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A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

DECEMBER 2018 VOL. 36 NO. 12 \$12.00

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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



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2019  
INDUSTRY EVENTS  
CALENDAR

## Embracing Entertainment Trends

Attendees Are Drawn to Live and Interactive  
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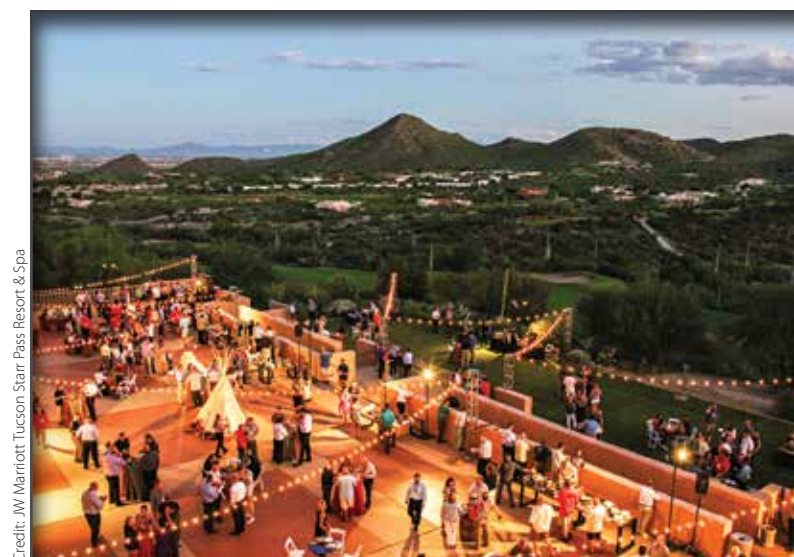
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Attendees can get together for drinks in the lounge at Atlantic City's Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa after a day full of meetings. **PAGE 34**



Wellness activities don't have to be confined to a gym. Some event groups meet outside on the beach for a good workout. **PAGE 48**



An enviable blend of desert and mountain views attract planners to bring their events to Arizona. **PAGE 60**

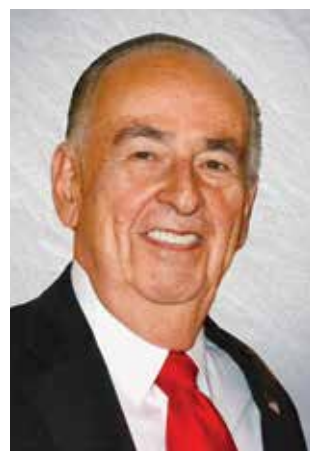


# Publisher's Message

## 2019 Outlook: Change is Coming

The 2019 meetings industry is changing — for the better. Meeting Professionals International's (MPI) Fall 2018 Meetings Outlook confirms that the industry is continuing to thrive, and these changes — in areas such as innovation/engagement, CSR and technology — will result in events being even more impactful for attendees.

Two key trends stood out in MPI's report: a rise in meeting innovation/engagement and a greater target on corporate social responsibility (CSR). Meetings are becoming more frequent and larger, yet shorter in duration. And, there is an increased focus on events for niche groups.



"There is an interest in engaging meeting spaces, as the ballroom trend is beginning to fade and outdoor experiences are introduced," says Paul VanDeventer, president and CEO of MPI.

As for CSR, the practice is increasingly becoming a regular part of the event-planning process, as the report noted. You are using CSR-related activities for interactive teambuilding to engage employees and according to Philip J. Eidsvold, CIS, CITP, SITE president-elect, it will continue to be an important element of incentive travel itineraries. You can also expect quite a few mainstream hotel brands to expand their footprint in exciting global destinations in 2019.

Rapid innovation in technology is helping to create increased opportunities for attendee engagement in 2019. Facial recognition, virtual reality, artificial intelligence and apps transform meetings and events, making them more immersive and interesting. The millennial generation barely knows life before the digital revolution. As such, you have to employ different strategies to involve participants across the multigenerational divide. "Through our conversations with meeting planners, we also recognize that there is an increased demand for efficient, easy-to-use technology for attendee engagement," says Catherine Chaulet, president, Global DMC Partners. "Cost-effective, easily useable and engaging app-driven technology is a big opportunity to help shape the future of our industry."

For more on what our group of industry experts have to say about the "2019 Industry Forecast," turn to Page 12.

**Also in this issue is Caesars' "2019 Meeting Industry Calendar," which you can remove and keep handy to effectively plan your attendance at events next year.**

*Harvey Grotsky*

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## Harrah's Resort Atlantic City Announces Upgrades for Its Coastal Tower



ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Harrah's Resort Atlantic City has plans for a \$56 million renovation of its Coastal Tower to be completed by summer 2019. The upgrades are part of Caesars Entertainment's total investment of more than \$250 million into its Atlantic City casino-resorts over the last four years. "We are thrilled to announce the news of the Coastal Tower renovation to continue to provide an enhanced experience for our meeting planners, attendees and all guests," says Steve van der Molen, Caesars Entertainment vice president of meetings operation, Atlantic City region.

The 507 upgraded rooms and suites will further complement the resort's destination appeal among business and leisure travelers alike, enhancing the property's profile of first-class dining, entertainment and nightlife. The first phase of the renovation is set to debut in early 2019. [www.harrahresort.com](http://www.harrahresort.com)

## Rhonda Brewer Joins BCD Meetings & Events

CHICAGO — Rhonda Brewer joins BCD Meetings & Events as the new vice president, North America sales meetings management. Brewer will be responsible for pre-sales, new customer acquisitions and renewals for all North American Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) and life sciences customers.



BREWER

"Rhonda brings a tremendous amount of experience in navigating the complexities of a B2B third-party agency sales functions within the meetings and events space," says Bruce Morgan, senior vice president, meetings management & LATAM.

Previously, Brewer was president of RMC, one of the largest privately held, woman-owned, destination management companies in North America. Prior to that, she worked for more than 25 years at Maritz Travel company, where she held various senior leadership roles. She's also immediate past president of SITE (Society for Incentive Travel Excellence). [www.bcdme.com](http://www.bcdme.com)

## Hyatt Completes Acquisition of Two Roads Hospitality

CHICAGO — Hyatt has completed its acquisition of the lifestyle hotel management company Two Roads Hospitality, which adds five lifestyle brands to its portfolio: Alila, Destination, Joie de Vivre, Thompson and tommie. The deal will grow Hyatt's brand presence in 23 new markets with management and license agreements for 74 open and operating hotels across North America and Asia. "We will leverage the shared expertise of Hyatt and Two Roads across our powerful combined portfolio of 19 brands to bring best-in-class offerings for guests around the globe," says Mark Hoplamazian, president and CEO, Hyatt Hotels Corporation. [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com)



HOPLAMAZIAN

## Grand Hyatt to Open in Nashville in 2020



NASHVILLE — The 24-story, 591-room Grand Hyatt will be one of downtown Nashville's biggest hotels when it opens in 2020. With multiple food and beverage options, rooftop lounge and pool, world-class spa and 65,000 square feet of meeting space, the Grand Hyatt will be located in Nashville Yards, a billion-dollar development spanning more than 16 acres in the heart of downtown. The hotel is expected to attract many bookings from associations and conferences. [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com)

## Conrad Washington, DC, Bringing New Standard of Modern Luxury

WASHINGTON, DC — Conrad Washington, DC, is now accepting reservations for guests, meetings and events for its opening in February 2019. The hotel is the first for Conrad Hotels & Resorts in the nation's capital.

Conrad Washington, DC, features an all-glass exterior that wraps around its 10 floors, 360 rooms and 30,000 square feet of high-end retail space below the hotel on the ground floor. The hotel will offer 32,000 square feet of elevated meeting space, as well as three outdoor terraces, a rooftop bar and dedicated event terrace featuring panoramic views of the U.S. Capitol.

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

## Swan and Dolphin Resort to Construct New Hotel Catering to Groups



LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL — The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is expanding, with features and amenities catering to meetings and groups. The new tower will include: more than 22,000 square feet of meeting space, including two ballrooms, 12 meeting rooms and a rooftop reception area; 349 guest rooms; 16,800-square-foot outdoor elevated deck with a fire pit and pool; restaurant; lounge and more. Once the tower is completed in 2020, the resort will offer more than 2,600 guest rooms and 350,000 square feet of meeting space. [www.swandolphinmeetings.com](http://www.swandolphinmeetings.com)

# Tips & Trends

## 4 Food Rules Planners Should Follow for Meeting Menus

As recently as five years ago, menus would offer a vegetarian option along with one or two meat-based dishes. Today, thanks to a broader embrace of foodie culture, as well as greater cultural diversity among meeting groups, menu choices at events are more varied, more sustainable — and more expensive. Event planners and catering pros share the new "food rules" they're following these days.

### 1 Offer more choices.

Planners say that after the gluten-free craze took off, it opened the floodgates to a seemingly endless number of specific, food-restrictive eating regimens. Beyond that, there are requests for paleo and ketogenic (both lower-carb) diets; meat-, dairy- and pork-free menus; and kosher and halal requests.

Now, it's more of an "expectation" that a venue or property will be able to provide several different choices, says Phil Aldax, food and beverage director at the Anaheim Marriott, but the trade-off is higher meal costs.

### 2 Emphasize sustainability.

"Clients love to hear that we partner with local farms and vendors that use sustainable foods," says Shai Tertner, founder and CEO of Shiraz Creative.

Scott Gingerich, senior vice president of restaurants and bars at Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, says his chefs have learned to seek out recipe combinations that will let them use the entirety of an ingredient so nothing goes to waste, such as making a soup or a stock from vegetable stems that would otherwise be discarded. In addition to making menu planning more economical, touting a commitment to cutting back on food waste has the bonus of pleasing planners who want to know that their vendors are mindful about sustainability.

### 3 Make food Insta-ready.

"At a sit-down dinner, everybody's phone is out," says Beth Norber, owner of BN Events in Los Angeles, and that creates an expectation for planners to deliver painstakingly styled presentations. "They ask, 'How exactly is it being presented, and what can you add to make it Instagram-worthy?'" Norber says she obliges by swapping out traditional serving equipment for something open like a paella pan that will showcase a buffet in all its bounty. Other event pros say they seek out unusual dishes on which they can stage their menu items, as well as vary the height of dishes presented or add an interactive element like a staffed station. One universal recommendation: Ditch boring chafing dishes.

### 4 Allocate more money.

Event planners say the combination of higher ingredient costs and more involved preparation are responsible for the increase. One reason dishes have gotten more expensive is what goes in them. Gluten-free breads, pastries and pastas are more common nowadays but still cost more than their conventional counterparts. Paleo- and keto-style diets eschew cheaper carb-based food like pasta and rice in favor of meat, fish and other protein sources, which are often more expensive than starch-based menus.

In addition, the growing number of requests for organic, free-range and small-batch ingredients — which generally cost more than mass-produced — pushes up prices. The fast pace at which food trends go global means that demand can sometimes spike before supply catches up. — **Martha C. White**



# News & Notes

## Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills Resort and Conference Center Completes Redesign



OAK BROOK, IL — The final phases of the three-year, \$25 million transformation of the Hilton Chicago/Oakbrook Hills Resort and Conference Center are now complete. The Prospera Hospitality-managed property has created a new vision and identity centered on modern design and innovative resort culture. Located just 18 miles west of downtown Chicago in upscale Oak Brook, the Audubon and IACC-certified resort positions itself as an Illinois premier destination for business, leisure and recreation.

The mid-century-influenced design is themed throughout the resort, from the public spaces to the 386 guest rooms.

With all phases of the transformation finished, the Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills Resort and Conference Center has reinvented its brand. Complete redesigns were made to the lobby, rotunda, 42,500-square-foot IACC conference center meeting space, including the Grand Ballroom and 36 meeting rooms, amphitheater, executive lounge, indoor/outdoor pools, Fitness Health Wellness Centre, Willow Crest GC Learning and Performance Center, Monarch Spa, themed gastro pub “Tin Cup” and signature farm-to-table restaurant “B.” [www.oakbrookhillsresort.com](http://www.oakbrookhillsresort.com)

## JW Marriott Houston by The Galleria Unveils Newly Renovated Meeting Space

HOUSTON — JW Marriott Houston by The Galleria recently unveiled renovations to its meeting and events space, following an extensive redesign, which reflects the city's unique history, culture and modern style.

The new space is built around a style-savvy, curated allure that breathes new life into events and meetings in Houston. A diverse American city on the international stage, Houston has style to back up its influential spirit. The JW Marriott Houston by The Galleria bridges the distinguished legacy of the city with the business and cultural forces of the



future, creating a space that focuses on innovation and connection.

The Houston meeting rooms renovation extends the property's sophisticated brand through a new sense of style and a modern edge. The space boasts

## Naples Grande Beach Resort Renovates Meeting and Event Spaces

NAPLES, FL — Naples Grande Beach Resort announced a more than \$3 million renovation to its meeting and event spaces. The resort's ballroom level received full enhancements to its design and facilities. The spaces offer the latest upgrades in modern technology, along with a new coastal-inspired design. The 474-room resort is situated on 23 waterfront acres, offering 83,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor space.

The resort's largest function space, Royal Palm Ballroom, has 14,442 square feet that can be divided into eight separate meeting rooms and can accommodate up to 1,660 guests reception style.

The Orchid Ballroom is a contemporary-style conference facility with 6,435 square feet of space that seats up to 740 guests and is divisible into four sections. The Vista Ballroom offers 5,802 square feet of space, with capabilities for up to 500 people. It is adjoined by outdoor venues Vista Terrace and Sunset Veranda, where guests can overlook the beautiful Naples sky. [www.naplesgrande.com](http://www.naplesgrande.com)

modern textiles, bold local artwork and rich and varied materials.

All the design elements come together in an array of neutral and jewel tones, creating the perfect setting to meet in a refined and fashionable style. Enjoy the easy access the hotel provides meeting planners and attendees to the city's famed upscale, mixed-use urban outlet.

With 25 redesigned venues, including elegant ballrooms and more than 40,000 square feet of versatile space, the hotel caters to a variety of social and corporate events. [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)

# Snapshots



Credit: (3) Cindy Ord/Getty Images for NYC & Company, (4) Ketara Gadahn/Studio Alani, (5) Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort

**1** Joining the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills Resort and Conference Center transformation event on November 14 are (from L-R): Kevin Kilkeary Sr., Ron Gunter, Peter Knell, Steven Ellingsen. **2** The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club hosted meeting, incentive and event professionals on December 2 at a Florida Encounter Post-Fam, coordinated by the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention & Visitors Bureau. **3** Guests enjoy the NYC & Company Foundation's 18th Annual Visionaries & Voices Gala 2018 on November 28. (From L-R:) Claire Bentley, Simon Brooks, Charlotte St. Martin, Fred Dixon, Emily Rafferty, Thomas Schumacher, Charles Flateman, Mike Morey, Roger Dow, Mike Gallagher. **4** (From L-R:) Allen Haines, Bonnie St. John, Michele Polci at the Cvent Elite Meetings Alliance hosted by Caesars Entertainment at Harrah's Resort Atlantic City. **5** The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort broke ground on its new tower November 27, bringing together representatives from Walt Disney World and Marriott International. (From L-R:) Fred Sawyers, John A. Vickers, Dan Tishman, Mickey Mouse, Andy Hopkins, Bill Webster, David Marriott. **6** Exhibitors from 150 countries attended IBTM World 2018 in Barcelona, Spain, November 27-29.



By Philip Eidsvold, CIS, CITP

## Planner Certification: Is It Right For You?

**T**he Society of Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) developed the Certified Incentive Travel Professional (CITP) designation earlier this year to standardize and verify the skills of incentive travel professionals while promoting overall expertise across the industry and bringing validity to the profession. Since its debut last summer, more than 75 industry professionals have earned their CITP designation. So, is certification right for you? Let's explore some of the potential benefits of CITP certification.

### Get Noticed

When you take the time to become certified, it is a clear indication to your peers, colleagues, clients and others — in and outside of your industry — that you have taken significant measures to increase your knowledge and expertise in the field. Certification demonstrates commitment and dedication to your profession.

This gold-star recognition validates a passion for your career and enables you to stand out in a sea of otherwise similar professionals. The addition of a certification acronym behind your title quickly denotes you are a leader and expert in your field — someone that others look to for guidance, input and recommendations.

### Find Your Dream Job!

Certification can open doors and serve as a stepping stone to new career opportunities, including your dream job. Certified employee candidates are far more likely to be hired than non-certified professionals.

Remember the above information about standing out in the crowd of industry professionals? Certification demonstrates to prospective employers that you are committed to the job and/or industry and will be an exceptional brand ambassador who will add value.

Organizations love to boast about certified employees because they are a walking, talking, living “commercial” for the excellence of the organization.

### Add Value

The certified professional not only adds value to your career, but certification also adds value for your employer. We have seen a growing number of organizations that submit RFPs or bids for business inquire about the number of employees with a certification at the bidding organization.

In many cases, business is awarded to organizations that have the most employees with certifications, which underscores industry knowledge, commitment, excellence and quality.

This benefit is especially helpful when seeking approval for certification expenses and continuing education investments internally.

### Keep Learning to Stay Current and Relevant

Certification keeps you current with industry skills and trends, while also making you extremely relevant. By having a valid certification, you are demonstrating to the world you are up to speed with the latest and greatest your industry has to offer. Plus, you've taken the exam to prove it!

Certifications require the professional to obtain continuing education points or re-certifications in order to maintain a valid designation.

This is especially important in the meetings and events industry, where it is critical to be on top of the latest trends,

compliance matters and ways to minimize risk — both financial and legal.

### Make More!

Research has shown that professionals with certification are typically compensated at a higher rate of pay than those without certification.

In fact, results from a 2018 salary survey from the Professional Convention Management Association noted planners who hold the Certified Meeting Professional designation earned an average of \$10,500 more per year than colleagues in the field without the designation. That is a substantial compensation increase! We anticipate higher wages are extremely promising with the newly established Certified Incentive Travel Professional designation.

### Worth Pursuing

There are a number of reasons people choose certification; however, the most important is it's something you're excited to pursue and that you view it as more than just another item to check off the career checklist.

Certification in the field you are passionate about allows you

to demonstrate your capabilities, gain additional experience in the industry and work toward a higher salary.

Another way to think about certification is it's like achieving a mini-degree without needing to go back to school. It can be one of the best things you do for your career as it readily shows others you have a high level of competence in your field and that you not only have an interest in your profession, but you take pride in your growth. **C&IT**

Certification in the field you are passionate about allows you to demonstrate your capabilities, **gain additional experience in the industry** and work toward a higher salary.



### Philip Eidsvold, CIS, CITP

Philip Eidsvold is One10 Senior Director, Client Services and SITE President-Elect. Eidsvold and the One10 team were active in establishing the curriculum for the CITP study modules and exam and partnered with SITE as one of the incentive travel industry advisers responsible for designing this new certification.



## 2019 Industry Forecast

### Meetings and Events Demand to Rise, Bring Change



Roger Dow



Philip Eidsvold



Paul VanDeventer



Sherrif Karamat

### Associations

#### Roger Dow, president and CEO U.S. Travel Association

As we near 2019, domestic economic fundamentals remain solid, with business and consumer confidence alike sustaining their recent highs. Domestic leisure travel volume will continue its growth trend, increasing 1.8 percent next year, supported by solid gains in employment and personal income. Increases in corporate profits and investment will help push domestic business travel to 1.8 percent growth, as well.

We will also see international inbound travel grow at a slower rate of 3.2 percent in 2019. Despite the forecasted increase in international arrivals, the U.S. faces a decline in market share of global long-haul travelers. America's share of the international travel market slid from 13.8 percent in 2015 to 12.2 percent in 2017, and that trend looks set to continue. This is why U.S. Travel advocates for a bold

new national strategy on travel and tourism that includes extending Brand USA; expanding and enhancing the Visa Waiver Program; growing trusted traveler programs such as Global Entry and Preclearance; and adding port-of-entry screening personnel.

We expect a good year for travel in 2019, but it could be even better.

#### Philip J. Eidsvold, CIS, CITP SITE President-Elect

As the fastest-growing and with the highest per-person spend in the MICE industry, 2019 is poised to be a very strong year for incentive travel. By all indicators, use of incentive travel as a key business strategy is growing at a brisk rate; and organizations are leveraging incentive travel in new and different ways to drive employee retention, learning and development initiatives and even health and wellness goals. The 2018 Incentive Travel Index study,

powered by SITE and in partnership with FICP and IRF, revealed that globally, 65 percent of buyers are increasing the number of incentive travel qualifier. And what's interesting is that Asia is leading the way with 73 percent, which is a testament to the adoption of incentive travel in this very important emerging market. The growth and increased use of incentive travel is an output of many influences; chief among them, a strong global economy and very competitive job market.

Per-person budgets will rise in 2019, and much of that is due to increased focus on new and compelling technology to enhance the incentive travel experience. From mobile apps to advanced production elements and Wi-Fi, technology is becoming an increasingly important part of the development and deployment of incentive travel programs for communications and operations.

Optimism is high around incentive travel for buyer and suppliers alike, despite world events and political volatility. The threat of terror groups is the largest area of concern; however, we are seeing it decrease year after year as the world is adjusting to our "new normal." On the political front, important elections and the tightening of border security between nations are increasingly seen as having a negative impact on the incentive travel industry.

Other trends for 2019 include the rise of all-inclusive resorts being used for incentive travel. All-inclusive resorts see the value in incentive travel and are partnering with DMCs to create compelling offerings and are willing to be more flexible with the planning to meet expectations required to deliver a true incentive travel-quality experience. Of special note on this topic is the growth of "ultra-all-inclusive" properties that specifically cater to the high demands of incentive travel.

And finally, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) will continue to be an important element of incentive travel itineraries with significant growth and focus on CSR in Europe and Asia.

#### Paul VanDeventer president and CEO, MPI

In 2019, we are predicting a healthy period of growth in the meetings industry. According to the 2018 Meetings Outlook survey results, we are seeing increased attendance in both live and virtual events.

Meetings are becoming more frequent and larger, yet shorter in duration. There is an increased focus on events for niche groups.

More organizations are focusing on specific topics that have a higher impact for the intended audience. There is an interest in engaging meeting spaces, as the ballroom trend is beginning to fade, and outdoor experiences are introduced.

More groups of all sizes are interested in health. This includes healthy foods and refillable water bottles to avoid plastic cups and bottles.

Technology continues to be weaved

throughout meeting presentations in new ways. At one conference, attendees were asked to text their input to a central number, and it was recorded on an electronic map onstage.

There is less of an emphasis on traditional PowerPoint, while some presenters employ decidedly low-tech tools, such as flip charts, white boards and glass walls.

In the next year, we will see new ways to engage multiple generations in an impactful way.

#### Sherrif Karamat, CAE president and CEO, PCMA

There are so many factors that constantly generate concern and change in the business events industry. As the world's largest network of business events strategists, PCMA advises our members to always consider the impact of consolidation, budgets, safety and security, and food and beverage.

Now, however, business events strategists must factor in other environmental concerns, such as global trade policies, regulations and referendums. For example, we see the impacts of GDPR and Brexit.

These are not typically issues the business events industry has needed to consider. But as the sector continues to expand internationally, so does the portfolio of concerns for business events organizers.

Artificial intelligence's (AI) impact on the workforce and consumer customization is another area I will be watching closely for signals of where the business events industry is heading.

And I am monitoring how urbanization will affect cities, services and the way we work. I believe the effect of urbanization has the potential to transform global political structures, though the ultimate impact of the phenomenon is not yet understood.



Frank Passanante



Michael Massari



Carol Lynch

### Hoteliers

#### Frank Passanante senior vice president, Hilton Worldwide Sales – Americas

Meeting attendees' expectations are continuing to increase as it relates to every facet of the meeting — from the design of the room, to food and beverage offerings and, of course, meeting content. As hospitality leaders, it's our responsibility to both evolve and inspire.

Our 100-year history in meetings and events tells us there is no

one-size-fits-all answer for meeting planning. Today, meeting professionals tell us that they are looking for flexible spaces and creative, budget-friendly ways to host more mindful or sustainable events.

There is a greater demand for more unique and flexible spaces. Among Hilton's 15 different brands, there are a variety of options for those looking for unconventional spaces to host more intimate gatherings, such as team trainings and workshops.



Sustainable elements and purpose-driven activities are no longer a request but an expectation among meeting attendees. It's crucial that meeting providers implement these elements seamlessly into programming — both in terms of budget and timing vs. as a costly or timely add-on. Hilton's "Meet With Purpose" program was created specifically in response to growing demand in this area and

enables more productive, meaningful and memorable meetings. Today, we offer half a dozen rewarding give-back opportunities that are sure to inspire — from group meal packing activities to preparing floral arrangements for local nonprofits.

**Michael Massari, senior vice president and vice president of meeting sales and operations  
Caesars Entertainment**

Based on what we're seeing across our 40 U.S. properties, we are extremely optimistic that the future of meetings is bright. Our confidence in the industry is underscored by the significant capital investments our company is making to develop new conference facilities in key markets like Atlantic City and Las Vegas. While meetings are growing larger in size, planners continue to be highly focused on finding unique experiences to engage their attendees. Hyper-local offerings and health and mindfulness themes are not new, but still in demand. We've also heard from our clients that they want to get their attendees out of the meeting room to have the opportunity to experience a sense of place wherever they are meeting, which is why we're developing Las Vegas' first dedicated outdoor meeting space, the FORUM Plaza, a 100,000-square-foot venue which will open in conjunction with our new CAESARS FORUM conference center in 2020. We expect 2019 to be a record year for the meetings industry, and we're excited to be part of its continued evolution and growth.



Michael Dominguez

**Carol Lynch, vice president, global sales, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts**

Strong relationships will be a key advantage for planners in 2019 as they navigate growth and change in the group segment. We're seeing three major trends coming up again and again: consolidation, commissions and privacy. Having solid partner relationships will help planners steer through these challenges as hotel and other travel companies continue to consolidate, challenging the status quo for negotiations and contracting for planners. Additionally, commissions changes will impact budgets and revenues for customers and intermediaries alike, making relationships and partnerships that much more important. We're also hearing from planners that privacy and security is an increasingly present challenge with new compliance needs like GDPR changing the game.

And 2019 also has a lot of growth in store for the group segment, not only in North America but also in China, Europe and Latin America. Travelers are crossing borders today more than ever before, and planners can look to their hotel partners for exciting new destinations. Wyndham Hotels & Resorts is keeping pace, rapidly expanding the footprint of its midscale and upscale brands in these regions, including meetings leader Dolce Hotels and Resorts by Wyndham — a brand which pioneered the Complete Meetings Package and continues to innovate with nutritional menu items supporting meeting productivity — as well as its Wyndham and Wyndham Grand brands, which announced new hotels coming in the Greek Isles, Georgia, Mexico and Cyprus next year.



Dan Surette

**Michael Dominguez  
chief sales officer, MGM  
Resorts International**

I would think that 2019 will have a great deal of uncertainty and volatility, much like the markets. The economy should remain strong as employment is very positive, as is consumer confidence. However, interest rates, inflation and trade concerns will persist.

The M&A activity in business and in our industries will continue to change the landscape and create much risk and opportunity. We see this in all vertical industries with a lot of activity in the tech sector. These mergers will redefine what the tech industry looks like for years to come. In our industry, you continue to see the merger of smaller hotel brands, as well as DMCs and tech in our industries. Very disruptive, but very exciting. We are excited about 2019, as we will have the new Park MGM completely done, Eataly opened, New Space open at MGM Grand, and Lady Gaga, Aerosmith and Britney residencies all beginning. We enter the year with a strong group base of business with no signs of our group business slowing down.

**Dan Surette  
senior vice president, sales and marketing, Omni Hotels**

As Omni Hotels & Resorts heads into 2019, we are predicting another very strong year for the brand. With \$1.5 billion in growth and expansion, including the \$150 million renovation project at Omni Barton Creek Resort & Spa, along with new properties underway in Oklahoma City and the Seaport District in Boston, Omni is poised to continue to sustain its position as a leader in the marketplace, especially among the groups and meetings industry.

An example of this is the creation of our new group loyalty program, Omni Select Planner (the only group loyalty program to offer planners immediate redeemable rewards and benefits), where we are able to capture what our groups and meetings planners are seeking; therefore, allowing us to cater to their needs.

## DMCs

**Jennifer Patino, DMCP  
CEO, Hosts Global**

2019 predictions show a year with growth in the incentive market, however no/little growth in budgets. Due to escalating costs, we are seeing a shift in destinations selected with greater consideration of lift and hotel costs as the number of qualifiers continues to grow. Hosts is seeing growth in corporate meetings and events as well; however, booking windows continue to be compressed. More procurement involvement has led Hosts Global to differentiate ourselves with leadership in areas where procurement finds great value; proactive emergency preparedness planning to GDPR compliance and other regulatory requirements that have become part of the procurement process in guiding company's meeting spend and needs. Overall, we are optimistic about meetings and events with anticipated growth of 10 percent over 2018.

**Catherine Chaulet, president  
Global DMC Partners**

Global DMC Partners recently released our top destination predictions for 2019. The data used for this study was compiled from leads for meetings and events taking place around the world in 2018 and 2019. By analyzing the data, we found that secondary markets and new destinations are seeing increased interest as new experiences are sought after. As a result, tried-and-true top destinations such as New York, London and Paris should consider creating unexpected offerings and highlight off-the-beaten-path venues in order to continue to attract interest for repeat business.

As we have been closely monitoring, safety and security, as well as data privacy, will continue to be a focus for our industry in 2019. While destinations need to maintain their unique identity, they must rise to new global standards for the assurance of safety, security and privacy. We at GDP are dedicated to sharing information, valuable insights and best practices to our DMC partners and clients, staying



Jennifer Patino



Catherine Chaulet



Chris Lee

ahead of and addressing important topics, such as data privacy, ethics, safety and security or contingency planning.

Through our conversations with meeting planners, we also recognize that there is an increased demand for efficient, easy-to-use technology for attendee engagement. Planners are still challenged in not only encouraging attendees to download and utilize the apps but also in educating them how to use the technology. Cost-effective, easily useable and engaging app-driven technology is a big opportunity to help shape the future of our industry.

**Chris Lee, CEO, ACCESS  
Destination Services**

My industry predictions for 2019 can be broken down into several distinct categories:

Technology will continue to be a huge force in our industry, in ways even bigger than we could have imagined just 10 years ago. Voice and facial recognition will become much more commonplace as it relates to security (more on that below). Virtual and Augmented Reality will find its way into site inspections and room/design planning, and as technology improves, social media will be an even more powerful hub for live, streaming, "virtual" events.

The global reality is that security planning is not optimal. Event producers will have to begin developing written security and EP plans for each meeting or event they produce and work closely with local hotels and DMCs to implement them. These plans will have to be communicated in advance to participants via privately sourced member groups or

secure email. Plain clothes security personnel will better monitor security by blending in with the attendees.

Being creative or thinking outside the box isn't going to cut it in the future. Event planners should expect to have provable, repeatable methods in place to guarantee that creativity finds its way into their events consistently — regardless of personnel. Methods like Design Thinking or Innovation Labs combine both the art and science that is event production.

Most well-produced events will successfully engage your sense of site, sound and taste, but our sense of touch and smell is often overlooked, and there's so much potential to create experiences and events that utilize all of our senses. I think we'll see more planners experiment with bringing multi-sensory experiences — both virtually and in reality — into their events.

Society continues to evolve its social consciousness and mindfulness, and I only see that continuing to grow on an exponential scale. Neuroscientist Sam Harris calls it our "growing circle of compassion," and it's something our industry will continue to embrace. We expect so much from the destinations in which we plan meetings and events, and both planners and participants alike want to give back to those destinations whenever they can.

Related to CSR and sustainability — local, responsible sourcing will become an even bigger concern. The concept of farm-to-table and local craft beers and spirits isn't going away any time soon, and I believe we'll see a major push for most event elements to be local, including entertainment, speakers and décor. **C&IT**



## Experiential Events

# Embracing Entertainment Trends



Custom experiences, such as ball pits or photo booths, make events more memorable.

## Attendees Are Drawn to Live and Interactive Activities at Events

By Maura Keller

Orchestrating entertainment at any meeting or event can be challenging. Just ask Danielle Berman, founder and CEO at DB Consulting Firm in Baltimore, who has hosted several events for corporations of all sizes.

At a recent conference, Berman embraced the entertainment component by running logistics for a casino night-themed cocktail hour. In addition to overseeing a casino company, which brought tables, dealers and

the games along with them, Berman managed the food and drink for the evening. Winners at the tables received raffle tickets for a chance to be awarded more prizes.

The result? "Guests thoroughly enjoyed it," Berman says. "It was a fun and exciting way to have a networking cocktail party and close out an event."

As Berman explains, entertainment is becoming a bigger part of corporate events, especially on a larger scale. "Nearly every corporate event I

throw has some kind of cocktail reception, from small networking cocktails to themed casino nights or musical entertainment to close out the agenda," Berman says. "Even more so, there is a push for engaging speakers or inspirational entertainment from outside of the industry."

Amy Grace Collins, event planner and owner of Amy Grace Events, says that today's event entertainment trends are moving toward intimate and meaningful experiences that

participants feel use their valuable time properly and walk away with action items that can be immediately implemented.

"Main speakers are still a large draw, and VIP experiences to meet and greet with speakers can be added to help entice your attendees to register early and/or pay an additional fee for intimate access," Collins says.

Over the years, the types of entertainment gracing stages at various corporate events has changed significantly. Creating big blowout bashes were the trend a few years back, as attendees began to want to feel a part of a movement of people — and size mattered.

"Event organizers would feel a sense of panic if the event wasn't filling up or the seating had the image of being sparse," Collins says. "Now, the more intimate the entertainment lineup, the better."

In addition, corporate events have gotten more comfortable incorporating event entertainment over the years. Now you see appropriate event entertainment often closing out corporate events; whereas before, there was pressure from big companies not to just "throw a party." Rather, more meeting planners are trying to make sure the entertainment is applicable to the group meeting and the industry in which they are found.

"Attendees also want small groups. They want main stage speaker access and the ability to ask questions in breakout sessions," Collins says. "They are willing to pay a significant amount for this access over a cheaper experience that's less intimate."

Brent Turner, senior vice president of marketing strategy at Cramer in Norwood, Massachusetts, says the corporate meetings and events industry is now in a "festivalization" era for all types of meetings and events.

"The hallmarks of large-scale music festivals, with experiential pillars like end-to-end music, experiential food,

campus-like environments to explore and unstructured time for community collaboration, is changing how we design and build our events," he says. "This festivalization-shift is best embodied at scale with Dreamforce

**"It's important that the event entertainment is a value add for the event and doesn't completely take the event over."**

**Danielle Berman**, Founder and CEO  
DB Consulting Firm, Baltimore, MD

and in-depth with C2 Montreal, but is also being deployed in small leadership meetings, large sales meetings, external launch events and across the meetings and events landscape."

As Turner explains, the tried-and-true structure of "Sit in Ballrooms in the Day, Move Around with Entertainment at Night" does not align with the expectations and behaviors of today's attendees. People want a much more active experience, regardless of the type of meeting or event they are attending.

The biggest shift being experienced in corporate meetings and events is one from "passive" to "active" entertainment. Turner says that while

classic entertainment acts — where the attendees passively sit back and watch — still have their important role in meetings and events, attendees don't want to sit still all day. They multitask. They move. And they want their moments of entertainment to be self-directed and interactive.

## Festivalization Trend

"The best results, as we've heard from attendees, have been in some smaller explorations," Turner says. From adding entertainment to food

(like blender bikes) to bringing in unexpected selfie stations (like tiny rooms) to having roving talent (like an improv troop walking the halls during breaks) — these are moments of surprise and consistently delighting attendees in ways that traditional entertainment investments have been lacking.

"To hit these shifting attendee expectations and capture this festivalization trend, meeting planners are also reimagining how entertainment is designed into a program," Turner says. "Planners are now designing in unstructured moments for serious play, creating experiences around food consumption and delivery, bringing in pets — especially puppies — for



To embrace the festivalization trend, planners are changing the way they design events. Instead of the classic seating structure, attendees can now meet in chairs high above the ground.



**“Planners are now designing in unstructured moments for serious play, creating experiences around food consumption and delivery ... and selecting unexpected venues that are an entertaining adventure for the attendee.”**

**Brent Turner**, Senior Vice President of Marketing Strategy  
Cramer, Norwood, MA



moments of levity, and, where possible, selecting unexpected venues that are, in their own right, an entertaining adventure for the attendee.”

Samantha Hoffer, account manager, Event Services at metroConnections, says she is seeing several different types of entertainment options being embraced by corporations and

to clients. “Entertainment acts will travel anywhere, so the sky is the limit,” Hoffer says.

Attendees are also drawn to entertainment that ties into the location. This applies to both live and interactive activities at events.

“For example, if the event is taking place in the south, clients will tend to

everyone is NOT going to be inspired the same way. And since there’s always a budget to stay within, know that NOT all inspiring ideas are crazy expensive, either.” It’s really important to know the client and the audience and approach each client’s event entertainment needs.

Having been in the industry now just shy of 16 years, Lo and her team at Red Velvet Events are very fortunate to have experienced quite a bit of success in this area.

### Be On Brand

“Recently, it’s been the interactive custom experiences that have won over our clients’ hearts,” Lo says. “For example, recently for an alcoholic beverage client, we dressed up our walking greeters as ‘walking limes’ to be in theme with the evening’s event vs. just having our standard company uniforms on the greeters holding custom directional signs. We wanted to make it fun and on brand to their company culture.”

Some types of entertainment trends Nicole Chattin, CMP, senior program manager at Brightspot Incentives & Events, is seeing for corporate and incentive travel events include technology, keeping it local/authentic, interactive, magic/illusion and food and beverage.

“Event entertainment has gone high-tech in recent years,” Chattin says. Drone shows come to mind, with hundreds of synchronized drones dancing in the sky to spell out a company’s logo. 3D projection mapping is popular and a way to use technology in place of traditional décor and entertainment. A video or image projected onto a wall provides a moving backdrop for a performance. Instant gratification plays out with audience-controlled bands that let guests request songs live via a touchscreen kiosk or smartphone.

“Why hire a regular DJ when you can hire a visual DJ?” Chattin asks. “Build the stage backdrop and DJ booth with LED panels and hire a visual DJ who

At a recent casino night-themed event, winners were able to enter a raffle for more prizes.

plays exhilarating music that is complemented by videos.”

Magic also is becoming popular again with magicians, hypnotists, illusionists and mentalists allowing an audience to unleash their intellect.

“Keep entertainment local and authentic to the destination — a country band in Texas, junkanoo dancers in The Bahamas, Mayan-costumed greeters in Riviera Maya and Polynesian dancers in Kauai,” Chattin says. “And get creative food and beverage-themed entertainment with living tables and champagne skirts.”

During a recent dinner event that Chattin helped manage, entertainers, such as aerialists, dancers and jugglers, performed vignettes on different small stages between each course, keeping the audience engaged. At another event, dueling pianists played while guests sang along, allowing audience participation. At a Kauai Welcome Reception, a cast of 12 Polynesian dancers and musicians performed, which was a hit especially when the executives went on stage to learn to hula dance. During a Farewell Dinner in a Portuguese monastery, a Gregorian choir sang while guests arrived, creating a unique, authentic experience. At an Awards Dinner in Riviera Maya, guests were welcomed with Mayan-costumed greeters, video-mapping swirled around the temple backdrop and Mayan dancers performed.

“The goal with event entertainment is to keep the audience engaged, interested, excited and inspired year after year,” Chattin says.

### Biggest Challenges

Thanks to social media, finding entertainment ideas can be very forthcoming, but finding unique entertainment can be challenging. As Lo explains, it used to be



Credit: Danielle Berman

those planners that were well-traveled usually brought the coolest and newest ideas to the table. But now that we have social media, the new ideas are shared so quickly that meeting planners have a much smaller window to use the idea before it becomes what

for soirees of all sizes is ensuring that guests stay engaged in the process and that their work world doesn’t suck them back into the mundane of the day.

“Make sure the breakouts are as excellent as the main stage and create space for them to connect with the

**“Communication is key. There are a lot of logistics that go into entertainment, so asking all the right questions ... up front will help a planner budget correctly and help with those last-minute requests or changes onsite.”**

**Samantha Hoffer**, Account Manager, Event Services  
metroConnections, Minneapolis, MN



she calls, “been there, done that.”

“And to be completely honest, there is no idea that is 100 percent completely new in my opinion,” Lo says. “It’s about how a planner can take something that once was a great idea, and updating it to the current way we take in entertainment.”

One of the biggest challenges facing meeting and event planners who are orchestrating entertainment

right people to foster business connections worthy of returning to the same event year after year,” Collins says.

Speaker schedules can also prove to be difficult to orchestrate. In-demand speakers can take months (or sometimes years) to book and having the time and the funds to put out ahead of ticket sales can sometimes be problematic.

Another challenge with event entertainment is making sure that it fits with the audience. Meeting planners want the audience to enjoy it, not feel like it’s completely out of place or a show to distract them.

“It’s important that the event entertainment is a value

**“Recently, it’s been the interactive custom experiences that have won over our clients’ heart.”**

**Cindy Lo, DMCP**,  
President and Event Strategist  
Red Velvet Events, Austin, TX



Attendees gather on the pool deck of a cruise ship to enjoy a live band during a corporate travel event.



Credit: Josh Gold Photography

their subsequent meeting attendees. These include:

Entertainment and activities at events that interact with guests get them involved in the program and networking with each other. “This is huge with corporate incentives since attendees are at a recognition event, interactive entertainment coupled with a giveaway is very popular,” Hoffer says.

Entertainment with some type of social tie-in is also favored. Live entertainment acts that were featured on well-known TV shows such as “The Voice,” “America’s Got Talent” and “American Idol” are big selling points

ask for a more country-style band and then maybe we will tie in a Southern-themed photo booth and/or an interactive oyster-tasting,” Hoffer says.

According to Cindy Lo, DMCP, president and event strategist at Red Velvet Events, corporations are asking for entertainment that is “Instagrammable” because those that work with a marketing eye understand the power of good visuals.

“Attendees are asking to be inspired,” Lo says. “So for creative event agencies, it’s so important to really understand who the audience is and how they are wired to get that right mix. Remember,





Live entertainment acts that tie-in to the destination are always a hit with attendees.

add for the event and doesn't completely take the event over," Berman says. "In a corporate event setting, event entertainment should complement the event, not overpower it."

According to Turner, when shifting from the classic "entertainment

but understanding where the attendees are coming from and how fast can you get them organized and seated — if that's how they are supposed to view the entertainment — so that you can begin your actual planned entertainment," Lo says.

**"Keep entertainment local and authentic to the destination — a country band in Texas, junkanoo dancers in The Bahamas, Mayan-costumed greeters in Riviera Maya and Polynesian dancers in Kauai."**

**Nicole Chattin, CMP, Senior Program Manager**  
Brightspot Incentives & Events, Irving, TX



goes here" structure — for example, when entertainment is a set activity or at a set time in the agenda — to an "always-on" activated experience, where there are moments of entertainment throughout the meeting or event, the biggest challenges are buy-in and coordination.

"As with any large shift to a tried-and-true structure, getting buy-in from all stakeholders is always a challenge," Turner says. "Then, once there is buy-in, these smaller-but-always-on entertainment moments require more coordination and management to fully deliver on their potential."

For Lo, timing of entertainment is perhaps the most challenging aspect of entertainment orchestration. "This is not just how long of a performance,

For Chattin some challenges in orchestrating event entertainment include budget constraints, travel challenges, sufficient rooms in room block for added entertainment, audio-visual needs, indoor vs. outdoor events and power needs, appealing to corporations, key stakeholders and attendees' needs and wants.

### Steps to Take

Meeting planners need to get the schedule of events out early. This will allow people time to fully research the breakouts and speakers. The earlier a planner can confirm and lock in event entertainment the better, as usually there is an added layer of logistics that has to go into their segment of the event.

Credit: Samantha Hoffer

"A planner doesn't want to leave it until the last minute, or all the hard work they've put in to planning a smooth event will fizzle when people see how unorganized the entertainment part is," Berman says.

"Allowing them the time to create their perfect day is paramount," Collins says. "Take the time to create amazing descriptions of each aspect of the event so that people want to attend."

If the budget allows, invest in an event app. This will allow a meeting planner the opportunity to push updates and fully communicate with attendees about event entertainment options.

"Communication is key," Hoffer says. "There are a lot of logistics that go into entertainment, so asking all the right questions about needs, time lines, etc., up front, will help a planner budget correctly and help with those last-minute requests or changes onsite."

Also, Hoffer suggests taking notes from previous years. Pay attention to what worked with the group and what didn't work with the group. Apply that knowledge to future programs.

"Use one band in multiple ways," Hoffer says. "This will save on budget and also provide a dynamic experience for guests. Use a couple of band members for an acoustic duo during cocktails, then add more band members for a full live band experience during dinner and for the after party."

Chattin recommends streamlining the event entertainment process by submitting an RFP with general information about the program, history of previous destinations and entertainment hired, objective and goals of the program, demographics and budget.

"Communication is imperative throughout the planning process," Chattin says. "All details should be outlined in a signed agreement between both parties, including event date, travel and hotel requirements, green room, rider and rehearsal needs and more."

**C&IT**



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By Patrick Simms

Similar to most professions, the skill set of the successful meeting planner includes effective communication, attention to detail, organization, time management and multitasking. But many of the skills in the event-planning trade go beyond basic logistical abilities and are no less important. Following is a close look at what veteran planners regard as their top skills, the first considered instrumental to elevating one's role in a corporation and making a greater impact.

## Influence

Planners will often have a vision about how events and processes can be improved, and getting stakeholders to subscribe to that vision becomes a vital people skill. "I feel the greatest skill needed to be a successful event planner is influence," says Judy Payne, CMP, director, meetings and travel at Grapevine, Texas-based GameStop. When trying to persuade executives across the company to adopt a change in the way meetings are run, Payne has learned to "pitch to their passion" in order to get them excited about a new idea she is presenting.

Admittedly, she was not the most proficient influencer early on in her career. "Originally, I would go in with my passion, what makes me tick, and I would try to pitch that and convince

has convinced executives to move the opening general session to Monday morning from Sunday night. As attendees arrived on Sunday, the session drew quite a bit of energy from that first-day buzz. But on the negative side, attendees also found it hard to get to the general session on time.

"It's a lot more casual now [since the session was moved]. We lost the rush and excitement, but the attendees now feel a lot more comfortable, and they don't have the pressure. We've created more things for them to do on the arrival day and instead kick it off with a dinner. But reformatting the whole arrival took a little convincing," Payne relates. "Some of the executives are more numbers driven, so I would go in with surveys from the past four years and show how many responders

need to shift your conversation based on stakeholder needs," says Victoria Johnson, CMM, CMP, global manager, Strategic Meetings Management Program at Northbrook, Illinois-based UL LLC. "You have to show stakeholders the 'what's in it for me': Here are your goals, and here is how the SMMP will help to achieve those goals. For example, if I go to the security team, I talk about duty of care. Sure, they're glad I'm saving money, but they care about the duty of care piece that SMM can offer. For the chief legal officer, here's the contractual piece and how we avoid risk. The CFO cares about the savings, so you talk about the savings. Marketing cares about the ROI, so here's how we helped to track ROI and customer journey."

It should be added that influence is

"I feel the **greatest skill** needed to be a successful event planner is **influence**."



Judy Payne, CMP

Director, Meetings and Travel, GameStop, Grapevine, TX

people that my view is the right one," she explains. "And then along the way, I learned to fine-tune my pitch and better understand my audience, better learn who I'm speaking with. I learn their passion, what makes them tick, and then reframe my ideas to help them see it from their perspective."

Individual meetings with stakeholders may be necessary. "Pitch it to the person individually to get them on board before sitting down in the boardroom to discuss it. That way, you already have their buy-in," she advises.

Thanks to her ability to influence, Payne has been able to institute changes that have significantly improved the attendee experience at GameStop meetings. For example, she

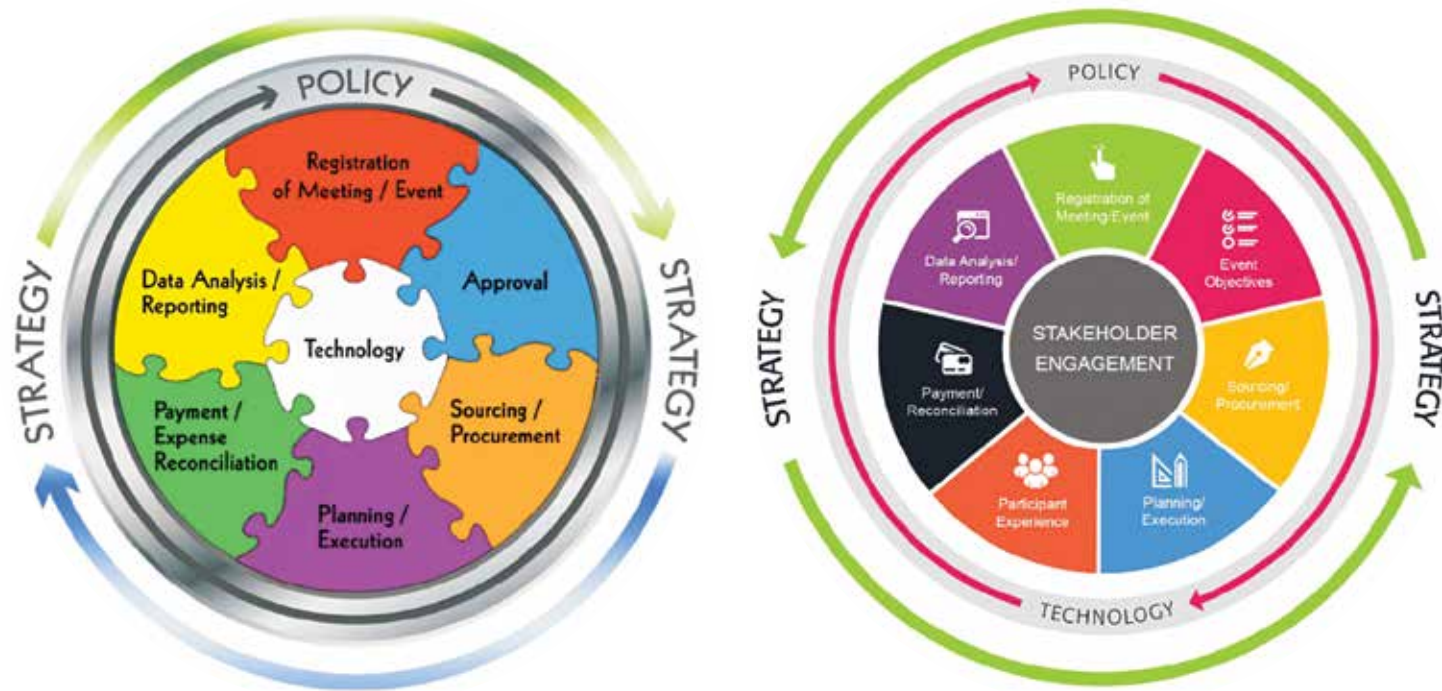
on the surveys would say the arrival day is too hectic. So depending on how they approach leadership, I would change my pitch."

Influence is also an invaluable skill when it comes to implementing one of the most impactful changes to a company's meetings business: the creation of a strategic meetings management program (SMMP). Reflecting the importance of getting company-wide buy-in to the SMMP, the GBTA has updated its SMMP Wheel (a circular chart depicting the primary elements of such a program) to feature "stakeholder engagement" at the center of the wheel. In trying to influence department heads to support and help develop the program, "you

not just about speaking persuasively, but also about being the kind of person that inspires confidence. Stakeholders "must have confidence in your abilities or they would not agree with the recommendations that you're making," notes Sharon L. Schenk, CMP, director of conventions and event management for CCA Global Partners. "You've got to build that foundation of trust first." Even if the planner is a new hire, there is likely already some level of confidence in his or her abilities.

"When they hired you, they knew you were bringing a skill set that they realized they needed," she says. "And you obviously have references as a planner; you bring a portfolio of past programs and a list of accomplishments."





The GBTA updated its SMMP Wheel (the circular chart above depicting the primary elements of its strategic meetings management program) to feature "stakeholder engagement" at the center of the wheel. The goal is to influence department heads to support the program.

### Negotiation

Influence is certainly an aspect of negotiation, as one party is attempting to persuade the other to accept their terms. But negotiation also involves accommodating the other party's needs and goals, in order to achieve an agreement that is as mutually favorable as possible. Given the ongoing seller's market in the hotel industry, negotiating is one of the planner's most valuable skills, perhaps more than ever. "It's a skill that can always be improved upon," says Schenk. "I've taken courses in negotiation, and I think one of the

big things is to be quiet, which is not easy. You have a conversation and say, 'This is what I'm looking for,' and then be quiet and give the other person an opportunity to think about it and come back. That's just one of the basics of negotiation."

The result may not be a reduction in pricing, but a different kind of added value. "Although I may not be able to get the pricing down on the hotel exactly where I want it, I could negotiate better amenities, like suites, or things that don't necessarily get thrown in for free as concessions," Payne explains.

### Presentation Skills

In some scenarios where a planner is trying to influence internal executives, a presentation is called for. It's an opportunity for a planner to shine in front of upper management and build that confidence, so honing presentation skills is advantageous. "Any planner who wants to change his or her job needs to learn presentation skills," says Johnson.

Part of that is learning how to make the talk concise and focused. "We're detail-oriented, and the C suite often does not want to hear the details," she adds.



"Any planner who wants to change his or her job needs to **learn presentation skills.**"

**Victoria Johnson, CMM, CMP**

Global Manager, Strategic Meetings Management Program, UL LLC, Northbrook, IL

Beyond the presentations a planner may deliver at work, they might want to present at industry conferences, thus raising their profile in the field.

At UL, presentation skills are taught through a Global Leader Program and various courses offered by UL University. Johnson also recommends planners join Toastmasters International, especially if their company can pay for the membership.

### Adaptability

While a planner can affect positive change via influence, he or she must also be able to adapt to unforeseen negative occurrences. And that itself is a skill. "Being able to adapt to (what seems to be constant) change is key," according to Kim Hentges, CMP, senior planner, events and

trip, the airline carrier canceled several flights back to the States, affecting approximately 200 attendees, including executives.

- A work laptop crashed on the first day of a five-day program.

Dealing with these kinds of situations is a matter of resourcefulness, as well as keeping a cool head under pressure. Indeed, one might add stress management to the planner's skill set.

### Risk Management

Keeping one's planning skills sharp is assisted by attending sessions at industry conferences, and a skill that especially benefits from regular education is risk management. "When it comes to training and classes, I really feel like [it's a priority to learn] the latest and greatest when it comes

depended on the venue to make sure that we were safe, especially if you're in a hotel where doors are open and people can come and go with no scanning and no security."

Schenk adds that discussing emergency procedures with hotels and DMCs is part of her site inspections and pre-cons. And informing attendees about those procedures without overly alarming them is a skill in itself.

### Creativity

A very broad skill that plays into event design, branding, promotion and other areas, creativity is a trait of many planners, but for some it must be developed. In either case, creativity benefits from a group effort. "I'm lucky that my whole team is pretty creative," says Payne. "We challenge each other

**"Risk management and security is top of mind for me... I'm working with our executive teams to put together procedures for disasters onsite."**



**Sharon L. Schenk, CMP**

Director of Conventions and Event Management, CCA Global Partners, Manchester, NH

incentives with Richardson, Texas-based Lennox Industries Inc. She provides a few examples of unforeseen circumstances she has had to contend with in her work:

- For an international meeting, the poster signs and sponsorship meter board signs were ordered locally and ended up all being 8 1/2-by-11 inches.
- A less-experienced industry colleague was hired to manage the team.
- Budgets were not increased as needed to create that "wow" customer experience and to meet the annual expense increases of common program elements.
- On an international group incentive

to safety and security and the ever-changing legal issues that we deal with," Payne says. "We're kind of in the midst of the planning when it comes to AV and design. I feel like those things come a lot more naturally. But it's dealing with the safety and security of our attendees that is usually at the forefront of my training."

Schenk concurs on the importance of staying abreast of trends in this area. "Risk management and security is top of mind for me," she says. "You just have no idea when something's going to happen, whether a natural disaster or person out to make a point. I'm working with our executive teams to put together procedures for disasters onsite. Until recently, we've

with outside-the-box thinking. Anytime we go to an event or a conference, anytime we see something that's cool that draws our eye, we ask if it can be applied at our event and used to help create engagement or excitement with our attendees. I require my team to make five impactful changes to our event every year. They don't have to be big changes where it takes a lot of work, but they have to be something the attendees will see so they know we're trying to evolve the event."

Payne recalls being inspired to use a comic book theme at one meeting, which resulted in powerful engagement. "I reached out to our store operations team and had them find any fantastic comments from customers



on our store leaders, who are our attendees. Then I created these comic book walls all over the building," she says. "Instead of 'Bam' and 'Pow' in the word bubbles, I put in the comments from our customers and listed the attendee's name and store number. So when you went to registration or to the café, you could find a comment that was written about you from our customers for all the attendees to see. They were very customized callouts, and there were a few hundred of them all around the conference just to really showcase the passion of customer service when it comes to our stores. Everybody loved them. They were taking pictures with them and trying to see if they had one; it was almost like a scavenger hunt."

The importance of creative ideas

to be a little better at it," she relates. "Even when we do outsource [design work], something may change last minute, such as the text or a theme. And instead of having to send it out [to be fixed], having to pay design fees and worry about last-minute printing deadlines, I'm able to do all the updates myself. We've learned the whole Adobe Creative Suite. I know Illustrator, Photoshop and InDesign. I write my show guides from front to back myself, design it and do all the images. Everything we can, we've brought in-house, which helps reduce our costs a lot."

Tech-savvy is also helpful when establishing an SMMP. Johnson, for example, is in the process of integrating Cvent's event management software into UL's CRM tool so that mar-

small acts of kindness can improve the look and feel of an event and enhance the customer experience by [for example] receiving comped upgraded napkins and chairs, receiving destination hats complimentary to use as team-building giveaways and getting the DJ extended 30 minutes for 'one more song' at no additional cost because the DJ is having fun with the attendees."

Planner colleagues can pave the way to new supplier relationships and provide overall knowledge sharing. "Reach out to your professional relationships to receive supplier partner referrals, learn about a resort/hotel or destination that you may not have been familiar with and share experiences in general, as we all can learn from each other," Hentges advises.

Networking and maintaining indus-



"Being able to **adapt to** (what seems to be constant) **change** is key."

**Kim Hentges, CMP**

Senior Planner, Events & Incentives, Lennox Industries Inc., Richardson, TX

like this one in today's meetings landscape should not be underestimated. "People are increasingly expecting an experience that's memorable, even though it's a business meeting," Schenk observes. "They want to leave inspired."

#### Tech-savvy

Some companies rely on third parties to integrate their event tech tools, from conference websites to apps to registration software. But it can be advantageous for the in-house planner to take on that role, or at least be well-versed in those tools. Payne's internal team, for example, handles event website design. "We taught ourselves how to code first. Then we went into a design course and learned

keting and sales can access attendee data. And that functionality helps to "sell" the SMMP to those departments. "Right now, it is unknown across the enterprise who's going to all of our events that are customers. An SMMP can do that via the Cvent tool," says Johnson in describing her pitch to sales and marketing executives.

#### Relationship-building

This skill is a key to success in many careers, but especially in meeting planning. Strong supplier relationships can ultimately mean a better experience for attendees. "Over time, business relationships can evolve, and the benefits are abundant," Hentges remarks. "Due to these type of relationships,

try relationships is a skill, yet that skill can't be exercised without effective time management. A planner needs to budget the time to maintain connections and even attend industry events held by organizations such as MPI, PCMA and IMEX, which may be challenging with a busy schedule.

Schenk, who has more than 25 years of relationship-building in the industry, still finds it worthwhile to attend these events because it "reinvigorates me personally and professionally to meet new people and to reconnect with friends and industry colleagues." In doing so, planners may even learn about new skills whose acquisition would bolster their performance and success. **C&IT**



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## Contract Negotiation

# Effective RFPs & Strong Sales Relationships

## Be Thorough and Outline All Requirements in This Key Component With a Venue

By Maura Keller

One are the days when job quotes were written on the back of business cards or on paper napkins. Today, most meeting and event proposals average a dozen pages in length and are often supplemented with corporate or product brochures, drawings and contracts. From the event planner's point of view, writing a request for proposal (RFP) can be one of the most time-consuming

and difficult challenges they face. So what is the best way to create an RFP that streamlines the process of receiving estimates and proposed solutions in writing and helps establish a strong planner/vendor sales relationship?

### Elements of the Process

There are many different types of services requested through RFPs within

the meetings and events industry. From small intimate soirees to expansive, multi-day corporate offsite meetings, RFPs take many forms.

According to hospitality industry trainer Lynne Wellish, CMP, CHSE, CHO, RFPs are vital components because they are often the first line of communication between a meeting planner and a property.

has not finalized details, be honest," Wellish says. "Remember, sometimes a venue is just not a fit. Be as flexible as you can."

Wellish says meeting space needs, size, set-up and room rental are some of the most important elements of any RFP. They should also include:

- Arrival and departure patterns, as well as peak nights and suites' needs
- Food and beverage needs and budget
- Options for Wi-Fi and AV

"Ask if any competitors will be in the hotel over the same dates," Wellish says. "Check to see if any construction or renovations to the property are scheduled. What is on the wish list of concessions from the planners? How far out is the cut-off date and discussion of attrition? Are there any charges not listed that the planner is responsible for, such as parking, resort fees, fee for early check-in or under departure?"

The overall insight is to be as thorough as possible and to tailor your RFP to the specific service requested — whether it is for hotel space, technology, meeting and event production services, creative, marketing, catering, audio-visual or entertainment.

Keri McIntosh, senior vice president of events at The Castle Group, says every meeting RFP should clearly define the needs and specifications of the program.

"The more information provided in the RFP, the better for both parties," she says. "It's important to include a response date and decision date in the RFP so that the time line is clear. We also request that the hotel outline any additional fees (such as resort fees, service charges and taxes) so we are aware of total costs when budgeting."

Vital elements of the RFP are the room block needs, the meeting dates and the meeting space required. It should be noted if the dates are firm or flexible, including the day of the week pattern.

"To set expectations, desired concessions, such as complimentary room upgrades, waived fees and discounts on services, should be provided in the RFP," McIntosh says. "It is also a great idea to



**Lynne Wellish, CMP, CHSE, CHO**  
Hospitality Industry Trainer  
Phoenix, AZ

**"Planners need to double-check the RFP for accuracy; sometimes, RFPs are crafted by procurement and details may be lost in translation."**

include the group's background, meeting objectives, previous meeting history and any 'hot button items' so that the hotel is aware and can address them."

According to Genny Castleberry, CMP, director of sourcing at Brightspot Incentives and Events, in today's sellers' market, meeting planners need to be thorough and outline all requirements in their RFP.

"Be up front and share valuable information about the program and meeting to arm the reader with key points which will help the hotel sales manager assess the worth of the RFP and also quickly understand the planner's expectations in terms of proposal content and negotiable vs. non-negotiable elements," Castleberry says. "Most importantly, the meeting planner needs to understand that space and rates are not guaranteed until an agreement has been signed — time is of the essence in this current market."

Also, meeting planners should be selective to whom they send their RFP. Limiting the number of venues that receive the RFP — and informing the venues of this number — provides each

"Meeting planners need to research and find venues that fit meeting space and guest room needs," Wellish says. "Be specific and precise with check-in date, departure date, guest room count and number of suites. Send an agenda or time line that reflects actual needs."

Some key questions to ask include: When does the AV load in? Prior to the guests checking in, do you need a 24-hour hold on the meeting space? What time frame does the hotel allow for setting up or taking down elements of the meeting or event? How do you handle emergencies?

"If there is an unknown or the client



with a better chance to win the business. For example, knowing they have a one in five chance or a one in 75 chance may change the venue's perspective on responding and the thoroughness in which they do so.

### Mistakes to Avoid

The RFP is a road map to creating a successful meeting or event for both the planner and the property. Sometimes there is not enough detail when an RFP is originally sent or parts don't match what is being proposed, so a supplier may have to reach out to the planner to receive more information on the event. The more detail that is provided makes the RFP process much smoother for both parties. And this results in a successful event.

So what are common mistakes made within RFPs or the RFP process that can affect a meeting planner and the event they are planning?

Knowing the true budget and being able to manage it and share it with your partners is paramount. Go online and look at the meeting space that is being proposed by the venue. Will your group actually fit in the room layout you want? Wellish often reaches out to peers to see if they have used that venue before and if there are any challenges she should know about.

"Planners need to double-check the RFP for accuracy; sometimes, RFPs are crafted by procurement, and details may be lost in translation," Wellish says.

Also be sure to stay away from a basic, cookie-cutter RFP template. Every meeting and company is different, so list what is important to the planner, the decision-makers and the attendees. Don't be afraid to tell a property what the final decision is based on, what has worked well in the past, the budget and the main goal of the meeting being planned.

McIntosh says that once it's determined that a hotel has available dates and is a good fit, planners need to make sure they are holding the space on a first option basis and request a realistic option date, especially if the decision-making process can be a lengthy one.



## RFPs' Must-Haves

The RFPs meeting planners create and send to suppliers should include:

- Who the client is and an overview of the type of business they reside in
- Goals of the meeting/event
- Pertinent meeting information (dates, location/preferences, number of attendees)
- Meeting/event overview, including agenda
- History of the event
- Services required
- Budget
- Decision factors in order of importance or priority
- Response deadlines
- RFP instructions, expectations for what and how you want to see the proposal come back to you (capabilities, references, samples of work)
- Contact information for who receives the proposal and to direct questions

C&IT

"Keep an open line of communication during the RFP process," McIntosh says. "You would not want your best option to fall to another group. Another potential pitfall is not including the proper load-in and strike time into the meeting space requirements. If there is significant setup for the meeting, consult with the production crew or the hotel AV department in order to factor enough time for rigging, load-in, testing and rehearsals into the equation. Ideally, a planner would want this to be on straight time, not overnight or overtime."

Castleberry has seen a variety of mistakes being made on the part of planners as it relates to RFPs and the hotel sales process. For instance, a delayed process can cause problems when the meeting planner or corporation involved doesn't make quick decisions to secure or contract the chosen property.

"The fear on the part of the meeting



**Keri McIntosh**  
Senior Vice President of Events  
The Castle Group  
Boston, MA

**"Keep an open line of communication during the RFP process. You would not want your best option to fall to another group."**

planner to not disclose their true budget and pain points from the onset can also be an issue," Castleberry says.

Asking hotels for their very best offer from the get-go is a must as time is a luxury that those within the industry simply can't waste.

"The meeting planner needs to understand the hotel's perspective as well and how many e-RFPs flood their inbox daily," Castleberry says.

One other common mistake she sees planners make is having a lack of respect or professionalism when working with a hotel sales manager. They may exude a sense of entitlement about the company they represent and what they should be offered.

"The ultimate goal is to find a win-win situation with any hoteliers — finding the best venue for a program where both meeting planner and hotel find a common ground for a positive and profitable outcome," Castleberry says.

Planners need to look at the bigger



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picture and not just the property they are booking for an event, but what hotel chain and what other programs they might be able to reserve within that entity.

"It goes back to the ethical question of doing the right thing," Castleberry says. "This industry is such a small circle when you analyze it. You never know who your next client, employee or employer will be, and you never want to burn your bridges or have a poor reputation as it will spread faster than [something on] social media. These types of actions may deter planners from ever booking a property or hotel chain in the future."

### Partners in Progress

For many planners and hotel sales professionals, the RFP is the true ice-breaker, opening up the conversation and establishing a relationship. In a world of electronic RFPs, it is still important for planners to forge solid relationships with hotel contacts.

Here's why: Global hotel sales representatives can make the RFP process easier for planners. From a planner's perspective, hotels often use standard responses and don't take the time to prepare a custom response.

Planners should look for properties that are willing to take the extra time and respond with the same level of detail that the planner and their team has prepared and requested.

In an era where personal relationships have taken a backseat to electronic communication, it is so important for a meeting and event planner to be as specific as possible in every email. Also, planners need to take time to pick up the phone and discuss pressing matters or important questions rather than sending an email.

"Being able to connect with your hotel sales manager and talk through situations will be so much more beneficial than trying to convey the information in an email," Castleberry says.

"Having a sales rep that knows your group can make all the difference," McIntosh says. "For example, if they understand your needs, less time is wasted on properties that will not fit.

They may pitch a perfect property that you weren't even considering and can work collaboratively with you to plan for long-term goals."

Ultimately, both parties should be seeking the best fit for the program. If it doesn't work on one occasion, it might be better for another.

"When a hospitality sales executive contacts the planner, be certain the questions are relevant to the RFP and clarify some cloudy points," Wellish says. "This attention to detail becomes the foundation and will foster a positive working relationship."



**Genny Castleberry, CMP**  
Director of Sourcing  
Brightspot Incentives and Events  
Irving, TX

**"The ultimate goal is to find a win-win situation ... finding the best venue for a program where both meeting planner and hotel find a common ground for a positive and profitable outcome."**

Wellish likes to build the relationship via phone and speak directly to the hospitality sales executive to introduce herself and her program. To follow up, she sends the RFP and the communication begins.

"It is crucial to pick up the phone and talk through any changes as soon as they occur," Wellish says. "Each call and email is a touch point to continue building the relationship."

One of the most common mistakes

she sees meeting planners make that can affect the hotel sales relationship is not responding to phone calls and emails, on either side. Constant open communication is the key to a meeting's success.

Castleberry advises other meeting planners to stay in touch through the sourcing phase of the meeting or events. It's important to keep the hotel sales manager apprised of the time line and decision-making process and share any dilemma that a meeting planner may run into while they assess all of the options.

"Sometimes the timing can really work in your favor, such as at the end-of-quarter or end-of-year deal where some extra benefits might be added to your proposal for the sake of closing a deal within a certain time frame," Castleberry says. "Put all your cards on the table and share any challenges you may face — be it budget, proposed meeting space or any other elements which prevent you from booking this hotel."

In the end, it's important to stay in touch. "In negotiations, open and honest communication is important along with the need to be flexible and think creatively," McIntosh says. "Also, when the final hotel is selected, it is proper etiquette to contact all parties that received the RFP and inform them so that the hotels that did not make the cut can take the space off hold. All parties in the meeting industry depend on each other, so it is good business to play fair and not burn bridges."

Hotels and convention centers are holding valuable meeting spaces and guest rooms that could be sold to another group, so it is crucial to keep the line of communication open with all of the vendors. And be ready to explain why their site was not selected to host the meeting.

"Remember it is a win-win game. Lack of interest, incorrect information and asking for too much can mean big delays in the sales process," Wellish says. "A planner must know the true value of their meeting, and the venue can be honest from there. Not always is it a good fit or perfect match." **C&IT**

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# Fun *and* Games

## Gaming Resorts Offer Meeting Attendees More Than Just Casino Action

By Sophia Bennett

**W**hen Steve van der Molen first began working for Caesars Entertainment in Atlantic City, many companies were leery to host meetings at gaming resorts. They were nervous to expose their attendees to the gaming portion of the property and all of the perceived problems that gambling can bring.

That's not really the case anymore. "Over the years, people have seen gaming as an acceptable form of entertainment," says van der Molen, who is now vice president, meeting operations, Atlantic City, and oversees meeting operations at the company's properties along the eastern seaboard,

including Caesars Palace, Harrah's Resort and Bally's Atlantic City Hotel and Casino. "Today, it's considered more of an amenity. People can use it or not, and it's not the distraction people thought it was 16 years ago."

Now that the stigma of going to a gaming resort has eased, companies are free to focus on the many benefits they offer.

"The big difference is you have a lot of things under one roof," says van der Molen. Business travelers can find all of the amenities they need to be successful at meetings. But when the day's events are over, they have a variety of ways to spend their time or mingle with colleagues. Depending on the property, options may include restaurants, bars, music or other live shows, pools, fitness facilities and shopping.

"We call them integrated resorts because they have so much to offer," says van der Molen. "You can literally spend four or five days at the property, and you don't have to eat at the same restaurants or bars. There are



Now that the stigma of going to gaming resorts like Harrah's Resort in Atlantic City has eased, companies are free to focus on the many other amenities they offer.

Credit: Harrah's Resort Atlantic City

"We call them integrated resorts because they have so much to offer. You can literally spend four or five days at the property, and you don't have to eat at the same restaurants or bars. There are different and ever-changing entertainment options."

Steve van der Molen, Vice President, Meeting Operations, Atlantic City, NJ



different and ever-changing entertainment options."

The wide variety of things to do is a real benefit to both planners and attendees, who can take advantage of multiple entertainment options without much effort. "Gaming resorts can be a great place for meetings because they offer attendees a chance to do something fun and different after a long day of meetings," says Abby Kahn, vice president of global events at the technology solutions company Numerix. "When we do our annual kick-off sales meeting at the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa [in Atlantic City], it allows my colleagues the chance to socialize in a way that wouldn't be possible at just a hotel."

"When you do a sales meeting for as many as 2,000 people, you end up with the gambit of people," says Shelley Williams, director of events for Seacret Direct, which manufactures skincare products from ingredients sourced from the Dead Sea. "Some people like to relax, some people like to dance, some people want to go to the pool. Some people like to gamble. Talking Stick Resort and Casino [in Scottsdale, Arizona] gives people everything they need. Last year, when I was finished with the event for the day, my whole group was dancing in the mid-bar and having a great time — and I could watch them do that." Conference participants can feel connected without having to engage in the same activities or spend every waking moment together, she adds.

Located on Cable Beach, Baha Mar in Nassau, The Bahamas, is an oceanfront property with 1,800 rooms among three hotels: the Rosewood, the SLS and the Grand Hyatt. While the Grand

Hyatt Baha Mar features the Caribbean's largest casino — 100,000 square feet of world-class gaming, including the latest slot machines, table games and live entertainment, it has so much more to offer. Complete with beautiful ocean views, Grand Hyatt Baha Mar boasts 200,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor event space. An event held in the 82,000-square-foot Baha Mar Convention, Arts & Entertainment Center surrounds attendees with a magnificent collection of Bahamian art. Planners can choose from one of three nautical-inspired ballrooms — the 29,600-square-foot Grand Ballroom, the 19,610-square-foot Andros Ballroom and the 15,725-square-foot New Providence Ballroom, as well as a 2,000-seat entertainment venue, 16 breakout meeting rooms or lush outdoor spaces

to accommodate groups of any size. And, located throughout Baha Mar are facilities and amenities that guests of all the hotels can access, including a golf course, kids club, racquet club, a luxurious spa, art gallery, more than 20 restaurants and bars. And, a trip to The Bahamas wouldn't be complete without soaking up the sun by any of the six onsite pools or on the miles of beautiful beaches. After a day of meetings, attendees can stroll through the nearby open-air Straw Market, where local craftsmen sell handwoven items, island souvenirs and other charming goods.

### Bang For Your Buck

Another benefit to gaming resorts is that they can be quite affordable. "No matter what type of event you are hosting, when you come to Las Vegas



Many resorts in Atlantic City, such as the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, have plenty of places to mingle with other attendees after putting in a day's worth of meeting sessions.

Credit: Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa





"Gaming resorts can be a great place for meetings because they offer attendees a chance to do something fun and different after a long day of meetings. ... It allows my colleagues the chance to socialize in a way that wouldn't be possible at just a hotel."

**Abby Kahn**, Vice President, Global Events, Numerix

as a destination, the opportunities you have at the value and price points you have are unbelievable," says Stephanie Glanzer, CMP, vice president of sales at the Delano Las Vegas. The large resorts do brisk business with leisure travelers on the weekends, but they need ways to keep their properties full during the week. Offering great deals on hotel rooms and meeting spaces allows them to stay busy all seven days of the week.

Because gaming resorts have so many amenities, planners can also create experiences for their groups without the cost of transportation or outside experience companies. Mandalay Bay hosts Cirque du Soleil troupes in its performance space, and convention staff can arrange for small groups to have meet-and-greets with cast members before attending shows. "It gives them that exclusive, 'in-the-know' feel," says Glanzer.

"We've been doing a lot of dine-around functions where it's not the entire group going to one restaurant, but kind of a pub crawl where you go from restaurant to restaurant within the resort," she adds. That's possible within large resorts because there are so many different eating establishments.

Gaming resorts will often allow

planners to do full restaurant buy-outs so they can host dinners or special events. Williams is using that to her advantage for her upcoming event. She's planning a special dinner called "Light Up Your Life" that will be available only to the company's



Located on Cable Beach in Nassau, The Bahamas, Grand Hyatt Baha Mar features the Caribbean's largest casino with world-class gaming, live entertainment and much more.

top-performing salespeople. It will be held in Talking Stick's Orange Sky Restaurant, so named for its stunning views of the desert sunset. The meal will take place at sundown and be lit entirely by candlelight, giving

the room its own glow as participants watch the sun sink toward the horizon.

"Harrah's has a Viking Cooking School, which is a fun experience where you and your colleagues can get together and do this cooking experience," says van der Molen. "It's

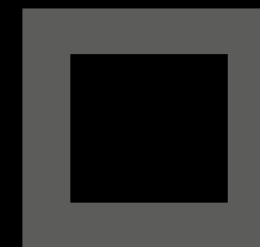
two to three hours, and you cook with a chef and prepare your own meal. They teach cutting techniques, you make your own marinades, then as a group, you eat the meal that you prepared yourselves. Those are the types of things you wouldn't see at other properties. You would have to venture out into the city to find those things."

The grand size of many resorts' spaces also allows them to do some fun things. "We had a group last week that was in our foyer space, and they actually built out a tiny beach with hammocks so that in between meetings, exhibits and general sessions, people could sit in these

"Some people like to relax, some people like to dance, some people want to go to the pool. Some people like to gamble. Talking Stick Resort and Casino [in Scottsdale, Arizona] gives people everything they need."

**Shelley Williams**, Director of Events, Seacret Direct, Scottsdale, AZ

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**"No matter what type of event you are hosting, when you come to Las Vegas as a destination, the opportunities you have at the value and price points you have are unbelievable."**

**Stephanie Glanzer, CMP**, Vice President Sales, Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino/Delano Las Vegas

Planners can create unique experiences for their groups without added costs at the Delano and Mandalay Bay resorts in Las Vegas.

hammocks and put their feet in the sand," says Glanzer.

She encourages planners to lean on their convention services manager for advice about the best ways to utilize the property. "We see everything that happens every day," she points out. "Take advantage of the knowledge and experience your hotel contacts have. They know the layout of the space and what works and what people like to do."

### Size Matters

In addition to their physical size, gaming resorts often have some oversized amenities that you wouldn't find at a more conventional property. The Pool at Harrah's Resort is one of the largest covered pools on the East Coast and is set under a giant dome. "During



Credit: Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino

the day, it's a nice, balmy 80 degrees," says van der Molen. "At night, we bring the temperature down to about 70

degrees and do group receptions or meals there. Around 10 p.m. on certain nights of the week, it turns into a night club environment. It's rated one of the top 20 nightclubs in the U.S."

Groups that want to use the space for private parties can glam it up with floating lights in the pool, tropical décor or a sign with their company logo on the DJ booth. The pool, nightclub, fitness center and all the guest rooms in the Bayview Tower were renovated last year, making the facility very up-to-date and modern-looking. A \$56 million renovation of the guest rooms in the Harbor Tower is planned for next spring.

One of the advantages to using a family of gaming resorts like Caesars is that they often allow planners to

Talking Stick Resort and Casino in Scottsdale, Arizona, gives people everything they need — fantastic meeting spaces and many entertainment options.



Credit: Talking Stick Resort and Casino

utilize all their properties for events and gatherings. "Within our organization here in Atlantic City, meeting organizers and conferences have the option to take the food and beverage minimum and apply it not only at this resort, but at Bally's and Caesars," says van der Molen. "You can have your opening or closing reception somewhere else or have flexibility for where you have your meals. It's the same in Las Vegas."

Planners organizing smaller events or who like a more intimate feeling to their meetings and conventions can still have great success with gaming resorts. Not all of them are city-sized complexes with urban entertainment. "The thing I love about Talking Stick is it's not five miles to walk to the convention space," says Williams. "It's compact — not in a small way, but things are close. The rooms are beautiful, and people love to stay there."

The new ilani in Ridgefield, Washington, is located 20 miles north of Portland in a semi-rural setting. "We have access to the city, and it's convenient because we're right off the highway," says president and general manager Kara Fox-LaRose. However, because it's not in the middle of a city, "we have a beautiful landscape around us. You can see three mountains from our facility. If you're going to be here for a few days and are looking to engage in some sort of outdoor recreation or want to have a retreat built into your itinerary, we have plenty of options. We're close to the Columbia River, and there are many wineries and breweries nearby. We're close to a golf course." Attractions such as the beach and mountains are a short drive away.

### Keeping Attendees Focused

Corporate executives sometimes worry that the many amenities offered by gaming resorts will distract event participants from the things they're supposed to be doing at the event. Glanzer assures them that's not the case. "There are great statistics from the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority that [reveal] trade show

attendance is higher when groups come to Las Vegas because people want to come here," she says. Participation in meetings and other events also tends to be higher because people realize if they blow off their meetings or other obligations, they might not get to come to Las Vegas in the future.

Fox-LaRose offers a similar perspective. "Meeting planners sometimes

hesitate to have events at gaming resorts because of the gambling and perception of what that brings, or the concern that it will be a distraction and you won't retain those people in the meeting," she says. "What we've found is our meeting planners tend to see a higher level of attendance." The attraction of being in a beautiful, fun setting serves as an incentive and attracts more participants.

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**"If you're going to be here [ilani in Ridgefield, Washington] for a few days and are looking to engage in some sort of outdoor recreation or want to have a retreat built into your itinerary, we have plenty of options."**

**Kara Fox-Larose**, General Manager, ilani, Ridgefield, WA

Companies may also worry that the lure of gambling may prove too great for employees and guests to ignore. Again, Glanzer says that usually isn't true. "People don't really come to Las Vegas anymore to gamble. There are too many other amenities to take advantage of," she says.

Keep in mind, too, that the gambling part of resorts typically isn't "in your face" the way it used to be. "Our property is designed in a way that people are able to navigate around the casino floor if they're not interested and access the other amenities," says Fox-LaRose.

The best thing planners can do to make sure participants attend all of the event sessions is to build free time into the agenda so people feel like they'll have a chance to explore the city. If they know there will be opportunities to eat out, take in shows and do the things they want to do, they won't feel like they need to skip programmatic elements.

"I try to make sure that we have a lot of meetings and group activities planned so that there is not much time to get distracted," says Kahn. "After all of the meeting events are completed, attendees are welcome to enjoy the casino floor and all it has to offer. However, we have pretty strict rules that are explained by our CEO at the start of our event: 'Have as much fun as you'd like, but show up the next day ready to listen and participate.' It's up to everyone to act responsibly and know that they are representing our company while at the meeting."

While you don't want the resort to be too much of a distraction to attendees, there's no reason not to play it up when you're trying to attract people

to an event. "In your marketing materials you can say, 'You can do almost anything you want here. You can even gamble if you want to,'" says Williams.

Companies might even look at creative ways to make the gambling more fun and somewhat less risky

more and more groups are concerned about the safety of their guests, that can be a real benefit.

"There are stringent rules at gaming resorts," says Williams. "You know there are cameras everywhere. The resorts are ready for anything because



The attraction of being in a beautiful, fun setting serves as an incentive and brings more participants to meetings and events at ilani in Ridgefield, Washington.

for attendees. "We offer all attendees some casino chips as a welcome gift so they can enjoy the games without fear of losing too much of their own money," says Kahn.

#### **Safety and Security**

Williams brings up a benefit to gaming resorts that many planners may not think about.

Because there is so much money moving around, most properties have very tight security. In a time when

they're a gaming property. You know you're secure."

The other thing planners should keep in mind is that they might not have the same access to the space they're accustomed to.

"Planners often think they can just wander around the back hallways," says Williams. "But you have to have the right passes to go many places within the building. Make sure you have the right credentials from your convention services manager." **C&IT**

Credit: ilani

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# Planning With Purpose

## Designing Education Sessions is a Thoughtful, Deliberate and Scientific Process

By Christine Loomis

**T**he when, where, why and how of education sessions has changed, and innovation keeps coming. Much of the current philosophy related to delivering content has evolved not from education theory but from the world of design, particularly “design thinking,” popularized by David Kelly, founder of IDEO and Stanford’s design school. A primary tenet of design thinking is putting the user at the center of the experience.

We asked six experts for their take on trends, innovations and successes in content delivery. Their insights provide a blueprint for designing education sessions that engage attendees and deliver on stakeholder goals.

To start, prioritizing goals and objectives and understanding audience demographics and needs is critical. You can’t design a session without first answering important questions.

### The Questions

Carol Norfleet, MBA, CMP, DMCP, strategic account manager with PRA Nashville, says there are four questions she always asks:

- What is the goal of the meeting; why are we having it?
- What do we want participants

to do differently when they leave the meeting?

- What are the participants’ demographics, and how do different groups learn?
- Where are we? The physical space (city, venue, meeting room) can

**“Know your audience in advance, understand the demographic and tailor the session to that audience.”**

**Michael Costa**  
General Manager  
PRA New York  
New York, NY

help support learning or it can be a hurdle to get past.

Norfleet says even the term “attendee” is no longer viable and that, too, impacts education sessions. “We have participants today — not attendees. People coming to our meetings and events want to be part of the education experience, not passive listeners. You have to involve them, and you have to customize the experience for each one. Personalization in learning is becoming more mainstream.”

Lisa Meller, CMP, CED, CIS, managing director of Meller Performance Events Group in Irvine, California, uses the ACE acronym to put a plan in place: Audience, Context, Engagement. In terms of context, she says, planners must ask, “How does this event relate

to other important elements in stakeholders’ lives, personally and professionally? Does it make sense? What do attendees and stakeholders at all levels need to accomplish as a result of this meeting? Then design around how you can deliver it,” she says.

Sarah Michel, Velvet Chainsaw’s vice president, professional connexity, in Fort Collins, Colorado, says planners must answer not just the big-picture questions but also those related to details, including, “What do you want your participants/attendees to be doing during the session?”

Karen Kotowski, CMP, CAE, chief executive officer of the Events Industry Council, also notes planners must understand how session design can facilitate participant sharing and interaction. “Adult learners have as much to

### The Trends

Education delivery isn’t static; it’s impacted by evolving trends and perceptions.

Overscheduling as a negative was noted by several experts. “People are paying more attention to the neuroscience of learning and utilizing techniques that help people retain information and be more participatory in their learning,” Sanders says. “Many MPI Academy professional certificate courses are now structured so information is ‘chunked’ and surrounded by breaks for interaction to incorporate group work and give participants time for reflection. Those techniques reinforce learning and memory.”

Michel says the brain actually shuts down when it can’t process anymore, which makes “chunking” content and

**“We had a room set so people rotated to different activity stations to ... experiment, discuss and play with different concepts.... You could feel the energy in the room, and the ratings for a couple of those sessions were among the highest we got that year.”**



**Kristi Casey Sanders, CMP, CMM, DES, HMCC**, Director of Community MPI, Santee Nacoochee, GA

share as they have to learn. Provide an opportunity for them to be part of the education process,” she says.

Michael Costa, general manager of PRA New York, references many of the same questions and adds another: How many participants is the right number? Planners, he says, “must keep the number manageable to create an environment that encourages active participation.”

And of course, planners must also ask themselves how they can create what they need within certain parameters. Kristi Casey Sanders, CMP, CMM, DES, HMCC, director of community for MPI, puts budget and other restrictions and limitations among the top four considerations for creating education sessions.

allowing time for reflection and connection imperative. “When we schedule people all day with only 10-minute breaks and no time for reflection, we overstimulate the brain, and it will shut down. That’s why many afternoon sessions are empty.”

Kotowski likes to ensure “hang time” for participants. “So many programs are overscheduled in order to fill in as much content as possible in the short time available. Adults need to process what they’ve learned and make sense of it so they can apply it to their daily lives. This happens most effectively when you allow time in the schedule for participants to recharge and connect.”

Norfleet agrees. “I’m a big proponent of programmed ‘white space,’”

she says. “We required our participants to walk out of one session right into another and then another without giving them time to process and absorb what they heard and experienced just 15 minutes before. We think if we’re not filling every minute with education that time is being wasted — and this expectation comes from the event owner down. What’s missed is that if there were time to reflect and review ‘a-ha’ moments with fellow participants, information retention would be greater, thereby causing a stronger ROI in the end.”

Another trend Norfleet sees is the “death” of the talking head. “It’s a whole new day for presenters. Anyone relying solely on a PowerPoint deck is missing their own opportunity to grow. Presenters, and especially lecturers, are having to step up their game as educators,” she says. “Educating through edu-tainment (education + entertainment) is trending. I saw Vinh Giang at PCMA in January and was so taken with his use of magic as his metaphor. His session was engaging and educational.”

“Also, I’m a big fan of storytelling as a way to expound information,” Norfleet continues. “If I hear a relatable story, I am more likely to connect with the message and remember what was said rather than reading a slide of words or hearing a list of facts recited. Weave me a story and I will connect.”

Meller points to crowd sourcing, among other things. “More and more, we’re seeing crowd-sourced content incorporated into meetings; whereby, the audience’s sources of knowledge and experience shape and influence conversations with the speakers. Lecture-style, passive content delivery is growing more abbreviated and concise to allow time for attendees to digest the material, actively engage in meaningful conversation and apply it to their lives,” she says. “Room formats are also changing to allow for more dynamic movement (around)



"People coming to our meetings and events want to be part of the education experience, not passive listeners. ...Personalization in learning is becoming more mainstream."



**Carol Norfleet, MBA, CMP, DMCP, Strategic Account Manager PRA Nashville, Nashville, TN**

the room during a session, and time is divided into smaller chunks that allow for diversity in how it is spent during a session or a day."

She says there are a multitude of ways to facilitate crowd-sourced content into meetings, meaning that education isn't relegated just to education sessions.

"At MPI's South Coast Edcon 2018," Meller says, "we designed Ted-style general assembly topics allowing for deeper dives into the subject matter in workshops that allowed attendees to exchange peer-to-peer and attendee-speaker ideas, work through personal challenges in the solution-center room and focus on actionable next steps. We changed up the format to bring non-traditional room sets into the general assembly, expo hall and workshops."

"We encouraged use of fishbowls, rotations among tables by topic,

dotmocracy voting for end-of-day topics and sponsor-moderated educational discussions as 'watercooler chats' in the marketplace," she adds.

Crowd knowledge and experience, Michel notes, impact the role of speakers, as well as the design of learning spaces.

"With the information age we live in, the speaker is no longer the smartest person in the room. The collective wisdom of the room is much stronger than one voice. The speaker role is shifting to facilitator, guide and 'sense-maker.' We're designing 'participant-centric' learning spaces where the focus is on the learner/participant instead of the expert/speaker," she says.

Costa notices increased visuals in presentations. "I see more video-based presentations, using real-life and current events as examples of points presenters are trying to convey. It all boils

down to creating a presentation that attendees can relate to," he says.

Even if content comprises statistical information, such as financial metrics, he adds, "It should be presented in a clear, concise manner with emphasis on visuals. Visuals are an important tool to avoid losing participants' interest. No one wants to sit in front of a series of slides full of words that the session leader is reading to them."

## AI & Other Trending Technology

The future is here — and still coming. Technology greatly impacts the meeting space, and its impact on education will only increase. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is just one example.

"AI allows us to move far out of the physical environment and into places we couldn't otherwise experience," Meller notes. "We can stretch our reach considerably into other realms, other worlds, in a way we could previously only imagine."

"Now we gain perspective, too, from others of different cultures around the globe and even in fantasy worlds like never before. The use of AI can help us discover more about ourselves in a roundabout way."

Sanders says use of AI is limited — for now.

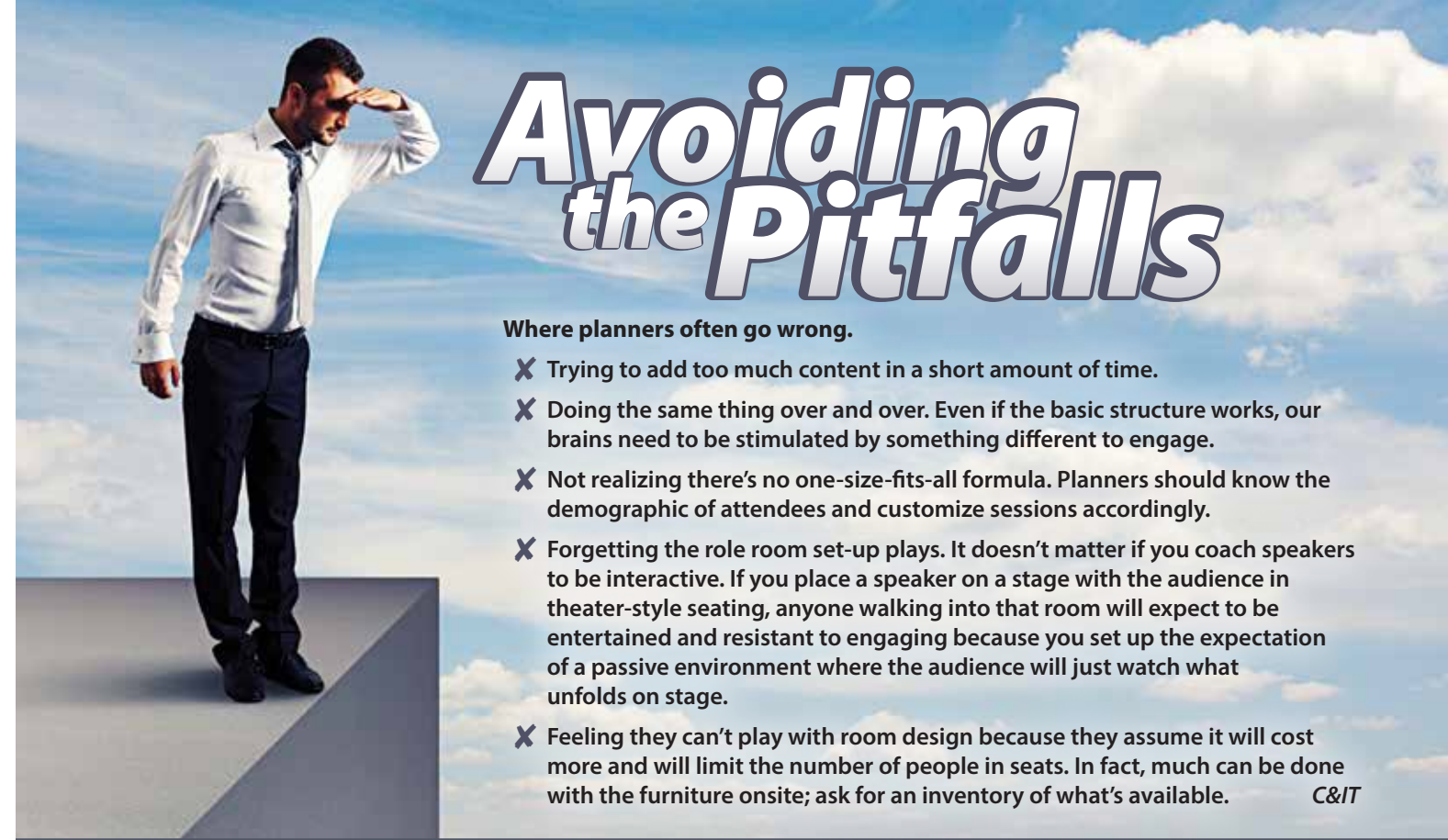
"Chatbots allow for interesting real-time interactions where people can learn things by texting back and forth with an AI-enabled bot," she says. "Interactive polls can create word clouds from audience input. You can put an AI robot in the room and let people have conversations with it. You can have people use Google Translate to communicate in different languages and some other translation services, like Stenopoly, that can provide real-time, closed-captioning in dual languages."

Keeping up with technology may be the most challenging aspect of designing successful learning environments because it changes so rapidly, and some audiences have expectations that the latest technology will be in use.



The use of smartphone videos is a new way to incorporate edu-tainment (education + entertainment) as a learning tool.

Credit: Carol Norfleet



## Where planners often go wrong.

- ✗ Trying to add too much content in a short amount of time.
- ✗ Doing the same thing over and over. Even if the basic structure works, our brains need to be stimulated by something different to engage.
- ✗ Not realizing there's no one-size-fits-all formula. Planners should know the demographic of attendees and customize sessions accordingly.
- ✗ Forgetting the role room set-up plays. It doesn't matter if you coach speakers to be interactive. If you place a speaker on a stage with the audience in theater-style seating, anyone walking into that room will expect to be entertained and resistant to engaging because you set up the expectation of a passive environment where the audience will just watch what unfolds on stage.
- ✗ Feeling they can't play with room design because they assume it will cost more and will limit the number of people in seats. In fact, much can be done with the furniture onsite; ask for an inventory of what's available. **C&IT**

## Interactivity

Interactivity remains a meeting focus, but how much is the right amount and can you have too much?

That depends on the content and makeup of the audience, Meller says. "If we're talking about interacting with other people as the question, yes, there could be too much for very introverted people or people who don't feel safe sharing ideas or in interpersonal situations. We need for people to feel safe, secure and open."

Interactivity isn't just people-to-people, she points out. "Interactivity with animals, with equipment, with technology, with food in the kitchen or with arts and crafts materials are other ways to incorporate 'interactivity' for a hands-on experience."

It's often about options. "If a presenter doesn't give people permission to opt out of what isn't comfortable or tries to get everyone to participate, the interaction become too much for some," Sanders says. "Depending on the topic, the audience may want a sage on the stage dispensing pearls of wisdom, and if they don't get it, they

might feel cheated. But there's a lot of room between a lecture format and something that's 100 percent group work to crowd source solutions. Know what your audience needs and that will help you program what's appropriate."

Kotowski says participants still want to hear from experts. "That's why they're coming to the event," she says. "However, they don't want to be lectured at. Designing sessions where an expert shares some content followed by an interactive segment can highlight the expertise of the speaker and allow adult learners to fully engage."

But interactivity must have a purpose. "Breaking up a lecture with an activity should be part of getting the educational message across, not just something to take up time," Norfleet says. "I present a session on ADA accommodations. Rather than lecture about what needs to be in a venue for ADA compliance, I take participants on a field trip around the venue, having each one take turns

on crutches and in a wheelchair. That activity resonates much more with them than if I just talked about it. The activity is critical. Is taking five minutes to discuss ADA with your neighbor useful? Maybe not."

## Seating

Seating set-up is the element demanding out-of-the-box thinking.

"Space matters," Michel says. "We like to say, 'The way you set/design a room is the body language of your meeting.' If you want participants to



"AI allows us to move far out of the physical environment and into places we couldn't otherwise experience."

**Lisa Meller, CMP, CED, CIS**  
Managing Director  
Meller Performance Events Group  
Irvine, CA



**“We like to say, ‘The way you set/design a room is the body language of your meeting.’ If you want participants to collaborate and innovate, you need to design the room for that.”**



**Sarah Michel**, Vice President, Professional Connectivity  
Velvet Chainsaw, Fort Collins, CO

collaborate and innovate, you need to design the room for that. You might need lightweight furniture that’s easily moved around the room or multiple types of seating and tables. We need to allow collaborative participants to transform the space themselves, moving things around. We need to allow them to create what they need for the experience that they’re having at the moment. Collaboration and innovation need we spaces, not I spaces.”

Norfleet believes, “Getting off of the traditional ballroom/meeting room chair can add energy and adventure to an event. When participants see the room set in a different way, they know the educational experience is going to be different. We’ve used yoga balls, hay bales and quilts on the ground. Soft seating in living room arrangements continues to be popular, adding a sense of coziness often missing in business meetings. Yes, this is business but we’re people first, and when we connect on a human level, we’re more open to learning.

“If you have to use banquet seats in rows,” she says, “at least angle the rows in a chevron so participants are looking straight onto the stage area rather than turning their head all day. It’s the little things that count.”

Meller likes mixed seating. “Pods for theater seating, others as couches and chairs, and interesting groupings or combinations of high communal tables, hi-boys and cocktail rounds can be fun. We set the room to give attendees options for what they like in order for them to learn and comfortably attend,” she says. “I’m a kinetic

learner, for example, and I’d rather stand and move than be seat-belted into a theater-style chair. I’d gravitate toward high-top tables perhaps in the perimeters of the room that allow me to do it my way. Additionally, setting stages in the center of the room with AV all around so every vantage point offers visibility and nearly equal views resonates with many groups. It’s not generally expected and is exciting.”

Sanders references a successful environment at WEC 2017. “We had a room where the Velvet Chainsaw team curated deep-dive sessions to help learners think differently about how they encourage attendees to connect, learn and play at their events. The room was set so people rotated to different activity stations to fill out worksheets, experiment, discuss and play with different concepts. Much of the learning was self-directed through these action stations. You could feel the energy in the room, and the ratings for a couple of those sessions were among the highest we got that year,” she says.

Non-linear set-up works for Costa. “Circular/oval arrangements seem to work well as these enable everyone to have eye contact without straining to do so. They also put everyone at par with each other — no one is at the ‘head of the table,’” he says.

As for the old-school classroom set-up, there’s still a place for that, too, but in limited situations, such as presenting “one-way” information to beginners or presenting highly technical information, abstracts or briefings.

As Meller notes, “I think there’s also

a place for paper and pen. We just can’t rely on this as the sole factor in an environment, but it can be a grounding point for more dynamic interaction.”

### Best Practices

How can planners create the best education sessions?

For Sanders, it’s about nailing down basics. “Know who you’re serving, how you want them to feel and what you want them to do. Then look for educators who can collaborate with you on designing the optimal learning environment,” she says.

Costa emphasizes the audience. “Know your audience in advance, understand the demographic and tailor the session to that audience,” he says. “If the demographic varies significantly, find those common denominators and capitalize on them.”

Kotowski encourages planners to envision how they want participants to feel after the event. “Let your imagination run wild then back into the ways you can work to create that atmosphere. Listen to all ideas and stay connected to your education or content team,” she says.

Meller suggests planners get out there to see other programs and session formats in person in order to have an arsenal of ideas they know first-hand work or don’t. “Think about your attendees and who they are as people. Ask them what they want and need and put yourself in their shoes,” she says. “Life is fun. So are events. Think of how you can make your attendees happy on the inside as a vehicle for learning, and the results will come.”

And it comes full circle. “Go back to asking, ‘Why?’” Norfleet advises. “Why are we having this educational opportunity? Why do people want to come? Why are we setting the room the way it has always been set? Most of all,” she says, “Be brave! Be brave to try something new ... a presenter, a room set, a meeting format. They all may not be successful but at least you tried — and I think more times than not it will be a success. Just trying something new is a win.”

**C&IT**



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Credit: Angie Proctor

# Incorporating Health & Wellness

Planners Have Countless Ways to Bring Lifestyle Into Meetings

By Christine Loomis

**T**he idea of incorporating elements of health and wellness into meetings is no longer out of the box or trendy. It's what's expected, just as it is in the everyday world.

That, of course, is good news, because the days of sitting for hours in windowless meeting rooms and breaks devoted primarily to the intake of caffeine and sugar were not good for us — and, ultimately, not optimal for productive learning, creative brainstorming or teambuilding, either.

Yet that doesn't mean planners have to reinvent the meeting wheel. There are endless ways of bringing elements of health and wellness into a meeting — via food choices, break options, connection to nearby health and wellness venues, meeting structure and setting. Hotels often already have necessary elements in place, especially with today's chefs well-attuned to dietary health and wellness spaces and/or instructors already onsite in the form of spas, fitness staff and robust activity rosters.

The makeup of a particular group often drives the decision as to what works and what doesn't when it comes to adding health and wellness to a meeting.

Matt Marvel, director of business development and marketing at Jordan & Skala Engineers and co-founder of Georgia Built and BUILT National, typically incorporates wellness into his meetings, as he has for an upcoming event at Sea Island Resort in Georgia.

"We make sure all events and meetings allow time for wellness," he says,

"including workouts, downtime and group activities. As for food, all of our meals and menus have turned healthy and, we hope, smart — lots of lean proteins, vegetables and salads. We're staying away from anything fried, heavy starches and junk food in general. Time is also key. We make sure not to eat dinner too late; before 7 p.m. is our preference."

About Sea Island, he says, "I can't think of many places in the United States that offer the variety of wellness activities that Sea Island does, along with the setting it's in and the beauty of what has been created there. It's something special. To have the opportunity to have your event there and do the activities that you would like is so nice. Sea Island is helping us create Beach Olympics one afternoon and also our own specialized Sea Island Spring, the resort's version of the 'Amazing Race.' We're bringing in multiple fitness

**"By focusing a specified amount of time daily to ... health awareness, we're creating an environment of encouragement and positive mental energy. Caring about attendees encourages them to care for themselves."**

**Kristin Hems, CMP, COO**  
Third Avenue Events  
Leawood, KS



**"Wellness is here to stay. I think it's essential to keep everyone engaged and energized and feeling their best. Active and healthy and balanced — work less, play more and live longer! It's not a bad plan."**

**Matt Marvel**, Director of Business Development and Marketing  
Jordan & Skala Engineers  
Athens, GA

instructors to help with morning classes; we'll have yoga each day, daily group runs, biking and more."

Marvel's group will use many of the resort's activities and facilities, including the beach and beach club, spa and workout areas, tennis, golf, biking and kayaking. "We have met with members of each team, and they're helping plan events where the schedule allows," he says.

Although adding wellness foods and activities may impact the budget, Marvel calls it "minimal at best." He says there's no question that attendees want healthier options.

"We just finished an event where we offered cups of celery and carrots with hummus during a break, and our attendees went crazy. Everyone is still going to want that cookie from time to time," he adds, "but healthier options are being asked for and preferred, such as nuts, veggies and hummus, fruit, etc. Plus, I don't think it's the cookie we're super worried about. It's the processed junk food and heavy starches that need to go — chips and fries, for sure."

While Sea Island raises the bar on health and wellness for groups, Marvel says many hotels should consider improvements.

"Mini bars need to be redone with better options. And most hotels are super far behind with workout rooms, what those rooms offer and where they're located," he says. "Hotels should make them more prominent, make them bigger and bring in more natural

lighting. I travel every week, and there are hotels I truly love but struggle booking my stay there because the workout facilities are so bad or so small and limited. Basement areas with no windows are the worst. In-room workout options would be nice. If guests could order kits from the front desk and have them delivered to their room, or just have some things in the closet, that would be great."

In the end, Marvel says, "Wellness is here to stay. I think it's essential to keep everyone engaged and energized and feeling their best. Active and healthy and balanced — work less, play more and live longer! It's not a bad plan."

## Managing Stress

Kristin Hems, CMP, and Annie Rector,



Sea Island Resort in Georgia offers a gym with state-of-the-art equipment for groups who want to workout in their downtime.

Credit: Sea Island Resort



## Ramp Up Wellness

Depending on their budget and the needs of their attendees, planners have multiple ways in which they can ramp up wellness — a little or a lot.

- » Challenge chefs and catering staff to create healthy, brain-friendly, energy-producing dishes and snacks that are delicious and fit your budget. Then have chefs engage with attendees to talk about their creations and nutrition, perhaps offering a cooking demo or lesson.
- » Offer mindfulness exercises or meditation during the meeting. Providing these at the start can help set the tone for a productive meeting. When offered mid-day or at the end of the day, these activities can help attendees clear their minds and refocus before afternoon sessions or provide a satisfying conclusion to a day of hard work.
- » If hotel facilities are limited, create a workout “need to know” sheet for the surrounding area, giving attendees info about nearby options for yoga, Pilates and fitness studios, as well as walking and biking routes and bike rentals or urban share programs.
- » If weather permits, set a couple of sessions outside, giving attendees an added boost of vitamin D. In tropical areas, remind participants to use sunscreen or provide individual packets of sunscreen at seats.
- » Arrange for hotel fitness or spa staff to offer spa breaks during the meeting — chair massages, hand/foot massages, yoga, stretches, etc. For early morning, have fitness pros provide mini boot camps.
- » Find health and wellness partners in the community to speak at your meeting, especially those who can provide motivation or inspiration for attendees. Rather than a static format, have the experts talk while leading a morning run or a wellness Q&A during breaks.
- » Consider having health experts set up blood-pressure stations. Let attendees check their blood pressure at different times of the day, noting what they were doing just prior. Have experts offer tips on deep breathing and calming exercises, then test attendee blood pressure again to see if that makes a difference. Offer attendees small notebooks to record their blood pressure info.
- » Make access to a hotel fitness room or club part of your attendee package so they can use exercise facilities any time they’re able to work them into their meeting schedule.
- » Be mindful of your meeting destination environment. If you’re in high altitude, provide plenty of water throughout the meeting, and include a tip sheet in the registration info on how best to acclimate to high altitude. If you’re in a tropical climate, remind attendees to use sunscreen and let them know the nearest place to buy it if they forgot their own.
- » If your receptions include an open bar, consider a limit in terms of the time it’s available or the number of drinks that are free.
- » Toward the end of the conference, give attendees tip sheets showing five exercises that can be done in an airplane seat and other tips for staying healthy on long flights.

C&IT

CMP, the COO and CEO, respectively, of Kansas-based Third Avenue Events, brought a Mazda National Lifestyle Program to California’s Rancho Valencia, where wellness figured prominently in the event.

“Providing an opportunity for attendees to be able to completely unplug and tune in to their own body and mental needs allows them to fully engage during particularly challenging or stressful parts of an event. By focusing a specified amount of time daily to wellness or health awareness, we’re creating an environment of encouragement and positive mental energy. Caring about attendees encourages them to care for themselves,” Hems says.

“Depending on the schedule and group goals,” she continues, “we try to encourage clients to set aside at least an hour daily for attendees to focus their energies on themselves or an exercise activity to help reduce stress and combat mental fatigue.”

The team at Rancho Valencia was very receptive to Rector and Hems’ requests to add both meditation and yoga sessions to each group of hosted attendees. “We worked closely with the spa team to select instructors and shape sessions to benefit and complement the rest of the program,” Hems says.

Food is an area of focus, as well. “We take dietary considerations very seriously and try to provide balanced and health-conscious menus,” Rector says, noting that snack foods are often driven by the client’s own preferences. “If healthy options are important to a client or their event, we make it a priority to be selective in offerings during breaks. One thing we have found that works nicely is to not offer dessert with both lunch and dinner, but to offer a dessert option as the afternoon break.”

Hems believes a significant number of attendees take advantage of healthy options when offered, including morning yoga and other programs. “It truly depends on the group and the demographic of the attendee,” she says, “but we’ve seen as much as 50 percent participation in scheduled wellness and health activities.”

**“The more opportunities we, as planners, can offer attendees to achieve health and wellness goals while in a new and often stressful environment, the more appreciatively attendees seem to respond.”**

**Annie Rector, CMP, CEO**  
Third Avenue Events  
Leawood, KS



While the planners know added activities can impact budget regardless of whether part of a health or wellness angle, Rector says, “we think it’s important to consider all aspects of the event during the planning phase and build a budget that meets the financial goals and overall objectives of the event.”

And they believe, too, that wellness has become part of the core culture of the country.

“The larger population and the working generation now are putting a greater focus on health and wellness overall,” Rector says. “The more opportunities we, as planners, can offer attendees to achieve health and wellness goals while in a new and often stressful environment, the more appreciatively attendees seem to respond. With increased focus from both sides — planners and attendees — this could be a piece of meetings that stays around for quite a while.”

### Run With It

Corinne McCanse Schmidt, president, Corinne McCanse Events, Inc., also believes incorporating wellness into a meeting is beneficial to attendees and stakeholders and that including wellness in meetings and events is more than a passing trend.

“I think it is here to stay,” she says.

In terms of how she builds wellness into her meetings, Schmidt says she most typically focuses on offering healthy food choices.

“But there’s one meeting,” she says,

“where we offer a morning run. Last year, the Westin Copley Place coordinated a morning run for our leadership exchange participants. The group met the hotel’s running concierges in the lobby at 6 a.m. We have about 35 people, and there were five running guides to lead them on a wonderful route of about three miles through Boston. We also had a group of walkers that did about a mile.”

After the Boston Fun Run, Schmidt says, the same group asked to do it again the following year. “The hotel we used didn’t offer running support, but we had two of our staff, who are avid runners, lead the group on a very informal morning run. We will probably continue to do so annually.”

Schmidt says she hasn’t seen much of an impact on her budget when incorporating wellness elements, though The Westin Copley Place offered its run as a complimentary service. Still, she says, “I haven’t seen a big difference in the food and beverage budget.”

Schmidt’s attendees have specifically told her they appreciate the inclusion of healthy options; however, she does think attendees really want healthier break foods or just believe they should want them? Schmidt says, “I think it’s 50/50.”

Yet when hotels offer morning yoga and other healthy activities as an option for meetings, Schmidt believes her attendees do attend these sessions.

In terms of break foods, she says, “I usually order a combination of whole

fruit, some kind of protein bar or raw bar, nuts and cookies.”

Tasha Miller, lead planner and partner at Meant2B Events, speaks to the beneficial aspects of meetings with a wellness component.

“Incorporating wellness and health into a meeting or event is beneficial to keep attendees alert and engaged,” she says. “Keeping one’s mind, body and soul nourished will help keep one’s attention longer; by investing into attendees, they will invest more into you and the meeting.”

Miller, who has brought multiple events to the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa in Scottsdale, Arizona, says that one thing she’s changed about her meetings is that now she has attendees, “take a moment to write down everything that is on their brain, then have them see what is adding unnecessary stress and how can they eliminate it.”

She says it’s important to give attendees time during meetings to talk and use the restroom, and to provide

**“We had two of our staff, who are avid runners, lead the group on a very informal morning run. We will probably continue to do so annually.”**

**Corinne McCanse Schmidt**  
President  
Corinne McCanse Events, Inc.  
Vancouver, WA





**“Keeping one’s mind, body and soul nourished will help keep one’s attention longer; by investing into attendees, they will invest more into you and the meeting.”**

**Tasha Miller**, Lead Planner and Partner  
Meant2B Events  
Scottsdale, AZ



mid-meeting snacks and beverages. She also includes breakout periods of standing up and stretching because, “sitting during a long meeting can make you tense so that you start thinking how miserable and uncomfortable you are.”

And, of course, she says, “Keeping people fed and hydrated is huge. You will keep your attendees alert by providing light refreshments so they don’t become hungry or get a headache from lack of food or water.”

Miller says, “More and more groups are heading into selecting and adding environments, venues or different aspects of wellness to their meetings.”

And though certain additions, including food and beverage, as well as allocating more time in the schedule for wellness activities, can increase a budget, she thinks wellness is going to continue to be more a part of meetings.

“I see attendees more often going for healthier options vs. unhealthy options unless they are not given an option,” she says. And when hotels and planners offer such activities as morning yoga or other pre-meeting activities, she believes attendees are taking advantage of them. “It’s a way to engage attendees,” she notes, “rather than just depending on speakers to engage them.”

### Mind and Body Balance

Innisbrook, a Salamander Resort, in Palm Harbor, Florida, is another property that lends itself well to meetings with a health and wellness component. “The grounds at Innisbrook are ideal for

encompassing stress reduction and rejuvenation exercises and sessions,” says Angie Proctor, who has brought a group of aquatic exercise experts there for meetings.

As someone involved in the exercise industry, Proctor believes that adding wellness to any meeting can be highly beneficial. “It provides a great stress reduction in the learning or meeting day and allows for an escape to recharge the brain and energy systems,” she says.

For her group, the day typically begins and ends with specific types of health and wellness activities. “Even though our events are physical in nature, we have found it beneficial to begin each day with a wake-up session of indoor- and outdoor-type movement, and (end the day) with yoga or classes to balance both the mind and body,” she says.



Fitness classes engage attendees by providing stress reduction plus a mind and body balance.

Like others, Proctor says that when morning yoga or other types of healthy activities are offered as part of a meeting, not every attendee will participate. “Not the entire delegation,” she says, “but a healthy percentage of them.”

Proctor notes that post-conference survey and feedback responses have indicated that most of her attendees do “appreciate the breaks and/or wind-up and wind-down sessions in the schedule,” and she doesn’t believe that there has been a negative impact on the budget.

“It’s an added benefit for everyone,” she says.

But when all is said and done, do attendees actually want healthier food options or, on some level, prefer the more traditional cookies and other sugary snacks? Proctor says definitively, “They want them.”

Like many other things, break foods are a matter of balance. “They also want something satisfying,” she says. “They are putting out a lot of energy on any given topic of the meeting, and a little extra treat is always a good thing — especially if meals are healthy, balanced and appropriate amounts of proteins provided.”

Proctor wishes hotels would offer more quick-service spa treatments for meetings. “I would like to see more promoting of reflexology and tension-reduction massages in chairs, loungers and so on, so that attendees can get a quick fix without having to go the whole way to the spa, undress, etc. When people are at a conference venue, the time for a full spa service simply isn’t readily available,” she points out.

Incorporating health and wellness into meetings is definitely, in Proctor’s view, not a passing trend. “It’s a lifestyle,” she says. “Anyone thinking otherwise needs to pull their head out of the sand trap!”

Considering all of the health and wellness elements now in place at many meetings, it seems a given that such practices are only going to increase as time goes on and more attendees make health and wellness a core element of their daily lives. **C&IT**

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# Meeting Budgets Growing



Careful Calculating and Negotiating Can Help Planners Achieve Event Goals

By Derek Reveron

**T**hink of planning and executing meeting budgets as a numbers juggling act that starts when an event is conceived and continues until it ends. Throughout the process, planners must create budgets that satisfy stakeholders, provide memorable attendee experiences and control costs.

Planning event budgets can be challenging. Budgets come in all sizes, and methods for planning them vary. However, the more planners know about formulating, tracking and managing budgets, the more they can stretch spending.

Precisely planning budgets is especially crucial during periods of

shrinking budgets, but it's also key when they are rising as they are now.

According to Cvent's 2018 Global Planner Sourcing report, 52 percent of planners say their event budgets have increased from last year, and 71 percent said they are certain about what they can spend.

Budgets are rising as event size is

“Meeting stakeholders are sending attendees to hotel restaurants and telling them to expense a \$20 breakfast to **avoid paying** the exorbitant F&B costs.”

**Jennifer Murphy**

Director, Meetings, Incentives, Conventions & Events, Atlas Travel Meetings & Incentives, Marlborough, MA



“Clients have become **more demanding** for their planning partners and agencies to demonstrate methods that measure financial ROI.”

**Cat Butler**

Director, Operations - Project & Onsite Management, BCD Meetings & Events, Chicago, IL

increasing. According to Cvent, the number of meetings with more than 100 attendees have grown, while those with 100 attendees or less have declined. Meanwhile, price and discounts remain important to planners, and the desire to provide memorable experiences are still paramount.

A survey by Convene reports similar results. It says 42 percent of planners expect to see budgets rise in the next year, while 44 percent expect them to remain the same. Thirty percent say budgets for attendee experiences will rise. Price is the top factor driving venue selection.

### Rising Costs

Whether budgets will increase enough to keep up with rising costs is an open question, and some planners are pessimistic about the prospect.

According to Jennifer Murphy, director of meetings, incentives, conventions and events for Marlborough, Massachusetts-based Atlas Travel Meetings & Incentives, “I think budgets will never increase at the same rate as costs. I’m continually shocked to see hotel banquet menu pricing these days and wonder how the price of a continental breakfast has soared to over \$45 per person at many resorts. Meeting stakeholders are sending attendees to hotel restaurants and telling them to expense a \$20 breakfast to avoid paying the exorbitant F&B costs. It’s creating more work for organizations to manage those reports and get true meeting budget data.”

Murphy says that, for the most part, she sees budgets shrinking, particularly

in organizations that conduct mostly meetings of internal people and don’t necessarily identify true ROI benefits. Such organizations are quick to decrease budgets, or cancel a meeting entirely, without weighing the consequences, she adds.

On the other hand, Murphy does see exceptions. “We have worked with a few companies that have pulled resources from different departments to increase the budget for a meeting,” she says. “Specifically, the marketing department will sometimes cover the cost of that must-have keynote speaker, and HR might handle the room gifts to make the overall budget impact less costly to one department.”

Cat Butler, director of operations - project and onsite management for Chicago-based BCD Meetings & Events, sees a mixed bag. “In recent years, we have experienced stable budgets from some clients and fluctuations in others,” she says. “Depending on the state of a client’s industry, we have seen both growth and decline. In either case, clients have become more demanding for their planning partners and agencies to demonstrate methods that measure financial ROI. We need to clearly illustrate value for cost on all services provided.”

Other planners see budgets rising along with costs.

“It’s a fact of life, the cost of doing business rises every year,” says Carroll Reuben, CMP, CMM, of Los Angeles-based Meeting Excellence, an event planning and management firm. “The rises will keep up with costs, though it’s up to planners to negotiate and work

hard to control the increases. Planners must always strive to deliver the best attendee experience.”

According to Amy Gagner, planner and account manager for Schaumburg, Illinois-based Creative Group Inc., “Clients’ budgets will need to increase to keep up with industry demand because the economy has bounced back, and meetings are in more demand than in years past. The bottom line is if you have more money, you can create a better attendee experience. There are many ways to accomplish this task, which would be determined and driven by your target audience and your client’s goals and objectives for the experience.”

### Enhanced Experiences

Butler agrees that planners fortunate enough to see real budget increases may be able to enhance attendee experiences. For example, she says, planners with more to spend can focus on programs such as premium gifting experiences, enhanced mobile apps and top-tier experiences for elite attendee audiences.

Butler cites other areas, as well. “We can also allocate more funds to registration website design and offer live chat registration,” she says. “Investments can also be made in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) components that give back to the host community. For clients prioritizing data analysis, we can increase a budget for defining data strategy, managing data and taking a deep dive into data analysis for long-term event consultation. This list is as long as the planner’s and client’s imaginations.”



“A good planner will know where the **maximum profit** lies with venues and vendors, and will know how to negotiate for benefits and services.”

**Carroll Reuben, CMP, CMM**  
Meeting Excellence, Los Angeles, CA



Successful budget planning must include some basic principles that can ensure accuracy and streamline the process. And planners must treat a budget as an investment that has to be diligently planned to correctly calculate ROI. In addition, it's crucial to start the budget planning process early and proceed strategically, using a detailed event budget history. If there is no budget history for a meeting, create one.

Experienced planners offer the following tips on budget planning.

Butler suggests, “Start by assessing the client’s event goals. To motivate? Celebrate? Reward? Have a clear understanding of the brand and image so you can recommend the best solutions for their event design, technology and communication strategies. Recommend the best destinations with the right products and services (including airlift) and ensure it all fits inside their budget.”

Greg Jenkins, partner at Long Beach, California-based Bravo Productions, an event planning company, offers an example of goal-focused budgeting.

“If your goal is increasing sales by inviting key potential customers, there should be an allocation for making a great first impression, whether through creative presentation of food or selection of the most appropriate venue that attracts guests,” he says. “Adequate dollars also will be needed on the back end to follow up with customers post-event. View the big picture, and put money into the function that has the most impact and will help you achieve your goals.”

#### **Estimate Every Cost**

List budget categories and line items, then research the costs for each item and come up with estimates.

According to Butler, “Work through the budget logically and bucket items such as air, guest rooms, program agenda, etc. From there, you can map your needs more specifically, considering ground transportation, F&B, activities, meeting rooms, production, apps, site inspection, printed materials, etc. Don’t let budget constraints hinder creativity. Sometimes the most challenging

budgets can bring out the most creativity in a team, forcing it to be resourceful and think outside of the box.”

Write a description for every budget item to know exactly what it funds in case cuts must be made later. Be detailed. For example, a line item for a gift bag should include a description, count and price of each item.

When it comes to venue selection and pricing, don’t put too much weight on recommendations from other planners. According to the Cvent survey, peer recommendations are the top influence on venue sourcing decisions.

Allocate funds to areas that provide the most value for event goals, attendees and stakeholders.

Make every dollar count, says Jenkins. “Some planners make the mistake of spending lots of money on what I call ‘trinkets and trash’ that many guests will not appreciate, throw away or pass on to someone else. Plastic mugs, key rings and pens cost money (and don’t appreciably enhance the experience), and those dollars might better be utilized for

food service or an event element that will be much more memorable,” he adds.

Include fixed ancillary expenses items, such as service charges, resort fees, sales and occupancy taxes and other costs usually not included in quoted prices. According to Jackie Wood, chief experience officer for Seattle-based Sparkwood Events, “I think that the extra fees and hidden costs can derail a budget. Most planners know about resort fees, service charges and taxes, but there can be a list of additional charges that get tacked on, such as administrative fees, Wi-Fi connections, parking, room delivery, etc. It adds up in the end.”

#### **Communicate Constantly**

Keep stakeholders in the loop throughout the budgeting process. Address concerns. Offer cost-cutting

percent to budgets for emergencies. According to Murphy, “One of our best practices is to encourage our clients to include an executive discretionary fund that allows them to add spending on-site but with clear parameters on how it can be spent.”

Immediately update budgets for changes in estimates, pricing, receipts, quotes and other information as soon as possible. Maintain a real-time attendee count. Planners can incur extra costs because a surprising drop in the number of attendees can cause loss of perks and privileges based on attendance.

Murphy describes her approach on keeping the budget current. “I encourage my team to update their clients’ budgets each time a change is made so that they see how it impacts the overall budget and perhaps identify other areas

if they aren’t caught. According to Butler, “The biggest mistakes start with inaccuracies at the get-go. Pay attention to detail when reviewing contract terms and conditions. Inserting incorrect data can result in significant incorrect totals.”

Butler cites an example: “Failing to calculate taxes into the budget or inputting the net value rather than gross could impact the final budget by 20 percent depending on where the event is held. Create the budget and get a second set of eyes. Collaborating with your sourcing and planning teammates should catch these types of mistakes prior to the budget being sent to the client,” she adds.

#### **Budget-cutting Tips**

Experienced planners offer the following practices to identify savings.

“The **biggest mistake** is not keeping clients informed. Always be up front about where the budget sits as you’re planning.”

**Kelly Fuller, CMP, CIS**

Planner and Account Manager, Creative Group Inc., Schaumburg, IL



options. According to Kelly Fuller, CMP, CIS, planner and account manager, Creative Group, Inc., “The biggest mistake is not keeping clients informed. Always be up front about where the budget sits as you’re planning. Clients always appreciate being kept abreast of current numbers. It’s the best way to show your stewardship of their budget, whether it’s letting them know you are over budget, or that there are extra funds in one area that can be used in another.”

Set aside part of the budget for unexpected expenses. This is especially important for outdoor events, which are subject to weather changes. Also, even the most well-prepared budgets can drift higher and cause last-minute surprises. Some planners add 10 to 20

that may no longer be needed because of that change,” she says. “Most times, planners only worry about increasing the budget when costs go up but forget to do it when costs are removed or decreased. However, this can backfire since it could prevent new things from being added due to cost concern.”

Reuben suggests using another term for the word “budget” can encourage planners to update frequently. “The term budget is a misnomer,” she says. “We should really call it a financial projection. It is a dynamic process that starts as soon as the event is identified and continues throughout the planning and execution, and even after the event is over for final accounting.”

Errors can ruin a budget and meeting

Act as consultants for budget savings. “Make informed recommendations that help clients stay focused on the end goal, rather than on big-ticket items, such as F&B, entertainment and production,” says Butler. “Be consistently mindful of the primary event goals and objectives, as this will then help you identify areas for budget savings. For example, if well-being is a top priority, then elements associated with this objective should be least likely to be removed as they will have the biggest impact on the end goals of the event.”

Negotiate, calculate and be flexible. “A good planner will know where the maximum profit lies with venues and vendors, and will know how to negotiate for benefits and services,” says Reuben. “Ask for



“Clients’ budgets will need to increase to keep up with **industry demand** because the economy has bounced back.”

**Amy Gagner**

Account Manager and Planner, Creative Group Inc., Schaumburg, IL





“If your goal is **increasing sales** by inviting key potential customers, there should be an allocation for making a great first impression.”

**Greg Jenkins**

Partner, Bravo Productions, Long Beach, CA

discounts if certain conditions can be met like prompt payment by check or cash instead of credit card (which costs vendors 3 percent). If you pay cash, you could ask for the 3 percent as a discount. With F&B, piggy-back on the menu of another event held in the same place at the same time, allowing the chef to bulk-buy. Don't just buy off the printed menu.”

Examine the impact of cost cuts on attendee experiences. According to Murphy, “We look for value savings because sometimes reducing the cost of a service isn't always in a meeting's best interests. Ask yourself, ‘Does this reduction lead to a positive attendee experience?’ It is important to avoid having them feel the event was mediocre.”

Suppose a group wants two dinners, and the budget allows for one to be a great experience but the other to be so-so. In that case, says Murphy, “I believe in removing an entire dinner, giving the group an evening at leisure, and applying the savings to build up another evening dinner. It's better to have one ‘wow’ event than two non-stellar events.”

Consider using speakers and entertainers that live in or near the region where the meeting is held. This cuts travel costs. Contact the talent directly instead of through an agency to save on fees. Another suggestion: Book the same talent for two different events that are held in the same area within a year or two.

#### Mix Meeting Formats

“Consider changing the format of meetings so they can be shorter, and the balance of the program be held online with webcasts,” says Reuben. “The use of technology, particularly communications technology in the form of customized apps and other media, will help to contain costs.”

Don't fail to plan for greater than expected food consumption at receptions not followed by dinner. Attendees may treat the reception as the last meal of the day and drive up catering costs.

Obtain at least three quotes from each vendor, including those who have offered good prices in the past. There's

always a chance of beating the price of “go-to” vendors.

Don't use several separate online meeting management services. Instead, consider an integrated event management system that combines services because it's typically less costly and more efficient.

Consider how lower- or higher-than-expected attendance can impact the budget. For example, receiving 100 more attendees than expected in a breakout room can mean higher costs for F&B or AV.

Planners must not be lured into a false sense of security by the overall increase in meeting budgets and should continuously work to control costs because prices may rise. Economic experts cite the possibility of inflation due to the combination of a hot economy and rising interest rates.

However, diligent budget planning can help control costs in any economy. Moreover, careful budgeting can help planners achieve meeting goals and defend outlays to stakeholders. **C&IT**

“Most planners know about resort fees, service charges and taxes, but there can be a list of **additional charges** that get tacked on.”

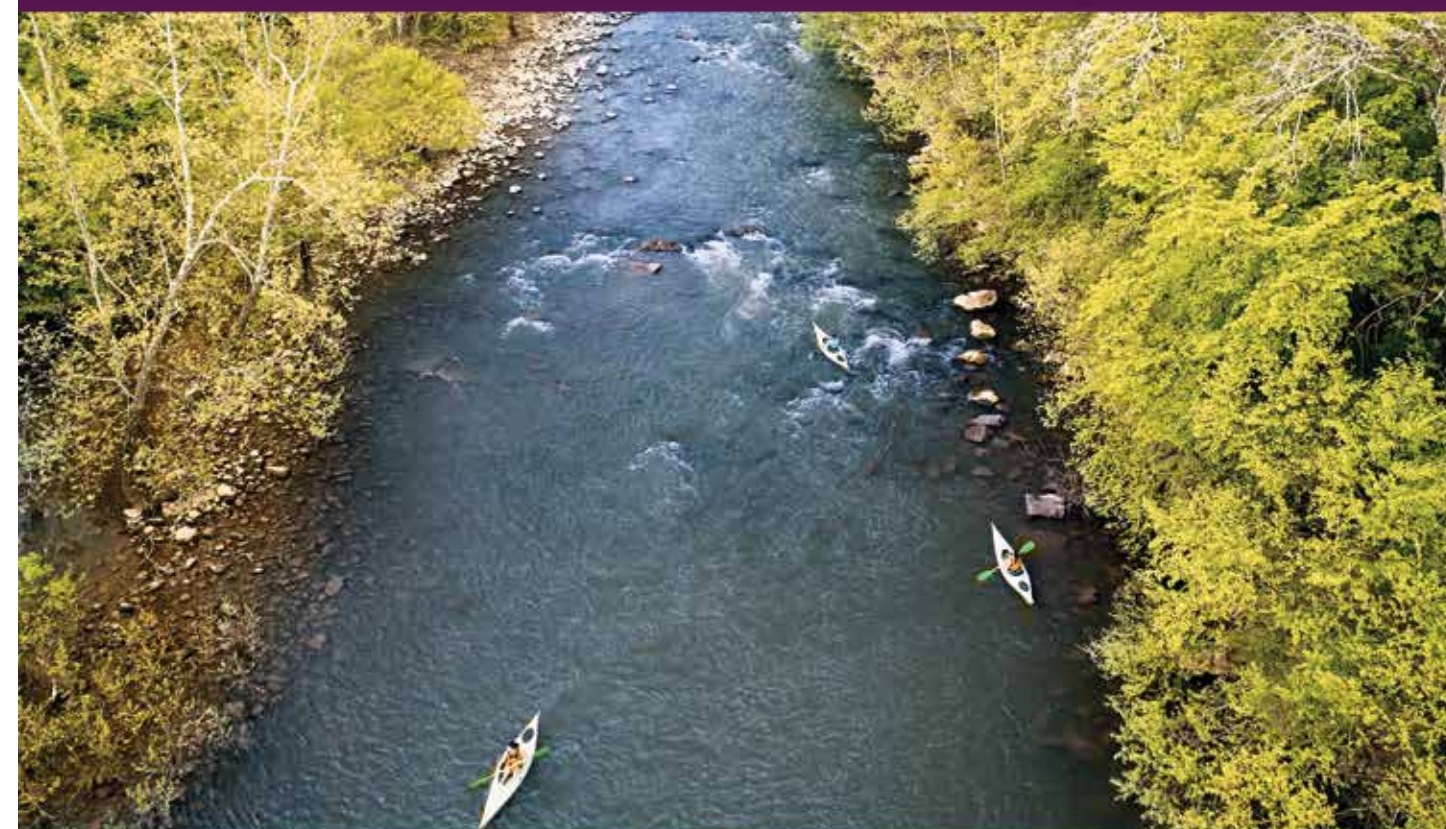
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## Destination



ASI Power Summit attendees took part in three fun-filled days of networking at Tucson's JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort & Spa.

Credit: Stephanie Turner-Scott

# Arizona: Southwest Style

## Year-round Mild Climate Encourages Attendees to Enjoy Outdoor Adventures

By David Swanson

As the chill of winter settles over most of the U.S., one state is assured to be enjoying milder months and outdoor environments at its peak: Arizona.

An enviable blend of desert and mountain settings, Mexican and Native American cultures, and iconic sights ranging from the Grand Canyon to Monument Valley, Arizona offers a surprisingly exotic backdrop for memorable meetings.

The Phoenix-Scottsdale metropolitan area, home to more than two-thirds of Arizona's population, holds the bulk of the state's meeting space, but don't overlook outlying cities for something different, especially for small and mid-sized events.

Such was the case for the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI), which normally alternates East and West Coast sites for its Power Summit.



**Tricia Walter**, MASI  
Manager of Corporate Events, Advertising Specialty Institute,  
Trevose, PA

"We wanted warm weather so we could do outside activities, and last year we received an invitation from Visit Tucson to check out several properties."

"It's a networking event and a bit of a reunion each year," says Tricia Walter, MASI, manager of corporate events for ASI. "We bring in decision-makers, the owners and presidents, and we've had multimillion-dollar deals done at the events. But we were looking for a different destination."

### Tucson

The company has been heavy on California and Florida locations, and for last October's

meeting, Walter says ASI wanted a change — a "newer, sharper, hotter destination. We wanted warm weather so we could do outside activities, and last year we received an invitation from Visit Tucson to check out several properties. It gave us a chance to check out the dining and activities like horseback riding."

ASI chose the **JW Marriott Tucson Starr Pass Resort & Spa** for the Power Summit. At 575 rooms, the resort is Tucson's largest, located in the saguaro cactus-dotted foothills overlooking the city, yet just six miles from downtown. The property has 80,768 square feet of event space, including a 19,836-square-foot ballroom, while other features include 27 holes of championship golf at the Starr Pass Golf Club and a 20,000-square-foot, full-service spa, which just completed a renovation in September.

"It's a beautiful resort," says Walter. "We've stayed at a JW before but we're not loyal to any one specific brand. We needed a hotel with enough ballroom space to build a stage for our Power Summit. It's a different stage every year with panelists and keynote speakers, but we need a minimum of 11,000 to 12,000 square feet in the ballroom, so the JW's was big enough."

"We also require dinners to be held outside if possible, weather permitting," she continues. "For our welcome night reception, we brought in a mobile escape room, so we needed the square footage — the Starr Circle and Foyer area was more than enough to accommodate this."

ASI's annual event draws 200 suppliers and distributors of promotional products. "Anything you can put a logo on — that's our people," says Walter. One piece of the resort's AV arsenal proved ideal for the Power Summit.

"They had an LED projector for a filtered gobo image, so our logo could be projected," explains Walter. "It was significant in price, but being a promotional product company our specialty is that we can brand anything. The resort said we've got this beautiful mountain to light up, so we could actually brand a mountain!"

"We've heard nothing but terrific things about the food at the JW," she adds. "The first night welcome dinner was a buffet-style barbecue, and all our people could not stop raving. The second night was our awards dinner, a plated dinner with assigned seating."

Walter says ASI likes to keep its 200 attendees close but planned two offsite activities — guests could choose between horseback riding and autobahn racing. Horseback riding was offered at Cocoraque Ranch, a 45-minute ride from the resort, while the Autobahn Indoor Speedway was 15 minutes away in Tucson.

"It was adult go-carts," explains Walter. "They went about 40 mph, and there were a few minor accidents but no injuries. They enjoyed it. We have a pretty competitive group, and they took great pride telling us about the collisions. The horseback riding was a lot of fun, but those horses had a mind of their own."

Stephanie Turner-Scott, ASI's director of corporate marketing, says there were other advantages to holding the Power Summit in Tucson.

"The cost was a little cheaper, and we probably had a little

"Once they arrived [in Tucson], and they got a chance to relax, calm down and settle in, they said, 'Wow, look at this view.'"

**Stephane Turner-Scott**, Director of  
Corporate Marketing, Advertising Specialty Institute

higher attendance from the West Coast," suggests Turner-Scott. "East Coast attendees don't mind traveling west, but our West Coast attendees don't like traveling east in the fall as much."

"Some of the feedback we got before the event was a little apprehensive about Tucson," notes Turner-Scott. "But once they arrived, and they got a chance to relax, calm down and settle in, they said, 'Wow, look at this view.' It's just that they're used to California and Florida, and this was a totally different experience — they didn't know what they were walking into."

One other amenity at the resort proved helpful for the budget.

"Kudos to the JW for having a UPS Store on site," says Turner-Scott. "We had a presentation that was going to be handled like a Publishers Clearing House, with an oversized check for a local charity. By the time we got the check printed, it would have cost us a lot to ship it. I worked directly with Melissa at the UPS Store, and she saved us a significant amount of money."

The JW Event Concierge meeting services app was designed with planners in mind and another asset for the ASI team.

"Even if I was in middle of a session, I could key in requests — whether it was moving boxes or asking them to start the coffee break early," explains Walter, who downloaded the app prior to arrival. "Andrew Lopez was our events services manager, and he was amazing. No sooner did I send a request through the app, and he was on it and making whatever I requested or needed happen."

"The staff that assisted me the most at the JW was our Event Manager Kenzie Swenson," Walter continues. "I had a

Meetings in Tucson are a totally different experience for those traveling from other parts of the U.S.



Credit: Visit Tucson



few last-minute changes with menus, seating set-up, etc., and no sooner did I let Kenzie know, she was quick to make the changes. Her assistant, Eli Moreno, was also very helpful and would step in and assist when I couldn't reach Kenzie. And Rena Caldwell is the sales merchandiser — she assisted me greatly with our golf outing activity that we offered to our attendees on the first day of our event."

Tucson's tourism picture lagged the rest of Arizona's following the 2008-09 recession, but a resurgence of interest has bubbled over the last couple years. The opening of a 136-room Marriott-operated **AC Hotel Tucson Downtown** last fall — the first new hotel downtown since the 1970s — has helped lure locals and visitors into the city, as has a growing menu of restaurants and bars. The *Arizona Daily Star* reports that five additional hotel projects are in the pipeline for downtown, including a sorely needed \$20 million, 125-room hotel adjacent to the Tucson Convention Center.

Existing properties are also getting fresh attention. The **DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Tucson – Reid Park** is currently undergoing a \$16 million renovation that will enhance the hotel's common areas, including the lobby, restaurants, meeting facilities and courtyards. The hotel offers more than 22,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space, and a new dining venue, Crystals, has been added. Improvements to the expansive pool area and landscaping are underway and a remodel of the 287 guest rooms will be completed in early 2019.

Meanwhile, the **Hilton Tucson East**, in midtown Tucson, celebrated its 30th anniversary with an \$8 million makeover that was unveiled in April. The renovation covered all 232 guest rooms, and upgrades to meeting rooms and the 4,743-square-foot Rosewood Ballroom and swimming pool area, plus a new restaurant and bar, and modernized HVAC and water systems.

## Sedona

Sedona, renowned for its scenic beauty but perfect for smaller meetings, is a city of just 10,000 residents set amid red rock landscapes and swaying sycamore trees, and tempting with endless outdoor adventure activities. Just three Sedona hotels offer more than 5,000 square feet of meeting facilities,

including the 137-room **Poco Diablo Resort** and the **Hilton Sedona Resort at Bell Rock**, which has more than 14,000 square feet of indoor event space.

For a meeting of 30 hotel suppliers last April, Liza Lampi, with Eventive Meetings, brought her group to Sedona with "truly memorable" results.

"We chose Sedona for its unique beauty of the red rock country, which was different than previous incentive trips that had been offered," explains Lampi, who booked the incentive group into the destination spa retreat, **Enchantment Resort**. "This was a VIP trip, and Sedona offered relaxation and adven-



"We chose Sedona for its unique beauty of the red rock country, which was different than previous incentive trips that had been offered."

**Liza Lampi**, Event Planner  
Eventive Meetings, St. Louis, MO

ture all in one close area. Enchantment is far from the city itself, but the Sedona atmosphere and experience encompasses you as soon as you drive in.

"The resort is located in Boynton Canyon amid large red rock formations," adds Lampi. "The rooms are uniquely designed casitas equipped with fireplaces and private balconies, and nestled right in the red rocks so you can walk out your door and go on a hike. Our attendees were only there for three days, but the location really made them feel like they unplugged from the world, which is unique in such a short time span."

The 218-room resort offers a variety of conference facilities located within the Meeting Village, including three separate ballrooms ranging up to 5,100 square feet and each with floor-to-ceiling windows.

In total, Enchantment has 12,000 square feet of indoor meeting space and an additional 32,000 square feet of outdoor function space, perfect for events under the stars. In addition



Attendees at the Hilton Sedona Resort can play a relaxing round of golf surrounded by the large red rock formations of Bell Rock.

Credit: Hilton Sedona Resort

to of the renowned spa, activities available at the 70-acre resort include golf and yoga, with hiking and mountain biking on abundant trails.

For Lampi's group, the attention to detail started right on arrival. "We like to have a private check-in for our guests to minimize the amount of time they spend traveling and maximize the time they have enjoying their trip," she says. "The hotel pre-assigned rooms and set up an exclusive hotel registration desk right next to our hospitality desk so we could streamline the process and get attendees started on their relaxation. Because the property is so spread out, they use golf carts and bell staff to bring guests and their luggage to their rooms. In addition, you can call any time to be picked up and brought somewhere on property — all the bell staff were extremely friendly and engaging."

The biggest challenge Lampi says she encountered at Enchantment was transportation. "The resort is 129 miles from the Phoenix airport through canyons and long roads. We only had three days, with attendees flying in from all over the country. Therefore, timely and flexible transportation was necessary," she says. "We worked with Hello! Arizona, who did a great job monitoring flights and making changes to keep attendees moving on this short trip." At 34 miles, Flagstaff Pulliam Airport is closer to Enchantment, but offers only limited air service, all via Phoenix.

The location also meant that Wi-Fi and cell access was constrained inside the canyon. "The hotel was fully communicative about this, but in this day and age, you rely so heavily on your phone that it's hard when you don't have it. We had to be proactive and hope that things were coming together as planned, as we didn't always have communication of what was happening elsewhere," she says.

But otherwise, the remote location lived up to the resort's name.

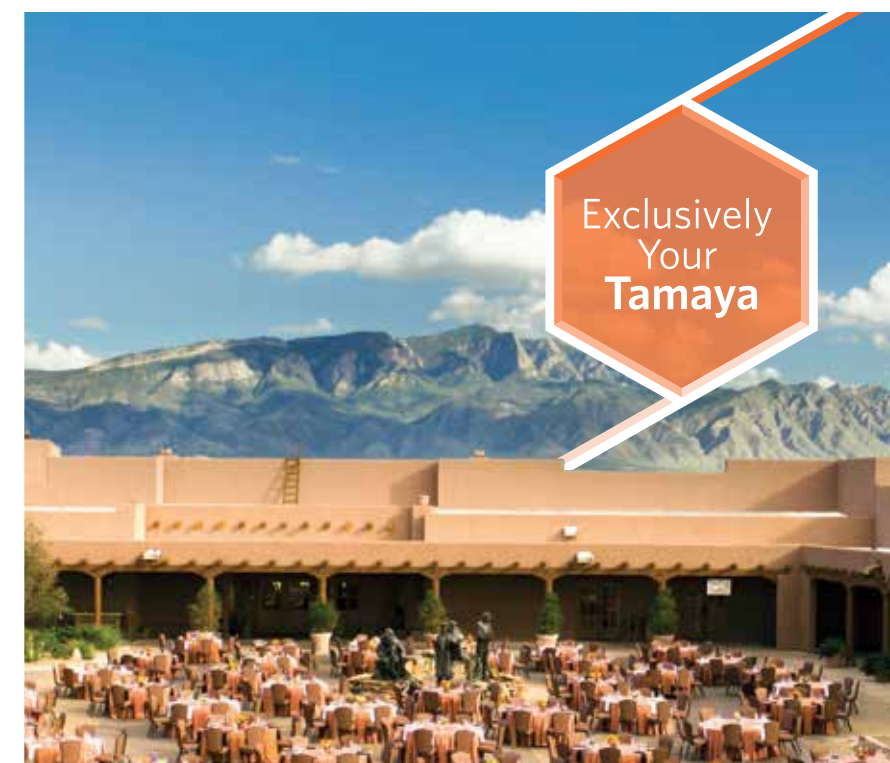
"Our welcome dinner was outdoors nestled among the red rocks," adds Lampi. "The hotel decked out the outdoor patio with a mixture of seating lounges, table centerpieces and custom lighting. It really gave a relaxed and upscale feeling for the first evening."

Lampi also organized an offsite open-air jeep adventure with Pink Adventure Tours.



"From meeting space, guest rooms, dining and common areas, Royal Palms defines the phrase one-of-a-kind."

**Randy Meacham**, President  
World's Finest Meetings, Colorado Springs, CO



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Credit: Eric Swanson

Expansive views abound at the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa.

"We took the group through the Broken Arrow Trail in Coconino National Forest," explains Lampi. "It was amazing and picturesque, combined with rugged, off-road adventure. The certified interpretive guides were extremely knowledgeable and entertaining with facts ranging from Arizona's history, to Hollywood movies shot on the trail, to geological rock formations. We ended the jeep tour with an outdoor lunch on the red rocks. Pink Adventure Tours and a local caterer were able to set up a full, functioning barbecue and cooked onsite along with full seating and buffets. Our guests enjoyed a delicious meal among a majestic backdrop of blue skies and red rock formations. It was truly memorable."

## Scottsdale

With more than 40,000 hotel rooms combined, the Phoenix-Scottsdale Metropolitan area represents the vast majority of Arizona's bounty of meeting options. The combined destination is percolating with real estate developments.

In June, the area's largest hotel, the 1,000-room **Sheraton Grand Phoenix** was acquired from the city by Marriott International for \$255 million. A "significant" renovation of the 10-year-old hotel is planned for 2019, and will include updates to the 110,000 square feet of meeting space. Also next year, a 200-room **AC Hotel Downtown Phoenix** is slated to open at Arizona Center, providing visitors an urban-inspired, select-service lodging option.

In Scottsdale, the 250-acre **Phoenician** resort just completed its most extensive renovation since the hotel opened in 1988. A redesign of guest rooms and common areas was completed in 2016-17, while last spring saw the opening of a new athletic club and three-story spa facility. The Phoenician Golf Course was also redesigned and re-routed from 27 to 18 holes, a 10-month project that was completed in November.

This year, the **JW Marriott Camelback Inn Resort & Spa** unveiled its new 15,000-square-foot Paradise Ballroom, along with another 20,000 square feet of outdoor and prefunction space. The additions bring the resort's total meeting and event space to 95,000 square feet. Floor-to-ceiling windows radiate natural light and provide views of Mummy Mountain, and the ballroom is the first in Marriott's portfolio to display artwork from J. Willard "Bill" Marriott Jr.'s personal collection.

"Phoenix-Scottsdale is always a solid choice to hold

meetings," says Randy Meacham, president of World's Finest Meetings, a Colorado Springs-based meeting and incentive planning company.

Last December, Meacham organized a last-minute VIP meeting for 15 of the top executives from a large company specializing in supply chain technology solutions. "Their preference was warm weather and an easy location for airlift. Since the CEO and other top VIPs were attending, I had to find a unique, high-end property. It had to have meeting space that was amazing and offer our attendees privacy to get to work."

Meacham's solution: The 119-room **Royal Palms Resort and Spa**, part of Hyatt's Unbound Collection.

"The architecture defines individuality from start to finish," says Meacham. "From meeting space, guest rooms, dining and common areas, Royal Palms defines the phrase one-of-a-kind. The service levels of the staff make you feel special and valued, and the food and beverage is outstanding. My client wanted all of their functions in-house and, as a result, was not disappointed."



Credit: Royal Palms Resort and Spa

The architecture and atmosphere at Royal Palms Resort and Spa in Phoenix is one-of-a-kind from start to finish.

Situated below Camelback Mountain, the Mediterranean-style Royal Palms caters to smaller groups, with 10 indoor meeting spaces, multiple outdoor patios, along with garden and pool settings. The largest meeting room is the Estrella Salon, topping out at 2,450 square feet, but the property's total event space covers more than 20,000 square feet, much of it facing mountain views. The resort's various meeting options blur the lines between indoor and outdoor, including two new spaces added this year, Camelback Vista and Orange Grove — 3,600 square feet of outdoor areas that offer the requisite mountain vistas.

"My clients deserve the highest ethics and standards the hospitality business can bring, and it is our duty to recommend properties that will deliver and exceed their expectations," adds Meacham. "The result was a successful meeting and a happy client. A day after the meeting concluded, the CEO personally wrote me an email and thanked me for arranging their meeting at the Royal Palms and wants to go back. These comments were music to my ears."

"It's gratifying when hoteliers take pride in their properties and go overboard to assure success," he concludes. **C&IT**

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## On The Move



MCGREGOR

The Allegretto Vineyard Resort in the Paso Robles wine region welcomes **Lee McGregor** as director of sales and marketing. Early in her career, McGregor worked as director of banquet and catering sales, senior sales manager and director of sales and marketing for some of the Central Coast's most prestigious hotels and resorts.

New York's Marriott Syracuse Downtown has named **Melissa Oliver** as its new director of sales and marketing. Oliver most recently served as director of sales and marketing at the Crowne Plaza Syracuse.

Montage Beverly Hills has appointed **Aleksandr Sigalus** director of sales, international. Most recently, he was sales director at The Beverly Hills Hotel and Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles.

**Florian Connert** has been named



OLIVER

senior director of sales and marketing at Haven Riviera Cancun Resort & Spa. Previously, he served as director of sales, Caribbean for AMResorts.

The Ballantyne, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Charlotte (North Carolina) has appointed **Heidi Nowak** as director of sales and marketing. Previously, she was director of sales and marketing at The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman.

Visit San Antonio has promoted **Laura Betancourt** to national sales manager. Betancourt joined the Visit San Antonio team in 2007 as a senior events coordinator and advanced to the organization's destination services team before joining the convention sales team in 2017.

**Heather Terry** has been promoted to director of sales for the Owensboro (Kentucky) Convention Center and the Owensboro Sportscenter. Prior to this,

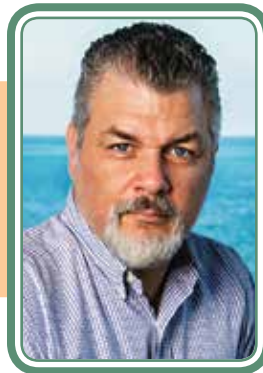


SIGALUS

she worked as a supervisor at Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville.

**Jenny Lynch** has joined Visit Indy as national sales manager. Most recently, Lynch spent three years with Visit-Dallas as regional director of sales for the Midwest.

Explore St. Louis has added three new members to its sales staff: **Jill Hericks**, director of convention sales; **Erin Jackson**, director of executive meetings sales and **Stephanie Monroe**, director of specialty market sales. Hericks served in senior positions with the Sioux Falls Convention Center in South Dakota, Century Center in South Bend, Indiana, and Hollywood Casino and Hotel in St. Louis. Jackson served as the director of sales of the Moonrise Hotel. Monroe joined Explore St. Louis in 2007 as national convention sales manager. **C&IT**



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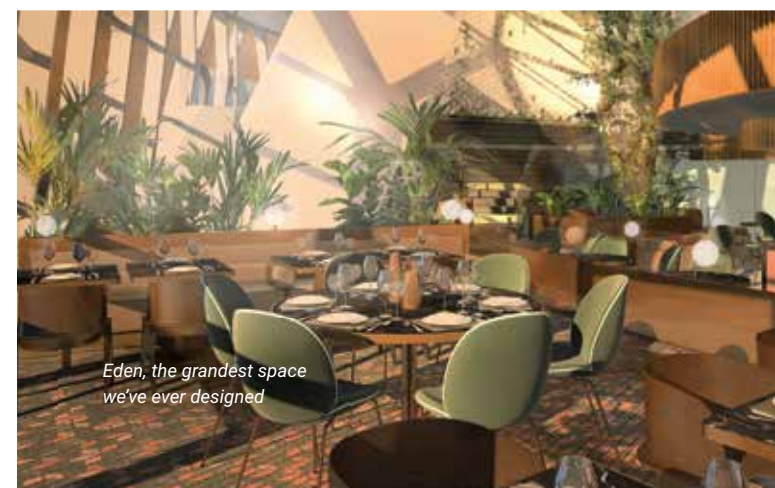
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The logo for Rosen Shingle Creek Orlando. It features a stylized 'h' inside a circle, followed by the word 'ROSEN' in a small, sans-serif font. Below 'ROSEN' is the word 'SHINGLE' in a large, serif font, and below that is 'CREEK' in a large, serif font. At the bottom, 'ORLANDO' is written in a smaller, sans-serif font.