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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## Diversity is Beneficial to the Bottom Line

Inclusive Meetings  
are Key to Success  
PAGE 40

## Making Safety a Priority

How Secure Are Your  
Off-Property Events?  
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## Ideal Florida Locales

Your Meetings Will Shine  
in the Sunshine State  
PAGE 58

George Aguel, president and  
CEO, Visit Orlando, enjoys the  
ever-changing experiences  
that Orlando has to offer.





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Medical meeting planners must follow a new stringent set of guidelines which could impact future events. **PAGE 14**



Various types of artificial intelligence are starting to pop up at meetings to answer attendees' basic questions. **PAGE 28**



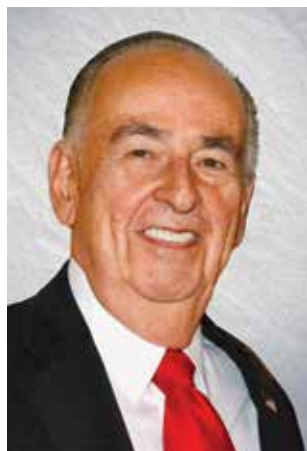
Winter meetings at mountain resorts, like Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa in Colorado, entice planners with snow-capped activities. **PAGE 52**



# Publisher's Message

## How Secure Are Your Events?

Whether on-property or off-property, risks are unavoidable. The biggest risk planners can take is not learning how to prepare for the unexpected. With the Duck Boat accident in Missouri earlier this year and the recent limousine accident in New York that killed 20 passengers, as well as tragedies at gatherings around the country, event planners have to start focusing more on the security for off-property events. These incidents have raised awareness for the need to do due diligence when it comes to attendees' safety. "Making Safety a Priority" on Page 46 focuses on how planners need to pay more attention to crisis planning. "To not have an emergency plan in place is not responsible and can leave the host organization exposed to liability and reputation damage or worse," says Laura Craven, meeting planner/director of communications and marketing, Imperial Dade. Managing the risk of offsite meetings and events is of the utmost importance in an age of unpredictability.



Diversity is another timely topic to be considered for success in today's world. More often, planners must address this topic when planning events that meet the needs of all attendees, no matter gender, age or cultural background. In "Diversity is Beneficial to the Bottom Line" (Page 40), read how the industry has seen the value that diversity and inclusion adds to the success of meetings and other events. "We must embrace diversity because attendees at meetings we produce come from diverse backgrounds and cultures.... As planners and suppliers, a large part of our job is to be sensitive to the topic and be proactive," says Rosa MacArthur, CMP, president, Meeting Planners Plus.

Whether your attendees enjoy the warmth of the sun or bundling up for the cold, there is a destination that best suits your needs. "Ideal Florida Locales" on Page 58 lists plenty of reasons why Florida stands out as a destination for meeting planners, including the sun, sea and the myriad properties with large event spaces in Orlando, Miami, Jacksonville and other appealing Florida destinations. "What I love best about Orlando is that there is always something new to experience," says George Aguel (on our cover), president and CEO, Visit Orlando.

On the flip side, for cool destinations, "Mountain Resorts" (Page 52) are luring planners to hold winter events at a higher altitude. These venues in Colorado, Lake Tahoe and elsewhere offer meeting facilities with majestic mountain views. And outdoor attractions, such as skiing and snowshoeing, are fun for attendees after a long day of meetings. Jim Crystal, president of The Revelry Group, says participants want an opportunity to conduct business and have a unique personal experience at the same time. "We plan our agenda around giving people experiences they normally would not be able to participate in," he says.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## Visit Austin and Lufthansa Airlines Announce Austin as Part of Its New Route Expansion



AUSTIN, TX — Visit Austin, Lufthansa Airlines and Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA) announced nonstop service five days a week between Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS) and Frankfurt, Germany (FRA) starting May 3, 2019.

"We are very excited with the announcement of Lufthansa Airlines' new route between Austin and Frankfurt, and welcome tourists from Frankfurt and beyond to enjoy everything Austin has to offer," says Tom Noonan, president and CEO, Visit Austin. "Lufthansa has long been on Austin's list for airline route expansion, and with year over year increases in visitors from Europe, we anticipate this flight will be extremely successful." Tickets are now available at [www.lufthansa.com](http://www.lufthansa.com).

## The Ritz-Carlton, St. Louis Renovates Its Meeting Space

ST. LOUIS, MO — The Ritz-Carlton, St. Louis has finished a two-stage renovation of its 30,000 square feet of meeting space and 229 guest rooms and suites. The meeting space upgrade was completed at the beginning of the year and introduced a new color palette, ergonomic seating throughout and upgraded lighting in the 12,750-square-foot Ritz-Carlton Ballroom. The 3,300-square-foot amphitheater has tiered seating for 140 and has introduced new streaming and projection equipment for the 16-foot-by-10-foot projection screen and two high-definition TV monitors for live video-conferencing. There are eight additional meeting rooms ranging from 483 to 1,680 square feet. The property's guest rooms and suites were reimaged this summer in the same color palette and new, modern furnishings and accents



in leather and chrome. Meeting planners looking for nearby unique venues will find the recently redesigned underground Museum at the Gateway Arch

## Fred Shea Retiring From Visit Orlando

ORLANDO — Fred Shea, senior vice president of convention sales and services for Visit Orlando, has announced he will be retiring in March 2019. He served as the vice president of strategic partnerships for the organization since 2010, overseeing portfolio accounts and Visit Orlando's Business Development team with the goal of increasing revenue and market share for Orlando.

"Since Fred Shea joined Visit Orlando, we have reached record levels for our convention business," says George Aguel, president and CEO, Visit Orlando.

"I'm so proud to finish my career in Orlando," says Shea. [www.visitorlando.com](http://www.visitorlando.com)



SHEA

## Radisson Hotel Group Launches "Take 10" Promotion

MINNEAPOLIS — Radisson Hotel Group announced the launch of "Take 10," a new global promotion for meeting and event planners to earn double points in the company's Radisson Rewards for Business program. As of October 1, planners can earn 10 points for every U.S. dollar spent on all meetings and events booked and held through March 31, 2019.

Radisson Rewards for Business is for business professionals and offers benefits and rewards to meeting and event planners, travel agents and executive assistants. Benefits include free hotel stays, gift cards, airline miles and other offers.

"We are excited to launch 'Take 10' this fall because meeting and event planners are an important part of our extended sales team and provide a valuable service to our hotels," says Ross Hosking, vice president, sales and distribution, Americas, Radisson Hotel Group. "Given the importance of their partnership, we also have made the decision to maintain our group booking commissions at 10 percent for the brands in Radisson Hotel Group's portfolio."

Earlier this year, Radisson Hotel Group announced a five-year operating plan that will transform the company's business and position it to become the preferred hotel choice for guests, owners, investors and talent.

As part of the five-year plan, the company also launched Radisson Meetings, a program of meetings and events designed to make every event a success. Radisson Hotel Group offers a variety of fully equipped spaces and personalized meeting rooms featuring fast, free Wi-Fi and AV technology. Radisson Meetings also has a commitment to sustainability, with ongoing efforts to reduce our carbon footprint, minimize food waste and single-use plastic. [www.radissonhotels.com/rewards/meetingsbonus](http://www.radissonhotels.com/rewards/meetingsbonus)

## Tips & Trends

### Three Creative Tips for Designing Small Events in Big Spaces

When it comes to creating the perfect atmosphere for an event, design is everything. While event designers and planners are usually tasked with maximizing space in a small venue, sometimes it's the exact opposite challenge that event professionals must deal with. It can get a little tricky when the event being planned is too small for the space it will be hosted in.

If you're curious about event design, read on to discover three essential tips for pulling off a small event in a large space.

#### 1 USE INNOVATIVE FLOOR PLANNING

- Establish and build specific focal points throughout the space
- Create room boundaries and structure using bars, buffets and other fixtures
- Add aisles and entry points to space seating
- Use table shapes that take up more space, such as square tables, long tables, etc.

#### 2 GET STRATEGIC WITH LIGHTING

- Create zones with lighting to visually mark or differentiate the space
- Turn off lights to "close off" certain areas of the space
- Use lighting to create unique destinations within the space
- Avoid using perimeter uplighting, as it emphasizes how big the space is
- Make "installation"-style lighting using color and patterns to create visual interest in the space
- Use illuminated furniture and features

#### 3 CHOOSE CREATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

- Step outside the box when choosing event seating
- Try creating a lounge area or unique seating groups
- Build rooms within a room or space
- Choose big impact fixtures that take up a large amount of space



# Snapshots



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By Eric V. Holtzclaw

## How MarTech is Neglecting Guests in the Event Services Industry

**B**ack in the early 2000s, a few brave CMOs invested in some rudimentary tools designed to help better manage their campaigns and audiences.

These hardy pioneers sought to organize, analyze and improve performance, and thus, created the first marketing technology stacks — integrated systems that brought order, unlocked targeted campaigns and personalized messages for better results.

Considering how far the marketing industry has come in the past few years is similar to comparing that of quill and parchment paper writing to the evolution of the first printing press.

The changes have been particularly rapid and widely adopted in the hospitality and event services industry. In 2011, there were approximately 150 companies offering marketing technology. That number has now ballooned to more than 6,800 technology-based tools, including direct response, mobile marketing, email services, social media, contact centers and many more.

### Nothing But the Stack

Somewhere along the way, event marketers became stack managers: shadow IT experts who spend more time on technology implementation than messaging, creative development or customer research. Marketing technology budgets now commonly exceed IT budgets, and overall marketing software spending is projected to exceed \$32 billion this year alone.

For some, the job is now “nothing but the stack.”

Event marketers today face unprecedented pressure to build and manage stacks. Technology and software companies are desperate to control as much of the stack as possible. Internal technology teams are desperate to maintain their seat at the table. And all too often, guests and prospects suffer as a result.

In part, this is due to fierce competition among a few major software players vying for ultimate control of the marketing stack.

They envision a walled garden of orchestrated platforms — their platforms — and as a matter of course, have little incentive to build in a way that enables sharing and communication with competitive or ancillary products.

### Guest Consent and Preferences

This problem is most apparent in the collection and distribution of customer and prospect consent and preferences — likes, dislikes, channels of choice, topics of interest and so on.

Almost all of these marketing technology systems and frameworks that comprise the almighty stack collect and store preferences. However, their functionality is limited, and few of them are designed to communicate with other technologies or contribute to a holistic customer record.

As a result, guest consent and preferences stored in a sales CRM system never migrate to customer support, marketing or third-party providers. For example, explicit permission to contact a cell phone — absolutely vital for compliance purposes — lives inside an ESP that can’t interface with the marketing automation solution.

When asked, many enterprise clients often guess that their customer preference information flows through four to six separate, disconnected technologies. Through subsequent analysis, an average of 12 to 14 distinct systems are revealed — more than double their estimate, as well as clear evidence of deep compliance and customer experience challenges.

All of this makes sense considering each system is better at one thing than another.

If any venue is using Salesforce, Microsoft Dynamics or SAP, they want to track their guests from a “sales” perspective — the classic customer relationship management (CRM) solution. These platforms are geared to enable sales organizations with the information they need to do their job — understand the guest across the life cycle and achieve insight into what the customer has bought — or could buy — from the company.

Preference and compliance requires maintaining history — the ability to look back over time as the customer changes from one choice to another. With the forward-looking bias of these platforms, use of a CRM-oriented system can leave you with an incomplete picture of the customer and lacking the information you need to answer a compliance inquiry.

If an event organization implements an outbound email service provider like IBM Watson Marketing (formally Silverpop), Oracle Responsys or Oracle Eloqua, the primary goal is to send communications to the customer to move them

further along in the buyer journey, based on scoring, behavior or company objectives.

While these systems extensively cover email as the primary form of communication, the customer is likely engaging with the company across multiple channels. These systems are not built to provide interconnectivity between all of the touchpoints and systems each customer encounters.

Guests and customers expect that when they provide a preference across one channel, the result is shared across the organization. Frustrations exist when the customers feel like they aren’t heard. Preferences shared to one system or employee should easily propagate across all your outbound communication platforms with a clear understanding of the source of the change.

If the venue is counting on the customer identity access

data and preferences as their situation changes. It is not a “point in time” collection. It is a combination of a technology approach with a built-in process that considers the customer and their ability to participate in the preference conversation in an ongoing fashion.

### Problem With Technology

What is the biggest problem event planners and marketers are facing today with these technological systems?

None of them are built with direct customer interaction in mind for the management, maintenance and collection of preference data or to provide compliance support across the enterprise.

Within the event, party and the hospitality industry, a great portion of satisfaction is determined by the interactions a

In 2011, there were approximately **150 companies** offering marketing technology. That **number has now ballooned** to more than 6,800 technology-based tools.

management system like SAP (formally Gigya), Janrain or Log-inRadius to solve the problem, they need to look only to their primary purpose to understand why they fall short. These systems are built to provide the customer with easy access across the enterprise and to more deeply understand them (from third-party sources, for example). The power in an effective preference management implementation is found in an ongoing conversation with the customer as their desires change for their stay and how and what they receive in communications across all the company’s channels.

A complete picture of your guest requires more than just the information you’ve collected from them to date. It also requires that they have seamless access to update their profile

guest experiences throughout. Now, guests are expecting a customized approach in this area; some prefer to help themselves and communicate digitally, while others want to be catered to and rely on face-to-face interaction. Beyond the desire to record and share preferences across all channels, staff need an easy way to be aware of a guest’s preference and adjust face-to-face interactions accordingly.

Event and hospitality companies are always hopeful to find one system that can solve all the needs of the marketing stack, but often forget it is called a “stack” for a reason. Each component solves a specialized and specific marketing problem. It’s important to consider the original heritage of any system a business might be considering. **C&IT**



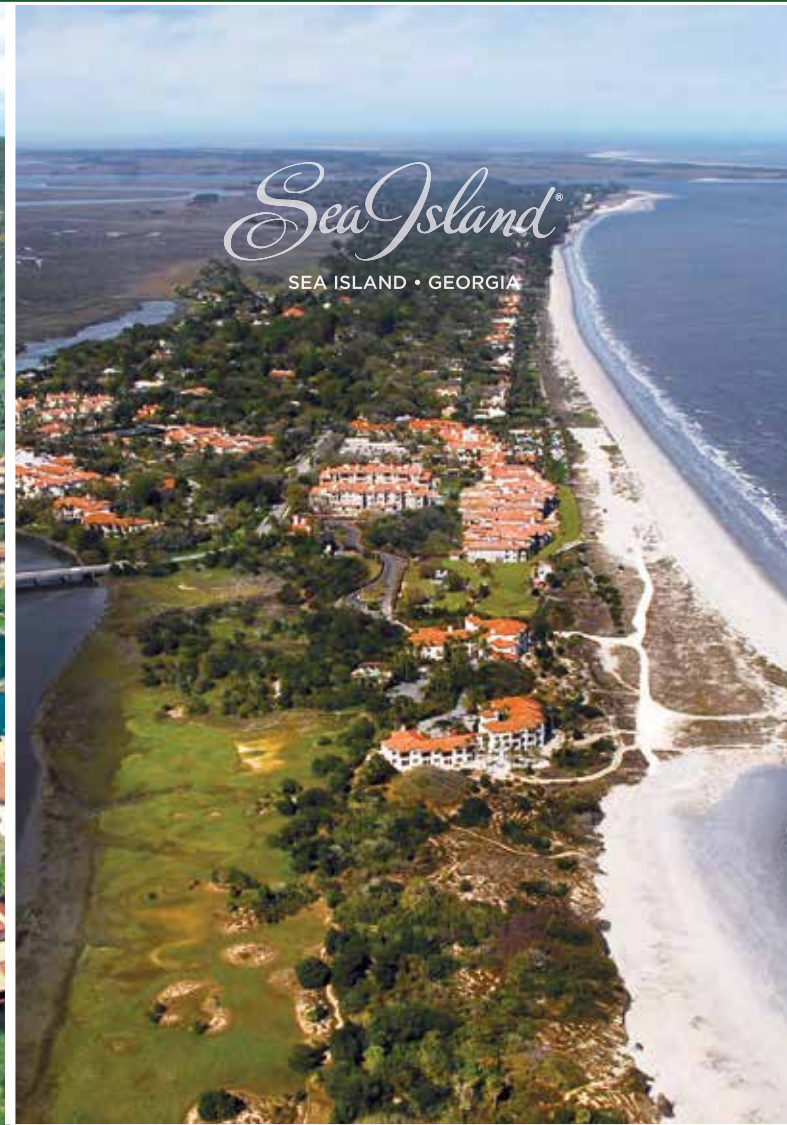
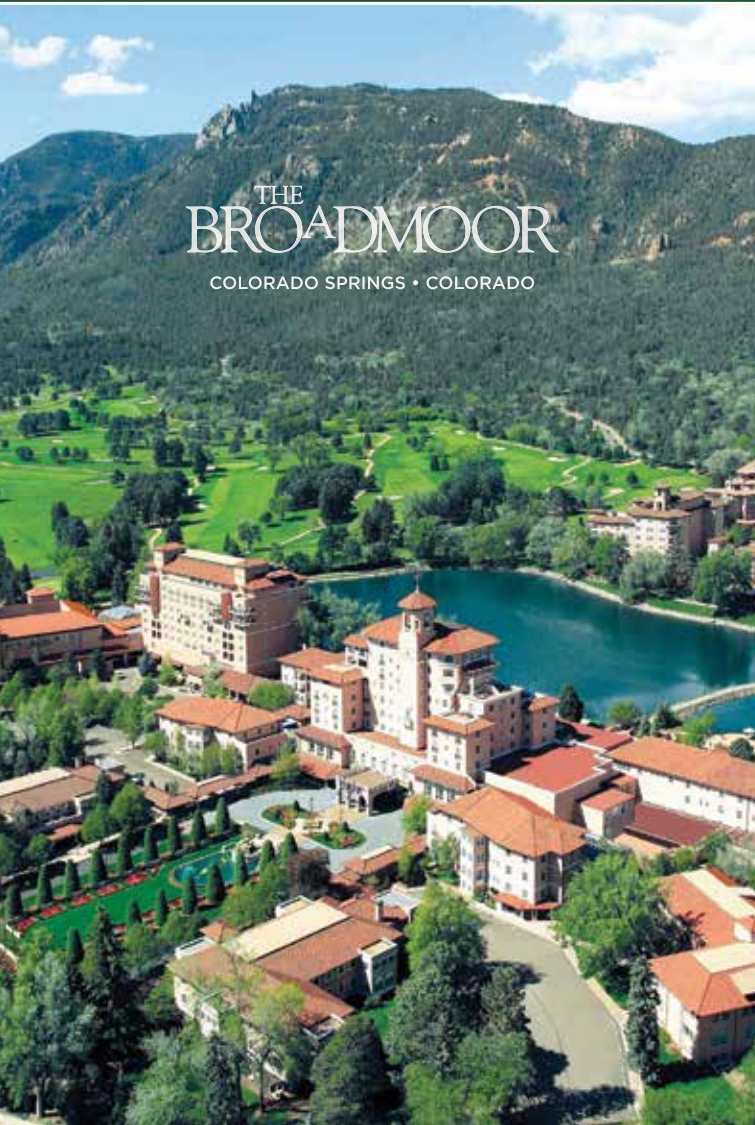
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# International Forces Are Changing the Structure of Medical Meetings



## Regulations and Oversight Are Not New, But 2018 Saw Some Unprecedented Changes

By Christine Loomis

**J**anuary 2018 brought a new era of increased transparency and vetted ethics and compliance into the medical meetings industry. That's not to suggest there was a lack of transparency or ethics prior to that. There wasn't.

But the revamped 2018 MedTech Europe Code of Ethical Business Practice, which affect not just European-based medical meetings but meetings everywhere, usher in a newly stringent set of guidelines aimed at ensuring that interactions remain untainted and unbiased between the companies that make and sell medical devices and technology and the health care professionals who use them.

The biggest change is that medical device companies can no longer directly support individual health care providers. In the past, they could underwrite a physician's attendance at a medical meeting by helping with travel costs, for example. As of January, that is no longer permitted, and the repercussions could be far-reaching.

Then, there's the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which went into effect in May. That regulation impacts how meeting planners and others use and protect attendee data, including registration information, for example. While GDPR is currently a European law, it's impacting how other organizations are working with data and currently affects any U.S. company or meeting with international clients or attendees.

And finally, there's Open Science, which can potentially have a major effect on continuing medical education, primarily in terms of whether it will continue to be a viable revenue source for medical meetings.

### Today's Challenges

The fact is, planners of medical and pharma meetings have always had challenges related to stringent compliance rules, but the challenges today have even more far-reaching impact.

Pat Schaumann, CMP, CSEP, DMCP, HMCC, senior director, health care compliance for Martiz Travel, whose work has included the American Medical Device Summit, Pharma Forum, Global Pharmaceutical and Medical Meetings Summit and ExL Events, notes that there is a lot happening and about to happen that medical meeting planners must stay on top of.

"Planners need to be aware of changing state and country compliance laws and regulations, particularly with New Jersey, Nevada and



**Pat Schaumann, CMP, CSEP, DMCP, HMCC**  
Senior Director, Health Care Compliance  
Martiz Travel  
Fenton, MO

**Planner knowledge  
"is key to mitigating  
any health care  
challenges."**

Chicago, as well as Japan and South Korea," she says.

Additionally, they need to be aware of how the new codes and regulations can affect accreditation for continuing medical education. "With the launch of MedTech Europe's new Code of Ethical Business Practice earlier this year, and GDPR going into effect in May, there have been new challenges regarding the processes of health care organizations (HCOs) in terms of gaining sponsorship dollars from medical device companies and how that can affect their accreditation for continuing medical education (CME)."

Planner knowledge, she says, "is key to mitigating any health care challenges."

The Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) is a good source for medical meeting planners on the issue of GDPR. It's important for planners to understand that GDPR and ACCME compliance are not at odds.

"We understand the concern of accredited CME providers regarding their potential obligations under the newly implemented GDPR," says Graham McMahon, M.D., MMSc, president and CEO of ACCME. "However, compliance with the new EU-mandated regulation would not put an accredited CME provider at odds with the ACCME's accreditation requirements."

ACCME requirements state that CME providers "must have mechanisms in place to record and, when authorized by the participating physician, verify participation for six years from the date of the CME activity."

Thus, McMahon notes, "If a learner requests that their participation record not be retained or erased, that would be acceptable to the ACCME. With respect to the annual report data submitted by accredited providers, learner data is submitted in aggregate — aggregate counts of physician and other learners per activity. The accredited provider would still be able to provide that aggregate count even if the identifiable participation record of the learner was erased at the learner's request."

He also points out that the ACCME itself protects individual patient information by mandating all CME providers must attest that any accreditation materials they submit "will not include individually identifiable health information, in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), as amended."

Moreover, McMahon says, "Accredited providers that offer CME activities that count for Maintenance





of Certification (MOC) are required to meet certifying board requirements for collecting and using learner data. As part of this process, accredited providers must obtain permission from learners to share data about their activity completion with the ACCME and certifying board."

When in doubt about GDPR, he adds, seek input from legal counsel.

Christina J. Wurster, chief revenue officer at HRS in Washington, D.C., who has presented webinars and education session at industry events and conventions, including PCMA Convening Leaders, is an expert on this topic. Through HRS, an international education and advocacy organization for cardiac arrhythmia professionals and patients, she has been part of many medical meetings and understands how these new regulations can impact meeting budgets and traditional revenue models.

Commenting on the MedTech Europe Code of Ethical Business Practice, she says, "These new regulations, which were focused initially in Europe, have been adopted by multinational medical-device manufacturers globally. As of January, manufacturers can no longer provide funding support directly to physicians to offset their costs to attend medical education conferences. In the past, commercial support provided much-needed funds to cover costs including travel, housing and registration.

"Physicians outside the U.S. do not have the same resources available to them to support attendance to global medical education conferences, so the new regulations severely disrupt their ability to attend. Under the new regulations, there are pathways for the support, but they require an independent third party, e.g., a hospital or foundation, to facilitate a grant and scholarship process. While this is led by the medical device industry, pharmaceutical



**Graham McMahon,  
M.D., MMSc**  
President and CEO  
ACCME  
Chicago, IL

**"Accredited providers that offer CME activities that count for Maintenance of Certification (MOC) are required to meet certifying board requirements for collecting and using learner data."**

manufacturers independently are also introducing new regulations to tighten commercial support."

That, she says, impacts registration and all that registration dollars support. "The biggest challenge," Wurster continues, "is planning for declines in attendance due to the travel restrictions, which directly affect registration revenue. Planners are having to plan on reductions in revenue while

maintaining a quality program and high-value experience for attendees. In addition to the reduction in commercial support, international attendees are also faced with increased barriers to obtaining travel visas."

But the repercussions are even more complex than that. "The organization, Ethical MedTech in Europe, which designed these travel regulations did not account for geographic regulations impacting medical meetings within the U.S.," she says. "That resulted in the regulations stipulated by the U.S.-based ACCME being in direct contrast to the suggested new pathways provided by Ethical MedTech to support attendees."

Clearly that has been a nightmare for planners and other organizers in the medical meeting arena. "Medical meetings that provide CME have had to recalibrate and look for new ways and new partners to help support attendees getting to their meetings," Wurster says.

### Compliance

Unfortunately, the alternative pathways to support for attendees are not easy. While the intent is to separate doctors and products so that manufacturers don't have any undue influence over doctors or anyone providing education at medical conferences, it's not just a matter of finding hospitals and foundations that can take money from medical device companies and use it to fund grants that help prospective attendees. There are also restrictions on what kind of organizations qualify as a permitted third party.

"Ethical MedTech does allow non-profit organizations and professional conference organizers (PCOs) to become approved MedTech Partners via its vetting system," Wurster says. "The medical society hosting the meeting cannot be involved and must rely on other organizations to facilitate the

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grant funding and scholarship process independently for delegates.”

Compliance is a critical issue for planners and medical conferences in general, but following the ever-changing rules and regulations is a daunting task. “There are constant changes on the horizon,” says Schaumann. “That’s what makes compliance and transfer of value reporting so complex. Every company does it differently and every country — 89 current countries — does it differently. There is no standardization, consistency or predictability.”

And to make things more challenging, she notes, “Politics play a huge role in health care policy.”

The issue of Open Science may not be a huge factor in the U.S. yet, but Kristi Casey Sanders, CMP, CMM, DES, HMCC, director of thought leadership for MPI, says it’s coming, and planners should start adjusting now.

“There’s something just over the horizon that could have severe implications for the medical meetings community,” Sanders cautions. “The National Academy of Sciences is advocating for Open Science, which means any federally funded research needs to be made available to the public free of charge. This extends to publications and education created from the research. The feeling is that if research was funded with taxpayer money, the public owns the content.”

The implications of this are substantial. “It means the whole revenue model for continuing medical education, and even certifications, may be forced to go to an open-education policy, where it must be offered free of charge to the public,” Sanders says. “That will hit medical meetings first and then ripple outward. It’s already in effect in Europe. We have maybe three to five years to prepare for it here, so planners need to start thinking about how



**Christina J. Wurster**  
Chief Revenue Officer  
HRS  
Washington, D.C.

“Under the new regulations, there are pathways for the support, but they require an independent third party to facilitate a grant and scholarship process.”

to develop new revenue streams once this one dries up.”

Of course, on the face of it, Open Science is a positive that can benefit us all. “First, and foremost, it is important for planners to understand what Open Science means,” Schaumann says.

“It’s a global movement to make scientific research, results and data available and accessible to everyone. According to authors Elizabeth Gilbert and Katie Corker, ‘Open Science can help speed scientific discovery. When scientists share their materials and

data, others can use and analyze them in new ways, potentially leading to new discoveries.”

### The Need Still Exists

But if research is free and available to physicians, would they still need research-based CME at meetings? McMahon believes so.

“There will always be a need for face-to-face accredited CME meetings to support the advancement of science. At meetings, health care professionals have the opportunity to engage directly with experts who provide context and insight about research data, answer questions and facilitate discussion about how research can be applied to practice. Effective CME conferences do much more than deliver information about research,” he says.

“CME providers are education experts who design learning experiences that inspire curiosity and encourage dialogue and collaboration among peers by incorporating a variety of educational strategies, such as case studies, simulation, small-group problem-solving and reflective exercises. CME providers build longitudinal relationships with health care professionals, offering opportunities for feedback and deliberate practice to reinforce learning long after the conference is over,” McMahon says.

How that plays out in the future will be something planners must stay on top of — along with every other challenge in this field.

Not all challenges are so monumental and global in nature. Some also relate to the details of planning a medical meeting, not unlike planning other kinds of meetings. But the details in the case of medical meetings often fall under a litany of domestic and international regulations.

The main challenges related to medical meetings, according to Schaumann,

are planners and sales reps making changes onsite, food and beverage, short lead times and too few trained medical meeting planners.

Last-minute changes are a nightmare for all planners and venues, but in the case of medical meetings, Schaumann says last-minute changes can easily fall outside of compliance without planners being aware of it because they have not been vetted by the necessary departments or governing bodies. In reality, nothing should change once it has been determined that all aspects of the meeting are, in fact, in compliance.

### Food and Beverage

As for F&B, Schaumann says, “All

governments, except the U.S. government, set limitations on F&B for medical meetings, and many companies have their own internal guidelines that are typically set by their procurement, compliance or legal departments.”

These caps are similar to those imposed for lodging and food related to government meetings. But the problem arises when U.S. planners are unaware of the specific caps imposed by various countries or international organizations, and meetings are set in places where costs exceed those allowed for F&B for international attendees.

And, it’s not just the cost of food in terms of caps, it’s also the kind of venue and the destination itself.

“There are still many country and

company restrictions on destinations and venues,” Schaumann says. “Many regulations state that the destination must be ‘business appropriate.’ Other countries are very specific about not using resorts, gaming destinations, cruise ships and five-star properties, which is very unfortunate, as many of these destinations work hard to overcome the stigma and perception of not being appropriate or too pricey for budgets.”

Wurster sees the same problems, pointing out that many of these issues, from spend caps to the specific type of destination, hinder a physician’s ability to attend a meeting, which is a problem for planners.

“Keeping up with the nuance of each country and region is very challenging.



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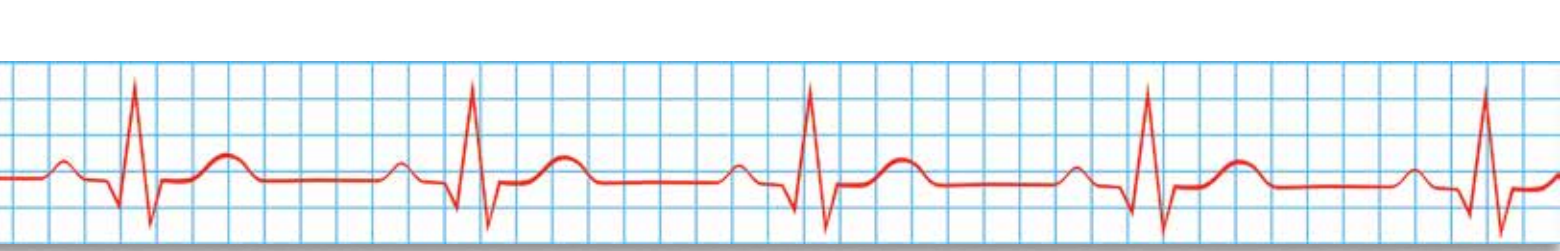
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One such new law is related to expenditure caps on lodging, which means a physician's average hotel rate during their stay cannot exceed a certain amount. In most major U.S. cities that are popular for medical meetings, there are no offerings within the hotel block that are below the expenditure caps. For example, in France, the expenditure cap is equal to approximately \$310 USD, and this must include all taxes and fees."

"Ethical MedTech has been declining meetings that are located at resorts or in resort cities, e.g., Las Vegas," she adds.

Some organizers are making destination adjustments. "Some medical meetings are moving to Canada and smaller U.S. cities to reduce expenses," Wurster says. "Plus, in Canada, the visa restrictions are not as strict and are friendlier to international attendees."

The preferred location options today, says Schaumann, are four-star airport hotels. "They're easy in and out."

Also gaining traction are creative venues, such as state-of-the-art facilities that are devoted to practical, clinical and knowledge-based learning.

Schaumann points to the Oquendo Center in Las Vegas, Florida Hospital Nicholson Center in Kissimmee, Florida, CAMLS in Tampa Bay, Florida, Global Center for Health Innovation in Cleveland, Ohio, and notes that Dubai will soon establish a health care innovation center, as well.

### How Long is Too Long?

Length of meetings is another trend that planners should take into consideration, according to Schaumann. She says the trend today in terms of ideal timing is two-and-a-half days. "If it's too short, it's not worth their time, too long, and they won't attend, as they don't want to be away from their patients. And the preference is for meetings to



**Kristi Casey Sanders, CMP, CMM, DES, HMCC**  
Director of Thought Leadership  
MPI  
Dallas, TX

*"There's something just over the horizon that could have severe implications for the medical meetings community."*

be held at the end of the week so doctors have less time away from patients."

Regardless of meeting destination, venue or timing, the bottom line for many of the issues faced by medical meeting planners is to be certain they are in compliance.

"Regardless of your meeting location," says Wurster, "if you have exhibitors that are from the medical device industry, you must submit your conference for approval by the Ethical MedTech Conference Vetting System. Without approval, the manufacturers that are members of Ethical MedTech cannot provide any educational grants to your

meeting, nor can they provide grants to third-party organizations that support travel scholarships to your attendees."

The very best way for planners to be up to speed on necessary compliance regulations and protocol is via their own education, which also addresses Schumann's issue that there are too few trained medical meeting planners available.

Fortunately, there are many ways for planners to ramp up their understanding and knowledge related to medical meetings.

"The Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate (HMCC) program is now the most recognized medical meeting certificate program in the world. There are nearly 1,700 HMCCs worldwide, and the classes are offered multiple times of year, as well as being available to companies for private sessions," Schumann says. "Also, the Events Industry Council offers the CMP-HC certification program to master the knowledge and skills necessary to manage health care-related meetings and events. And, Maritz offers quarterly health care webinars that are accredited through the Events Industry Council and worth CEs."

To be sure, new regulations and requirements related to compliance for medical meetings are likely to change much about these meetings going forward. This includes necessitating new ways of bringing in revenue and much added work for organizations in terms of procuring financial grants and providing them to health care providers so they can attend the meetings. The best path forward for medical meeting planners may be continuing education specific to these types of meetings, which gives planners something in common with the doctors and other health care professionals who attend the meetings, in large part, to continue their own education. **C&IT**

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# Connect With CVBs

## Their Assistance and Availability Helps Planners Succeed

By Derek Reveron

***“The CVB was a wealth of knowledge on venues and upcoming attractions that would be great options for our brand, program goals and our limited budget.”***

**Amy Barone**  
Senior Director,  
Events and Customer  
Engagement  
Tableau Software  
Seattle, WA

Suppose a planner arranges for a group to drive between several restaurants for a dine-around. The planner checks a map to estimate the travel times based on the shortest routes between restaurants.

Upon re-checking with the CVB, the planner learns the times are inaccurate due to slow traffic. The planner also discovers while service is good at each restaurant, some staffs are faster than others.

As a result, the planner makes small but important changes to the group's itinerary. A simple check with the CVB saved time and increased efficiency.

Partnering with CVBs should be a no-brainer for planners because the organizations function as free, one-stop shops that provide detailed firsthand knowledge of destinations and information databases on a range of local topics. The planner-CVB relationship is the ultimate win-win for both parties.

For CVBs, helping planners to succeed attracts meetings that fuel destinations' economies. For planners, CVBs function as a cost-free extension of their staffs, helping to organize meeting details, shave expenses and increase time to plan and execute meetings, which all translates to increased value.

The ability of a CVB to help planners obtain value improves the longer a planner works with the organization.

According to Laura Warkentine, chief client advocate for Moore, Oklahoma-based technology firm, Computer RX, “The longer you work with a CVB, you develop a relationship and familiarity with their staff and vice versa. As this happens, they learn your event better, and you learn what is available to you. We have worked with the CVB in Oklahoma City for five years. Each year, I feel something new is discovered that we did not think of in previous years, whether it's an idea they share from their experience, a service we didn't know was available or improving small things that could be better.”

Amy Barone, senior director, events and customer engagement for Seattle-based Tableau Software, cites an example of a CVB that did several things from the start of their relationship years ago to assure a long-term partnership in planning meetings, including the company's recent Global Sales Kick-Off in Seattle.

According to Barone: “Before, during and after each event, Visit Seattle was constantly asking for ways they can support the program and improve their services. They're constantly asking for feedback and looping in the appropriate

parties to make critical changes to better support future programs. These behaviors are constant reminders of a desire to improve and deepen their relationship with us and has created a stronger partnership.”

Barone offers an example of how CVBs can make life easier for planners. “Most recently, we were struggling with options that would fit our needs for our annual company holiday party. The CVB was a wealth of knowledge on venues and upcoming attractions that would be great options for our brand, program goals and our limited budget. They provided direct contacts for each venue, helped facilitate conversations and streamlined the process.”

Tala Baltazar, director, global events and sales enablement for Long Beach, California-based software firm Laserfiche, is finding that developing mutual familiarity with a CVB is a big plus. Laserfiche, which holds its annual Laserfiche Empower Conference at the Long Beach Convention Center, has met there since 2016.

According to Baltazar: “They come to the table as partners when we want to push to be creative, use space in new or innovative ways or want to push the norms of experiences we want to offer our attendees. They never come across as wanting to make a sale or land a program, but truly as partners in the success of our events.”

Baltazar also finds that longevity is a big plus when partnering with CVBs.

“The longer we partner with the CVB, the better they understand Laserfiche as a customer, our company's values and our mission,” she says. “They help us find solutions that are not only aligned with our objectives, but also fit our specific requirements and company culture. We're a very customer-centric organization, so it has been key that the CVB get to know Laserfiche's customers and support our mission of providing the best possible experience for them.”

While some planners use CVBs routinely, others don't use — or underuse — the organizations. Some planners may not have time to explore what CVBs provide or aren't aware of the full range of services they provide.

### What Are CVBs?

Convention and visitor bureaus are non-profits that represent local convention centers, hotels and other meeting facilities and venues. CVB services are free to planners because they are funded mainly by a destination's hotel occupancy taxes.

About half of CVBs' members pay dues from

**Laura Warkentine**  
Chief Client Advocate  
Computer-Rx  
Moore, OK



***“When selecting a city, the quality of the CVB is extremely important and should be considered. Find a CVB that is genuinely interested in you and your event and loves their city.”***

sources such as hotels, restaurants, attractions and businesses. The other half of CVBs are government and tax-funded. CVBs stress that there is basically no difference in their services based on various funding sources.

However, some planners have complained that membership CVBs show some favoritism to members over non-members in services such as referring vendors to planners.

CVBs can be valuable to planners meeting in large destinations because of the overwhelming variety of offerings in unique venues, hotels, entertainment options, restaurants and other areas. In addition, CVBs can be helpful to small groups, to planners meeting in a destination for the first time and to independent planners with small budgets and few staffers.

Planners also benefit from CVBs' thorough knowledge of destinations in every area of meeting planning, including offsite venues, transportation, pre-meeting promotion, site inspections, entertainment, dining options, attractions and staff and volunteers dedicated to a group onsite.

The primary goal of all DMC services: promote destinations to drive meeting business, especially repeat meetings. According to a study by PCMA and IEEE, destination is the No. 2 influencer in whether attendees register for a meeting. Also, about 75 percent of attendees who have a positive experience in a destination will consider returning at their own expense.

Seattle-based Moss Adams, a consulting firm, benefitted in several ways from CVB assistance. According to Stacy Weber, CMP, meeting and





**Tala Baltazar**  
Director,  
Global Events and Sales  
Enablement  
Laserfiche  
Long Beach, CA

***“They come to the table as partners when we want to push to be creative, use space in new or innovative ways or want to push the norms of experiences we want to offer our attendees.”***

event manager for Moss Adams, the local CVB “is my go-to for what’s new, what’s upcoming, what’s being renovated, what meetings and conventions are in town (so I can avoid those dates for my own meetings), ideas on activities, special deals for my attendees, suggestions for venues and putting me in contact with the right salespeople.”

Weber also finds CVBs’ help immeasurable in getting good value from properties.

“They help me with local RFPs and often will suggest a venue that I had forgotten about, didn’t know had been renovated or is opening in time for my event,” she says. “In one case, Visit Seattle was able to explain to a new hotel sales manager the overall volume of business my company does locally, and that resulted in a better proposal.”

Zillow Group, a Seattle-based real estate database company, has found CVBs’ help to be an integral partner in planning the company’s annual Zillow Group Week, which included the company’s 4,000 employees.

According to Toddy Dyer, director of events, Zillow Group, “Whether it be something we can leverage at the Washington State Convention Center, a hotel or even through a vendor that works with them, the CVB is a trusted member of our planning team. We rarely hear no from them. We have had to put our heads together to solve space issues, and with creative thinking, carefully consider how we can leverage space and our budgets.”

Planners need CVBs more than ever because they plan an increasing number of meetings

while facing flat or shrinking budgets and pressure to cut costs.

For example, 63 percent of planners have been asked to focus on reducing food and beverage expenses.

As planners grapple with controlling costs, they look for ways that CVBs can provide value. Here are ways that organizations can do that:

- They help groups save time and costs when vetting and hiring local vendors. According to Karen Shiba, manager of global events for San Francisco-based Gap, “I was once having trouble getting in contact with a key vendor, and my Visit Austin partner helped to hunt down the person so I could get a response. I felt like I had an advocate on my side.”

Baltazar found the CVB to be a big help in sourcing vendors for an ancillary event related to its conference.

“Instead of tediously searching for and calling each venue, I contacted the Long Beach CVB with specifics of what I needed,” says Baltazar. “They promptly provided me with a short list of venues that fit my requirements (availability, space, atmosphere, distance to convention center, budget, etc.). Because of the fast turnaround, I was able to make a selection quickly and contract with the venue and send invitations for the event within a few days. We were able to pull it together quickly so we could focus on our attendees and their experience.”

- They offer special deals — including discounts, rebates and other savings expenses, such as rooms, tours, entertainment or airfare — as incentives to book a destination. The deals may depend on the size of a meeting and its number of attendees. However, navigating such offers can be ethical to ensure there is no appearance of a quid pro quo.
- They offer original ideas for planners who seek recommendations for groups that repeatedly meet in destinations.
- They help groups create authentic and unique local experiences due to intimate knowledge of their communities.
- They provide free promotion of meetings through social media, CVB websites and tailored microsites.

- They are constantly adding more free online digital and media services that help planners stretch marketing budgets. Many CVBs offer ready-made online tool kits and social media complete with content, videos and local facts that planners can use to sell destinations to attendees and meeting stakeholders.

In addition, some CVBs produce customized microsites that include information about a meeting’s registration and agenda, along with entertainment and dining recommendations. For example, the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau can create welcome videos tailored to specific groups and promote meetings using several media channels. Visit Orlando makes tailored videos and social content for groups seeking non-theme-park attractions.

One of the characteristics of a truly dedicated CVB is one which can help a planner get improved service from a venue that under-delivered in the past. Warkentine describes such an experience: “We had a year that the venue we were contracting with did not deliver to

the normal expectations, and it led to frustration and distraction during our event.

“The CVB could only do so much, but they went out of their way to help as much as they could,” she continues. “The following year, they stepped in early and showed up at the event to ensure the venue was delivering and we were



**Toddy Dyer**  
Director of Events  
Zillow Group  
Seattle, WA

***“The CVB is a trusted member of our planning team. We rarely hear no from them. We have had to put our heads together to solve space issues.”***

***“Engage with the CVB early so they have a full understanding of what you’d like to achieve with your group.”***

**Karen Shiba**  
Manager,  
Global Events  
The Gap  
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**Stacy Weber, CMP**  
Meeting and Event  
Manager  
Moss Adams  
Seattle, WA

***“They help me with local RFPs and often will suggest a venue that I had forgotten about, didn’t know had been renovated or is opening in time for my event.”***

happy. None of our frustrations were related to the CVB, yet, they did all they could in their power to help us out, and it was a great event.”

Experts also offer the following advice on how to get the most out of working with CVBs.

- Contact the CVB soon after choosing a destination, before distributing RFPs, and involve it in the planning process from the beginning.

Shiba says, “Engage with the CVB early so they have a full understanding of what you’d like to achieve with your group. The more they know about the attendees and your group, the better prepared they are to offer suggestions, recommendations and marketing opportunities.”

Communicating up front with CVBs has been successful for The Gap. “I find that the CVB had a good understanding of our group and attendees from the initial sales process through the planning process,” says Shiba. “They were able to make valuable recommendations and suggestions because they understood our objectives.”

- Consider having the CVB review the RFP before it’s sent to properties to get suggestions for improvements based on the organization’s knowledge of local properties. Planners can also use their research to verify CVB research.
- Know which aspects of each meeting and conference can benefit the most from CVB

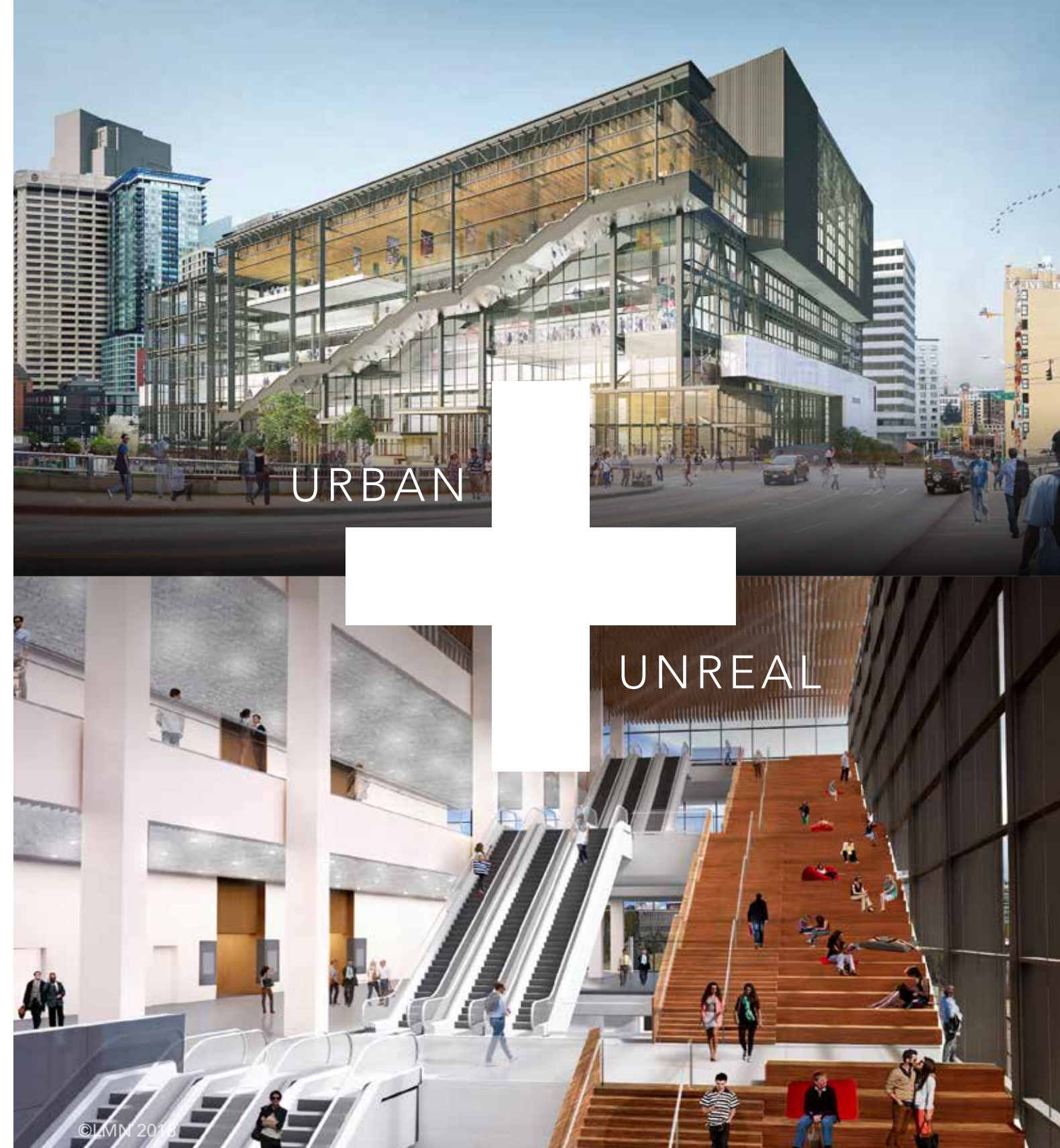
assistance. Every CVB can’t be helpful with every aspect of each meeting or conference.

- Conduct an exit interview with the CVB, even if the meeting was successful. This may be especially important if the group plans to return. Ask what the CVB might improve next time.
- According to planners who work successfully with CVBs, ask questions such as the following:
- What services does your CVB offer that can help us cut expenses? How did you help a group with similar needs and size obtain value? Ask these questions after familiarizing the CVB with the group’s needs.
  - How can your CVB help promote my event or meeting through email and social media?
  - How can your CVB help market my group to stakeholders? This question comes in handy for planners wanting to convince clients of the benefits of a destination.
  - What are some of the most original ideas your CVB has suggested that “wowed” planners and attendees?

Warkentine’s advice: “Don’t be afraid to ask a CVB anything, whether it’s for advice, lessons they’ve seen from other events or services they can help you with.”

Communication is paramount. “I feel the more open you are, the more you will get as far as help,” says Warkentine. “The CVB should be there to ensure your event is a success in their respective city. So anything that could impact that, they will be able to help with or at least know who can help to ensure it’s the best event possible. When you work with multiple cities, you can tell if a CVB is genuinely willing to help you and show off their city. When selecting a city, the quality of the CVB is extremely important and should be considered. Find a CVB that is genuinely interested in you and your event and loves their city.”

Planners who don’t make full use of CVBs should ask themselves one question: Why turn down free help from sources who know everything about a destination, know what planners need and can save time and expenses? Indeed, one way to look at CVBs is that not using them is almost like throwing away money. **C&IT**



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# Digital Media Taking Center Stage

## New Technology Leads the Way for Meetings of the Future

By Derek Reveron

**T**wenty years ago, most planners depended on binders, folders and other paper-based systems.

My, how things have changed.

Today, planners can use thousands of event software systems and mobile apps to make planning more efficient and less costly.



**Linda Nelson, CMP**  
President and CEO  
To Plan Ahead  
Asheville, N.C.

**“By posting details about keynote speakers and topics that will be discussed during the meeting, I can create excitement and a willingness of attendees to relay the information to their peers and upper management.”**

Technology is also starting to take center stage in creating unique attendee experiences, which are more important than ever for planners.

According to the IACC’s 2017 Meeting Room of the Future survey, 80 percent of planners reported that their job involved more experience

creation, a five percent increase from the previous year. Meanwhile, 75 percent of respondents agreed that creating experiences will be even more important five years from now.

Mobile phones and accompanying apps are becoming standard planner tools for creating meeting experiences.

According to the IACC’s survey, using smartphones for attendee participation was the top technology use that planners expected to continue growing over the next five years.

The reason: Mobile device-enabled apps make planning tasks more efficient for tasks such as registration, attendee polling, content management, data analytics, logistics management, site selection, gamification, speaker management and networking.

Linda Nelson, CMP, president and CEO of To Plan Ahead, an Asheville, North Carolina-based event management company, uses mobile apps for a growing number of tasks.

“We are getting very close to utilizing everything for our mobile apps or devices,” she says. “Currently, we use them for onsite registration, ticket and session counts and an interactive attendee chatline.”



### Apps

Apps also obviate the need to use paper. “They essentially take away the need to print any materials, such as agendas, attendee lists, speaker papers, PowerPoint presentations and exhibitor and sponsor details,” says Nelson. “Mobile apps also allow the flexibility of being able to update materials on the fly; whereas, printed materials are typically out-of-date well before the meeting even starts.”

Beth Faller, vice president of meetings and events at Christopherson Business Travel in Greenwood Village, Colorado, also uses mobile apps for a multitude of purposes. “Mobile apps are becoming more common for events, as they can provide one central source of communication,” she says. “The apps are important for events to generate excitement, communicate updates and provide networking opportunities between attendees. Having a social wall and livestreaming video during a conference provides a way for everyone to be interactive, but mobile apps can also provide additional communications post-program.”

Choosing the right event app can drive attendee engagement and provide value. Planners

can download low-cost or free apps or pay to create their own tailored for specific meetings, a time-consuming and costly proposition. Apps that planners can use for more than one event are popular because they offer the most value.

Regarding the future of mobile apps, Brandt Krueger, owner of Richfield, Minnesota-based Event Technology Consulting, predicts the following: “I feel like mobile devices and apps are going to evolve into just screens that fit in our pockets, and that the underlying services will become more important than the app.

“At some point, it will all be cloud-connected, and you can connect to your services on whatever device you want to use at the moment — phone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer. Other than the restrictions that size has on the interface, it’ll basically be the same services across all devices,” he says.

### Mobile Distraction

Most attendees use at least two handheld devices and inundate themselves with even more non-meeting digital information. As a result, planners must compete for the digital attention of attendees during meetings.





According to Krueger, “People have literally been calling the latest information technology revolution ‘a distraction’ since the invention of the printing press. Whether mobile is actually a distraction depends entirely on the meeting purpose, environment and social norms of the event. It’s not necessarily something you can dictate as the planner. If you have an aversion to people being on their phone during your event, you can try and communicate that it’s inappropriate, but you risk alienating some attendees.”

It’s impossible to stop planners from using mobile devices for non-meeting purposes during events. However, planners can try to keep the use within certain norms, says Krueger.

“You can see lines being drawn as society tries to deal with this latest revolution,” he says. “During social events, it’s OK to snap selfies and post on social media. At work, not so much. If

**“Having a social wall and livestreaming video during a conference provides a way for everyone to be interactive, but mobile apps can also provide additional communications post-program.”**

those norms are different during your events, such as having private social chats, you must be clear with attendees that it’s not allowed and explain why. But you still might lose part of your audience.”

Nelson offers the following advice on mitigating mobile distraction: “It’s important to keep in mind what your meeting objectives are. Mobile apps can be very useful for gaining audience engagement and interaction if they are built

into the up-front objectives where the goal is to create an open forum of ideas and suggestions.”

“However, if the meeting is a lecture or a dissemination of information, then mobile apps can be very distracting, so it’s probably a good idea to ask that they be turned off as a courtesy to the speaker and attendees,” she says.

The best way to prevent mobile distraction is to provide relevant, compelling meeting content in a way that captures attendees’ attention. That’s especially true for millennials.

The bottom line: If meeting technology doesn’t engage attendees, then they may engage themselves with non-meeting technology. “Planners need to make mobile apps easy to use and exciting to grab the attention of experienced and non-experienced attendees,” says Nelson.

### Social Media

Social media continues to drive attendance, engagement, sharing of meeting information and networking before, during and after meetings. More planners are using a multitude of online tools to create social media campaigns. The medium is effective because many attendees spend so much time using it. According to a comScore survey, mobile devices account for 80 percent of all social media viewing. That’s why it’s crucial that planners make their websites mobile-friendly and viewable.

Nelson uses social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn to promote meetings and boost attendance. “By posting details about keynote speakers and topics that will be discussed during the meeting, I can create excitement and a willingness of attendees to relay the information to their peers and upper management,” she says. “Another benefit is engaging attendees in a conversation or survey prior to the meeting to find out what challenges confront attendees and what topics they would like to discuss. We can continue the conversation throughout the event. They are also great platforms to promote sponsors and exhibit booth opportunities.”

While more planners are turning to social media, too many still depend on “old technology.”

According to Krueger, “It still feels like email is king for keeping in touch with attendees in the time leading up to an event, but they’re starting to use other channels to augment it, boost it and build hype as the event approaches. Planners are going to have to start leaning more and more heavily on these other channels as more and more younger attendees move away from

email and toward social media and messaging services exclusively to communicate.”

### Coming Soon

There are several emerging technologies that planners will eventually use as commonly as apps and social media.

The tools include artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), facial recognition (FR) and artificial intelligence (AI).

### AI

Various types of AI, such as chatbots, robots, “eventbots” and booths, are starting to pop up at meetings and conferences to answer basic attendee questions and market services and products via voice and text. The technology can respond to inquiries about registration, meeting schedules, speakers, sessions and other details.

For example, Frederick, Maryland-based MeetingPlay, a mobile event apps company, offers an app that answers voice and text questions about agenda details and scheduling. Eventually, AI will respond to complex attendee inquiries and be integrated with social media.

According to Nelson, “There is much talk and experiments currently going on whereby hotels are using robots to deliver room service items like extra towels, pillows and food and beverages. While this can sound innovative and maybe even fun, I foresee reliability issues, but more importantly, losing touch with the human element. However, robots can be a useful and more cost-effective solution to communicate information at a huge meeting or convention.”

The popularity of basic voice-activated AI technology, such as Google Home and Amazon’s Alexa, are expected to pave the way for the creation and acceptance of meeting-specific AI conversational assistance at meetings.

“AI and machine learning will play a bigger role in customer service, as chatbots and virtual assistants grow in popularity,” says Krueger. “Behind the scenes, marketers and salespeople can use these technologies to fine-tune their events with incredible precision, ensuring each attendee gets the most out of the experience. We already know so much about the psychology of events, but AI has the power to help us learn even more.”

### VR and AR

Virtual reality and augmented reality will eventually allow planners to increase attendee engagement by creating interactive, immersive

experiences through the convenience of VR headsets and AR glasses.

Short definitions: VR is a depiction of a real-life environment. AR superimposes computer-generated images on what a viewer sees in real life.

According to Krueger, “These technologies, whether phone- or tablet-based or a stand-alone headset, could be enormously useful. Imagine walking into an empty ballroom and being shown in AR what your room setup would look like for 100 people in a classroom setup, or in rounds? You can walk through the space while your device overlays a 3D-representation of each setup.”

Substituting VR for some site visits could help planners stretch their budgets. “I’ve seen planners make three or four site visits by the time an event happens,” says Krueger. “If even one of those could be replaced by a VR walk-through

**“The convenience of ‘getting it all in one place’ and having all the data flow properly from registration to onsite badging to the mobile app to the post-event reporting is incredibly appealing.”**

or visualization of the event, millions of dollars could be saved annually in the industry, as well as significantly reduce the impact on the environment due to transportation.”

Both VR and AR are still under development and are gradually making inroads into the meetings industry. Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Samsung are investing heavily to develop the technology, and it will take years to produce practical, affordable everyday uses for planners.

Meanwhile, leading-edge uses of VR and AR include the following:

VR platforms such as Oculus Rift, popular among gamers, is gradually making its way into the meeting and events industry as convention and visitor bureaus, hotels and venues offer online VR views.

For example, Destination British Columbia uses VR to promote the beauty of its outdoors. Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts offer VR site inspection tours. The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) provides Vegas VR, a downloadable app exploring local sites. Best Western hotels provide VR tours of its 2,000 properties. Attendees at a Marriott conference



**Brandt Krueger**  
Owner  
Event Technology  
Consulting  
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used AR tokens designed by MeetingPlay to educate employees about the hotel's brands after its merger with Starwood. Virtual images appeared when conference attendees held their apps over the tokens.

## FR

Facial recognition (FR) isn't science fiction anymore, but it's not commonly used — yet. Like AI, FR is becoming more familiar to people through everyday technology. Google, Facebook, Snapchat and Apple have made big investments in developing facial recognition technology. People use facial recognition technology to unlock Apple iPhone X.

In the meeting realm, Event-interface, a Scottsdale, Arizona-based conference platform firm, partnered with Houston-based Zenus to introduce FR-based meeting check-in. Also, the IMEX America 2017 conference used FR software to print name badges. Experts predict that FR will eventually replace passwords.

For the most part, planners still lack the convenience of multiple planning tools on one platform. However, meeting technology companies, such as

Aventri (formerly Etouches), Cvent, Eventbrite and EventGeek, are starting to combine some event technologies into one platform. Merging platforms enables aggregation and analysis from several sources, including apps, registration systems, social media and attendee profiles.

According to Krueger, "The convenience of 'getting it all in one place' and having all the data flow properly from registration to onsite badging to the mobile app to the post-event reporting is incredibly appealing. It's important for planners to push this issue with their technology vendors."

Nelson agrees but offers a note of caution. "Merging platforms could be the way forward," she says. "It sounds very simple, but sometimes when you try to merge too many platforms into one, it can become very cumbersome or you end up replicating certain modalities that just don't work well."

The growth in meeting technology options and complexity coincides with relatively slow adoption rates among planners.

Krueger says, "Adding complexity increases

risk, and if you're going to increase risk, you have to justify that risk very carefully and thoughtfully. Emerging technologies are inherently unstable and risky, so their use is going to be limited usually to only the most daring and those with the highest budgets. Then, it slowly filters down to the rest of us once it's been 'proven' to be reliable."

## Pressed For Time

Many planners also lack the time to learn new technology. Some fear or don't like the new tools. Others simply find it difficult to break old habits. "I think it's like anything," says Nelson. "People get used to doing things in a certain way and can be reluctant to change. Other big factors probably are cost and making sure that the new technology really has merit and is not just a passing fad."

New meeting technology tools are constantly under development, and there are thousands that address all aspects of planning. However, the needs of each meeting differ, even if it involves the same group year after year. Planners can save time and money, and meet strategic goals, by choosing the right technology for the right meeting.

Experts advise asking the following questions before choosing a meeting technology:

- What is the extent of technology training among you and your staff?
- Do you rely on everyday software, such as Excel, Word and Access, for the bulk of meeting planning tasks?
- How do you record, store and retrieve records of event histories, including spending and attendee demographics?
- What is the goal of the meeting and, specifically, how can technology help achieve it?
- Do you already have separate tools for different functions?
- Do you use primarily off-the-shelf apps or those created for specific meetings, as well?
- Do you have one integrated tool that includes all functions?

Technology will not replace face-to-face meetings, but it can focus attendee interactions and make them more productive if used in a creative and targeted fashion.

As the rate of meeting technology accelerates, planners will have even more choices, and they will become less costly, simpler to use and more integrated with each other. The challenge for meeting planners is to find the technology that best fits their needs to engage attendees while achieving strategic goals. **C&IT**

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# Partners in Progress

Being In It to Win It With Suppliers Will Ensure Pulling Off a Successful Event

By Maura Keller

**H**ave you ever worked with a meeting or event industry supplier who meshes so well with your vision it's simply startling? You know the ones — they are organized, effective and deliver on their promises each and every time. They are the person you turn to time and time again because of their exceptional products and services.

Planning an event often requires a person to be a project manager, choreographer and planner — all rolled into one. Even the most organized meeting planners shudder when thinking of managing the details alone, so many turn to a core group of suppliers and consultants — people they know they can trust and who will do an effective job in helping make their portion of the event a success. They have known and worked with these individuals over the years — saving valuable time and avoiding embarrassing and costly mistakes.

Laura Langhout, corporate meeting planner at Self Esteem Brands, LLC, says that from working in hotels and now being a corporate planner, there are a few ways she's learned to establish strong partnerships with suppliers.

"I've always believed that having open communication is the strongest way to establish a partnership," Langhout says. "If you're clearly communicating what you're looking for with a supplier, it should be easy to have an open conversation about those needs." Indeed, when

both meeting planners and suppliers have developed a strong rapport with another person in the industry, they see each other as partners and confidantes, as a "well-oiled machine" — eager to get the job done.

Also Langhout says being able to provide suppliers with honest feedback on proposals, planning and service allows you to see how they handle all kinds of situations, and this can quickly accelerate the relationship.



**Laura Langhout**  
Corporate Meeting  
Planner  
Self Esteem Brands, LLC  
Woodbury, MN

**//If you're clearly communicating what you're looking for with a supplier, it should be easy to have an open conversation about those needs.//**







**Shannon Mickelberg**  
Event and Meeting  
Planner/Producer  
Mickelberg Event Group  
New Hope, MN

“Once I work with a supplier and have a great experience, they become a trusted partner, and I will work with them as much as possible.”

“I believe in treating others the way you want to be treated,” Langhout says. “Being nice goes a long way. Just how being good with communication, feedback and being a genuinely nice person can build a strong partnership — the opposite effect will more than likely hinder, if not ruin, a supplier relationship.”

For Shannon Mickelberg, event and meeting planner/producer at Mickelberg Event Group in New Hope, Minnesota, finding a supplier that a planner trusts, has a track record and someone that a planner can easily collaborate with is key to establishing a successful partnership.

“I view my supplier partners as an extension of my company, and ultimately, my client’s company,” Mickelberg says. “I need to feel that they will provide honest, ethical and high-level service. Once I work with a supplier and have a great experience, they become a trusted partner, and I will work with them as much as possible.”

Finding suppliers who understand the 24/7, last-minute world of event planning is really important. As Mickelberg explains, so often, planners are all put in the position of last-minute revisions, additions or complete changes in direction, so it’s important to have partners who can adapt and thrive in that environment.

“I always try to bring my partners in early and give them as much information as possible to help them understand the project,” Mickelberg says. “Clear communication throughout the process is key. If I am sensing a change from the client, I try to communicate that early so everyone can be prepared.”

According to Bob Schuster, HTS, national director of conferences and events at CMP Meeting Services, in today’s age, communication between both partners in a supplier relationship is a key component — along with transparency to keep partnerships strong.

“If we are about establishing and maintaining a win-win relationship, the basic foundation is solidifying trust,” Schuster says. “Also, communication and transparency on both sides of the partnership is important. But professionalism is of the utmost importance. Collaboration toward a mutual journey of a successful relationship is based on being clear and concise with each other, with all sides smiling as a result.”

Tom McCulloch, chief marketing officer at metroConnections, says the first step toward a promising partnership with suppliers is doing research on a supplier before entering the relationship. Look for companies that can successfully meet all a planner’s needs in one stop,

rather than piecing together services from a variety of partners.

“The more research done on a supplier before entering a partnership, the lower the risk a meeting planner will take in working with them,” McCulloch says. “Once a meeting planner establishes a comfortable, communicative relationship at the onset of the partnership, they’ll likely prevent any issues down the road. A corporate planner also wants to make sure the supplier is compatible with the organization, taking into account similar work styles, accessibility, company culture, transparency, stability and ensuring they fit into the budget.”

- Similar work style — Oftentimes, a planner’s success will be dependent on the job a supplier does. Therefore, a planner will need to make sure supplier partners become extensions of their staff, smoothly fitting into the planner’s company’s current work style.
- Accessibility — If the planner is someone who likes to be part of the process, even when outsourcing elements, find a company that will keep them updated throughout the course. Someone who is easy to contact will alleviate any nervousness the planner may feel about the partnership.
- Transparency — Find a partner who’s upfront about fees, their billing model and other processes key to the relationship.

“Creating a win-win supplier and vendor rela-



**Bob Schuster, HTS**  
National Director of  
Conferences & Events  
CMP Meeting Services  
Ponte Verde, FL

“Collaboration toward a mutual journey of a successful relationship is based on being clear and concise with each other.”

tionship starts with transparency and honesty,” says Johanna Belsuzarri Dahlman, founder and CEO at Local Latin in Denver, Colorado, a meeting and event planning company. “Being upfront with vendors, letting them know what is possible and what is not possible according to expectations of time lines, turnaround, caliber of service, payments and payment method, are all topics to discuss openly.”

- Budget-friendly — Find a partner that meets the budget and respects any constraints a corporate meeting planner may have.

“Many times, venues, like vendors do not fit certain clients with their nuances and peculiar requests or demands or forms of payments,” Dahlman says. “As the meeting professional, you become the mediator of how service is delivered and how the client will be satisfied.”

In order for planners and suppliers to enable true collaboration, they need to align on a set of shared objectives that, by design, drive mutually beneficial outcomes. These may vary depending on the nature of the relationship between the planner and supplier.

“When establishing relationships, I love to take the time and meet in person,” Dahlman says. “When I was working for Apple and expanding operations in Mexico and other countries, meeting in person went a long way. Once people meet you and see you are ethical, responsible and trustworthy, it encourages them to do business with you, especially if they have been burned before or are over-extending themselves due to my client’s or company’s demands.”

Dahlman recommends planners let suppliers know that repeat business is on its way. “Letting them know that this is not just a ‘one and done’ scenario is also helpful to discuss in forming the relationship,” she says. “You want to nurture the relationship with your vendors and suppliers.”

In Dahlman’s business, she enjoys building the relationship and being able to count on a supplier for future events, many times at a moment’s notice. When possible, she also recommends their services and helps them succeed with other planners or colleagues. If they are affiliated with other offices within the same company in different cities or countries, then she likes to promote them and work with them when possible.

Sometimes, creating win-win relationships

starts at the top with an NSO or GSO from a hotel or brand of hotels.

“I’ve worked with some clients where their addendums and demands are difficult and challenging, where contracts actually get in the way of the event planning itself and distract from the big picture,” Dahlman says. “In order to move things seamlessly, especially at a moment’s notice, these relationships have expedited meeting requests and have gotten me through velvet ropes, bureaucracy and red tape. The power of the relationship supersedes the organizations.”

The relationship carries on after a meeting planner may have left or the supplier has resigned from the organization where the planner first encountered them. Dahlman says understanding that people move, get promoted or take other lucrative jobs and positions, allows an automatic entry and warm welcome to the next organization once the work ethic and rapport have been established.

“Above all, adding a human touch, understanding when things go wrong and trying to create solutions, working together in a partnership,” she believes to be the key to success.

### Embracing Challenges

When a meeting planner is confident in his or her suppliers’ services, and they can count on them as a reliable business, it’s a win-win partnership that typically leads to successful events.

As McCulloch explains, there are several things that can hinder the ability to establish a strong relationship with a supplier. For instance, not sharing the overall goals and objectives can create frustration, as can denying a partner access to key decision-makers within the company.

“If communication is hoarded or blocked, a vendor supplier cannot successfully meet expectations,” McCulloch says. “The best relationships exist when a supplier partner has access to key information and gains an understanding of what a meeting planner would like accomplished, as well as how to best meet those needs.”

So what does a win-win supplier relationship look like to Schuster? Quite simply, the relationship needs to exude core values with integrity and actions that support the trust relationship.

“Services levels within that relationship must solidify the actions and continues to reinforce the partnership,” Schuster says. “Continuity with a genuine smile and both sides of the partnership should display the same respect for each other.”

There are some important tools that market-



**Tom McCulloch**  
Chief Marketing Officer  
metroConnections  
Minneapolis, MN

“A corporate planner also wants to make sure the supplier is compatible with the organization, taking into account similar work styles, accessibility, company culture, transparency, stability and ensuring they fit into the budget.”





**Johanna Belsuzarri Dahlman**  
Founder and CEO  
Local Latin  
Denver, CO

**“As the meeting professional, you become the mediator of how service is delivered and how the client will be satisfied.”**

ers can help dealers utilize in order to streamline their operations. One of these key strategies is benchmarking, which is essentially a methodology for defining specific levels of performance for distinct processes based on the best levels of performance historically achieved. Through the effective use of benchmarking, a corporate meeting planner can identify and use proven techniques to clarify its relationship with a supplier and set new, higher standards of performance.

For instance, does a current caterer exude exceptional communication skills as compared to a previous supplier? What makes these communication skills better for a meeting planner's needs? This “benchmark” can be used when evaluating or hiring future suppliers for meetings or events. Benchmarking is not a static activity, but rather a tool for achieving continuous improvement.

Of course, the benefits of a solid supplier partnership are numerous and long-lasting. As McCulloch explains, once a meeting planner has a good working relationship established with an ideal partner company, they can expect the following:

- Each of the strengths and weaknesses of both the planner and supplier will balance each other out. The supply partner will benefit from the planner's expertise and vice versa.
- Increased focus where it's needed. When a corporate planner can leave facets of a program up to a trusted partner, they can direct more of their attention to the tasks on their own to-do list.
- Improved quality of overall work. If a planner is stretching their team too thin to ably manage every part of a project, their work output will suffer. Bringing a skilled and reliable partner on board will mean more can be done at a higher level of quality.
- A long-term trusted partner in the industry. Developed properly, this relationship provides additional resources for a meeting planner and their company to leverage. They're a true extension of the planner's team, adding experience and knowledge to the company.
- A relationship where the supplier will go

extra miles for the client due to mutual respect. And in turn, the client extends appreciation to the supplier partner.

One big mistake planners may make when trying to establish strong partnerships with suppliers is not doing adequate research on the company. “Planners may have a distinct vision in mind of what a supplier is able to provide, but without doing their due diligence and spending time researching the company, the partnership can fall short of the planner's expectations,” McCulloch says.

Another mistake planners can make is not establishing goals to share with the supplier. If a planner doesn't have defined goals, their supplier partners will not effectively be able to help build a roadmap for a successful program and relationship.

“Lack of communication and preparation hinders everyone's effectiveness,” Mickelberg says. “Expecting partners to read minds never works. Creative briefs, schedules of events or any documents that will help them understand a meeting planner's needs will help.”

Mickelberg says another common mistake made by corporate meeting planners is putting the wrong supplier on the wrong project. Remember, everyone has his or her strengths and weaknesses. And not every project plays to every supplier's best skills. Putting the right team together is really important to ensure everyone's success.

And remember, it is vital that both parties be honest about the project from the beginning. “If a meeting planner doesn't know all the details yet, it's OK to say that,” Mickelberg says. “They don't want a supplier to sign up for one thing but end up working on another. Like us as planners, they need to manage their bandwidth and inventory.”

For Mickelberg, her supplier partnerships are like family. “I have their back, and they have mine,” she says. “Every event or meeting has elements that are unexpected. Having partners that are in it with you to come up with a solution is so important. In return, I try to refer suppliers to other planners as a thank you for working with me.”

Mickelberg has seen many planners treat a vendor poorly or disrespectfully when things get stressful. “It is disappointing and won't build strong relationships,” she says. “We need to be advocates for everyone we work with, whether it is a client or partner.” **C&IT**



# One Time in New Orleans

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# Diversity is Beneficial to the Bottom Line

By Derek Reveron

Planning diverse/multicultural corporate meetings was once a niche endeavor for planners because attendees, speakers and panelists were predominately white males. Those days are steadily coming to an end.

Planners are increasingly called upon to create meetings and events that include African-Americans, Latinos, women, seniors, LGBTQT people, Asian-Americans and other diverse groups. In addition, many CVBs (also known as DMOs or direct marketing organizations) are offering a range of tools to help planners with diverse meetings.

As a result, diverse meetings are becoming more of a common practice for many planners. "To be successful at what we do and be engaging planners,

we must view diversity as essential," says Rosa MacArthur, CMP, president of Costa Mesa, California-based Meeting Planners Plus. "We must embrace diversity because attendees at meetings we produce come from diverse backgrounds and cultures. People are becoming more sensitive to the topic of diversity and are making extra efforts to be inclusive. As planners and suppliers, a large part of our job is to be sensitive to the topic and be proactive."

Planners are finding that diversity can help them achieve meeting goals, as well as provide unique and enriching experiences for attendees.

## Diversity Adds Value

Kate Stockton, CMP, president,

Stockton & Partners Meetings and Events, a Philadelphia-based meetings, event and destination management company, says, "Attention to diversity in planning meetings adds value for attendees because they can experience something new, meet someone new or hear a speaker with a fresh viewpoint. Meetings are less about the straight delivery of information and more about the interaction of ideas and people. Diversity is the world of different experiences, voices, backgrounds, ages, etc. Diversity is essential to living in, doing business with and innovating in the world, and that includes meetings."

Several factors are driving diversity in meeting planning: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, minorities will account

## With Minorities Becoming the Majority, Inclusive Meetings are Key to Success

for the majority of people living in the U.S. by 2040. Corporate diversity policies seek to ensure minority representation in meetings and events. The globalization of U.S.-based businesses means that meetings include more attendees from cultures worldwide.

In addition, corporations now see diversity as a benefit to the bottom line. Companies with the most diversity in the areas of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation are 35 percent more likely to generate financial returns higher than their respective industry medians, according to consulting firm McKinsey & Company.

Another factor encouraging diversity results from the growing trends to book meetings and events at least partly based on a destination's record on controversial diversity laws and issues. For example, according to the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority (CRVA), North Carolina's law limiting bathroom access for transgender people caused the cancellation of 11 conferences, dozens of meetings, three sports events and

63,023 hotel room bookings representing \$83.9 million in direct spending. The law was partially repealed last year.

Joan Eisenstodt, principal of Eisenstodt Associates, LLC, a Washington, D.C.-based meeting management and consulting firm, has firsthand experience with groups that respond to diversity controversies.

"Having had a client who pulled out of a destination because a discriminatory law passed, I am fully aware of what can happen," she says. "Groups look to DMOs to find out where they stand on issues that aren't favorable to diversity. DMOs are in a tough position because their stakeholders include local and state governments. But many DMOs have lobbied against discriminatory laws because they know the economic harm that will occur if they pass. Meeting planners and attendees want to see commitment from destinations and those who market them."

## More Progress Needed

Planners and others who follow the

issue of diversity in meetings closely say there is still a need for progress, and it should be defined broadly.

Says Eisenstodt, "Diversity has to be seen in terms of ethnicity, gender, gender identification, gender expression, race, religion, ideas, country of origin, etc. When a person goes to a meeting and sees people who are not like them, or if they see that an organization holds meetings over significant religious or ethnic holidays, or meets in cities that have experienced hate crimes and done little to change the culture, then it shows a culture of not caring about others."

Planners can help ensure diversity by encouraging meeting stakeholders to include speakers and panelists who vary by culture, race, gender and ethnicity. According to MacArthur, "If attendees feel welcomed, comfortable and assured that their requests/concerns are taken seriously, and if their presence is valued and the message is relevant to them, they will want to attend most, if not all, sessions and be fully engaged. If

"Meetings are less about the straight delivery of information and more about the interaction of ideas and people.... Diversity is essential to living in, doing business with and innovating in the world, and that includes meetings."

Kate Stockton, CMP, President, Stockton & Partners Meetings and Events, Philadelphia, PA







**"We rightly highlight our city's diversity as a key attribute for our destination. We believe that when everyone has a seat at the table, the quality of an event improves immensely."**

**Greg DeShields**, Executive Director, PHL Diversity, Philadelphia, PA

they see presenters, speakers and other attendees who look like them, it is easier to relate. It puts them at a level of comfort and gives them a greater feeling of belonging."

Eisenstodt agrees. "We all want to hear diverse ideas and experience diverse speakers," she says. "Those who look alike or have the same ideas don't stimulate thought. Meetings present opportunities to expose people to new ideas and different people, and that leads to more comfort and ability to interact. Although we are often most comfortable with people 'like us' (whatever that means to an individual) we are better when we experience others unlike us."

That's the philosophy that MacArthur practices when she plans diverse

meetings, including one that involved a company holding diversity leadership meetings for managers and employees.

MacArthur planned the five-day meetings twice a year, and attendees were required to stay on property.

"I had to work with the chef or catering manager to make sure that the opening welcome reception served food that was familiar to the several ethnic groups represented," she says. "I had Asian, African-American, Hispanic, Middle Eastern and other food stations during their opening welcome reception. Throughout the week, I also concentrated on their meals and snacks, which was a huge effort because we served all three meals every day."

Culturally appropriate décor and

decorative linens enhanced the multicultural experience. "Everyone enjoyed the diversity and appreciated all the extra effort that went into making the meeting interesting and inclusive," says MacArthur. "Once you get people talking, and they have agreed to suspend all judgment, they are amazed at how much they have in common vs. how much they differ."

### CVBs Can Help

Planners looking to create diverse meetings can get more help than ever from CVBs and DMOs. The efforts result from the belief that supporting diversity is the right thing to do and the increasing importance of diverse groups to CVB bottom lines.

According to Greg DeShields, executive director, PHL Diversity, a business development division of the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau (PCVB), which works to attract diverse meetings to the city, "Meeting planners in our business want to know that CVB representatives are sensitive to issues close to their community. The Philadelphia population is representative of this cultural mix — giving us the upper hand when competing with other cities for business opportunities. We rightly highlight our city's diversity as a key attribute for our destination. We believe that when everyone has a seat at the table, the quality of an event improves immensely."

Philadelphia is one of several destinations that have sought to increase and track the number of meetings booked by diverse groups. In 2017, the PCVB brought 51 diversity-related events to

*Continued on page 44*

## CVBs Increasing Their Diversity Outreach

More CVBs are promoting their destinations as diverse and dedicating staff, websites, multicultural destination guides, videos and outreach programs to attract diverse meetings and events. Some CVBs dedicate entire teams to diversity, and many have at least one official with titles such as executive director of diversity or vice president of diversity.

For example, the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau's (PCVB) PHL Diversity unit has a two-person team that embraces the effort as a "strategic competitive advantage, has its own budget and calculates a return on investment in diversity."

In addition, the PCVB's comprehensive diversity website, PHL Diversity, includes information about diverse neighborhoods, historical sites, entertainment, activities, events and cuisine. PHL Diversity also lists meetings booked by diverse groups and offers podcasts on diversity, including more than 30 that were produced last year.

"Our website is designed to be reflective of the many groups we serve," says Greg DeShields, executive director, PHL Diversity. "The podcast is a medium that often serves as a sounding board for these groups."

In addition, PHL Diversity has five separate committees that address different aspects of diversity, including education, marketing and innovation. Looking to further raise the profile of diversity issues, PHL Diversity will hold a Diversity & Inclusion Conference at Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia at Comcast Center next spring.

Another CVB, Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau, recently created its own four-member multicultural sales team that consists of a vice president of multicultural sales and community development, a director of multicultural sales, a national manager of multicultural sales and a multicultural and community development coordinator. The team focuses on building relationships with diverse groups and has hosted two multicultural travel and tourism forums.

According to the Cincinnati USA website, "Industry trends and changing national demographics indicate that the mul-

ticultural sector in the tourism and hospitality industry will continue to show strong growth in the coming years. In response, this move is a strategic reallocation of CVB resources to attract and win more diverse business."

### Accountability for Diversity

Looking to encourage accountability for diversity, the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau (GBCVB), wrote its "Guidelines to Ensure Diversity at Programs, Events & Conferences."

The GBCVB's event partners and co-sponsors are required to adhere to the guidelines, which include not holding any event with an all-male panel, making efforts to ensure diversity among speakers and attendees and gathering data to measure the diversity of speakers and attendees.

According to the GBCVB website, "We encourage every organization to consider adopting these guidelines for their own events."

The GBCVB seeks accountability for diversity from its event partners and co-sponsors. The GBCVB website states, "If the organization cannot (adhere to the guidelines), we would then require written explanation for why they cannot do this, including their plan to meet diversity goals in future years, before GBCVB will agree to partner or co-sponsor the event."

CVBs also focus on the experiences that diverse local communities can provide for planners and attendees.

For example, according to the Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau (NCVB) website, "Nashville's event calendar is filled with multicultural events celebrating cultures from all across the globe. Nashville is a model of the American melting pot with an active Native American population, thriving Hispanic community and growing Middle Eastern and Asian presence."

Other CVBs increasing their diversity outreach include the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, NYC & Company, the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, Explore St. Louis, Destination DC, Destination Cleveland and the Greater Palm Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau. **C&IT**



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**“Those who look alike or have the same ideas don’t stimulate thought. Meetings present opportunities to expose people to new ideas and different people, and that leads to more comfort and ability to interact.”**

**Joan Eisenstodt**, Principal, Eisenstodt Associates, LLC, Washington, D.C.

*Continued from page 42*

the city with 41,000 attendees, representing 52,000 room nights and an economic impact of \$37 million.

While CVBs are improving their diversity outreach, the commitment to it varies among organizations. Planners looking to create diverse meetings can determine the types of assistance available from CVBs by asking key questions.

MacArthur suggests asking: “Does the CVB have a salesperson who handles the diversity market? What exactly does that person do to address the needs of diverse groups? Does what they do add value, and is it appreciated by planners

information is updated as groups and populations change.”

### Diversity Planning Tips

Be diverse, as well as inclusive. For example, a diverse meeting that includes Jews and Hindus isn’t inclusive unless their dietary needs are met. A meeting may be more diverse if it includes attendees undergoing gender transition or whose self-gender identification differs from their physicality. But the meeting isn’t inclusive unless it also includes gender-neutral restrooms.

Research local cultures and spotlight them online and in distributed meeting

differences to review materials and respond with questions.

Schedule diverse speakers and panelists. If initial lists of speakers have zero or few minorities then re-evaluate the list. When speakers and panelists don’t represent attendees, it’s more difficult to connect with them to achieve meeting goals.

Arrange meeting activities to ensure that attendees arrive and are seated on time. Reason: Being on time is more important in some cultures and less significant in others.

Assure diversity of ideas. A diverse multicultural panel consisting of everyone with the same views isn’t necessarily diverse.

Create activities for diverse groups so they can become familiar with each other outside of meetings and help bridge cultural differences.

Track national and local news that may impact destinations under consideration for meetings. Pay attention to issues that are local or national controversies that have the potential to impact destinations under consideration for meetings.

Due to fast-moving demographic changes, diversity is becoming a way of life in the meetings and hospitality industry. One day, the vast majority of meetings will be overwhelmingly diverse. Routinely planning diverse meetings may require some adjustment for planners who are unaccustomed to doing so. However, planners who embrace diversity now will develop additional approaches to planning that will yield results in the long run.

As Eisenstodt put it, “Diversity is critical to ensuring the health of a meeting.” **C&IT**

**“We must embrace diversity because attendees at meetings we produce come from diverse backgrounds and cultures.... As planners and suppliers, a large part of our job is to be sensitive to the topic and be proactive.”**

**Rosa MacArthur, CMP**, President, Meeting Planners Plus, Costa Mesa, CA

or clients? How do they go about making diverse groups feel welcome?”

Other questions to consider include: Do the CVB’s goals include reaching out to groups to let planners know that diversity is important? Does it design and promote diversity websites and collateral materials? How does the CVB hope to improve its diversity efforts?

Ask CVBs about their diversity training efforts. “They can go a long way to train their members and their entire communities about the importance of a diverse workforce and diverse businesses to those who may visit for meetings,” says Eisenstodt. “Ask how often the

materials. Include diverse restaurants, events, venues, attractions, historical sites and short excursions.

Collect demographic data about attendees and speakers that include gender, age, ethnicity and race. Research the specific needs of diverse attendees.

Get diversity “references” from the local CVB. Ask: What do diverse local leaders think about the organization’s diversity efforts? Do local multicultural groups tout the destination’s diversity?

Distribute meeting agendas, handouts and presentations well in advance. This provides extra time for groups with language and cultural

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# Making Safety a Priority

## How Secure Are Your Off-Property Events?

By Maura Keller

**P**redicting the future is like forecasting the weather. You think you know what's going to happen — then it doesn't. There has been a lot of media attention recently concerning the safety and security of events, usually in terms of a weather-related crisis or the likelihood of personal injury. So to what extent do meeting and event planners have to pay attention to crisis planning? Quite a bit, say the experts.

Jeff O'Hara, CMP, DMCP, president of Allied PRA New Orleans, is seeing the concern of offsite safety and security fluctuating based on news reports about incidents occurring elsewhere.

"Right now, it seems to be on the list of one of the many issues planners are dealing with, rather than top of the list," O'Hara says. "While this may seem strange given the relatively recent terrorist attacks, school shootings and cruise ship mishaps — the heightened interest seems to flow when events are unprecedented, and people may be becoming jaded on these events."

The recent Duck Boat tragedy in Missouri is something we haven't seen much of, so O'Hara expects this will

manager at Brightspot Incentives & Events in Irving, Texas, risk and safety management for offsite events has become the expectation and no longer the exception.

"Safety and security are key areas we are evaluating, planning for and communicating with our vendors, partners and clients," Dierks says. "Planners should never go into a program without having a risk management plan in place."

At Brightspot, many of the events are international incentive trips. "When we started hearing reports of tainted

**"What if you are in the midst of a huge product launch, and one of your competitors walks into your ballroom through the back of the house?"**

**Jeff O'Hara, CMP, DMCP, President**  
AlliedPRA, New Orleans, LA



raise awareness, and planners will request increased due diligence on aquatic events.

Of course, in the world of meeting planning, there are myriad disruptive challenges that occur.

While most of these disruptions are unpredictable and uncontrollable, evaluating and managing the inherent risk of offsite meetings and events is paramount in an age of unpredictability.

According to the Incentive Research Foundation, a study conducted in 2016 to determine what was disrupting events and how planners were coping found that almost 60 percent of planners had experienced a disruption of at least one event that affected its overall outcome or success. The report indicated that the two most frequently occurring disruptions are weather-related events and vendor failures.

For Kim Dierks, CMP, senior program

alcohol in Mexico, we reached out to our hotel partners to confirm their specific processes and procedures for alcohol safety," Dierks says. "How is it brought on property? Who takes it to the bars? Who is responsible for locking up alcohol at night? Who has a key to that locked area? What is the process of disposing bottles? Who is responsible



**"When we started hearing reports of tainted alcohol in Mexico, we reached out to our hotel partners to confirm their specific processes and procedures for alcohol safety."**

**Kim Dierks, CMP, Senior Program Manager**  
Brightspot Incentives & Events, Irving, TX

for the regulation and management of this process? Has that specific hotel had any reports filed against it? What is the hiring and training process for bartenders? These types of questions show our clients we are aware of the

current climate, and we are doing our due diligence to ensure we are not putting them or their guests in danger."

For Laura Craven, meeting planner and director of communications and marketing at Imperial Dade in Miami, Florida, a distributor of food service packaging, facilities maintenance supplies and equipment, safety and security have become increasingly important over the last several years.

"This has been fueled by natural disasters, such as hurricanes to tragic violence, like the shooting in Las Vegas," Craven says. "Attendee safety has become as important as attendee experience and enjoyment. To not have an emergency plan in place is not responsible and can leave the host organization exposed to liability and reputation damage or worse."

### Being Prepared

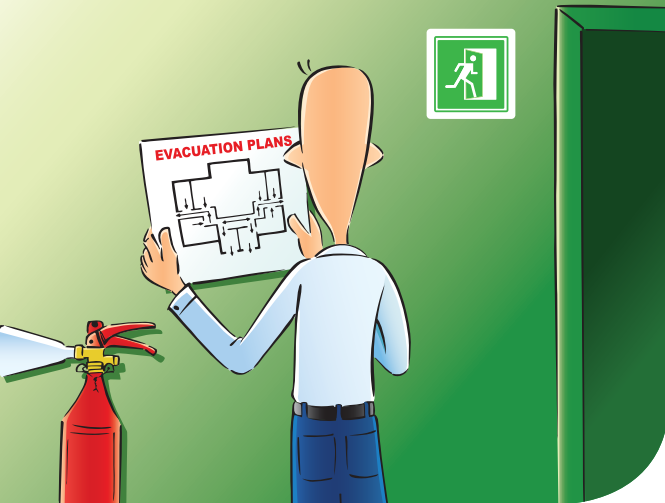
There are so many things that can be easily taken for granted because we pass by them every day. While the potential for risk may be low, with safety

and security issues, the cost can be astronomical in the unlikely event something does occur. As O'Hara explains, it's not just terrorist attacks and high-profile events, either.

"What if you are in the midst of a huge







Which leads me to another point — it is not enough to have a plan, everyone from your internal team to the venue to your suppliers must know the plan.”

So what are some key methods that planners can use to ensure the security of an off-property event? What steps can be put in place in doing so?

According to O’Hara, the first step is to understand the access that the general public has to the proximity of the location of your event.

“Many of the security hazards in this day and age are caused by individuals

with bad intentions. So, where the public will be relative to your event is a primary focus,” O’Hara says. “Then, you have to analyze the event space to see where the vulnerabilities are for unwanted people to access, and secure those accordingly.”

Most places have had fire safety and evacuation plans in place for quite some time now, but corporate meeting and event planners still have to verify them.

When planning events for Imperial Dade, Craven evaluates and addresses life-safety, and action plans are discussed with everyone involved — from the venue to the event team and other vendors.

“Safety should be considered during

site and activity selection,” Craven says. “A safety and emergency response plan should be documented and shared with all involved.”

For Imperial Dade’s annual trade shows, the team discusses safety and evacuation plans with the venue. They also meet with the onsite security company on protocols to discuss everything from a medical emergency to an act of violence.

“We drill into our staff ‘if you see something, say something!’ We discuss ‘what-if’ scenarios and go over the steps to address a variety of situations,” Craven says. “We provide contact information for all those involved in responding to emergencies, and we post these phone numbers at registration and the show command center. We have email addresses for all our attendees and exhibitors, and have group lists set up if a broadcast message needs to be sent out.”

To date, Imperial Dade has only had to deal with a hurricane (Irma in 2017) that was approaching South Florida the day before one of their shows.

“We decided to postpone the show rather than risking it. It caused a great deal of extra work and expense, but it was the right thing to do,” Craven says.

Allied PRA New Orleans has a comprehensive safety and security plan for every type of program that they offer. But O’Hara stresses that it is not enough just to have a plan.

“We do regular training with our field staff and our suppliers to ensure ev-



**“We should do our best to identify threats or situations that could arise that would negatively impact our guests.”**

**Beth Lawrence**, CEO, Event Planner  
Beth Lawrence, LLC, Collingswood, NJ

As part of the process, the AlliedPRA New Orleans vets the venues, restaurants and excursions safety and security plans, and one of O’Hara’s pet tricks is to quiz the line staff to see if they know their company’s plan.

“The busboy may be the first one to see a fire or encounter a criminal, and they have to know what to do just the same as the general manager,” O’Hara says.

Dierks recommends planners should have an internal risk management SOP Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in place. The SOP should be modified and updated for each program. Planners should reach out to their key partners (hotel, DMC, vendors, etc.) to determine their risk management protocols

and procedures, and planners should ensure their vendors have the appropriate insurance and should not be afraid to ask detailed questions about their safety and security processes.

“Education and communication are

experiences, as well. As an industry, we improve when we collaborate and learn from each other.”

Safety and security of offsite events is a huge concern for Beth Lawrence, event planner and CEO of Beth Lawrence LLC in Collingswood, New Jersey.

“When we work with a hotel or venue,



we have months, and sometimes years, of site visits and relationships with the venue sales and operations teams,” Lawrence says. “We familiarize ourselves with onsite security options and even those from outside the venue that we can tap into — but at the same time, there are outside forces that we cannot control. We should do our best to identify threats or situations that could arise that would negatively impact our guests. In Philadelphia, a local organization had an active shooter training for event professionals. Things like that are, unfortunately, becoming extremely important as we move forward in the event planning world.”

When planning events for corporate clients, Lawrence ensures that she has put proper safety measures in place when transporting guests from one place to another, whether that is a

## Handling a Meeting and Event Crisis

Good crisis management know-how begins with diligent planning on the part of meeting professionals:

- **Know your audience.** When planning ahead of time, the key element would be proper assessment of risk. Every meeting planner should have a good sense of who will be attending. Who will be meeting? A meeting for senior company leadership will require a different level of security than a meeting of lower-level staff. Also, a meeting being held by a controversial group may attract protests and demonstrations that will necessitate security and crisis management planning.
- **Scout the location.** Know the entrances and exits well. Know potential hazards. Know whom to turn to in the event of anything going on (emergencies, etc.). Try to book safe locations for venues. How far away are hospitals, fire departments and police stations? Is the building difficult to evacuate or at risk of a traffic jam?
- **Prep.** Both the staff and the participants need to be briefed on the security measures that will be implemented. Providing people with a heads-up is crucial, since it will let them be more comfortable. Bag searches, metal detectors, frisking, etc. — these are all practices which entail some amount of invasion of privacy and personal space.
- **Gather intel.** What other events and meetings had recently taken place in this venue/area? What type of security was implemented? Were there any incidents? What can a planner learn from the achievements and/or mistakes of those who came before them?
- **Plan for the best, expect the worse.** This is one thing that should not be forgotten because if something could go wrong, it probably will. Ideally, a planner will have anticipated it. If not, the event may begin to spiral downward rapidly.
- **Establish a system for emergency communication.** This could be via text, cellphones, chats, social media, email or all of the above. You’ll need to reach everyone quickly during a crisis, and hunting for contact information during an emergency could put people at risk. Review your safety and security plan with your staff and with the venue and vendors during any pre-conference meetings.
- **Keep contacts:** Keep a comprehensive and organized list of internal and external contact information for each meeting.

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**“To not have an emergency plan in place is not responsible and can leave the host organization exposed to liability and reputation damage or worse.”**

**Laura Craven**, Meeting Planner/Director of Communications and Marketing, Imperial Dade, Miami, FL



everyone understands what to check for pre-event, what to watch for during the event and how to wrap post event,” he says. “In cases where our supplier’s procedures are not as rigorous as ours, we require them to adapt our plan.”

key methods to being prepared to plan properly for risk management issues,” Dierks says. “Talk with peers about what they have experienced, how they handled that incident and what they might do differently the next time. Share your





There are a number of ways that planners can prepare for disruptions, including tighter contractual language, more backup resources, better contingency planning, establishing more guidelines and extending planning cycles.

And while there may be hundreds of situations that are disruptive, there are really only a few paths to manage the consequence

of any event. One key way is by having a destination plan identifying the names and contacts of hospitals, clinics, emergency services, supplier emergency leadership and contacts. Also the creation of a guest “status check-in” process during a disruption event creates the ability to take a census of status and location of each guest.

shuttle service or a guided walking tour. If budget does not allow for that, giving the guests clear directions of how to move from place to place and what methods to use to do that is vital. Matthew Struck, CPCU, ARM, MBA, partner at Treadstone Risk Management, LLC, in Morristown, New Jersey, says travel accident insurance to pay any medical expenses or accidental death should be offered or purchased and included as part of the event budget.

“This can fill a gap in personal health insurance coverage or commercial workers compensation if the event is for a group of employees,” Struck says.

It’s also important to vet ride operators or event organizers prior to signing up by checking reviews and safety records. And personal weather alerts and updates need to be provided to attendees via apps or services, such as the National Weather Service.

Having clear attrition policies, Force Majeure language, insurance coverages, data security, supplier responsibility and sponsor management contact chains identified, contracted and incorporated as part of the program are “must-haves” when it comes to crisis management for meetings and events.

#### Mistakes to Avoid

One simple example of a common mistake to avoid revolves around name tags. Often clients will say their attend-



the biggest mistakes occurring around assuming a business that has been operating for a number of years is safe, neglecting to do due diligence on the activity providers and dynamics at the event location due to a time crunch and avoiding conversations about appropriate insurance coverage for the trip,” Struck says.

“It is extremely important to document everything. From the smallest injury to a major incident, planners need to document the details of what occurred,” Dierks says. She uses a standard incident report to collect all pertinent information regarding an incident. This allows her to follow up with all parties involved and provide the necessary documentation that may be needed post program.

“From a moral and ethical perspective, planners should focus on risk management, as we have a ‘duty of care’ responsibility in ensuring the safety of our attendees, vendors, staff and anyone who is associated with our event,” Dierks says. “Should an incident arise, we need legal evidence that we have done our due diligence in planning a smart solution for our attendees.”

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“Planners need to provide basic safety training geared toward travel for any members of the party or employees if they are going to be participating in high-risk activities.”

**Matthew Struck, CPCU, ARM, MBA, Partner**  
Treadstone Risk Management, LLC, Morristown, NJ

“Meeting and event planners need to provide basic safety training geared toward travel for any members of the party or employees if they are going to be participating in high-risk activities or in an area that is extraordinarily dangerous,” Struck says.

ees “don’t want to be bothered” to wear name tags to their evening event. But lacking identification, a criminal — or worse, a terrorist — can more easily slip into the event.

Struck says the most mistakes are made based off of assumptions. “I see

## NEW MEETING SPACE THAT DEFIES CONVENTION.



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## Mountain Resorts Winter Meetings Have Reached New Heights

Harrah's Lake Tahoe (left) partners with its sister property, Harveys Lake Tahoe, to combine space for larger meetings.

Whatever the sales managers at mountain resorts are calling it these days — “unplugged adventures,” “experiential retreats,” “connecting to nature,” “teambuilding” — corporate planners are finding that organizing winter events at high-altitude venues may be the perfect antidote for groups that yearn for a break from the typical urban business hotel or suburban conference center.

Although warm, seaside meeting destinations can be alluring, especially during Midwestern and Northeastern winters, there is definitely a sobering, esoteric moment about staring up at the towering Rocky Mountains from your hotel's dining room window,

when the morning sun accentuates the crisp, newly fallen snow on its peak and a nearby fireplace offers warmth and the crackling pops of burning logs.

Whether skiing, tubing, ice skating, snowshoeing or taking a ride in a snowcat across a beautiful white meadow, any of these experiences can make your group more than ready for the afternoon meeting or conference that awaits them, or refreshed and relaxed after a morning seminar or training session. And participating in these activities with their co-workers is sure to bring them.

Mountain resorts in Colorado, Lake Tahoe, Vermont, New York, Utah, North Carolina and Idaho are ideal meeting destinations in exceptionally lovely

surroundings, with all the amenities available for an enjoyable and very different corporate event.

### Colorado

In Colorado, the most mountainous state in the country, with 25 peaks more than 14,000 feet high, there are many venues to consider. The **Vail Marriott Mountain Resort** launched the property's \$25 million “Reimagination” redesign project this summer with a new guest room experience and transformed meeting spaces. The comprehensive project is geared toward travelers with high-tech attributes, and its indoor/outdoor design embraces the year-round destination with its chic, modern aesthetic.

The redesign, by the award-winning Simeone Deary Design Group, was inspired by Swiss chalet architecture and small European towns. Natural tones and authentic materials in the newly transformed 350 guest rooms are paired with luxurious metallic elements. Guestroom bathrooms feature highly upgraded finishes, including gray rift-cut oak vanities with sleek, green marble countertops and matte black metal accents, porcelain tile floors and walls and polished chrome hardware.

With the new rooms introduced in the summer and early fall of this year, the entire first phase of the renovation will debut with the launch of the reimagined Grand Ballroom, Grand Foyer and Colorado Ballroom totaling 25,000 square feet of meeting space. This will include an outdoor veranda featuring a bar, fire features and private settees.

Located at the base of Vail Mountain, just steps from the Eagle Bahn Gondola, guests can enjoy countless activities, including skiing, biking, taking a scenic gondola ride up to Colorado's highest mountain point, or exploring the cobblestone streets of Lionshead and Vail Village, offering hundreds of shops, boutiques and art galleries. The resort also has an array of programming, including Check-in Sips, Mountain Mindfulness and Hair of the Bear.

Located in the heart of Beaver Creek, the 190-room **Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa** provides corporate groups access to great skiing and meeting facilities. The resort offers ski-in/ski-out access and is just steps away from shops, restaurants, cultural attractions and outdoor adventure activities. The chateau-style property includes the Allegria Spa with 23 treatment rooms, a slopeside pool and hot tubs and two on-property dining venues.

For corporate meetings, the property offers indoor/outdoor meeting space, including the Sawatch Hall ballroom with its breathtaking views of Beaver Creek Village and Mountain. The convention service staff at Beaver Creek works closely with the food and

beverage team and meeting planners to create specialty catering events.

Situated in Colorado Springs, in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, **The Broadmoor** and its Wilderness Experience properties of The Ranch at Emerald Valley, Cloud Camp and Fly Fishing Camp, cover about 5,000 acres, perfect for winter skiing, mountain biking, hiking, rock-climbing and fly-fishing activities for corporate retreat and bonding trips or incentive groups with a desire for a different type of reward trip.

The resort campus has 784 guest rooms, suites and cottages, two championship golf courses, an award-winning spa and fitness center, a nationally recognized tennis staff and program, retail boutiques and 10 restaurants, including the Penrose Room, Colorado's only Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond restaurant.

In 2016, The Broadmoor opened The Estate House, a lavish historic mansion designed during the 1920s that is perfect for small, private parties and receptions. Overall, the property features 185,000 square feet of function space, including Broadmoor Hall, and 62 meeting rooms.

For corporate planners with sustainability goals, The Broadmoor has taken steps toward increasing sustainability in a number of ways throughout its 100-year history, such as embracing sustainable food. The resort's honey comes from its own bees, its beef comes from the resort's ranch and produce is grown in the property's garden. To supplement these offerings, the resort partners with a number of local and international merchants.

Also in Colorado Springs is the 316-room **Cheyenne Mountain Colorado Springs**, a Dolce Resort, where a vast array of amenities attract corporate and incentive planners whose groups

appreciate plenty of indoor/outdoor activities in stunning surroundings. Some of the amenities at this property include an 18-hole championship, Pete Dye-designed golf course; the Alluvia Spa; four swimming pools; 17 indoor/outdoor tennis courts; full-service fitness center; aquatics center and a 35-acre recreation lake.

In addition, there are great mountain views, deluxe accommodations, two restaurants and one lounge, in addition to comprehensive conference facilities. For planners, the property's Cheyenne Meeting Package (CMP) bundles all the essential components of a meeting together for one convenient per-attendee price, including accommodations with Alluvia

Spa bath products, terry cloth robes, high-speed internet and separate study areas with laptop workstations. A dedicated conference planner and conference concierge work with planners and can help arrange the resort's signature meeting experiences. These include the Cheyenne Mountain Resort's take-off on the hit TV show, *The Amazing Race*, which combines both indoor and outdoor challenge stations, taking advantage of a wide range of amenities available at the property's Country Club. There is also the seasonal Glow Golf, where participants head out onto the 18-hole championship course in the early evening and golf as the Rocky Mountain sky turns from deep blue to star-filled black.

Susie Cornette, an event leader with Best Buy, works with the resort to bring in the company's Expert Camera Training Events for employees. “I arrange two groups a year to Cheyenne Mountain, bringing about 125 to 150 participants in each trip to the property, along with professional photo coaches,” says Cornette. “We especially like the

**“We like the 220-plus acres of resort scenery ... because it provides numerous photo opportunities of not only the resort, but also the surrounding area of Colorado Springs.”**

**Susie Cornette**  
Event Leader  
Best Buy  
Richfield, MN



220-plus acres of resort scenery for this group because it provides numerous photo opportunities of not only the resort, but also the surrounding area of Colorado Springs, with Garden of the Gods Park just a few miles away, and of course, Pikes Peak, 32 miles from the property, makes the ultimate backdrop for any picture."



**Michelle Palmer**  
Director of Sales  
and Business Development  
DSC, an AlliedPRA Company  
Park City, UT

"The food and beverage options are also perfect for our group, and the views from the Mountain View Restaurant and the restaurant patio are amazing," says Cornette. "Over our five-night, six-day conference/training sessions, we utilize the Colorado Ballroom for our general session, and the resort has abundant breakout rooms as well, which are great for our one-on-one training sessions. The property's Lakeside Pavilion, the Lake, the Alluvia Spa and the golf course with its amazing Rocky Mountain backdrop are also perfect for our associates to be as creative as they like. Last, but not least, the sunrises and sunsets off of the lobby terrace offer amazing photo opportunities as the light continues to change and reflect off of Cheyenne Mountain during this time of the day."

## Lake Tahoe

Surrounded by pine-forested mountains rising more than 4,000 feet above the shore, Lake Tahoe is situated in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, between the border of California and Nevada.

On the southwest shore, Emerald Bay State Park contains the 1929 Nordic-style mansion Vikingsholm. Along the lake's northeast side, Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park includes Sand Harbor Beach and Spooner Lake.

Since 1955, **Harrah's Lake Tahoe** has been entertaining guests in style. The 18-story hotel features 512 guest rooms and offers planners the facilities and services to make their next meeting extraordinary. With an array of guest-pleasing amenities and one-of-a-kind venues, such as its casino, pool and spa, group events will be memorable.

This Caesars-managed property offers 25,000 square feet of versatile meeting space. The Sand Harbor Ballrooms, totaling 11,073 square feet, can be configured to seat up to 680 guests for meal functions or 1,100 in theater-style seating for a major presentation. With their symmetrical layout, the four 812-square-foot Tahoe Rooms can be used separately for intimate programs or joined together to accommodate events of up to 142 attendees. Four 495-square-foot Committee Rooms offer a perfect setting as a boardroom or for breakouts. The 7,000-square-foot South Shore Room boasts a built-in stage with high-tech lighting, sound and audio systems.

With easy access from every direction and resort hotels offering luxury accommodations, fine-dining and top entertainment, Lake Tahoe has become one of North America's major meeting, conference and incentive destinations.

## Vermont

One of New England's premier ski resorts is also one of New England's premier mountain meeting destinations. At Vermont's **Stowe Mountain Resort**, there are several unique venues to choose from for corporate events, including the Spruce Camp

Base Lodge state-of-the-art function facility, an expansive, two-story building that features plenty of natural light and open floor plans. With an attached, private terrace and vaulted ceilings, Spruce Camp Base Lodge is perfect for large receptions, company dinners or product-launch events.

A variety of dining options are available, such as the exclusive Cliff House mountaintop restaurant. And recreational activities for groups include the new ZipTour Adventure, TreeTop Adventure and Stowe Rocks Climbing Center, as well as the Gondola SkyRide. Other onsite options include outdoor ice skating and indoor shopping and dining in the Spruce Peak Plaza entertainment area at Spruce Peak Performing Arts Center.

Corporate meeting, seminar or incentive groups who enjoy skiing can experience the excitement of competing in a professionally run race with bibs, timekeeper and two runs per person. Bringing home a video of individual runs is a great way to remember the event. For spring, summer or fall group visits, popular onsite amenities include the private 18-hole Stowe Mountain Golf Club and the 21,000-square-foot spa and wellness center. The property offers its own in-house Destination Management Services, Alpine Destinations, to handle transportation arrangements and develop personalized recreational options, themed events and entertainment.

"I arranged a two-day seminar at Stowe Mountain Lodge in 2016, for about 100 participants," says Steven King, event director for The Oxford Club, a private network that publishes and markets financial investment advice. "I used to plan different types of seminars for our customers, including cruises and tours, but I started using mountain destinations not so much because of the skiing opportunities, but my groups were looking for a more intimate setting, and off-season dates in ski areas worked well."

"What I loved about Stowe Mountain Resort is that it had this reputation as being a great location in both



The current expansion of Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort in North Carolina will add 83,000 square feet of meeting space and 725 guest rooms to its already expansive property.

winter and summer, and my seminar participants added on pre-days and post-days to their Stowe Mountain dates," says King. "It was a winner for everyone. I used most of the resort's meeting rooms for the seminar functions and dining venues for our food and beverage events."

King says that a strong, summer lightning storm caused a change in plans for one of his dining events. "I had arranged a reception at the property's Cliff House restaurant, situated high up on Mount Mansfield. I liked the interior of the venue, as it has a spectacular panoramic-view through the floor-to-ceiling windows, and the food is great, as well," he says.

"But a summer lightning storm meant that Stowe Mountain Resort had to shut down the gondola, which was going to take the group up to the restaurant. Fortunately, we were able to move the group to the Alpine Clubhouse, part of Stowe Mountain Resort and located nearby. The restaurant seats 120 persons and often does private corporate dinners, so it worked out perfectly for our group. From the Alpine Clubhouse, there were

nice views of the mountain and the Village Green, the dinner was enjoyable, and we watched the lightning storm from the comfort of our seats."

## New York

The **Mohonk Mountain House** in New York's Catskill Mountains is a Victorian castle-like structure that dates back to 1869, and has hosted all manner of notable names, from Andrew Carnegie and Theodore Roosevelt to Bill Clinton. Mohonk has 14 meeting rooms with varying capacities that range from an expansive Victorian Parlor to intimate wood-paneled studies. They are all equipped with the latest AV technology and complimentary high-speed wireless internet access.

In 2016, Mohonk unveiled Grove Lodge, its first accommodation outside of the main Mountain House in its 150-year history. Located by a fern grove on the northeast side of the 1,200-acre property, the 7,000 square-foot, two-story lodge utilizes native stones, reclaimed wood, natural finishes and sustainable materials throughout. It features six rooms and a Great Room with cathe-

**"I started using mountain destinations not so much because of the skiing opportunities, but my groups were looking for a more intimate setting."**

**Steven King**  
Event Director  
The Oxford Club  
Baltimore, MD

dral ceilings, exposed wood beams, a natural hardwood floor and artwork from Hudson Valley artists.

Mohonk's group recreation team works with corporate meeting and incentive groups to personalize and customize activities that cater to group needs. The property offers more than 40 different activities, ranging from scavenger hunts and wilderness survival challenges and ropes courses to more relaxing campfire sessions and creative "egg protection" module building.

Mohonk also recently introduced Mindful Meetings,

a package that incorporates holistic practices into group meetings to increase productivity, creativity and more. Participants open their meetings with a guided 15-minute mindfulness session, setting the tone for the rest of the meeting and day. Guests receive refreshing breaks offering healthy snacks and drinks, such as fresh fruit and green juices, to recharge the mind and body after heavy brainstorming sessions. As part of the package, each group member also gets a cellphone "sleeping bag" to discourage digital distractions during the meeting. Perhaps it is the pollution-free atmosphere of the Catskill Mountains, or the quiet nights in the countryside, but corporate planners are almost always impressed by the location of the property.

## Utah

For more than 30 years, the **Stein Eriksen Lodge** in Deer Valley, just outside Park City, has established itself as one of the best mountain meeting venues in the West. With its 360-degree views of the Wasatch Mountains and sunny skies almost every day, the property has been a favorite mountain meeting venue for corporate planners for decades. With 385 guest rooms, including 177 in the Lodge, 139 in the Chateaux and 69 residences, the resort is continuing to expand and add to its inventory of recreation and





Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa in Colorado provides corporate groups with large meeting facilities as well as ski-in/ski-out access.

Credit: Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa

to achieve a luxury experience where they may otherwise be out of their financial range,” says Palmer.

## North Carolina

When Edwin Wiley Grove, known as the “Father of Modern Asheville” and his business partner Fred Seely opened the Grove Park Inn in 1913, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan delivered the keynote address at the hotel’s opening banquet, saying that the monumental property “was built for the ages.” The gentleman did not know how prophetic that statement would be. Today,

the 105-year-old **Omni Grove Park Inn** is a National Landmark, known for its distinctive architecture and scenic mountain location.

The lobby, also called the Great Hall, measures 120 feet and features 24-foot-high ceilings and two 14-foot stone fireplaces, which add warmth and atmosphere to the space. The andirons alone weigh 500 pounds each. Another unique feature of the fireplaces are the original working Otis elevators, concealed within the rocks alongside the chimney shaft.

The property has long been a favorite for corporate meeting planners looking for a mountain location with easy access, and one that blends its historic ambience with modern conveniences. The hotel recently unveiled its new Seely Pavilion, an Arts & Crafts-inspired space designed to serve guests, as well as corporate groups. The Seely Pavilion is named in honor of the Grove Park Inn Resort designer and original general manager, Frederick Loring Seely.

The pavilion is built in the style and craftsmanship of the historic Main Inn. Design details include exposed trusses, reclaimed wood and a stacked hearth around a large fireplace, polished concrete flooring, six pairs of floor-to-ceiling picturesque doors and windows offering panoramic views of

meeting spaces. The new Stein Eriksen Ballroom, on the second level of the Event Center, accommodates flexible seating capacities of up to 500 guests and is divisible by a retractable air-wall and sliding glass doors with mountain-facing views. The refurbished Olympic Ballroom, on the ground level of the Event Center, has two grand fireplaces, and attendees can easily access the entry lobby and plaza, allowing the pre-function area to convert to an indoor/outdoor space. In addition to the event center, coffee bar, movie theater and pool, the new outdoor plaza space will add firepits and heated walking paths to enhance corporate meetings and events. Located five miles from Park City, the property is 45 minutes from Salt Lake City Airport.

“Our team has organized a great number of corporate events at Stein Eriksen Lodge,” says Michelle Palmer, director of sales and business development at the destination and event management firm DSC, an AlliedPRA Company. “One of our recent corporate events at Stein Eriksen Lodge was a top achievers forum for an online consulting agency with 155 participants.

“With the Stein Ballroom’s cathedral ceilings, fireplaces, rich wood and paneled wall surfaces, rear wall perimeter that has the capability to fully open and flow into a pre-function foyer, as well

as onto a terrace showcasing dramatic ridge-top views of Deer Valley and Park City Mountain resorts, we were able to curate an authentic mountain destination-focused event,” she says. “This flexible space proved very worthwhile for this group, as we were able to arrange the Flying Aces to perform. This is an athletic exhibition where expert aerialists perform maneuvers on trampolines with skis and snowboards reaching heights of more than 20 feet, which is possible due to the greater-than-average ceiling height.”

Palmer also thinks highly of the property’s Flagstaff Room, which is conveniently located in the heart of Stein Eriksen’s mountain lodge and features floor-to-ceiling windows and a walk-out deck with sweeping views of Deer Valley Resort’s Flagstaff Mountain ski slopes. She says the cozy fireplace and overall intimate setting provide an ideal space for her group’s dinner gatherings and as a hospitality lounge.

Another advantage of working with the Stein Collection is the opportunity of utilizing both Stein Eriksen Lodge and Chateaux Deer Valley. “When a group size exceeds the capacity of Stein Eriksen or firm date patterns challenge availability, the Chateaux provides an alternative with equitable merit at a price point that may provide an entry point for mid-tier budgets

the surrounding mountain range and a Donald Ross-designed golf course.

Though it’s the largest hotel in the Carolinas, **Harrah’s Cherokee Casino Resort**, managed by Caesars Entertainment, Inc., is getting even bigger. The current expansion will add 725 rooms and 83,000 square feet of meeting space, including a 32,000-square-foot ballroom with 22 breakout rooms, 11,100-square-foot prefunction ballroom, 900-square-foot boardroom, 33,000-square-foot exhibition hall and a 6,000-square-foot pre-function exhibition hall. Once complete, Harrah’s Cherokee Casino Resort will have 1,833 guest rooms and suites and 115,794 square feet, respectively.

The 56-acre property, about 50 miles west of Asheville, sits at the entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. When attendees have down time, they can hike up the river-lined trails to the observation tower at the top of Clingmans Dome, offering scenic views of the mist-covered mountains.

## Idaho

Idaho’s **Sun Valley Resort** was built in 1936 by the Union Pacific Railroad and has more outdoor recreational activities than at any other destination resort in the U.S. Between the legendary Sun Valley Lodge and Sun Valley Inn, as well as nearby apartments, cottages and condos, the resort can accommodate 1,200 with 480 guest rooms and 26,000 square feet of convention space.

The historic Sun Valley Inn will complete a major renovation in 2019, revamping almost 100 guest rooms and opening the new Village Station restaurant. There have also been updates to The Ram Restaurant and Ram Bar. This major Sun Valley accommodations renovation includes new décor, carpeting, 55-inch televisions, wall coverings, bathrooms, linens and amenities

adorning the guest rooms, all while retaining the traditional look of the historic hotel. Enhanced wireless internet and energy-efficient windows were also a part of the modern updates.

In addition, Sun Valley Resort has been improving its huge ski area. A special place to glide down a wide-open bowl, navigate through trees and descend deep chutes, the resort’s Cold Springs Canyon Project area will expand the skiable terrain at Sun Valley Resort by 380 acres, thus bringing

the skiable acreage within the Sun Valley Resort boundary to 2,434 acres. By

“We plan our agenda around giving people experiences they normally would not be able to participate in.”

**Jim Crystal**  
President  
The Revelry Group  
Portland, OR

next fall, the resort’s oldest chairlift, Cold Springs (#4), will be replaced with a new high-speed detachable lift, providing a seamless transition to The Roundhouse, the Roundhouse Express Gondola and Christmas (#3) chairlift. For those who prefer groomers and gradual pitches, the Lower Broadway run is being extended 3,400 feet, lined with highly efficient snow-making guns, all the way to the new Cold Springs lift lower terminal.

Jim Crystal, president of The Revelry Group, a Portland, Oregon-based marketing and communications firm, contracts with the Sun Valley Resort several times a year. “Our first event was held in Sun Valley 25 years ago, and these days, we do five events each year at the destination; all are food, beverage and hospitality conferences,” he says. “One is a CEO event, one a CFO event, one a CMO event, and the other two are purchasing and R&D events. Our dates are September, October, February, March and June, and each event has about 125 attendees. The purpose is to bring leaders together who are peers in the industry to share knowledge, experiences and insights.”

Crystal explains that Sun Valley was the venue choice because the destination offered his participants an opportunity to conduct business and have

a unique personal experience in the same week. “The goal for our conferences is to reconnect people to the planet, people and families,” he says. “In order to do this, we had to select a place that was geared to outdoor activities, as we plan our agenda around giving people experiences they normally would not be able to participate in. For instance, in our spring/summer/fall conferences, each attendee is issued a bike at check-in, and this becomes the primary mode of transportation to all activities and meetings. Group activities include hiking, biking, fly fishing and snowmobiling. Even though Sun Valley has incredible golf courses, we do not engage in golf as an activity because you can do that anywhere.

“We use all of the facilities at Sun Valley during each conference — the conference rooms at the Sun Valley Inn, the boardrooms at the Inn, the boardrooms at the Lodge — and we also use the ski lodges in the off-season as meeting facilities,” says Crystal. “For accommodations, we have people stay at the Inn, Lodge and in some of the apartments nearby. We also use all the restaurants at Sun Valley, including the resort’s catering department for evening meals and activities.”

Crystal’s corporate groups always spend time at the Sun Valley Club, which has all the trappings of an exclusive golf club. Among the most popular places in Sun Valley to eat, drink and relax, the wraparound terrace offers stunning views of Bald Mountain, Dollar Mountain and the 18-hole Sawtooth Putting Course. Open year-round, the club serves as a luxurious Nordic and snowshoe center in the winter and a golf clubhouse in the summer.

During the past decade, the trend to hold corporate events in deluxe mountain meeting venues has increased tremendously, especially in the fast-growing western states of Colorado, Utah and Idaho, where high-tech startups have found lower costs and a business-friendly environment, combined with great weather and recreational opportunities for employees. **C&IT**



## Destination

The renovations taking place at the Biltmore Hotel Miami, a signature resort in Coral Gables, will meet the needs of corporate meeting planners. The project will be complete in December.



Credit: Biltmore Hotel Miami

# Ideal Florida Locales

## Your Meetings Will Shine in the Sunshine State

By Maura Keller

When Jill Birkett, event director at Questex, recently worked with the Cultural Council of Palm Beach County, Florida, she recognized that Palm Beach offered the luxury and amenities she was seeking for the Ultra Summit and Ultra Wellness events concurrently held this past June. Questex is a business information and events company, producing digital media, events, business information and content marketing solutions to corporate and government clients and other industries in the United States and internationally.

With 150 people in attendance, the events' theme focuses on luxury travel trends.

"Palm Beach is a crown jewel in the realm of luxury travel," Birkett says. "It offers the ease of access with a well-served airport that is a short ride to the beaches and downtown."

Birkett says the reputation of Palm Beach means your attendees are eager to experience it themselves if they have not yet visited.

Palm Beach offers both a charming downtown area with shops and restaurants, great outdoor activities like boating

and golf, as well as the draw of the magnificent resorts along the Atlantic beaches, so there is something for everyone.

In addition, downtown West Palm Beach is experiencing an increase in travel due a new 72-acre cultural district that's transforming the area into a Tier 1 meetings destination. The city is in the midst of an economic boom with more than \$2.5 billion in construction projects proposed or currently under construction. At the epicenter of this boom is a \$40 million investment into infrastructure improvements over the next two years to reimagine the destination.

"An area of growing importance in travel is the aspect of wellness, which was a focus area of content during a portion of the Ultra events," Birkett says. "Palm Beach offers many opportunities for meeting attendees to add or include wellness practices because the community has already embraced the importance of this, including both residents and hotels."

Questex hosted their Ultra events at both the **Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa** and **The Breakers**.

"Both properties have superb facilities and service. Staff members are warm and friendly," Birkett says. "They know

**"Palm Beach offers many opportunities for meeting attendees to add or include wellness practices because the community has already embraced the importance of this."**

**Jill Birkett**, Event Director  
Questex  
New York, NY



there are high expectations in Palm Beach, and they strive to meet and exceed those expectations. So, you will have a team that is as focused on meeting success as you are."

Additionally, Discover The Palm Beaches (CVB) was extremely welcoming and helpful in connecting Questex to resources. They also introduced Birkett and her team to the Cultural Concierge services in Palm Beach so they could include authentic local things to the event, such as a charming young ladies' dance troupe, a classical guitarist and other cultural aspects of Palm Beach.

Of course, a vast array of outstanding cultural options awaits visitors at the many five-star oceanfront resorts of The Palm Beaches. In addition, destinations in Palm Beach — like Society of the Four Arts, Flagler Museum, Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, Lakeside Trail, Worth Avenue and others — world-class performing arts and outstanding local and touring companies are located just across the bridge — literally minutes away. Planners will find a valuable resource in the Cultural Concierge program, a complimentary service of the Cultural Council of Palm Beach County that supports and partners with Discover The Palm Beaches.

Lilo Matinas, president and meeting planner at Journeys Unlimited in Richboro, Pennsylvania, works with a national sales meeting for a pharmaceutical company based in New Jersey. At a recent meeting, 110 people attended the event held for three nights in January.

"We worked with the **Wyndham Grand Jupiter**," Matinas



Credit: Biltmore Hotel Miami

The meeting rooms in the world-class Biltmore Hotel Miami evoke charm and elegance.

says. "With high season for warm weather, I relied on Susan with Discover The Palm Beaches to help me with sourcing. I received quick replies, and the Wyndham Grand was a great fit for them in terms of availability, pricing, location, etc. Also, it is located right on the Intracoastal. It offers an amphitheater right next door, adjacent to a shopping area with several restaurants. It is so convenient for our attendees to enjoy on their free time — with no additional costs to my client."

For Matinas, Palm Beach has a wealth of hotel options, as well as nonstop flights.

"We can keep their transportation costs down and work with a shorter meeting if needed," she says. "They have hotels to fit a variety of budgets, activities and restaurants in the area that easily accommodate, as well. Whether you want beachfront, downtown, Palm Beach Gardens, Delray Beach — there are so many options to consider.

Matinas actually arrived in Palm Beach a couple of days prior to the meeting to spend time downtown, which she had not experienced before.

"We stayed right there at the well-known **Colony**, so we were able to easily walk to the beach, shops and nearby restaurants," she says. "We also took advantage of the hotel bikes passing by the beautiful estates in the area, explored downtown with a festival that was going on, visited other hotels nearby and just took in the Florida life. When you look at the overall area of Palm Beach, it's like hitting a gold mine of opportunities for your clients. I would highly recommend and will continue to make Palm Beach a choice for my meeting clients."

### Miami

While Palm Beach offers various levels of luxury to visitors, Miami is a truly international city with just about every amenity available. Whether a meeting or event planner is looking for a more formal or traditional environment or a venue that's off-brand and trendy, the city has something that will work for everyone's needs.

"It is also a great place to host events because people want to be there — the weather and entertainment that's already here in the city is part of the draw for your event," says Danielle Berman, an events and philanthropy consultant at DB Consulting - Tackle What's Next, who has hosted several corporate conferences in South Florida.





**“As a mecca for top events, (Miami) also features some of the best vendors on the planet. The sky is the limit when it comes to events in South Florida.”**

**Anna Noriega**  
Alore Events  
Miami, FL

In April, Berman orchestrated the Florida Alternative Investment Association’s ABC (Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain and Cryptocurrency) Forum with about 200 people in attendance.

“We chose the **Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino** in Hollywood as the venue,” Berman says. “The Seminole Hard Rock was a unique venue for us. We have traditionally used office spaces in the downtown Miami area, but we had some local South Florida attendees giving feedback that the traffic and distance for the West Palm Beach and Boca Raton folks was

vendors on the planet. The sky is the limit when it comes to events in South Florida.

Noriega has held numerous events at the **Newport Beachside Hotel & Resort** in Miami, ranging from 10 people to large corporate holiday parties and retreats of more than 300.

“We find that clients really love the dynamic amenities offered here,” she says. “During down time, they are able to take advantage of the beach, watch sunsets on the pier, as well as enjoy the pool, full spa and restaurant outlets.”

When Sean Bradley, president and founder of Dealer Synergy, plans meetings and events for his company, he does a tremendous amount of research on the various venues. For the past 11 years, Bradley has orchestrated the Internet Sales 20 Group Conference, a three-day training event for the automotive sales industry. All attendees are either managers or owners of a car dealership or a dealer group.

“We had approximately 200 attendees from all over the country at the event,” Bradley says. “With this being our 11th year hosting the event, we are very experienced in event planning. We have a combination of requirements we look for, such as location, access to a centralized airport, cost, menu, amenities and support.” As such, he chose to host the event at the **Trump International Beach Resort** in Miami.

As Bradley explains, Miami was a clear choice for this event because of the city’s reputation of being a fun, beautiful and modern city.

“The weather is awesome, the vibe and culture are amazing,” he says. “What’s not to love about doing an event on the beach of Miami. Since our clients come from all over the country, it is easy to sell tickets to an event on the beach in Miami. We stayed on property for the entire event except when we chartered a 550-foot private yacht for the VIP party.”

To meet the needs of corporate meeting planners — elegant, refined locations for their events — the **Biltmore Hotel Miami** is undergoing a complete rooms and suite renovation and golf course restoration to be completed by the end of this year.

Considered a signature, famed resort in the exclusive area of Coral Gables, the renovation restoration project will re-install the hotel’s old-world glamour and regal elegance. Corporate meeting and event attendees will revel in the golf course restoration, which is one of only nine Donald Ross-designed golf courses in the Top 100 golf courses in the U.S.

“We are proud to celebrate the Biltmore’s relaunch via its



Credit: Sean Bradley

too much. The hotel offered great amenities, including free Wi-Fi and parking, in addition to some well-received casino free play cards for our attendees.”

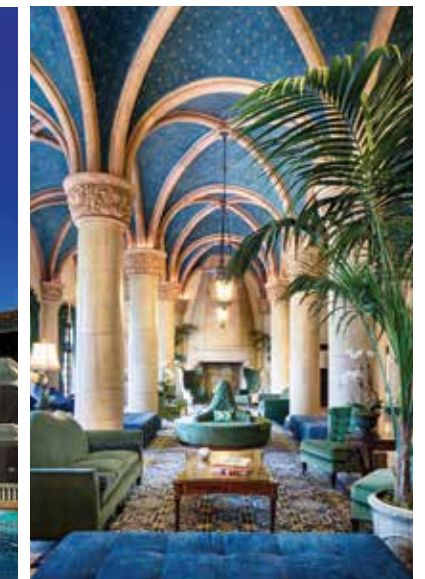
Outside of South Beach, Downtown Miami boasts a lot of great museums, such as the Perez Art Museum and the new Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science.

The Wynwood Arts District features the Wynwood Walls of graffiti and loads of trendy shops and galleries. Bayfront Park and Brickell Avenue have lots of great restaurants and night-life. And, only a short 30-minute drive is the Everglades, where meeting attendees can revel in the great outdoors.

“South Florida has so much to offer — from amazing award-winning beaches to some of the best shopping in the nation,” says Anna Noriega of Alore Events, a third-party meeting planner in Miami. “Not only do we have the perfect weather all year round, but hotels have spacious rooms with beautiful resort-style pools for lounging. As a mecca for top events, the city also features some of the best

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**"Naples is a perfect place for our attendees ... they enjoy the beaches, restaurants, golf and our fishing outings."**

**Russ Ryan**, Principal and Meeting Planner  
Rusk O'Brien Gido + Partners, LLC  
Maynard, MA

rooms and corridors renovation and golf course restoration projects" says Gene Prescott, president and CEO of the Biltmore Hotel. "This historic landmark is a treasure of the city of Coral Gables, and the newly redesigned elements allow us to highlight the hotel's old-world feel while exceeding today's modern-day standards of hospitality and golf offerings. We remain committed to the property's success while maintaining its status as a first-rate, world-class destination."

## Naples

Russ Ryan, principal and meeting planner at Rusk O'Brien Gido + Partners, LLC, in Maynard, Massachusetts, was looking to host a three-day Growth and Ownership Strategies Conference for senior-level architects and engineers. He set his sites on The Ritz-Carlton Resorts of Naples (**The Ritz-Carlton, Naples** and **The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples**). For the past seven years, more than 150 attendees have enjoyed the amenities offered at this exquisite venue.

"We looked for a hotel that our C-level attendees would feel comfortable staying at, and we thought The Ritz matched our business philosophy of excellence," Ryan says. "We also have a golf outing on the check-in day that is very popular, and we have been playing at Tiburon Golf Club right next door. It eliminates shuttles, and our attendees can check in, and their clubs are sent right over to Tiburon."

Featuring two resort experiences, The Ritz-Carlton, Naples, resides along the Gulf of Mexico, while The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort sits atop championship greens a few miles down the road. Meeting and event groups staying at one resort have access to the other via a shuttle, so those staying at the golf resort can spend a day at the beach or the luxury spa, or those staying at the beach can test their luck on the two championship courses that the golf resort provides.

One of the first things Ryan did on the company's site visit was to make sure that the venue was easily accessible from the airport. And, they sought a place that featured amenities aplenty. The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort offers tennis, a pool, spa and a great workout area, as well as the adjoining golf course. It is also a 15-minute shuttle away from The Ritz-Carlton, Naples beach resort.

"Naples is a perfect place for our attendees, as our post-conference evaluations attest. When surveyed, 99 percent of attendees have urged us to stay in this location, and they enjoy the beaches, restaurants, golf and our fishing outings," Ryan

says. "Many stay for the weekend, and we have a very high percentage of repeat attendees."

## Orlando

"As the overall top-rated destination for meetings and conventions in the country, Orlando can accommodate a memorable event for literally any group size or budget," says George Aguel, president and CEO, Visit Orlando. "Because we are a robust destination with so many options, our Visit Orlando team can help planners identify the best choice for their needs. Our team of destination experts can help them to coordinate site



Attendees can relax during an outdoor lunch at The Ritz-Carlton Resorts of Naples.

inspections, assist with attendance building or CSR opportunities, provide Visit Orlando registration staffing and create unique offsite events for receptions, private dinners and behind-the-scenes experiences. Our team understands the complexities and challenges that face planners every day, as well as all that our region can offer, and they go out of their way to not only accommodate their needs but anticipate them."

Orlando offers hundreds of venues — hotels, convention center and theme parks to name a few — to accommodate groups. Universal Orlando Resort has everything a planner needs to create an incredible event. The hotel collection, including **Loews Portofino Bay Hotel**, **Loews Royal Pacific Resort** and **Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort**, offers a total of 295,000 square feet of meeting space and 9,000 guest rooms.

Each onsite hotel is nearby the resort's three theme parks and the Universal CityWalk dining and entertainment complex. There are a variety of memorable event options — group dining, private use of CityWalk clubs/restaurants, after-hours theme park events and teambuilding activities, like scavenger



The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort in Naples provides two championship courses for guests.

hunts — for any size group. The upcoming events this month at the Orange County Convention Center alone will generate a combined economic impact of more than \$106 million.

"Orlando has made its mark as the No. 1 overall meetings destination in the country," says Aguel. "What I love best about Orlando is that there is always something new to experience. Every day, I learn about a new venue, event, restaurant or attraction that is opening in our destination. If you haven't been here in 10 years, five years or even one year, the Orlando you saw then will be different from what you see today."

From world-renowned theme parks to tropical trails teeming with splendor, Orlando presents a variety of meeting venues for professionals who are looking for unique locales. Cozy, awe-inspiring, and monumental, these Orlando gems offer accommodations and amenities aplenty — all while providing ideal opportunities for your group to work some and play some.

Heather Mangum, CMP, senior meeting planner at Darden, recently hosted a series of meetings for restaurant managers for LongHorn Steakhouse. The meetings were part of a leadership series for Darden's executive team. The purpose was to educate, motivate and celebrate achievements from the previous year.

"We had different groups each day of 160 attendees," Mangum says. "Orlando is a great city for meetings with access to

**"Orlando has something for everyone, and the Four Seasons Resort is a wonderful property located in the heart of the theme parks. They also offer fantastic private group event options within the theme parks. These events create lasting memories long after the meeting."**

**Amy Tynan**, Meeting Planner  
AlliedPRA Orlando  
Orlando, FL

**"This past March, we had 900 people attend our annual convention. We chose to host our event at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront."**

**Karen Latta**, Senior Director of Organizational Events  
American Quarter Horse Association  
Amarillo, TX



great airlift. The airport is very close to major attractions and doesn't require long trips to get to your location once you arrive. Depending upon the time of year, the weather plays a key role with the sun and warmth available to attendees for most of the year."

**DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at Seaworld**, which hosted Darden's executive meeting, was chosen for its close proximity to the airport and highways for ease of transportation.

"It is also close to our corporate office, as we invite many locals to join for the day," Mangum says. "I recommend DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at Seaworld for not only its location and the flexibility of meeting space, but the fantastic team that provides incredible service with a smile. Any of its team members are happy to assist with whatever needs may arise."

Having lived in this city for many years, Mangum suggests hosting a private event in one of the theme parks.

"The opportunities are endless," she says. "You can't find events like they do anywhere else in the world. I'd also recommend catching a game and hosting a group event to see Orlando City, one of the newer soccer teams to hit the MLS. Games are great fun, and the city really rallies around their team. The new stadium is beautiful and offers great food and beverage options."

Amy Tynan, meeting planner at AlliedPRA Orlando planned an annual incentive meeting for 650 attendees in February. The event was held at the **Four Seasons Resort**, as the meeting required a five-star high-end resort.

"Orlando has easy flight connections from all destinations, the cost of doing business in Orlando is very affordable, and





**"The excitement of the beach at an oceanfront property with the Daytona International Speedway nearby is a big draw of Daytona Beach for corporate meeting planners."**

**Paul Steen**, Director of Global Accounts  
HelmsBriscoe  
Orlando, FL

there is a variety of entertainment options," Tynan says. "Orlando has something for everyone, and the Four Seasons Resort is a wonderful property located in the heart of the theme parks. They also offer fantastic private group event options within the theme parks. These events create lasting memories long after the meeting."

### Jacksonville

When Karen Latta, senior director of organizational events at the American Quarter Horse Association in Amarillo, Texas, was looking for the ideal location for its annual convention, Jacksonville's coast region with warm spring temperatures was extremely appealing.

With more than 450,000 square feet of meeting space available, Jacksonville provides a wealth of unique experiences with white-sand beaches, award-winning restaurants and an array of outdoor activities to attract those with a wide range of interests.

"This past March, we had 900 people attend our annual convention," Latta says. "We chose to host our event at the **Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront**. We received proposals from several properties but wanted to utilize a Hyatt property because of their incentive program. The hotel staff — from the GM to the banquet staff were fabulous to work with and very inventive on assisting with location and food and beverage for our events."

For events that offer a family component, Jacksonville is the pre-eminent place for family-friendly meetings and

Jacksonville is an ideal place for family-friendly meetings, with a variety of outdoor activities along the Riverfront.



Credit: Karen Latta

events. From Shipwreck Island Waterpark to Adventure Landing to the award-winning Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens, kids of all ages will have a wonderful time. Of course, Jacksonville's plethora of family-friendly beaches include kayaking, fishing and paddleboarding.

### Daytona Beach

With 23 miles of world-famous beaches, Daytona Beach offers plenty of options for meeting and event planners that are looking for unique venues and attractions for attendees.

With area investments of more than \$2 billion in progress and a vast array of hotel, attraction, dining and shopping options available, Daytona Beach is proving to be a great option for meeting locations — especially in light of the wealth of construction and renovation happening in the area.

For example, One Daytona, a multimillion-dollar entertainment destination opened across from Daytona International Speedway with dining, retail and entertainment, along with new hotels. And the **Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach**, opened in March with 200 rooms on the oceanfront.

One area of interest for meeting and event planners is the **Daytona Beach Convention Hotel and Condominium**, a \$192 million, 501-room oceanfront complex, which is under construction just north of the Ocean Center convention center complex.

Paul Steen, director of global accounts at HelmsBriscoe, recently planned an attorney retreat for a large law firm based in Orlando.

With 85 attendees, Steen had originally signed a contract with the new Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach, but the hotel was undergoing a whole property renovation that missed their opening date by a month. While Steen had to rebook the event at the JW Marriott Orlando, Grande Lakes, he had originally chosen the Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach because of its fresh, interesting concept for the area.

"The excitement of the beach at an oceanfront property with the Daytona International Speedway nearby is a big draw of Daytona Beach for corporate meeting planners," Steen says. "Daytona Beach is being renewed and reinvigorated as evidence by the Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach."

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**Joy P**

May 15 at 9:07pm

Time to raise a glass and toast an amazing year. Gotta admit, luxe surroundings and VIP service is even better when you know you earned it. Cheers! [#BestMeetingEver](#) [#OrlandoMeeting](#)



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On The Move



DOLAN



CIRINO



DANIEL



MACGREGOR



MELCHI



HUDGINS

BENCHMARK has named **Dan Dolan** director of sales and marketing for The Abbey Resort and Avani Spa in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Dolan was previously account executive for the Creative Group, Inc., where he worked with senior sales, marketing, human resources and C-Suite executives.

**Brad Cirino** has been appointed director of sales and marketing for Hyatt Centric Key West Resort & Spa and Hyatt Regency Aruba Resort, Spa & Casino. Cirino brings more than 20 years of experience to his new role.

**Belinda Daniel** has been appointed director of sales at Dallas Marriott Las Colinas. She entered the hospitality industry in 2010 as business travel sales manager at the Dallas/Fort Worth Marriot Hotel & Golf Club at Champions Circle.

**Mitch MacGregor** has joined AlliedPRA, Inc., as global sales manager. MacGregor previously worked as a brand ambassador for Global Travel Alliance in the Midwest.

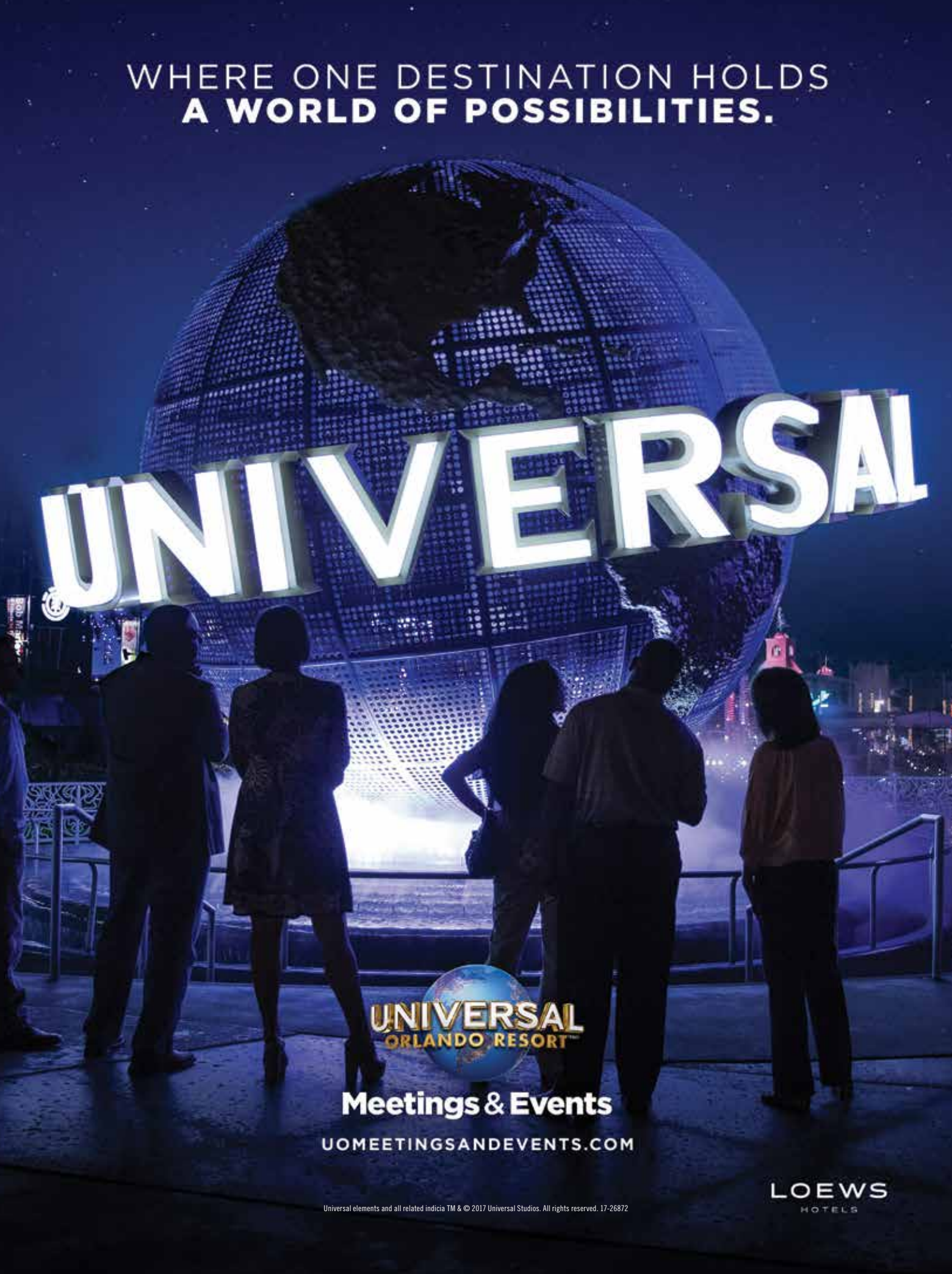
BENCHMARK has announced the appointment of **Becky Melchi**, CMP, as director of sales for Wingspread Retreat & Executive Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. Melchi previously held the position of senior sales manager for The Abbey Resort & Avani Spa.

Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau (ACVB) announces the promotion of **Brandy Hudgins** to sales manager, small meetings. Hudgins began her career with ACVB in 2015 as a trade show administrative assistant.

**Josh Hoce** is the new associate director of sales, and **Laura Gonzalez Pena** is the new meeting connections/business travel sales manager at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront hotel. Hoce has more than 10 years of industry experience in the Jacksonville market. Gonzalez Pena previously served as the business and leisure travel coordinator at Hyatt Regency Orlando.

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