8 million visitors last year, as an example.

A significant number of these visitors are business travelers attending

corporate events, as Euro Disney is the fifth-largest convention facility in France. The resort hosts around 850 corporate events each year with clients including Nestlé, Air France and McDonald's, and they are not there just to have fun. Disneyland Paris, which includes Disneyland Park and movie-themed Walt Disney Studios, comprises seven onsite hotels, 55 restaurants, a 27-hole golf course, two convention centers, 95 meeting rooms and two special event spaces. That's a total of 5,800 hotel rooms, and more than 207,000 sf of event space.

Euro Disney hosts major shows and conferences with average group sizes ranging from 500 to 1,000 guests, with the largest corporate events attracting up to 5,000 guests a day. Disneyland Paris' conventions division caters to a

large international clientele, which alone accounts for 20 percent of its revenue. What's more, earlier this year, Disney announced a 2 billion euro multiyear expansion for Disneyland Paris that will begin a phased rollout in 2021.

In the U.S., Disney, along with several other large, corporate-run theme parks, are enjoying new revenue streams by using Euro Disney as the model for how a theme park can attract corporate clients by giving them what they need most: a safe, clean and friendly destination with all the amenities (and more) of a large well-run meetings resort or urban hotel.

Disneyland

Missy Schrupp, director of meetings, events and travel for the Minnesota-based International Dairy Queen Com-



Where Business Meets Pleasure

These Premier Theme Parks Check All the Boxes for Meetings and Incentives That Impress and Inspire

By Ron Bernthal

panies, was thrilled when her group of 2,400 participants used Anaheim's Disneyland for their January 2018 final night, after-dinner party.

"We had a final night after-dinner party in the park, where we occupied Stage 17 and the Backlot area including the Hyperion Theatre in Disney California Adventure Park," says Schrupp. Disney California Adventure Park is the second theme park at the Disneyland Resort, located adjacent to Disneyland. It opened in 2001 as Disney's California Adventure. "We had many Disney

"The Disney planners were very helpful in providing the resources we needed. ...It makes the process easier and more efficient."

Missy Schrupp, Director Meetings/Events/Travel International Dairy Queen Companies Minneapolis, MN

characters in Stage 17 for our attendees (adults and children) to enjoy, including a country and western band in the Backlot area, which was great, and then as a finale we had Chicago perform in the Hyperion Theatre. In addition, the park provided desserts and beverages for our attendees, both adults and kids."

One of the benefits for corporate planners using theme parks is that booking multiple hotels is often quite easy, providing conveniently located venues. "We used Disney's Grand Californian Hotel & Spa, Disneyland Hotel

and Disney's Paradise Pier Hotel," says Schrupp. "It was all so convenient, and an easy way to keep track of our group for transfers to other attractions in the area. We offered optional sightseeing activities in the Orange County area, as well as a post trip to Huntington Beach for three nights. These were all optional activities to enhance our overall program.

"Our actual Expo included general sessions with the Disney Institute presenting on one of the days; breakout session; a large exhibit hall; a silent/live auction event with dinner for our charity; and the final-night dinner with the park party after. We used the Anaheim Convention Center for our exhibit hall, general session and breakouts."

Schrupp says that working with the Disney team in California was a major



Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

Universal Orlando Resort's Loews Portofino Bay Resort (top) and Loews Sapphire Falls Resort (above).

The Disneyland Hotel is the main venue for large conventions, meetings and milestone events with 136,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, more than 970 guest rooms, including 71 suites, a 18,000-sf grand ballroom, a 28,968-sf exhibit hall, 52 breakout rooms, 3,000-sf Blue Sky suite ideal for board meetings and receptions, accommodating up to 40 guests, six dining venues and outdoor space for events of up to 4,000 attendees.

Universal Orlando Resort

With three theme parks and the Universal CityWalk dining and entertainment complex, Universal Orlando Resort offers five onsite hotels

reason why the event was so successful. "The Disney planners were very helpful in providing the resources we needed. The planners know their venues extremely well, so it makes the process easier and more efficient. This was a first for us to use this park, but in past years we have done park parties at Walt Disney World Orlando. We feel that for some groups, a theme park is a great destination."

She continues, "The only concern I had, but ended up great, was that we usually use our own entertainment company when hiring big name entertainment, like the band Chicago," Schrupp says. "But with some of the restrictions presented with a theme park party as we started this process, it made more sense to have Disney source the entertainment, and they did a great job for us."

With flexible meeting and event space spanning over 180,000 sf, the Disneyland Resort has hotels, two theme parks and the Downtown Disney District, all within walking distance. They also arrange seasonal events, including New Orleans Square Mardi Gras and the Happy Lunar New Year multicultural tribute, as well as team building activities such as the "Walk in Walt's Disneyland Footsteps."

— Loews Portofino Bay Hotel, the Hard Rock Hotel, Loews Royal Pacific Resort, Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort and Loews Sapphire Falls Resort — offering a total of 5,600 guest rooms. The Loews Meeting Complex — comprised of Loews Sapphire Falls Resort and Loews Royal Pacific Resort, which are connected by a bridge — offers groups and planners 295,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 97,000 sf of outdoor space.

The Loews hotels have separate meeting entrances, business centers, registration desks, ballrooms, banquet halls and private meeting planner offices at each property, and each is within walking distance of the resort's theme parks and the Universal CityWalk dining and entertainment complex.

Julie Kinch, CTC, CIS, manager of global meetings, events and travel at Extreme Networks, organized the company's four-day annual global conference and

awards banquet at Universal Orlando in October 2017. Extreme Networks, which delivers software-driven networking solutions that help IT departments deliver stronger connections with customers, partners and vendors, has four North American headquarters, including Toronto. "Most of our group of 700 stayed at the Loews Portofino Bay property and used their wonderful conference spaces and other venues at that hotel," says Kinch, "including our welcome dinner and general sessions, with a great CityWalk block party organized at the end of our stay. We also used the park's nearby Hard Rock Hotel for some of the group."

Although many corporate groups use theme park venues for their family-oriented events, the annual global conference for Extreme Networks is mostly kid-free, with only a few participants bringing family members with them. "All the executives who attended the conference really enjoyed meeting within the theme park environment," says Kinch. "It really gets old taking groups to the familiar city business hotels. They want to do things in their free time, whether it's going out on their own for dinner and sightseeing in Orlando, or staying within the park and taking in the shows and the exciting atmosphere.

"All the executives who attended the conference really enjoyed meeting within the theme park environment."

Julie Kinch, CTC, CIS
 Manager, Global Meetings
 Events & Travel
 Extreme Networks
 Salem, NH

"Working with the Universal Orlando teams that were assigned to our group was fantastic," she continues. "They knew exactly what to do as far as logistics, setting up the function spaces and dining arrangements wherever we went. The Portofino Bay property really exceeded our expectations. I was a little concerned that the hotel would be too leisure-focused, but it was really perfect for our large, corporate group. Our fall 2018, annual conference will be held in Prague this year, to give many of our European partners a closer destination, but we will be back at Universal Orlando and the Portofino Bay in 2019, based on the general consensus of the 2017 group following the event."



Universal CityWalk (left) and The Amazing Adventures of Spiderman.

Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

In addition to the Loews Portofino Bay and Hard Rock Hotels, other Universal Orlando venues and activities included in the Extreme Networks event included The Groove, Munchie Station, Red Carpet, Stilt Walkers, after-hours theme park events, and lots of F&B functions.

New attractions at Universal Orlando include Volcano Bay, an all-new water theme park; Fast & Furious: Supercharged, a new high-octane experience ride; Universal's Aventura Hotel (opening August 2018), a 600-room property offering the destination's first ever rooftop bar; The Toothsome Chocolate Emporium & Savory Feast Kitchen, a new full-service restaurant, bar and confectionery at Universal CityWalk, with a menu that includes steak, seafood, crepes, milkshakes, gourmet chocolates and one-of-kind desserts, all within a 19th century-

themed, Steampunk-inspired dining establishment.

Available exclusively to planners who host meetings at Universal Orlando's onsite hotels, Meeting Enhancements allow planners to create experiences that directly connect attendees to the meeting message. Universal Orlando characters can be used for meet and greets, meeting openers, speaker introductions, meeting interruptions, excitement builders, ice breakers and more.

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay

The park welcomes corporate groups of 100 or more with special packages that include admission to Busch Gardens along with an all-you-care-to-eat lunch buffet featuring the park's special barbecue specialties and a one-hour exclusive seating at Gwazi Pavilion.

Corporate groups can participate in team building experiences, and exclusive areas of the park are available. For larger groups, an entire park buyout with a minimum of 3,000 guests is very doable. These large corporate groups will have unlimited access to all the rides, experience up-close animal encounters, visit the games area and still have time to take in the gift shops within the park.

Catering options are available, including an hors d'oeuvres reception or private dining in one of the air-conditioned venues, such as Dragon Fire Grill or The

Serengeti Overlook Restaurant, or dine-around certificates can be purchased for corporate guests to use at the restaurants throughout the park.

The Serengeti Overlook has great views of the Serengeti Plain, home to free-roaming African animals and is a great place for corporate events, meetings and evening parties for 50 to 250 guests. Serengeti Overlook's outdoor patio is also a perfect place for a cocktail hour with hors d'oeuvres and drinks before heading inside for dinner.

The Dragon Fire Grill, located in the center of the park, is an excellent dining venue for evening functions of 300 to 700 guests. The fully equipped stage at Dragon Fire Grill allows for receptions, dinners and award ceremonies.

Another popular venue for corporate events is Adventure Island, with its sandy white beaches and Key West atmosphere, group events are relaxed and provide water-soaked excitement for all ages, with corporate groups of 500 to 4,000 accommodated.

Hersheypark

"Groups enjoy more than 70 rides and attractions, award-winning live entertainment, games, a zoo and a water park at Hersheypark," says Kristin Maneval, director of group sales for the park. "Hersheypark can host corporate picnic events for groups of 40 to 10,000. After hours, private events are also available to be customized to the corporate group's needs."

Meeting space is abundant at the official resorts of Hersheypark: Hershey Lodge offers 665 guest rooms and



Serengeti Safari at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. (Right) Busch Gardens Williamsburg.



Credits: Busch Gardens



Credit: Hersheypark

Hersheypark in Pennsylvania can accommodate groups of 40–10,000 attendees.

100,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space, as well as teambuilding programs. Hotel Hershey has 276 guest rooms and 25,000 sf of meeting space. And Hershey Country Club features 10,672 sf of meeting space overlooking two of the club's three golf courses, and the Picard Grand Pavilion.

SeaWorld Orlando

A perfect venue for the family incentive in Orlando, or as a planned activity for meetings and conferences, there are many options to choose from when booking SeaWorld for corporate groups, including high-energy bands or djs, Island Trio, Jazz Band and caricature artists as part of the group experience.

Various areas within the park offer specialized activities. At Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin (300 to 1,200 attendees), guests are surrounded by the sights, sounds and encounters found in Antarctica, and participate in a one-of-a-kind ride and an incredible group adventure, combining close animal connections with state-of-the-art interactive ride technologies.

At the Discovery Cove (100 to 500 guests), a tropical atmosphere is complete with a paradise of rocky lagoons surrounded by lush landscaping, tropical reefs, winding rivers, a resort-style pool with waterfalls and white-sand beaches. Planners can create a private evening on the Laguna Grill patio and beach area with theme options that in-

clude a Caribbean night, luau or beach party. There is also the option of swimming with dolphins, rays and tropical fish and hand-feeding exotic birds in the free-flight aviary.

The Key West and Manta areas (up to 1,200 attendees) are great for private receptions and networking, and include Stingray Lagoon, Dolphin Cove, Manta and Manta Aquarium.

In addition, the Sea Harbor Pavilions (100 to 1,800 guests) are four open-air pavilions around a spacious central courtyard, ideal for buffet style functions and receptions.

"In September, 2017, we had a corporate incentive with family members attending," says Lisa Hurst, planning manager for meeting and event services at a multinational professional services network, headquartered in London. "Our events at SeaWorld Orlando were held for three Friday nights in a row, with 800 attendees the first and second nights, and 1,800 persons on the final night.

"The first two weeks we had our groups stay at Disney's Grand Floridian

was provided to ensure the program was executed flawlessly, which it was, and this was very important to us," says Hurst. "This group, and others, have been to SeaWorld previously, and always enjoys the events there. The park's event staff is very flexible, very organized, and willing to do whatever it take to ensure the guests experience is amazing."

Hurst says that planners should remember to use their normal checklist before booking large groups for theme park events, including researching the function spaces provided by the various parks being considered and checking weather history in the destination, especially in Florida. "Make sure your space will be adequate for the group size. Make sure the space being offered is appropriate for the time of year — a water park is not always ideal during hurricane season," says Hurst. "Be sure to review the contract with your operations/event manager with the venue, you do not want to miss any of the contracted details."

In a world where colleagues of all levels are encouraged to socialize with one



Sharks Underwater Grill at SeaWorld Orlando.

Credit: SeaWorld Orlando

property, with the last group staying at both Disney's Grand Floridian and Loews Portofino Bay properties," Hurst says. "The groups enjoyed the local Disney and Universal theme parks during their days in Orlando, and everyone had a fabulous evening together at a SeaWorld park buyout on their last night.

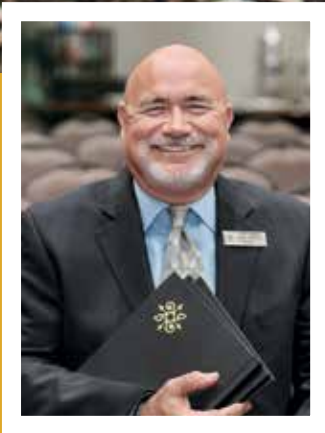
"The sales process for our multigroup, multinight event at SeaWorld was relatively easy, and once the contract was done an operations manager at the park

another and more CEOs are doing away with their stiff suits, theme parks provide the perfect playground for business events. Reminiscences of happy childhood experiences, roller coasters and fairground games can bring out the best in us. In fact, a day at a theme park can do so much more than just any average day out, so it's a wonder the corporate world only recently started taking advantage of these unique spaces in their mission to impress and inspire. **C&IT**



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Meeting Planning Liability Looms Large, From Damage to Property and Reputations to Actions of Uninsured Vendors

By Maura Keller

Predicting the future is like forecasting the weather. You think you can anticipate what's going to happen — then it doesn't. There has been a great deal written in the past few years concerning the legal liability of meetings and events, usually in terms of a weather-related crisis or the likelihood of personal injury. But to what extent do corporate planners need to worry about incurring liability

in the course of their work responsibilities? Quite a bit, say the experts. Despite risk-management practices that have reduced frivolous claims, meeting and event professionals continue to feel the effects of operating in a litigious society.

Dotting I's and Crossing T's

According to John Foster Esq., CHME, attorney and founding partner at Fos-

ter, Jensen & Gulley, who specializes in the legal aspects of meetings and conventions, trade shows and events, the general litigation explosion that has hit our society in recent years certainly has not missed the meetings industry. A meeting planner is now not only responsible for booking guest rooms and meeting space, choosing menus and hiring speakers, but also for protecting the sponsoring organi-

“Risk management starts by asking four basic questions: What can go wrong? What can be done to prevent harm from occurring? What steps should be taken if harm does occur? Where will the money come from?”

John S. Foster, Esq., Founding Partner, Foster, Jensen & Gulley, Atlanta, GA



zation from risk and ensuring, to the extent possible, the safety and well-being of the participants once they get to the meeting.

“In short, meeting planners are also risk managers,” Foster says. “Risk management starts by asking four basic questions: What can go wrong? What can be done to prevent harm from occurring? What steps should be taken if harm does occur? Where will the money come from?”

As Foster explains, the risk of loss to meeting sponsors from accidents and disasters generally falls into five categories: 1) property and casualty losses from theft; 2) damage or destruction to property from negligence, intentional acts or natural causes such as fires, floods or hurricanes; 3) personal injury to staff, attendees or participants, including damage to reputations; 4) economic losses from cancellation of the event because of acts of God, e.g., natural causes or other events caused by third parties; and 5) contractual liability from cancellation or attrition.

According to Laurie Sherwood, attorney at Walsworth LLP in San Francisco, when selecting locations, it is important for event planners to do their due diligence in investigating the location and the various vendors and suppliers being used. It also is important to account for all potential contingencies including weather, uninvited persons, geopolitical considerations, etc. And remember that a meeting planner also may be responsible for property damage and for the risk of bodily injury to attendees, so make sure any vendors hired are also reputable and insured.

“If the event involves physical activities, know the ability level of the participants, plan accordingly and have them sign waivers,” Sherwood says.

General liability issues include personal injuries resulting from event activities and/or conditions at the location, lack of appropriate accommodations/event space, alcohol service and breach of contract. Additionally, at offsite employee events, legal issues from an employment perspective can arise, such as sexual harassment and workplace safety issues.

In addition, some insurance policies only cover planning services and not the event itself. So when hiring independent contractors, such as a vendor, and they are not insured, a meeting planner or the employer may be held liable for that independent contractor’s poor work, illegal conduct or accidents.

“A meeting planner who already has general liability can ask the insurer to add one or more independent contractors to it as ‘additional insured,’” says Charles Vethan, founder and CEO of Vethan Law Firm. “They can be covered for the duration of the event or longer.”

Larger events also may pose additional security risks and may require the presence of outside security, and will likely require increased insurance coverage. “Indeed, the larger the scale of the event, the more risk of injury and liability. Typically these larger events will have transportation risks and liquor risks — if alcohol is being served,” Sherwood says.

That said, Vanessa Murray, an event marketing consultant and CEO of Charlotte, NC-based agency, TAKE Suc-

cess LLC, says it’s important for meeting and event planners to remember that the same rules apply whether they are working on a contract for a 200-person event hosted at a hotel venue or a 20,000-person event at a convention center.

“Yet these extra zeros may make a huge difference to your client’s insurance company,” Murray says. “By nature, larger events — especially sporting events where large groups of people will congregate — will lead to crossing more t’s and a longer planning process.”

Identifying Liability Concerns

If the companies with whom the meeting and event planners work have risk management departments, legal experts recommend starting there. Planners also should speak with the insurance carriers, and it is also helpful to speak with attorneys experienced in the area of meeting and event liabilities.

“Conduct due diligence in selecting venues, suppliers and vendors,” Sherwood says. “Have contracts with all venues, suppliers and vendors, and have the contracts reviewed by legal counsel. And where appropriate, have the participants and attendees sign liability releases.”

A corporate meeting planner needs to read the insurance policy and contact their insurance agent to ensure they have the coverage needed for each event. They also can contact their business attorney to help identify risks and the forms and contracts needed.

Murray says that meeting and event planners should know what they are held accountable for in a legal dispute.

Insurance



Purchasing Liability Insurance

John Foster Esq., CHME, attorney and founding partner at Foster, Jensen & Gulley, who specializes in the legal aspects of meetings and conventions, trade shows and events, offers some tips for meeting planners looking to purchase liability insurance:

- **Do a risk/benefit analysis to determine if insurance coverage is desirable.** If the total premium for the regular convention cancellation policy and the terrorism coverage is \$10,000, for instance, and your company or association stands to lose \$250,000 or more in net revenue or nonrefundable expenses, you have to decide if your organization can absorb this loss with its current assets or whether it is a better bet to pay the premium and add the \$10,000 to the cost of the meeting.
- **Shop early.** Liability insurance can be difficult to obtain in some markets, and the earlier you start shopping for it, the easier it will be to locate. The last thing you want to do is shop for insurance when your meeting is right around the corner and you've got to have it.
- **Use insurance brokers who are familiar with the meetings industry.** This will save you the time and trouble of explaining all the aspects of your business to an insurance broker who knows nothing about the industry or, even worse, being sold insurance that you don't need or that isn't appropriate for your business.
- **Get quotes at different levels of deductible.** The higher the deductible, the lower the premium. Take as high a deductible as your organization can afford.
- **Compare policies, not just prices.** It's important to know not only what the insurance policy covers but also what the exclusions are and whether a different policy would be better suited to your needs. The prices will differ according to your company's claims history and the features of the policy.
- **Reduce your future premiums by using good risk management techniques and by sharing them with your insurance carrier.** Putting your risk management policies in writing not only will show the insurance carrier that you are a good risk, it also will reduce your claims and keep your premiums in line in the future.

— MK

"These clauses are the ones that keep me up at night when it comes to venue contracts," Murray says. They include indemnity, insurance or certificate of insurance (COI), force majeure (more than just acts of God — includes civil disputes, etc.), confidentiality and merger clauses.

"Many meeting and event planners sign contracts with venues and vendors directly but there is huge monetary compensation for a loss, personal injury 'liquidated damages,' personal risk and other issues to take in account before doing so," Murray says.

For example, consider attrition. If the meeting planner or client does not fill the required hotel room nights per their contract, they will meet what's called "attrition" and the hotel shall hold the contract owner to liquidated damages for the incurred loss in hotel sleeping room revenue since these rooms were blocked out and not sold to the public.

"The nightly room rate is set in the contract and multiplied by the number of room nights the contract owner did not meet or book," Murray says. "Typically, a hotel contract will include an attrition allowance which is a 10 percent to 20 percent variance in room nights they must meet before penalty. The smallest oversight in these clauses could lead to a large liability to the meeting and event planner and/or their client."

Steps to Take

Murray suggests meeting and event planners initiate the following to ensure the liabilities they may be facing are thoroughly covered:

- Only work with vendors that are reputable, fully licensed and insured. Ask to see a copy of their COI for your records.
- Know who is at the event at all times. Audit the event registration list against the hotel's rooming list each day to ensure it matches and account for any no-shows or last-minute cancellations.
- Don't let in the "trouble makers." Inform the venue or hotel about

“Have contracts with all venues, suppliers, vendors and have the contracts reviewed by legal counsel. And where appropriate, have the participants and attendees sign liability releases.”

Laurie Sherwood, Partner, Walsworth LLP, San Francisco, CA



any misconduct or person(s) that may cause harm to the attendees. Provide a photo of such person(s) during the event's pre-con meeting so that all the hotel personnel can be on alert and refuse entrance to the private event. Allow the hotel to alert authorities should it need to be reinforced.

- Mother Nature has a mind of her own. So be sure to include the force majeure clause in the hotel contract as well as event registration rules. Communicate with the attendees about weather-related issues.
- State the rules about refunds because attendees will ask. Be sure the rules are clear and upfront with attendees on the registration page.
- Secure the venue for all attendees and exhibitors. If the exhibit hall is planned to be in an open, public area, for example, hire a security guard during off-hours to ensure vendors' booths are safe. However, state in the terms and conditions of the exhibiting contract that the meeting planner is not held liable for any missing personal belongings.
- Create a code of conduct to help attendees feel safe at all times and inclusive.
- Have plans in place.
 - » Emergency plan. What is the chain of command and communication? Who shall be called if someone is injured, hurt or has gone missing?
 - » Public relations plan. Who is communicating with the press? What can and can't be said? How

and when shall it be communicated to the attendees?

- » Site inspection. During the site visit, ask about the venue's safety procedures and exits in case of a fire.
- If it's offsite, make sure the same procedures are taken to ensure attendees are safe. Use a buddy system at all times.
- Develop a survival kit. Maintain a contact list of all the vendors, local authorities, maps, schedule, contracts, final invoices and copies of insurance, final attendee list and emergency contact list for attendees. Have everything on file so the client can access in case the meeting planner is unavailable or some-

one has to take over for the planner prior to the meeting.

- Get legal eyes on all contracts. Let the professionals help identify any red flags.

Understanding Insurance

There are myriad insurance options that can help meeting and event professionals protect themselves and the companies for which they work. As Foster explains, commercial general liability (CGL) insurance is a "must have" for all meeting sponsors.

"A typical CGL policy provides protection against claims involving bodily injury or death; damage to property owned, occupied or rented by the meeting sponsor as well as property





“Some meeting and event planners don’t give their intuition enough credit. If it doesn’t feel right, it most likely isn’t. Planners need to trust their gut and always overprepare.”

Vanessa Murray, CEO, TAKE Success LLC, Charlotte, NC

in the sponsor’s care, custody and control — as long as the premises rented or used by the meeting sponsor is for seven consecutive days or fewer; and personal injury to third parties caused by an accident,” Foster says.

Another type of insurance that meeting planners should consider is international property and casualty insurance. According to Foster, this type of policy is becoming more commonplace as domestic companies and associations plan more international meetings and events.

“It can include property, liability, foreign voluntary compensation, employer’s liability repatriation, travel services, accidental death and dismemberment, medical, political evacuation and kidnap and extortion coverage all in one,” Foster says. “Common exclusions to this coverage are war and terrorism.”

And, while fires, floods, hurricanes, strikes and snowstorms are frustrating unforeseen situations for planners and attendees alike, they also can cause considerable financial hardship without insurance. That’s why Foster also recommends “convention cancellation coverage” to protect against lost profits and expenses if the meeting or event cannot be held.

“For example, if a major airline strike, or strike at the headquarters hotel or convention center causes your event to be canceled, cancellation policies now cover cancellation, interruption or postponement of an event caused by terrorism, including bioterrorism, threats, fear of travel or prohibition of travel by employers,” Foster says. “Coverage is limited to sub limits, location and time period for any terrorist act.”

Thirty years ago, purchasing terrorism insurance coverage would have been a mind-boggling prospect. Unfortunately in this day and age of terrorist activity both in the U.S. and abroad, purchasing terrorism insurance coverage as part of an insurance package makes sense. While typical convention cancellation coverage may offer partial coverage for acts of terrorism, meeting planners should discuss the specific nuances relating to terrorism coverage to see if it is appropriate for the meeting or event being held.

Mistakes to Avoid

One of the biggest mistakes meeting and event planners make includes not understanding the extent of their insurance coverage.

“It’s a good idea to get general liability and professional liability insurance, although some states have statutory requirements already for the types of insurance your business needs to have,” Vethan says. “If a meeting or event planner runs a business in which clients are inherently at risk when participating in an activity sponsored by or on the property of the business, the planner might need a release of liability form.”

A signed release of liability waives the rights of the signatory to make a liability claim if he or she is injured. A meeting planner may not need one, but it is a good business practice to have one as part of a company’s risk management program if the meeting planner conducts a potentially dangerous activity or has substantial interaction with the public.

Another mistake planners make is

not putting everything in writing. It could be a simple email recapping the conversation the planner had with the AV vendor who agreed to waive the fee for the confidence monitor. Send a quick email noting that the conversation occurred and the details to which the parties both agree.

“Some meeting and event planners don’t give their intuition enough credit,” Murray says. “If it doesn’t feel right, it most likely isn’t. Planners need to trust their gut and always overprepare.”

And while a meeting planner may have asked for people to note any food allergies on the online registration form, sometimes the attendee isn’t the one registering himself or herself.

When an attendee starts to have an allergic reaction during an evening gala, the meeting planner needs to have emergency procedures in place to act fast. Include an emergency contact name and mobile phone number for all attendees, volunteers and staff members upon registration check-in at the event and have a hard copy of this information handy at all times. Should this be a larger event outside a hotel, consider hiring a local EMT to be onsite during the event.

“Any loss of or damage to property, harm to people or liability for damages incurred through contractual liability could spell financial disaster to a meeting sponsor,” Foster says. “The role of insurance is to not only pay off claims, but also to provide funds for defense if a frivolous lawsuit is filed and a defense versus a settlement is appropriate. Legal fees and court costs can mount up quickly and insurance should be there to provide for peace of mind.” **C&IT**



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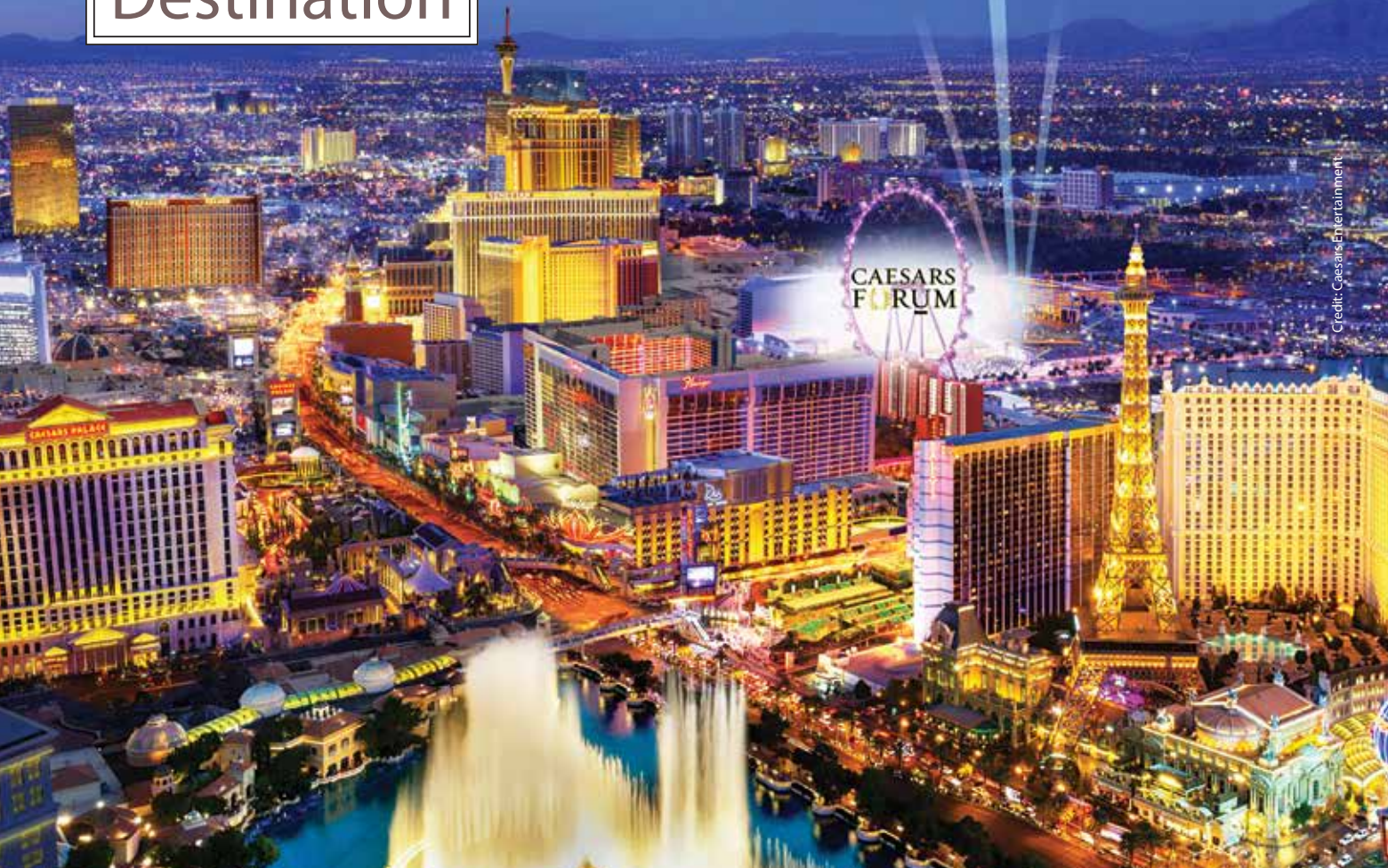
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Caesars Forum, a 300,000-sf conference center, is scheduled to open in 2020.

Las Vegas

Planners Report Stellar Meeting Experiences On and Off The Strip

By David Swanson

When it comes to the meetings and convention industry, few destinations can equal Las Vegas as a known quantity. The city caters to almost 22,000 meetings annually that draw anywhere from a few dozen attendees to the more than 182,000 who attended the most recent CES, the consumer electronics show in January.

Home to three of the country's 10 largest convention venues and almost 150,000 hotel rooms, the city is built to host. In 2017, Las Vegas welcomed more than 6.6 million meeting and convention attendees, and hosted nine of the nation's top 15 trade shows (by net square footage), according to *Trade Show News Network*.

Amazingly, all of this is conducted against a backdrop of 24/7 entertainment, gaming and nightlife — the “lost

weekend” cliché that the Sin City is also known for. Despite the obvious distractions, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that business actually gets done during meetings and conferences here.

Research released by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitor's Bureau (LVCVA) found that meeting attendance increased an average of 9 percent when shows rotated into Las Vegas. Attendance decreased 4 percent when shows rotated out of the city. Further, the LVCVA's research found that attendees actually spend more time on a show floor in Las Vegas — 11.3 hours versus an average of 8.6 hours in other cities. And with the city's McCarran International Airport evolving into one of the best-connected in the U.S., with scheduled service from Europe, Asia and South America, the

sheer convenience of Las Vegas becomes inescapable when selecting a meeting location.

Aria's Five-star Service

Accessibility is chief among the reasons why Nicole Dumitrescu, director of client services and events for dental marketing agency Chrisad, brought her company back to Las Vegas for its annual No Limits conference.

"We have clients all across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, so we want a location that is easy for them to get to," explains Dumitrescu. "Each year we have our conference (in Las Vegas), we have a great turnout." Following conferences held at Bellagio and The Cosmopolitan, for its March 2018 event Chrisad chose MGM Resorts' Aria Resort & Casino as the location for No Limits XIV, drawing about 500 attendees.

"Aria provided five-star service and didn't disappoint with their impeccable rooms, attentive staff and great cuisine," says Dumitrescu. "It's centralized in the heart of The Strip, which is ideal, and Vegas is attractive to our guests since the city has a ton of great restaurants and entertainment."

Dumitrescu said Chrisad relied on Aria's restaurants for diners, including Jean-Georges Steakhouse, Bardot, Carbone, Herringbone, Javier's and Sage. But Chrisad also took guests to The Cosmopolitan, next door to Aria, for the opening cocktail party and additional dining venues.

"Each year we have a welcome reception at The Cosmopolitan hotel," explains Dumitrescu. "We rent out the top and middle levels of the Chandelier bar. And at The Cosmopolitan we also had a number of group dinners: at Zuma, STK, Estiatorio Milos, and Beauty & Essex."

Following a recent expansion, the convention facilities at Aria now sprawl 500,000 sf, consuming the space originally dedicated to a Cirque du Soleil stage show. Much of the original three-story facility is flooded with natural light by day, courtesy of a soaring glass curtain wall opening onto

a landscape of native plants and trees. Aria now has seven ballrooms, ranging from the 17,542-sf Orovada Ballroom to Bristlecone, which measures 51,225 sf.

The 200,000-sf expansion at Aria offers versatile indoor-outdoor meeting rooms with retractable windows and dramatic views of The Park and T-Mobile Arena. The top floor offers one of The Strip's most distinctive meeting venues: a vast ballroom with two open-air verandas that can accommodate receptions for up to 2,000 attendees. Another facet of the approximately \$170 million expansion is the discreetly marked Cypress Executive Lounge. The 3,000-sf space features a fully



"Aria provided five-star service and didn't disappoint with their impeccable rooms, attentive staff and great cuisine."

Nicole Dumitrescu, Director of Client Services & Events, Chrisad, San Rafael, CA

stocked pantry, three private suites for personal workspaces and one-on-one meetings, a conference room with flexible furniture setups for up to 30 and a study for toasting to a successful event. While the expansion was receiving its first groups in February, a Resort Club Lounge will open this fall at Aria, providing dedicated concierge services, an HDTV lounge, food and beverage offerings, including breakfast to evening hors d'oeuvres, wine, sparkling wine and beer — all on the house for Resort Club guests.

"Aria is a beautiful property, with everything you could ask for," adds Dumitrescu. "The halls and foyers outside the conference rooms offer lots of natural light and modern décor. The location of the conference rooms in proximity to the casino floor and guest elevators is perfect. They aren't too far away from one another, but allow enough space so you feel like you are separated."

Dumitrescu called out Taylor McMurtie, Dawn Campbell, Kelly Rivas and Nick Kustudia at Aria for helping to make 2018 Chrisad's most successful conference to date. "The sales staff went above and beyond, and always exceeded my expectations. If you plan an event with this hotel you can expect five-star service from the planning stage to completion. The staff is very accommodating, will listen to your expectations and will follow through."

Park MGM Test Drive

An even bigger project, MGM Resorts International is wrapping up is



The construction, renovation and rebranding of the 2,700-room Park MGM is in its final phase, with some elements — including the boutique hotel NoMad — set to wrap up later this year.

Credit: MGM Resorts International

the \$450 million transformation of the erstwhile Monte Carlo Resort and Casino into Park MGM. John Stearns, director of connections for AccuBuild Construction Software, got to take the reconceived resort out for a test drive when he scheduled AccuBuild Connections at Park MGM.

“The space was brand new and really well managed,” says Stearns. But he adds that, ultimately, it’s the people on the

“The team at Park MGM was world-class. ...All (staff) put the client and event first.”

John Stearns, Director of Connections
AccuBuild Construction Software,
Pasadena, CA



sales team he worked with that made his 100-attendee conference in February 2018 come off without a hitch. “Honestly, the remodel is nice, but to me, the relationship you have with the team that is planning your event trumps the space. Now, all that said, it was really nice to take advantage of the remodeled rooms and convention space.”

Signage for the 21-year-old Monte Carlo came down in January, as the hotel transforms into a twofer: 2,700 rooms and suites will be part of the Park MGM brand, while 290 rooms will be dedicated to a boutique concept, NoMad (short for North of Madison). The construction, renovation and rebranding of Park MGM is in its final phase, with some elements — including NoMad — set to wrap up later this year. The hotel also includes a brand-new conference facility. Offering both non-traditional spaces and flexible design, Park MGM is designed to fill an unmet need in Las Vegas for small groups, while also offering beautiful spaces for groups up to 5,000 attendees.

A key feature at Park MGM is the new Madison Meeting Center, a 10,000-sf facility that can be customized for groups from 10 to 50 people. Ten flexible rooms accommodate varying layouts designed for uniquely tailored events, including classroom-style training, product seminars and workshops. The facility features two self-service lounges, ergonomic, movable furniture with integrated power and built-in AV equipment, confidence monitors and rolling whiteboards. But Park MGM isn’t limited to smaller groups — the hotel has an additional 67,000 sf of traditional conference space available.

Another draw for the complex is dining. Already open are the light, French bistro-style Primrose, and Bavette’s, a Chicago-bred steakhouse with a speakeasy setting (“Bavette’s might be my favorite new restaurant,” says Stearns). Coming later this year is Roy Choi, the eponymous venue for L.A.’s famed Korea-meets-Mexico food truck chef Kogi BBQ, and a Vegas branch of Eataly, a 40,000-sf marketplace dedicated to the intersection of cuisine and Italy, and sure to be a huge hit.

Stearns says the Park MGM crew was able to adjust to the curve balls that any event with unanticipated elements can present.

“We had a cocktail party for our clients at the Primrose, and the general manager, Joseph, was so great in providing us an alternative space when the weather turned a bit cold. Our original event was supposed to be at the restaurant’s outdoor patio, but Joseph suggested we move indoors and closed off the entire bar for our event. He even helped us accommodate our photo booth and live music.

“And our room block was a bit confusing, but the hotel did a great job at keeping it separate. We had a master account for our employees, and then our clients paid for their own rooms. It was always clear what block was being charged.

“Because accommodations have improved so much in the last 20 years, prices now reflect these upgrades,” Stearns adds. “Especially when it comes to catering. I think



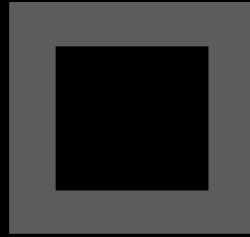
The Cypress Executive Lounge Conference Room is part of Aria Resort’s recent 200,000-sf expansion.

Credit: Aria Resort & Casino

the trick is to build a relationship with your catering and services managers (Jamie De Cordova and Reem Ewais at Park MGM) and to be honest with them about your budget. They did a great job helping me stay within our planned budget, and if something was ever an additional cost, they were up front with me about that.”

Stearns continues, “The team at Park MGM was world-class. From my original contact with Jillian Kyde, the executive director of sales, to convention sales managers Jena D’Amico and Gabrielle Wood, all put the client and event

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Credits: left, HRH; right, Pravana



“The choice of Hard Rock Hotel was a no-brainer for me,” says Noha Zerka, show production manager for Pravana. “You have the energy of Las Vegas without all the crowds you find on The Strip. This makes Hard Rock great for business meetings, with less distractions.”

first. They all have great communication, so you don’t have to segment your correspondence.”

“I love, love, love Park MGM,” Stearns concludes.

Caesars on the Move

MGM isn’t the only one writing nine-figure checks for renovations, expansions and new-builds.

Located immediately behind (east) of Linq, a groundbreaking for Caesars Forum is set for the second quarter of 2018. The \$375 million project will build a LEED Silver-certified conference center featuring 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including two 108,000-sf ballrooms. A 100,000-sf outdoor plaza will connect directly to the Linq Promenade and to the Las Vegas Monorail. Caesars Forum is set to open in 2020.

In February, Caesar’s-managed Harrah’s Las Vegas, one of the oldest names in gaming, announced completion of a \$140 million refurbishment, including 1,622 modern, refreshed guest rooms and suites in the resort’s Valley Tower. The upgrades started with renovations to the 672 rooms in the South Tower, and the casino floor and lobby bar has also received a makeover. The hotel offers more than 24,000 sf of meeting space — ideal for small- and medium-sized groups — and guests coming from their rooms need not traverse the casino to access the meeting facilities. Harrah’s is located just

a few minutes on foot from the Linq Promenade and High Roller observation wheel, providing easy access to round-the-clock dining and entertainment.

Strip stalwart Caesars Palace itself has benefited from an ongoing renovation and upgrade of the property, especially in the guest rooms. The recent renovation of the 1,181-room Palace Tower topped \$100 million; the Indigo Tower is cur-



“As much as I like the location, vibe and aesthetic of the (Hard Rock Hotel), the people are the real reason I choose to use it.”

Noha Zerka, Show Production Mgr. Pravana, Culver City, CA

rently receiving its makeover and the Forum Tower upgrades are scheduled for completion in 2019. The 3,793-room Caesars has also added new dining venues. The fast-casual, modestly priced Pronto by Giada (De Laurentiis) offers California-Italian fare with a variety of seating options. And Gordon Ramsey has opened his fifth restaurant in Las Vegas in perhaps the

most enviable of locations, right in front of Caesars, on the Strip: The high-concept Hell’s Kitchen is presumably the first fine-dining establishment built around a reality show (“Go to Hell” T-shirts are available at the gift shop).

Hard Rock Vibe

No question: The high-energy Strip isn’t always the right backdrop to a successful meeting, and some planners choose to venture just off Las Vegas Boulevard, where the neon and glitz are a little less constant.

One such option is the 1,504-room Hard Rock Hotel, which sits less than a mile east of The Strip, on Paradise Road, but can seem a world apart. And that made Hard Rock an easy pick for planner



Credit: LVCVA

The LVCVA recently unveiled the Las Vegas Convention Center expansion design. The \$860 million project will add 1.4 million sf to the current center when completed in 2021.

Noha Zerka, show production manager for Pravana, the professional hair care brand. The company was bringing a group of just 16 to Las Vegas for a training seminar in March.

"The choice of Hard Rock Hotel was a no-brainer for me," explained Zerka. "You have the energy of Las Vegas without all the crowds you find on The Strip. This makes Hard Rock great for business meetings, with less distractions. Also, the hotel's aesthetic works well with our brand. The attendees loved their rooms, and the vibe of the hotel overall.

"I can honestly say there were no challenges. The Hard Rock Hotel team made everything so easy for us. Booking the rooms, arranging transportation to/from the airport was simple — these are usually the things that I find challenging in other cities."

One thing Zerka loved was the Vanity Lounge, where most of the meeting was conducted. "It didn't look like a typical meeting space. It was all-glass and looked out into the pool area. It made the long day of meetings much better than sitting in a windowless room. Our attendees left the room only to use the restrooms — it didn't feel like we needed a break from the space.

"The event manager and catering team were outstanding," Zerka continues. "I provided breakfast, lunch and snack breaks for my group and each meal was better than the last. I had less than the minimum required for catering, but they were able to work with me and my budget. The catering staff were attentive and helpful — we never had to search for them for anything, because they were always around. We ordered a projector and screen, and the AV team was available to check on the equipment prior to each day and popped in to make sure everything was going well."

But Zerka did bring her small group to The Strip for an offsite dinner, at the Bellagio's Lago restaurant. "Although the food and setting was beautiful, there were multiple large groups," says Zerka. "You could barely hear the person next to you speaking. Overall, it was not a good experience. I would have preferred someplace that was a bit more quiet and spacious."

By contrast, Zerka's experience at the Hard Rock team was a winning one.

"It took me two years from initial site check to booking the meeting. I feel

that with any other property I would have experienced a sense of hostility for not booking sooner. But Drew Varga and Mike Roth kept the lines of communication open and seemed genuinely excited to work with Pravana. I work with several convention centers and hotels around the country, and they always seem to have the attitude of 'you need us more than we need you.' But the Hard Rock Hotel was different — they make me feel like I am their No. 1 customer. And as much as I like the location, vibe and aesthetic of the hotel, the people are the real reason I choose to use it."

In March, Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson an-



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Credit: Open Systems Inc.

Connect, an Open Systems Conference (above right), has been held at M Resort Spa Casino for the last two years, and will repeat in 2018.

nounced a deal to take over the Hard Rock Hotel and rebrand the property as Virgin Hotels Las Vegas by the end of 2019, following a renovation that will cost “hundreds of millions” of dollars. The hotel’s guest rooms and common areas will receive a facelift, but no word yet what will happen to the Hard Rock’s existing 110,000 sf of meeting and convention space. One thing that’s certain: Although the Hard Rock may not have a Strip address, its location is closer to both the airport

“The size of the event space as well as number of sleeping rooms accommodate our group perfectly. The sleeping rooms are beautiful, as is the aesthetic of the entire resort. In addition to the meeting space, M Resort offers multiple reception areas throughout the property. We have utilized many of these areas including the Milan ballroom and the boardroom. One of our favorite spaces is Lux, set on the 16th floor of the resort, offering beautiful views of the mountains and the city lights. Each year we also host an event at Villaggio Del Sole, the expansive outdoor pool and entertainment piazza, complete with live music and amazing food.

“At some events you can feel trapped in a dark exhibit hall,” Goracke explains. “But because we have access to all areas of the property we never feel that way at the M. All meetings, sessions, meals, evening activities and entertainment are in one place. We serve the large majority of our meals outside, so our guests are also able to enjoy the beautiful Las Vegas weather.

“And the staff are true professionals,” she continues. “From the director of sales, to the catering and conference services planner, to the reservations coordinator and the AV productions team, everyone gives their all to make sure our event runs smoothly. It’s great working with the same people year after year, as they really understand what we’re trying to accomplish with our event.

“Our attendees and staff rave about the catering at the M,” Goracke adds. “We particularly enjoyed The M Clam Bake (lobster!) catered out by their pool. The AV team has been able to handle every request we’ve had — they’re on hand immediately if there are slight issues or changes that need to be made.

“We have held events at other hotels in Las Vegas and found that the long walk from rooms to the event space was an issue. The size of the M is perfect for the number of attendees we have, and the elevators lead directly to the meeting rooms.

“Las Vegas is always a big draw for our attendees,” she says, “and the staff at the M Resort make it very clear that our event and attendees are their No. 1 priority while we are there.”

Whether choosing to base a meeting or conference on the glittery Strip or just off, Las Vegas truly is ready to deliver the environment that works for the style, concept and size of your event.

C&IT

“The staff at the M Resort make it very clear that our event and attendees are their No. 1 priority while we are there.”

Katie Goracke, Marketing Project Specialist, Open Systems Inc., Shakopee, MN



and the Las Vegas Convention Center than almost any other hotel, guaranteeing that Virgin Hotels will be a solid player in the years to come.

A Great Fit at M Resort

Katie Goracke, marketing project specialist for Open Systems Inc. also wanted a meeting venue away from The Strip for her annual Connect, an Open Systems Conference. The event is held every September and draws 500 attendees. For the last two years, Goracke used M Resort Spa Casino and is now planning her 2018 meeting at the property again. Although M Resort is located on Las Vegas Boulevard, it’s also nine miles south of the airport, well away from the usual bustle (and traffic) of The Strip.

“We like that the M is off the Strip,” says Goracke. “We don’t lose attendees to other attractions. And they have shuttles running all the time to and from the airport and The Strip.”

The 390-room resort is located in the suburb of Henderson, and offers more than 92,000 sf of meeting space, including a pavilion, grand ballroom and multiple reception areas. Goracke says everything about the M Resort is a good fit for her group.



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Destination



Credit: The Betsy South Beach

Miami in Motion

The City Is Growing, Developing and Ramping Up Its Experiential Quotient

By Christine Loomis

Miami artfully combines its sunny beach vibe with sultry Latin culture and cosmopolitan flare. Add a vibrant dining, nightlife and arts scene, and you have an urban environment that no other U.S. city duplicates, one that planners and attendees alike are drawn to.

From celebrated beachfront resorts to edgy contemporary brands, traditional venues to utterly out-of-the-box backdrops for memorable functions, there's something for every type of group in Miami — and then some. Here are just a few possibilities to consider.

In Good Hands

For Alyssa Kelliher Kent, the inimitable Fontainebleau Miami Beach checked off all the right boxes. The director of marketing and communications for Medical Specialties Distributors (MSD), which produces a range of medical devices and supplies medical technology solutions, says a combination of factors led the group to the hotel in January 2018 for its Innovation & Technology Conference for 600 attendees.

"Miami seemed like the right choice for us due to a com-

bination of factors — easy to get to, warm weather in January, competitive pricing and increased attendance due to the upscale location. Many of our industry conferences," she adds, "are in Orlando, Phoenix and Atlanta every year. Miami is a great mix up for our industry and people are excited to attend."

Add to that, she says, "a great location, beautiful hotel, top-notch staff, delicious food and ideal meeting space."

All of the group's functions were held at the Fontainebleau.



"Fontainebleau did a fabulous job of working with us when we needed to change something last minute and did it in a timely fashion."

**Alyssa Kelliher Kent, Director, Marketing & Communications
Medical Specialties Distributors, Stoughton, MA**

leau. "Next year," Kent says, "we are utilizing LIV nightclub, located at the hotel, for a couple of our events."

The Fontainebleau had several standouts. "Banquet services really stood out to me during the event. From the taste of the food to the prep of the event they were always on point," Kent says. "Pre and post the event, Felix Llibre, our sales point person at the hotel, was always a very reliable source."

In terms of décor, MSD used an offsite DMC, and Kent says the hotel staff worked well with the DMC to meet the group's needs.

Challenges were few. "We had a few changes onsite prior to the show so our start with AV wasn't as smooth as I'd hoped. Given our challenges, the staff pulled through and was able to accomplish what needed to be done," Kent adds.

"You don't have a great idea of the space until you are actually in it. However, Fontainebleau did a fabulous job of working with us when we needed to change something last minute and did it in a timely fashion."

Her advice to planners considering the Fontainebleau is to "Definitely go on a site visit first. Study your space and your ceiling heights. And always account for changes!"

In the end, though, she says planners should know this: "You are in good hands."

In February 2017, Fontainebleau updated and redesigned its Versailles Tower suites as well as the 33 luxury poolside cabana "retreats."



Fontainebleau Miami Beach recently debuted new poolside cabanas.

Flawless Planning

Trump International Beach Resort comes to the attention of planners in part because of its location in between the area's two major airports. But that's just a small part of its story.

"We could not beat the cost and quality at Trump International," says Jennifer DeHaven, Director of Operations and Training for Green Home Solutions. As a company who was introducing the new, 'We Make Air Better!' tagline, the cool Miami air couldn't have been better. Additionally, as Green Home Solutions is creating better indoor air quality and using plant based products, it made sense to team up with a resort that takes pride in using eco-friendly products and has their own "Green Team" initiatives. The group set its an-



The Ocean Ballroom at Trump International Beach Resort.

nual convention at the resort in November 2017, drawing over 120 attendees.

"The customer service was outstanding 100 percent of the time with all guests. Planning the event with the Trump staff was flawless," DeHaven says. "The location is beautiful and in between both Fort Lauderdale and Miami airports. Our convention was such a hit with our company, including franchisees, corporate staff, spouses and business partners. The outside beach bar was a big hit, as was the food and drink, especially the lava stone dinner."

A variety of local entertainers hit the right note with those in attendance. "We had Cigar Studs host a cigar roller at a mixer at the beach bar, which was a huge hit," DeHaven says. "That same night we had magicians and a DJ courtesy of Amazing Adam. They were incredible! Another night we hosted a luau with Aloha Islanders. It was super fun and entertaining. Our guests all had wonderful things to say and we had an absolute blast the whole time! The luau was down by the pool lawn and featured a delicious pan-Pacific buffet. The AV team also did an amazing job with lighting."

DeHaven calls the customer service at the hotel "top-notch," adding that the resort itself is beautiful. The group held all of its functions on property.

In thinking about those she worked with at Trump International Beach Resort, DeHaven notes that she and Melissa Burce, sales manager, "really connected the first time we spoke. Melissa, Joffrey Brown, Eddy Calero and Michael Erber were my top people before and during our event. They were awesome! I had about 40 boxes waiting for me when I arrived and they gave me a whole room to sort, package and store things during the convention. They were there in a heartbeat if I needed them. They did everything possible to make this event go smoothly."

The group used two side-by-side rooms for meetings and meals. "We used the main ballroom for large assembly gatherings and eating. We had breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks catered. The food was great, plus we had kosher meals brought in and food allergy issues addressed. All of our AV needs were taken care of and simplified with the staff's help. Eddy was wonderful. He was available the entire time. He was great with lighting, especially at the luau. He added extra lights and made a gorgeous scene. The meeting rooms were spacious, comfortable and attractive."

DeHaven notes that a number of attendees did ask if the resort provides a shuttle to and from the airports, which it does not so planners should be aware of that. "However," she says, "we utilized Uber and Lyft."

To any planner considering Trump International, DeHaven says, "I highly recommend it. It's gorgeous, right on the beach and the customer service is incredible. Give your company plenty of extra time and maybe before or after options as well. I work with hotels across the country and the Trump is hard to beat. I wish I could come here for every meeting and training we do!"

Sister property Trump National Doral Miami is another choice for planners in the area, and recently announced a partnership with Rick Smith Performance Golf Center, which began operating at the resort in January. Small-group clinics may be a nice option for incentive programs or for golf-loving executives and VIPs.

Exotic Appeal

Few people know Miami as well as Adolfo Solórzano Z, national sales manager with AlliedPRA South Florida, one of



Credit: AlliedPRA South Florida

AlliedPRA planned an '80s-themed event at Trump National Doral.

the region's premier DMCs. He has a whole host of reasons the city makes an excellent destination for corporate and incentive groups, including the fact that it provides tangible international influences that can make a group feel like it's visiting an exotic foreign destination even if company travel is limited to domestic destinations only.

In addition to its idyllic climate as an attribute, Solórzano Z. says, "Miami as a destination is exciting because it's the perfect mix of culture, beaches and luxury. It's a world unto itself."

And access is easy. "When it comes to flights and access, Miami International Airport is aggressive in increasing services. In 2017, it added about 20 new services, including the first direct flight from Tel-Aviv, and is projecting its first direct flight from Asia in 2019, if not sooner."

That makes Miami a good choice for groups with attendees from different parts of the globe. And there's a construction boom going on, which may not sound like an attribute but Solórzano Z. sees it differently.

"Probably the highest benefit for groups is the hotel inventory," he says. "More than 2,000 rooms were delivered in 2017, nearly 3,500 rooms are projected this year in 2018 and over 6,400 rooms are scheduled for 2019. That's almost 12,000 new rooms! In other words, competition for your incoming group business is going to be fierce and planners are going to have the opportunity to get some competitive deals on room rates."

And that's especially true, he notes, "when some of this inventory is being produced by independent hoteliers, as is the case with the newly expanded iconic Betsy Hotel on famed Ocean Drive in South Beach, as well as other newcomers including the Faena Hotel Miami Beach and East, Miami, which bring to Miami a new type of luxury and modern lifestyle."

Growth and change are impacting all areas, starting with infrastructure and core facilities. He points to the "tunnel connecting downtown to the Port of Miami in 2014, the extensive Miami Beach Convention Center renovation due to be unveiled this year and all the new developments and hotels."

Miami's distinctive neighborhoods contribute to its ability to meet any group's needs. "Miami is a beautiful city with many different neighborhoods, each offering something completely different," Solórzano Z. says. "Downtown has that metropolitan city-life ambience with cutting-edge culinary. Little Havana is the place for culture and an authentic feeling



Credit: East, Miami



Credit: Faena Hotel Miami Beach

Trendy newcomers to the Miami scene include East, Miami (top) in the Brickell City Centre and Faena Hotel Miami Beach (above).

Miami Need to Know



Adolfo Solórzano Z., national sales manager with AlliedPRA South Florida, offers this advice for planners who want to bring their groups to Miami.

You will need transportation to experience the entire destination. Certain activities potentially will have large distances from your hotel property, and traffic is often unpredictable. You will want to plan a few minutes ahead of everything. A good operations team will help plan around traffic as much as possible, and an experienced design team will make every transfer feel a little shorter.

Miami is not a good destination for last-minute planning. Recently, we've noticed an increase in planning within 60 days of the first arrival, and Miami is a city that has a large number of recurring conferences (e.g.: Winter Music Conference, International Boat Show, Sobe Wine & Food Festival, Gay Pride, Art Basel and more) that have many ICWs in conjunction with corporate partners, not to mention all of the weddings. It's safest to keep incentives and meetings on weekdays as much as possible.

Build up your budget. Miami can be a little pricey and even a seemingly small add-on can throw your budget off. A good DMC and local partners can help keep your budget in place, and it's never too early to contact them to start planning a program with you. Miami has an incredible amount of experiences to offer and the worst thing that can happen when planning a program in Miami is getting to the end of your budget before getting to the end of your program!

—CL

of traveling abroad, while the Everglades provides an engaging natural environment for that nature-bound group. For a true sense of urban arts and food there's Wynwood, and South Beach offers the quintessentially Miami Beach experience."

Themed Events and Local Experiences

The team at AlliedPRA South Florida has worked on a variety of creative programs for its clients with great success. The group was recently tasked with creating an '80s-themed event at the Trump National Doral, but nothing as ordinary as a Miami Vice theme, which might come immediately to mind but would have missed the mark for this group. The client wanted something more out-of-the-box and more personal.



"The customer service was outstanding 100 percent of the time with all guests. Planning the event with the Trump staff was flawless."

Jennifer DeHaven, Director of Operations and Training
Green Home Solutions, Tyrone, PA

"Experience Designer Danielle Rothenberg and her team went to work on their Etch A Sketches and put together one truly unique event," Solórzano Z. says. "The décor was pulled straight from her '80s toy chest — Rubik's Cube Tables, a ceiling made of Slinky's, black lights, neon, tie-dye, cassettes and leopard print. Every pop-culture reference they could find and purpose was reincarnated. Guests were encouraged to dress up and we managed to get our hands on some floppy disks and old yearbooks from the attendees and put the images on our Kodak Carousel for all to see!"

Any group can arrange to explore the Everglades by airboat. But for those that want a truly immersive and cultural experience, AlliedPRA offers something different. "Every year we probably take thousands of attendees to experience the Everglades and almost always it's on an airboat," Solórzano Z. says. "But every so often, a planner requests a really immersive experience. That's when we invite them to explore the Everglades with the Miccosukee Indian Tribe and wade through the running waters of the Everglades



The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami, located on a five-mile barrier island across from Miami, impresses with first-class service and style.

Credit: The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami

alongside the original locals and inhabitants of the region. ...We have a 99 percent survival rate!"

Island Oasis

While DMCs work with many hotels in a destination, some stand out because they offer something just a little different. Solórzano Z. notes that The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami is "Miami's only island oasis made for groups." The 490-room hotel recently underwent a reimagination, further "customizing the resort to the unique island in Miami on which it resides. The way it's built creates a level of privacy for those groups that want to hold meetings that are not open to the public. Its decorative ballrooms and meeting space are just as adaptable to fit your purpose from a theming point of view as they are appealing to look at when your keynote speaker is on stage," Solórzano Z. says. "When it comes to F&B, they are everything but basic.

"It's safe to say if you came to Miami in 2015, you wouldn't recognize it in 2018, and you'll be surprised at what it will be in 2019."



Adolfo Solorzano Z., National Sales Manager
AlliedPRA South Florida, Hollywood, FL

Just today while I walked the property, they were setting liquid nitrogen for the onsite instant ice cream station next to the full-size smoker for an authentic 'que' & 'cubes' dinner."

And then there's the service. "I've been lucky enough to experience their level of service and their dedication



Loews Miami Beach Hotel, in the heart of South Beach, recently completed a \$50 million refurbishment of meeting space and more.



Rendering of the Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter Hotel & Expo, which is scheduled to break ground in the third quarter of 2018.

to their staff and guests through their team we know as ladies and gentlemen. This is the cherry on top from an attendee experience point-of-view on property. They take care of everything."

One note about AV, rigging and lighting: Solórzano Z. says Key Biscayne has some issue that are island-specific, and this is one place where planners should build into their budgets contracting with the local PSAV team. "Beyond the insurance aspect, you'll need them if you're doing any rigging. There are some issues unique to Key Biscayne, such as using the proper lighting during turtle-hatching season that occurs traditionally between May and October, or when they spot the first nest."

Miami in Growth Mode

As Solórzano Z. notes, Miami is in growth mode. The convention center is expected to fully open in 2018 and is on track to receive LEED Silver certification.

As for hotels, Loews Miami Beach Hotel, in the heart of South Beach, recently completed a \$50 million upgrade and refurbishment of the lobby, guest rooms and meeting space, and opened a new "poolscape" with private cabanas. The Gates Hotel South Beach, a DoubleTree by Hilton, also unveiled an extensive renovation of public spaces that features a new entry as well as private cabanas. The Confidante Miami Beach completed renovations to its meeting and event space in September, including technology enhancements across its 10,000 sf of indoor space.

In January, La Centrale, Miami's first Italian food hall, opened in Brickell City Center, offering 14 different Italian-inspired dining experiences — and a nice dine-around option for groups.

Finally, in Q3 2018, ground will be broken on Miami Worldcenter, which will be home to the Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter Hotel & Expo Center, with approximately 1,700 hotel rooms and 500,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space. Completion is slated for 2022.

That's just a quick overview. "It's safe to say," Solórzano Z. notes, "if you came to Miami in 2015, you wouldn't recognize it in 2018, and you'll be surprised at what it will be in 2019."

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On The Move



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Chateau Elan Winery & Resort in Braselton, Georgia, has named **Joe Velasquez** as director of sales and marketing. With two decades of luxury experience and relationship-building, Velasquez most recently served as director of sales at The Venetian in Las Vegas.

Hawks Cay Resort in the Florida Keys has promoted **Michael Connolly** to director of national accounts, responsible for the New England, Midwest and West Coast markets. He most recently served as senior conference services manager at the resort, which is already accepting bookings for groups starting September 1, 2018.

Yael Rosenwald was named senior sales executive at the San Francisco Marriott Marquis. She previously worked for Starwood Hotels responsible for citywide accounts at several properties, including the St. Regis San Francisco, The Palace Hotel, Westin St. Francis and W San Francisco.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando, Florida, has named **Jennifer Barrett** as senior sales executive responsible for corporate and association business for the Midwest, West Coast and mid-Atlantic mar-

kets. She most recently served as conference sales manager at the Hilton Orlando.

Marci Zaworski was named regional director of sales, South Central, U.S., for Palace Resorts and Le Blanc Spa Resorts in Mexico and Jamaica. She was a vice president, at Teneo Hospitality Group.

Fontainebleau Miami Beach has appointed **Luz Orbaiz** and **Christine Sahakians** as directors of national accounts, **Nerissa Edwards** as national sales manager and **Jacqueline Gomez** as executive meetings manager. Orbaiz, responsible for Florida, Georgia and Latin America markets, was senior sales manager at Hyatt Regency Miami. Sahakians, responsible for Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and Indiana markets, was group account director at the W Fort Lauderdale. Edwards, managing the Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Vermont, Delaware and Rhode Island markets, was national sales manager at Hyatt Regency Pier Sixty Six in Fort Lauderdale. Gomez, responsible for groups of 10 to 79 rooms from Midwest, Florida, Georgia, Canada and Latin America, was catering and conference services manager at Atton Brickell Hotel in Miami. **C&IT**



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