

ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

2019 Industry Outlook

PAGE 14

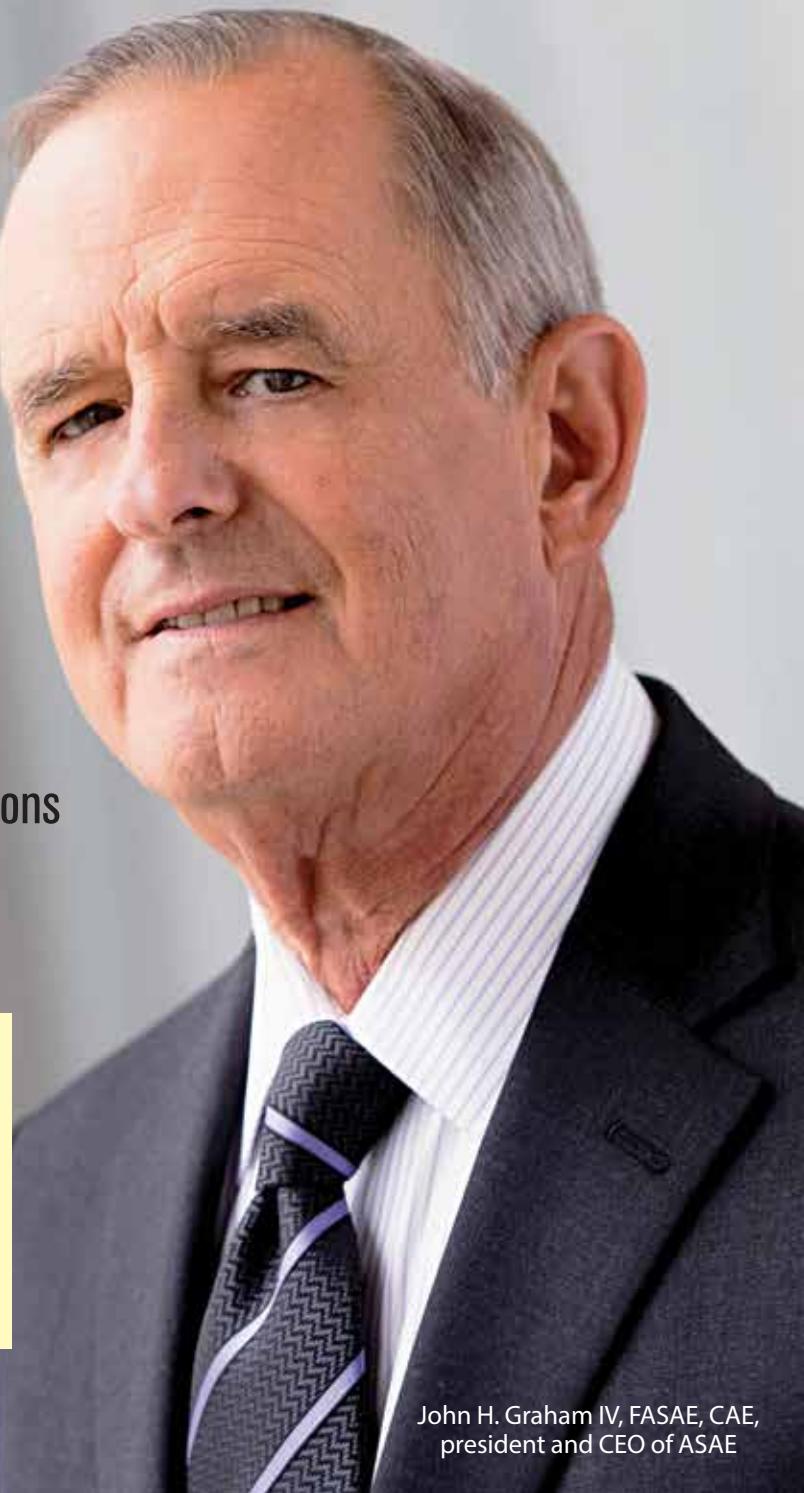
Strategies to Drive Trade Show Growth
Ways to Increase Revenue, Attendance and Exhibitors

PAGE 28

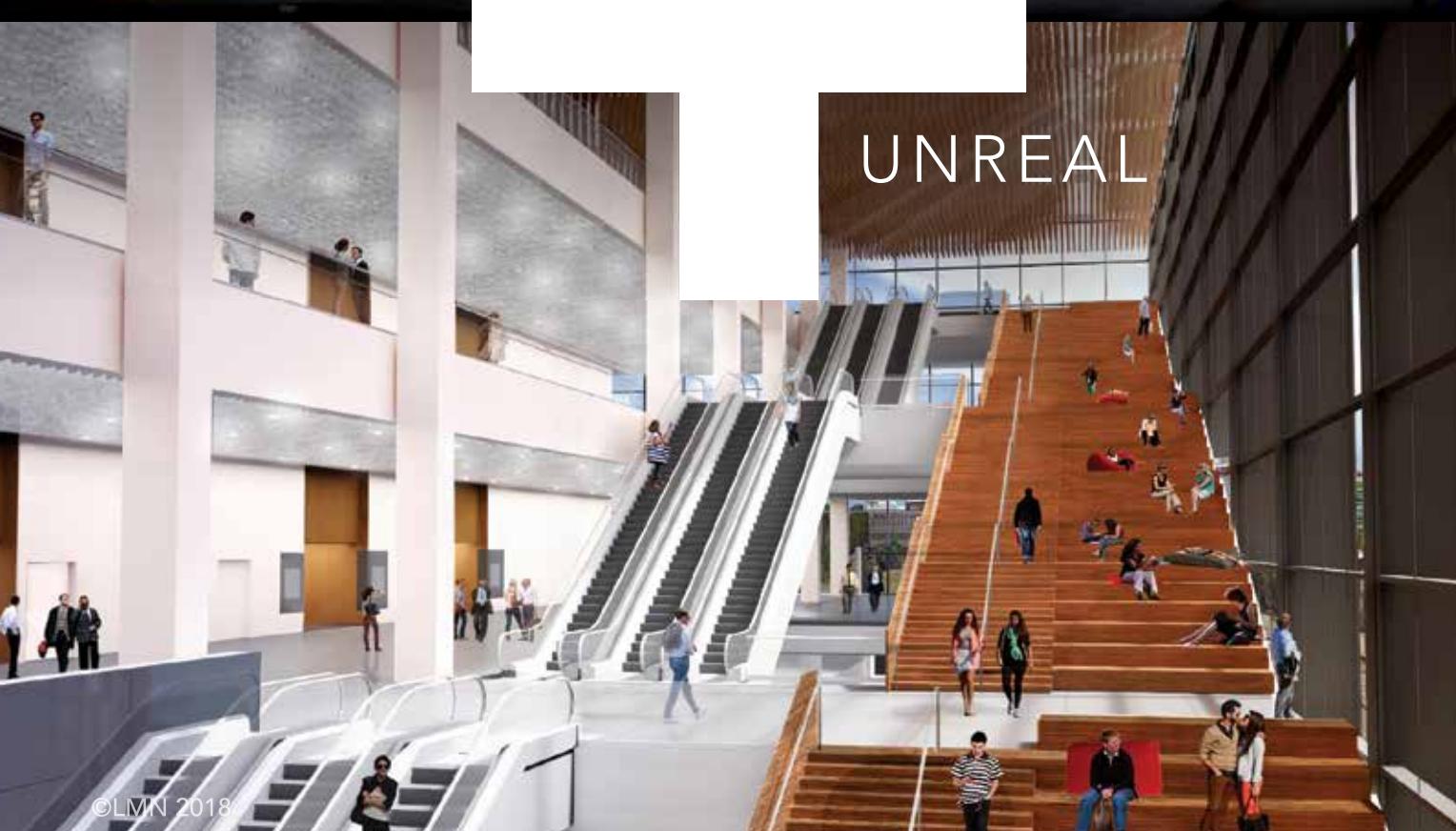
Getting Familiar With Potential Destinations
Onsite Visits Sponsored by Local CVBs or DMOs
Are a Win-Win For Planners and Venues Alike

PAGE 22

**CLICK HERE TO
DOWNLOAD/VIEW
TABLET VERSION**

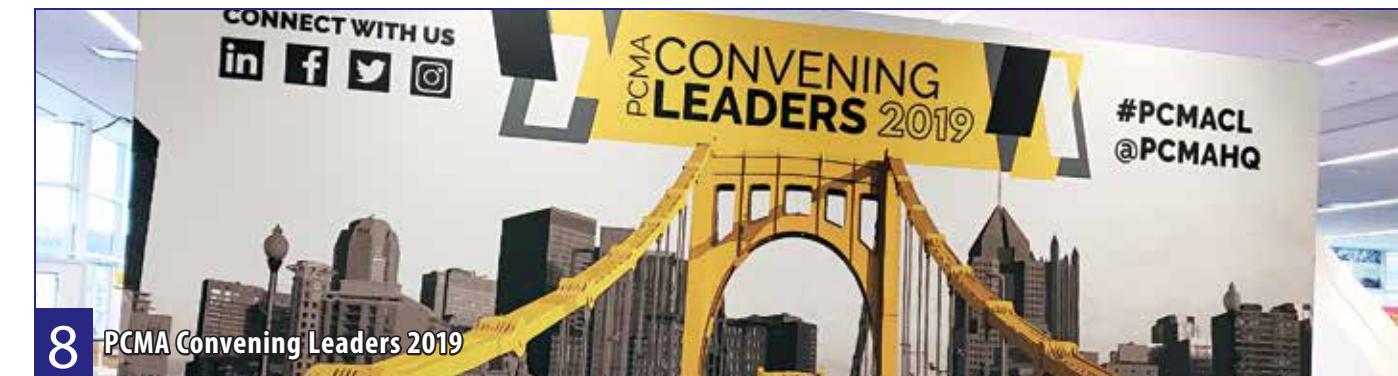


John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE,
president and CEO of ASAE



THE SUMMIT BUILDING, OPENING SPRING 2022 Welcome to a setting that blends city life with elements of our natural surroundings to create an environment that feels open and light. A place that will soon be home to uniquely local experiences, and awe-inspiring meeting spaces. Book your next event here or at our existing building on Pike Street. Learn more at visitseattle.org/conventioncenter

VISIT
seattle
Washington State Convention Center



ISSN 21628831 | USPS 003500 | A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

January 2019 Volume 12 • Number 1

Departments

4 Publisher's Page

6 News & Notes

50 Career Track

ViewPoint

12 Why No Speaker Wants to Present For Your Association

And What to Do About It
By Deborah Gardner, CMP

Destinations

32 Keeping Meetings Calm and Cool in Colorado

"Mile High City" is Abuzz With Attendees Who Want to Stay Low-Key
By John Buchanan

Features

8 PCMA Convening Leaders 2019

14 2019 Industry Outlook

Members Want Immersive Experiences and Mindful Events
By John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE

18 Tech the Halls!

The Right Technology Tools for End-to-End Event Engagement
By Derek Reveron

38 The Big Easy

While Planners Are Drawn to New Orleans, Other Louisiana Cities Also Have Lots to Offer
By Christine Loomis

22 Getting Familiar With Potential Destinations

Onsite Visits Sponsored by Local CVBs or DMOs Are a Win-Win For Planners and Venues Alike
By Sophia Bennett

28 Strategies to Drive Trade Show Growth

Ways to Increase Revenue, Attendance and Exhibitors
By Christine Loomis

44 Meet Me in Texas

Large Venues, Great Service Give Associations Many Options
By Christine Loomis

2019: The Year of Change



A constant theme we are seeing about the future of the meetings and events industry is change. Whether it's the type of event (engaging and impactful), duration of the meeting (the shorter, the better) or frequency of the meeting (the more, the merrier), attendees seem to want everything quick, yet innovative. Embracing this trend, some associations have tried to implement new ways to encourage member attendance at meetings and events.

In "2019 Industry Outlook" (Page 14), John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE, president and CEO of ASAE, says that before you can provide a compelling experience, you need to understand members' needs. Members want immersive experiences and mindful events.

Creating an immersive environment "can be as simple as changing the setup of your meeting and keynote session rooms by moving the placement of the stage to the middle of the room for a theater-in-the-round affect, or by utilizing a mix of comfortable lounge seating and traditional table and chairs," he says.

When it comes to mindfulness, planning pre-conference activities that encourage attendees to engage with each other, providing opportunity and space for casual conversations to continue after a session and offering ample time for breaks should be the focus. "Mindfulness might not be as up-front and visible as content and the number of continuing education units your members will receive; however, it will convey that you want your attendees to maximize the benefit of being at your event. It also reinforces your organization genuinely cares about the overall meeting experience," Graham says.

Just as associations want to increase member attendance, similarly, you have been wondering about ways to increase revenue, attendance and exhibitors at trade shows. "Strategies to Drive Trade Show Growth" (Page 28) offers tips and ideas from several high-level industry experts. First and foremost, they say you should re-evaluate each show you plan every year. Decide what was successful and what needs improvement.

As a reminder, the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) has a variety of resources available for you. "CEIR's Index and free Event Analyzer Tool offer planners a way to assess the bottom line of how well their event is faring compared to their peer set and the B2B exhibition industry overall," says Nancy Drapeau, PRC, senior research director at CEIR. Take advantage of these resources to improve your overall performance.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

Follow us on Social Media



[instagram.com/themeetingmagazines](https://www.instagram.com/themeetingmagazines)



twitter.com/themeetingmag

ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Harvey Grotsky

harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Mitch D. Miller

mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Bonnie Schultz

bonnie.schultz@themeetingmagazines.com

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR

Debbie Ryan

debbie.ryan@themeetingmagazines.com

DIGITAL CONTENT COORDINATOR

Erika Villalobos

erika.villalobos@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Sophia Bennett

Ron Berenthal

John Buchanan

Sara Churchville

Cynthia Dial

Maura Keller

Christine Loomis

Derek Reveron

Mark Rowh

Patrick Simms

David Swanson

PRESIDENT & CEO

Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

David Middlebrook

david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120

Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394

561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509

advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

MIDWEST STATES

Bob Mitchell

630-541-3388 • Mobile: 630-235-0126

bob.mitchell@themeetingmagazines.com

Association Conventions & Facilities is published bi-monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$13.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$65.00 in the U.S.A. Canada and foreign is \$135.00. Back copies \$14.00 plus shipping and handling, U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send Form 3579 address changes to Association Conventions & Facilities, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Association Conventions & Facilities), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of or reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is in no way to be construed as a recommendation by ACCF of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted by or to be binding upon any advertiser or subscriber. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscribers: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Department, Association Conventions & Facilities, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip code. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2019

AN ALL-NEW PERSPECTIVE ON MEETINGS AND EVENTS



All-New Walt Disney World Dolphin Lobby

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



Award-Winning Dining



All-New Guest Rooms And Suites



Impressive Meeting Venues



1500 Epcot Resorts Blvd.
Lake Buena Vista, FL, 32830
800.524.4939 | 407.934.4290
swandalphinmeetings.com



Hilton Americas Convention Center Hotel Getting \$37 Million Makeover



Credit: 2019 Hilton

HOUSTON — Downtown's Hilton Americas-Houston, the city's largest convention center hotel, is getting a \$37 million makeover. Plans include updating the décor and technology in the more than 1,200 guest rooms.

"With the new hotels that have come online since 2011 and the needs of travelers that are beginning to change, we felt we could do a renovation that would carry us forward through a significant amount of time," says Jacques D'Rovencourt, the hotel's general manager. The city-owned property opened in 2003 and was last renovated in 2011. D'Rovencourt says the planned improvements will be extensive. He cites an art component that will feature work from 11 local artists. The rooms will have a mix of new photographs and paintings, as well as an "art wall" with a custom graphic. "More people want to experience more of the local atmosphere when they're visiting a city," he says.

Other room renovations include changing the existing color scheme, adding LED lighting and installing larger televisions. www.hilton.com

Hosts Global Announces New VP of Operations, Opening of DMC in Seattle

UNITED STATES — Hosts Global announced the promotion of Gina D'Angelo, DMCP, CMP to vice president of operations, as well as the opening of Hosts Seattle, a full-service Destination Management Company (DMC) established to produce group programs, including

meetings, conventions, incentive programs and special events in Washington state and the Pacific Northwest.

In her new role, D'Angelo will be responsible for continuity in the onsite execution and delivery of work across all Hosts' owned-office locations. This role was established to ensure Hosts' operations departments are scalable, driving increased value for clients and exceeding expectations by delivering Hosts' high service standards.

Additionally, Hosts Seattle is now the seventh location opened and operated by Hosts Global. Opening this new office was driven by Hosts' determination to deliver more strategic value to existing clients and based on high customer demand for Hosts' services within the destination. "We're thrilled to expand into a bustling destination ... to deliver unforgettable group experiences within the city and surrounding area," says Joshua Jones, DMCP, regional president of Hosts Las Vegas, Hosts Southern California and Hosts Seattle. www.hosts-global.com



D'Angelo

Visit Spokane Hires New President and CEO

SPOKANE, WA — Meg Winchester, CMP, is the new president and CEO of Visit Spokane.

Winchester brings decades of convention sales and marketing experience to her new position. Prior to joining Visit Spokane, she was the director at the Galveston Island Convention and Visitors Bureau in Galveston, Texas.

During her tenure in Galveston, Winchester, she was instrumental in rebuilding and increasing tourism revenue and visitation every year. She is a Certified Meeting Planner (CMP) and Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA).

"I fell in love with Spokane from the moment I set foot in it," says Winchester. "I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to make this my home and help promote it." www.visitspokane.com

VisitPITTSBURGH Appoints Jerad Bachar as Executive Vice President

PITTSBURGH — VisitPITTSBURGH has hired Jerad Bachar as executive vice president. Previously, Bachar was as the executive director of the Economic Development Board for the country of Bahrain.

"Jerad is a proven leader with expertise in sales, economic planning, organizational structure and stakeholder

networks," says Craig Davis, president and CEO of VisitPITTSBURGH. "His international sales experience will be extremely beneficial as we continue to grow and expand our global reach." www.visitpittsburgh.com



Bachar

Kurt J. Krause Named President and CEO of VisitNorfolk

NORFOLK, VA — Kurt J. Krause has been named president and CEO of VisitNorfolk in Virginia. He is a native of Arlington,

Virginia, and a graduate of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Most recently, he served as the managing director for some high-profile hotel openings, including the Hilton Norfolk the Main, the Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, the Cavalier Virginia Beach and the Marriott Virginia Beach Oceanfront. Prior to those positions, Krause served as vice president of business affairs at Virginia Tech, as well as the senior advisor and executive director for consumer advocacy for the Transportation Security Administration. www.visitnorfolk.com

Atlantic Beach Hospitality Announces New Brand Flag: Wyndham Newport Hotel

NEWPORT, RI — Atlantic Beach Hospitality — a family-owned management company in Rhode Island — has opened the Wyndham Newport Hotel, a 143-room property with ideal proximity to the attractions, dining and shopping of downtown Newport. The hotel also offers 28,000 square feet of meeting and event space and the Newport icon, Johnny's Restaurant & Patio Bar.

Conveniently located near Newport attractions including the Cliffwalk and Newport Mansions, Wyndham Newport Hotel offers shuttle service to downtown Newport for a nominal daily fee. After sightseeing and shopping downtown, guests can relax in an indoor/outdoor saltwater pool. The hotel also provides complimentary onsite parking, fully equipped fitness and business centers, Wi-Fi in guest rooms and more. www.wyndhamnewportri.com

Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center Officially Opens



AURORA, CO — Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center has officially opened as the largest combined resort and convention center in Colorado. The property boasts 1,501 rooms, more than 486,000 square feet of exhibition, meeting, prefunction and outdoor space and an extensive indoor/outdoor water park on an 85-acre site. The resort offers eight dining options, a luxurious spa and salon, indoor/outdoor pools and more.

Overlooking the Denver skyline, Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center is Colorado's premier meeting and convention destination. Its "everything under one roof" approach ensures groups maximize their time together. Planners can bring their conference, convention or meeting to one of the property's new indoor or outdoor event rooms, including the 20,000-square-foot Aurora Patio and the 175,000-square-foot Exhibit Hall. The resort's décor is modeled after aspects iconic to Colorado — from cascading waterfalls over boulders and local nature artwork to native landscaping. Local food and beverage partnerships are also an integral part of the resort, including a collaboration with Dry Dock Brewing Co., an award-winning brewery in Aurora. www.gaylordrockies.com

Proposed Hilton Columbus Downtown Convention Hotel Grows



COLUMBUS, OH — A new proposal will be presented to the Columbus Downtown Commission this month seeking the addition of one floor and a rooftop terrace to the Hilton Columbus Downtown hotel to allow for more meeting space. The latest plan calls for the new Hilton tower to include 27 floors, plus the rooftop event space, says Don Brown, executive director of the Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority. "Our goal is to meet the industry standard for convention hotels, which is no less than 75 square feet of meeting space per guest room, so for a 1,000-guest convention hotel, that means we should have no less than 75,000 square feet of meeting space for the two towers combined," he says. The convention authority is hoping to break ground on the new hotel this fall and have it ready to open in early 2022. www.hilton.com

PCMA Convening Leaders 2019

Approximately 4,000 industry professionals from around the world gathered for PCMA Convening Leaders 2019 in Pittsburgh, January 6-9, for three days of education and inspiration aimed at driving economic and social progress through business events. Sessions covered innovation, design, leadership and technology.

Celebrities Billie Jean King, Geena Davis and Steve Pemberton were among 138 experts, advocates and industry leaders to address the group.

"We built this conference around the theme 'Disrupt + Deliver' because that's what the industry needs and wants," says PCMA President and CEO Sherriff Karamat.

Convening Leaders was held at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center and generated an estimated \$6 million for the Pittsburgh region.

The PCMA Foundation raised more than \$300,000 through onsite fundraising projects, including its annual Party With a Purpose.

AC&F



Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography



Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography



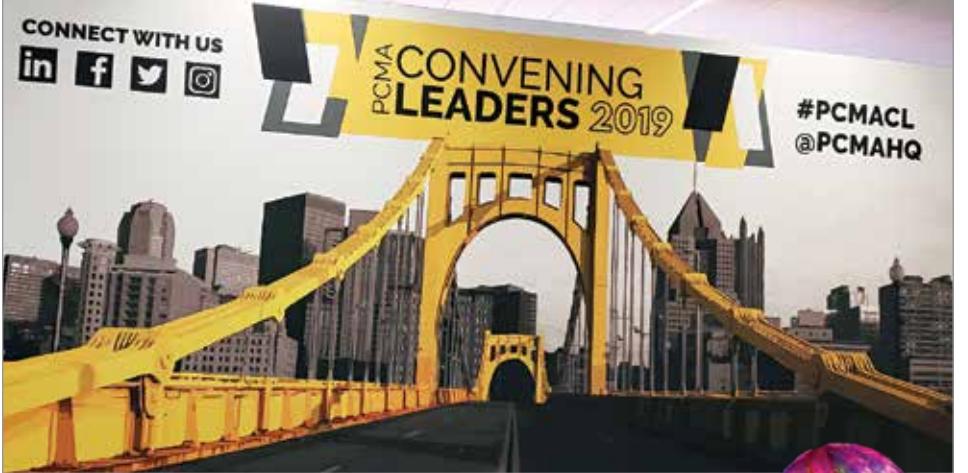
Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography



Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography



Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography



#PCMACL
@PCMAHQ



B
Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography



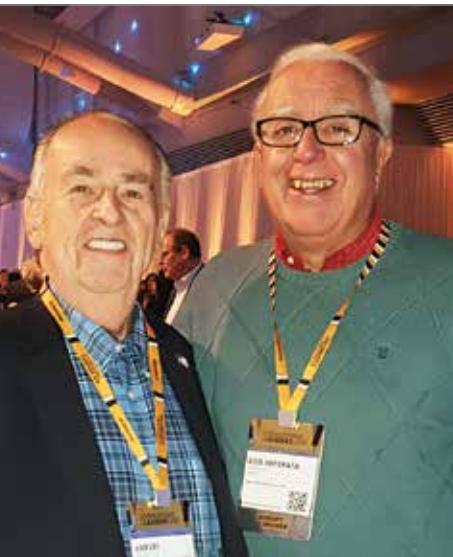
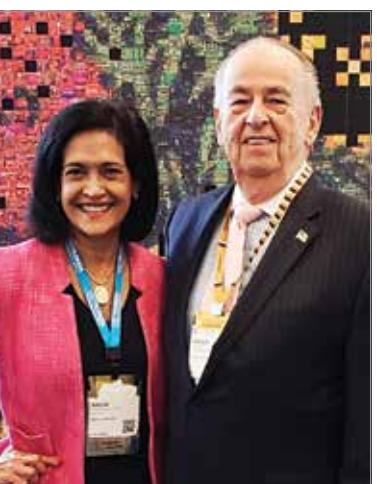
Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography



Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography



Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography





**Looking hard for somewhere new?
We'll make it easy.**

But in OKC, a new Convention Center
is just the beginning.

Six miles of modern streetcar through
downtown, now open!

New, fully programmed, 70-acre
downtown park, opening 2019.

Brand-new, 605-room Convention Center
Headquarter Hotel by Omni, opening early 2021.

**Want a closer look?
Check out the 3-D flythrough at
MEETINOKC.COM**

Booking now for 2020 and beyond.

OKC new

IN OKC, IT'S NOT HARD TO SPOT THE NEW



Why No Speaker Wants to Present For Your Association

By Deborah Gardner, CMP



And What to Do About It

If I had a dollar for every speaker that presented for an association for free, I would be rich. Don't get me wrong, there are associations that do pay something, but most still keep a close eye on the bottom line, especially when it comes to hiring speakers.

If this is true with your association, do you feel stuck trying to sell a high-priced speaker on a budget?

Are you fed up persuading speakers to commit to less than you can afford? So fed up, you've daydreamed about the association accepting every speaker you want, including their fee? Then don't you think it's time to say goodbye to tight speaker budgets and focus on what really matters to your association in order to maximize member ROI?

As a longtime hospitality veteran, I've been involved with many associations, from planning regional meetings to contracting hotel room blocks for citywide conventions to presenting at many of those same conventions. Reflecting on my journey, there has been a lot of changes and growth within the industry, except one important area that directly affects associations — budgets, in particular, speaker budgets.

One keynote speaker curiously asked her client in a recent conversation, "How long have you been offering speakers that fee?" The answer was 12 years!

The speaker then asked, "Would you work a job for 12 years and never get a raise?"

This was a valid point because the truth is speaker budgets haven't changed since the 1980s. Associations have been getting speakers for less, inflation increases, yet the harsh reality is you get what you pay for. Is that what your members deserve?

If not, here is what you can do about it:

FOCUS ON THE MAIN POINT

One of the biggest components for an association is to provide the members the best professional development

opportunities. The learning aspect that members take home from your meeting, event or conference impacts them directly. If they don't feel it's worthy, they will not return — or worse, they will cancel their membership. Yet, learning from expert speakers has not been taken as seriously as spending on gift bags, coffee breaks or other line items. Sadly, associations are missing the fact that budgeting education needs to be top priority, and selecting speakers should be decided upon immediately.

CHANGE YOUR MIND-SET FROM COST TO VALUE

The perception of speakers agreeing to present for your association and just showing up are gone. Just like the extensive back of the house logistical pre-planning



Credit: Deborah Gardner, CMP

Deborah Gardner, CMP, is an expert speaker, who has presented to many associations' audiences worldwide. She strongly supports the need for speaker budgets.

that goes into your upcoming meetings, speakers have to do the same.

Ed Rigsbee, CAE, CSP, author of *The ROI of Membership*, says, "Professional speakers live and die on their reputation. These are the people who generally interview, research the issues, tailor or customize their proven material for each unique audience. They are experts in their field, experienced storytellers or humorists delivering

solid take-home content while also creating a motivating environment. They have to be exciting, motivating and funny — or they don't eat!"

So, hiring a speaker based only on what your association can afford may be dangerous and tarnish your reputation, too.

And, if that doesn't help change your mind, consider the economic benefit as a result of their presentation.

They bring their proven message to you in order to help solve the member's problems. In other words, think of the VALUE that they bring to your association, not the COST!

the association. Plus, they can hear and experience some great speakers at many of these events, too.

Show your passion and guide them beyond just planning meetings. Have the conversation about the importance of meetings and the members' education to your association through Meetings Mean Business. This idea includes celebrating Global Meetings Industry Day (GMID), which could be as simple as having everyone within the association wear the color blue.

Bottom line, no speakers want to present for your association. Today, the old speaker budgets don't work. However, if more association leaders were involved with

"Professional speakers live and die on their reputation. ...They are experts in their field, experienced storytellers or humorists delivering solid take-home content while also creating a motivating environment. They have to be exciting, motivating and funny — or they don't eat!"

Bottom line, understanding that learning from a speaker's expertise helps an association grow.

Your association is there to educate the members. Without education, there are no members. Without members, there is no association.

EDUCATE YOUR ASSOCIATION

Associations often don't understand the numerous decisions and logistics that take place for meetings and events. The best way to help is to proactively educate them. Get them to see what is involved to put on a meeting or event.

Invite your boss, stakeholders, procurement, person in charge of budgets or anyone else that may be part of the speaker selection process into the meetings world. There are plenty of industry organizations that welcome this idea, like PCMA or SGMP.

Introduce them to the industry veterans that can help explain the importance of meetings and how it affects

the meetings world, there would be a better understanding why the speaker budgets need to be revised. And, with the members' education dollars being of utmost importance to them, it's imperative for associations to recognize this fact.

Oh, and the final outcome of the speaker asking her client the fee discrepancy question?

It turned out the association acknowledged the situation and increased their speaker budget. A prime example that you can adjust or find the monies needed, not only deserving of speakers but for your members education, as well.

Deborah Gardner, CMP is a longtime hospitality veteran, ambassador to Meetings Mean Business, author and performance expert who presents to hundreds of companies and organizations worldwide. Gardner helps to transform her audiences — personal and business — when servicing customers, selling, negotiating or leading. To reach her, visit www.DeborahGardner.com.

2019 Industry Outlook

Members Want Immersive Experiences and Mindful Events



By John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE, president and CEO of ASAE

Reflecting on the past few years and looking to the future, change is the only constant. Industry leaders like Facebook, Apple and Amazon have altered how we consume information, communicate and move through the purchase process. Those are just a few companies that have revised the landscape when it comes to how we engage on a daily basis. Those changes have ushered in a new era of customer service expectations, too. These dynamics are also occurring in the meetings and events that we attend.

The sunsetting of mature events and the development of entirely new events has been a trend for the last few years. However, the association world has been slower to jump on this than the for-profit sector.

When events are performing well, there is less motivation and sense of urgency to change. But many organizations are seeing a drop in the performance of their meetings and events. Of course, this differs based on the various industries

organizations serve, but overall, organizations are seeing either a plateau or a decline in their meeting attendance.

Members have a wide variety of options for professional development. Many times, these options are in direct competition with offerings from their professional or trade organizations. And that is why it is critical to understand your members' needs and identify what differentiates your organizations' meetings and events from competitors.

After reviewing organizations that have successfully implemented changes to meetings and events, a constant theme was a move toward meetings that help connect customers emotionally, physically and intellectually.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

Before you can provide an immersive, compelling experience, you need to understand member needs.

The first step is to engage member stakeholders in an idea generation session where they can illustrate their

expectations. Keep in mind, it is important to be sure the committees involved are representative of the members you currently serve and those you want to attract.

Also, allow non-committee members to provide input. Their engagement with your organization will look different than someone who is at the committee level. Options to explore are having members assist in the proposal evaluation process, or engage those that have attended in the past or already registered, through crowdsourcing to help co-create content that is relevant to them. Providing members options for engagement, whether during the creation of the event, onsite or post event, is critical to establish participation, transparency and buy-in.

So what does providing an immersive environment mean? It can be as simple as changing the setup of your meeting and keynote session rooms by moving the placement of the



This session during ASAE's 2018 Xperience Design Project created an immersive environment by mixing comfortable lounge seating and traditional table and chairs.

stage to the middle of the room for a theater-in-the-round affect, or by utilizing a mix of comfortable lounge seating and traditional table and chairs.

Both the stage location and the seating provide attendees a different sense of engagement and involvement. It also allows people to pick the type of seating that best suits them. When changing room sets and even show format, be sure to confirm your content and speakers work well in the environment you design.

Many planners are moving toward facilities that provide comfortable networking spaces complete with casual furniture throughout the venue to avoid the additional expense of furnishing these areas.

Such space allows attendees to stay where the meeting

Incorporate mindfulness by providing attendees a space for casual conversations to continue after a session.



Credit: ASAE
Engage member stakeholders and non-committee members in an idea generation session where they can illustrate their expectations.

is taking place and to not seek alternative locations to have conversations or small meetups.

Immersive experiences can also be delivered through hands-on activities either at the meeting venue or at offsite locations in the destination where the meeting is being held. The chance to extend the radius of your event beyond a convention center or hotel to other unique spaces in the destination creates the feeling of a campus-type of event. This approach also helps in delivering special offerings and opportunities that make your organization stand apart from the competition.

This is becoming more and more popular, and destinations are working with organizations to help connect groups with local businesses and organizations that can deliver unique value for attendees.

MINDFUL EVENTS

While the idea of mindfulness is not new, members of our organizations are incorporating mindfulness into their lives, so it makes sense that event designers should look to incorporate similar elements into meetings and events.

Mindfulness helps deliver on both the physical and emotional aspects of a meeting. The focus of mindfulness



Credit: ASAE
Incorporate mindfulness by providing attendees a space for casual conversations to continue after a session.

M E E T T H E F U T U R E

is thinking about the overall schedule and the amount of time for breaks (downtime), opportunity and space for casual conversations to continue after a session, which includes serving healthy food options to energize attendees.

The use of natural light and the incorporation of the outdoors/nature when available or appropriate is another mindfulness element that can be advantageous. Other options to consider when thinking about mindfulness can include adding a guided stretch during a planned break, pre-conference activities that encourage attendees to engage with each other or even a chair massage to help everyone stay loose.

Mindfulness might not be as up-front and visible as content and the number of continuing education units your members will receive; however, it will convey that you want your attendees to maximize the benefit of being at your



Audiences are now multigenerational and diverse, so planners need to carefully consider how content is curated and delivered.

entertained and informed for free. Delivery channels are also shifting rapidly for both economic and technological reasons. Meeting planners need to consider how the content is curated, formatted and in what environment it is delivered.

Microlearning, a relatively new trend, provides small, specific bursts of information to drive job performance, that is available on demand. This method addresses the need for continuing education in a world where consumers are moving away from traditional multi-day conferences. Certification requirements will need to evolve to allow micro-learning modules to be assembled in innovative combinations for new forms of certification.

Using the mix of elements discussed will produce a diverse collection of educational programs that allow members to create their own learning experience. This will not only help you retain attendees year-to-year, but it will also attract new audiences who found previous events did not meet their needs.

These trends may not seem revolutionary and perhaps you have heard of them before. But the real question is, are you implementing these key elements into your meetings, and if not, why?

Take the opportunity in 2019 to stop talking about these as trends and start implementing even just one of them into your meetings. If you aren't among the trendsetters, your competition will be.

For more information see: "Drivers of Change: Summaries and Forecasts," a resource providing information on 46 key trends identified by ASAE ForesightWorks. <https://foundation.asaecenter.org/research>

John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE has been president and CEO of ASAE since 2003. ASAE is more than 21,000 association executives and industry partners representing 10,000 organizations.

He serves on the Association Committee of 100, U.S. Chamber of Commerce; Chairman of the Better Business Bureau Mobile Giving Foundation Board of Directors; and the boards of directors of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity and the National Capital Area Boy Scouts of America.

AC&F



Credit: ASAE

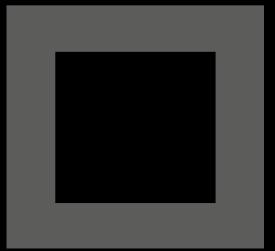
Large windows let natural light into the room where Michael Dominguez, senior vice president and chief sales officer, MGM Resorts International spoke to attendees during ASAE's 2018 Xperience Design Project.

event. It also reinforces your organization genuinely cares about the overall meeting experience.

SHIFTING ENVIRONMENT AND FORMAT FOR CONTENT

The ASAE Foundation study, ForesightWorks, identified 46 key drivers of change (out of a total of more than 300) that are particularly relevant at this time to the challenges association leaders will face in the future. These trends are looking 10 to 15 years out, but many of them are applicable now. The following two trends are specific to meetings and content at association events.

Content creators are faced with an increasingly challenging and shifting environment. Audiences are multigenerational, fragmented and distracted, and many times they expect to be



CAESARS FORUM



100,000 SQUARE FEET OF DEDICATED
OUTDOOR PLAZA SPACE

CAESARSFORUM.com | CaesarsMeansBusiness.com





Tech the Halls!

The Right Technology Tools for End-to-End Event Engagement

By Derek Reveron

As planners face increasing pressure from association stakeholders and attendees to provide memorable experiences on limited budgets, they're turning to engagement technology to achieve those goals.

A growing number of technology tools facilitate meaningful connections among fellow attendees; between attendees and speakers; between attendees and planners; and between attendees and exhibitors. Engaging attendees on every level enhances learning and participation, and helps boost member retention and attendance.

Achieving the desired engagement outcomes requires choosing the right tool for each meeting based on attendee characteristics and event goals. Experts say that more planners are using "end-to-end" engagement strategies, which start before the event, continue onsite and follow through afterward.

EVENT APPS

"Mobile applications are by far the most apparent tool to

connect with attendees throughout the entire lifespan of an event," says Renee Radabaugh, CMP, president and CEO of Delray Beach, Florida-based Paragon Events, a 30-year-old event planning and association management company.

Radabaugh says that engagement apps are leading to sweeping improvements in association meeting management. "Mobile apps are able to distribute important information prior to the event, including registration confirmations, agenda updates and travel details," she says. "During the

event, they can deliver notifications and alerts about sessions, speakers and other information. Following an event, mobile apps provide a source of networking and allow attendees to build upon relationships and keep themselves informed."

Mobile apps also impact the bottom line of associations and save time for planners. "We have found mobile apps to be a great asset to fulfill sponsorships by offering ad banner space, as well as including sponsors in a special directory," says Radabaugh. "Mobile apps also alleviate the amount of questions we receive at the registration and information desk, since all of the information is right at the attendees' fingertips."

According to James Spellos, CMP, president of Meeting U, a company specializing in technology training and meeting planning, "The best technology to enhance events is the conference app. It allows automatic updates for the conference. In the old days, when we printed schedules, it wasted paper, time and cost. Once you printed it, nothing could enhance it. The app changes that from something that was printed a month before the event to something that can be updated on the spot."

Jeff Rasco, CEO of Wimberley, Texas-based association management company Attendee Management Inc., says that apps are a time-saver for both planners and attendees.

"Being able to log in and view or download presentations and other materials is a great convenience for attendees and makes the lives of event organizers easier," he says. "Most engagements prior to or following events are app-based. Some apps extend the lives of events through attendee-speaker and attendee-attendee discussions beforehand and onsite, and then as repositories of information afterward."

Rasco cites a time-saving example. "By shifting to digital check-in by scan or search, tied to on-demand badge printing, we have been able to dramatically reduce wait times and put staff out with participants to engage them about the event instead of having their heads stuck in computer screens," he says.

BEACON TECHNOLOGY

Some of the most popular app-related technology provides information in real time to attendees. "We recently implemented Estimote Proximity Beacon technology for the first time to engage attendees based on their behavior and mobile app usage," Radabaugh says.

The beacons consist of a tiny computer that broadcasts a radio signal, which allows a smartphone to pick up and interpret the signal. "When an eligible mobile app enters the signal's region, vendors, planners and exhibitors can send information directly to an attendee's smartphone based on their location," says Radabaugh.

Through Bluetooth, the beacons then use notifications to

"Mobile apps are able to distribute important information prior to the event ... registration confirmations, agenda updates and travel details. During the event, they can deliver notifications and alerts about sessions, speakers ..."



Renee Radabaugh, CMP
President and CEO
Paragon Events
Delray Beach, FL

engage attendees with information that is relevant to them based on their proximity to the next session or special activity. The technology also can support areas such as registration by sending reminders of upcoming sessions or sending content they will cover.

Most planners choose from among the rapidly growing number of generic, off-the-shelf meeting apps. However, planners also can create their own event-specific apps.

The many uses for apps include:

- Polling attendees in real time on event experiences, personal preferences, speakers, education and training sessions and other topics of interest. They also can track walking and booth visitation patterns in exhibits and venues.
- Allowing attendees to provide instant feedback during sessions. For example, participants can create and prioritize questions for speakers by voting for those they see on the app. Speakers can see the questions, allowing them to make good use of time by focusing on topics attendees want to address. Participants can also submit questions before the meeting starts.
- Allowing attendees to see who in their social media networks haven't yet registered. This can build attendance because friends will encourage each other to attend.
- Analyzing data collected in real time, giving planners the flexibility to make adjustments onsite.

SOCIAL MEDIA

It's difficult to have a successful convention nowadays without involving social media. Here's why: Social media has helped transform attendees from passive event-goers into influential participants who continuously provide input to help shape meetings in real time.

There are so many options, including Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Tumblr and Foursquare, that it can be difficult to choose the right tool for the right purpose.

Radabaugh seeks to match the best social media with the specific goals of a meeting. She offers an example of using Snapchat with other social media to inspire attendees to document and share their experiences.

"We have designed custom Snapchat filters, branded with an event and client's logo, that are available to attendees once on premise," says Radabaugh. "We have also encouraged attendees to utilize an official hashtag to collect and generate online buzz. Cvent's Social Wall also provides an exciting, interactive experience to an event as it allows attendees to see their posts shared on a larger scale. Not only does this approach encourage attendees to participate, but it also creates connections that last well beyond the conclusion of the event."

REGISTRATION SYSTEMS

Custom-built registration systems can help engage attendees and increase interest in events while minimizing extra costs and fees.

According to Radabaugh, "We have seen that association planners are beginning to invest in a variety of registration management tools and services to enhance the attendee experience and garner helpful data. For example, Cvent's online technology software combines advanced functionality



James Spellos, CMP
President
Meeting U
Bayside, NY

"There are free apps you can use as a starting point. And, there are opportunities in your trade show to have advertising or marketing to offset costs. But, planners have to understand that their constituents are more important than the tool they are using."

with a user-friendly interface, offering a specialized and branded registration process for attendees."

Radabaugh also uses registration technology to identify information she wants to capture from attendees that will provide insight into their behavior and interests. "Our seamless registration experience online equally translates to our remarkable execution onsite," she says. "We strive to check-in guests as quickly and efficiently as possible, keeping in mind the valuable customer service aspect."

Technology companies are crowding the market with products, making it time-consuming and difficult for planners to

choose the right tool. And many planners, who are already overwhelmed with logistics, may have an aversion to learning new technologies.

SLOW ADOPTION

No wonder planners are slow to use new technology. According to a study by the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), only 57 percent of planners use some type of meeting management technology, even though 96 percent reported that they find value in the software.

Rasco says there are three main reasons for the slow adoption.

- 1. Fear.** "There is fear of making a bad decision," he says. "There are so many solutions out there. What if we spend the money and choose the wrong one? If you watch the online planner discussions, a huge number are testing the waters, seeing what others are doing, and trying to make the right call. Unfortunately, many remain in analysis paralysis and keep using spreadsheets."
- 2. Time.** "Planners, by definition, are busy people and finding the time to learn new systems is difficult," says Rasco. "What if other deadlines are missed because we're in training? The sunk costs of time spent are difficult to calculate, but even harder to project is the savings from greater efficiencies. We know in our hearts that technology is more efficient, but have trouble justifying it to our bosses."
- 3. Expense.** "Technology tends to start on the expensive side (although that's not so much the case with some of the newer cloud-based systems)," says Rasco. "Planners don't tend to budget for technology growth, so they are too often playing catch-up."

Radabaugh agrees. "For associations, budgeting is a major priority, and planners often have to follow conservative budgets, which may deter them from investing in new technology for their events."

Additionally, she notes, it's challenging to train both staff and attendees to implement and use technology effectively. "It also depends on what technology would work best for the event," she adds. "Event tech needs to be selected with purpose, and this results in a slow decision-making and acquisition process."

Experts say that planners who allow cost to be a major roadblock to using technology are being shortsighted.

According to Spellos, "The major problem with planners who are looking at technology limitations on a monetary basis is that they are not exploring other opportunities to offset the cost. The perfect example is the conference app. Putting a conference app together doesn't have to be very expensive."

He says there are many affordable conference app options. "There are free apps you can use as a starting point," says

Spellos. "And, there are opportunities in your trade show to have advertising or marketing to offset costs. But, planners have to understand that their constituents are more important than the tool they are using. If they can do that, then they can select the right tools to support their needs."

He adds that there are sites which provide free and low-cost stand-alone apps and those that planners can create. "That's a good entry to the process for planners," he says.

NEW AND DEVELOPING TECHNOLOGIES

Conventions, exhibitors and planners are starting to use Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to personalize meeting experiences. Cost is still a barrier for planners. However, adoption is likely to grow as the costs of the technology declines and as mobile apps get better at VR, AR and AI experiences.

Radabaugh believes that VR, AI and AR all have lots of promise for meetings. "VR headsets and AR glasses may be used for collaborative group interactions and accelerate audience response and engagement," she says. "On the other hand, AI will enable more personalized experiences by recognizing special traits or information about attendees. In time, association planners may be expected to offer it as part of their event technology services to enhance their customers' experiences."

In addition, voice-activated AI can use data collected from social media profiles and apps to recommend sessions, people to meet and other information to attendees.

Rasco notes that people are becoming accustomed to using simple AI by asking Siri, Alexa and Google to help with everyday tasks. "From there, it's a small leap to saying, 'Hey (name of association), tell me about a speaker or hotel, or register me for a symposium,'" he says. "People will use simple voice requests to check in and out of events, sessions and hotels, and request exhibitor materials, provide contact information, set appointments, etc."

Facial recognition is still a developing technology for use at events. Facebook uses facial recognition to suggest photo tags. Planners can do the same by encouraging staff to post and tag event photos to their own Facebook sites or one created by planners for an event. Eventually, facial recognition software will discern the mood of attendees by reading body language and facial expressions.

For now, planners are beginning to use facial recognition for check-ins. "When that technology takes off," says Rasco, "it will improve a lot of our manual processes. In the meantime, we are enjoying affordable tools to check in attendees, provide credentials and give them those great first impressions of their events."

Livestreaming can increase offsite "attendance." Planners can set up livestreaming and ask attendees to share it with

"Most engagements prior to or following events are app-based. Some apps extend the lives of events through attendee-speaker and attendee attendee discussions beforehand and onsite, and then as repositories of information afterward."



Jeff Rasco
CEO
Attendee Management Inc.
Wimberley, TX

others who can't attend. There is little evidence to suggest that livestreaming will lessen the growing importance of in-person event attendance.

ENGAGEMENT TECH TIPS

The type and quality of attendee engagement experiences can make or break an association meeting. That's why it's important to choose the right technology. Experts offer the following tips to select engagement technology and get the most out of it.

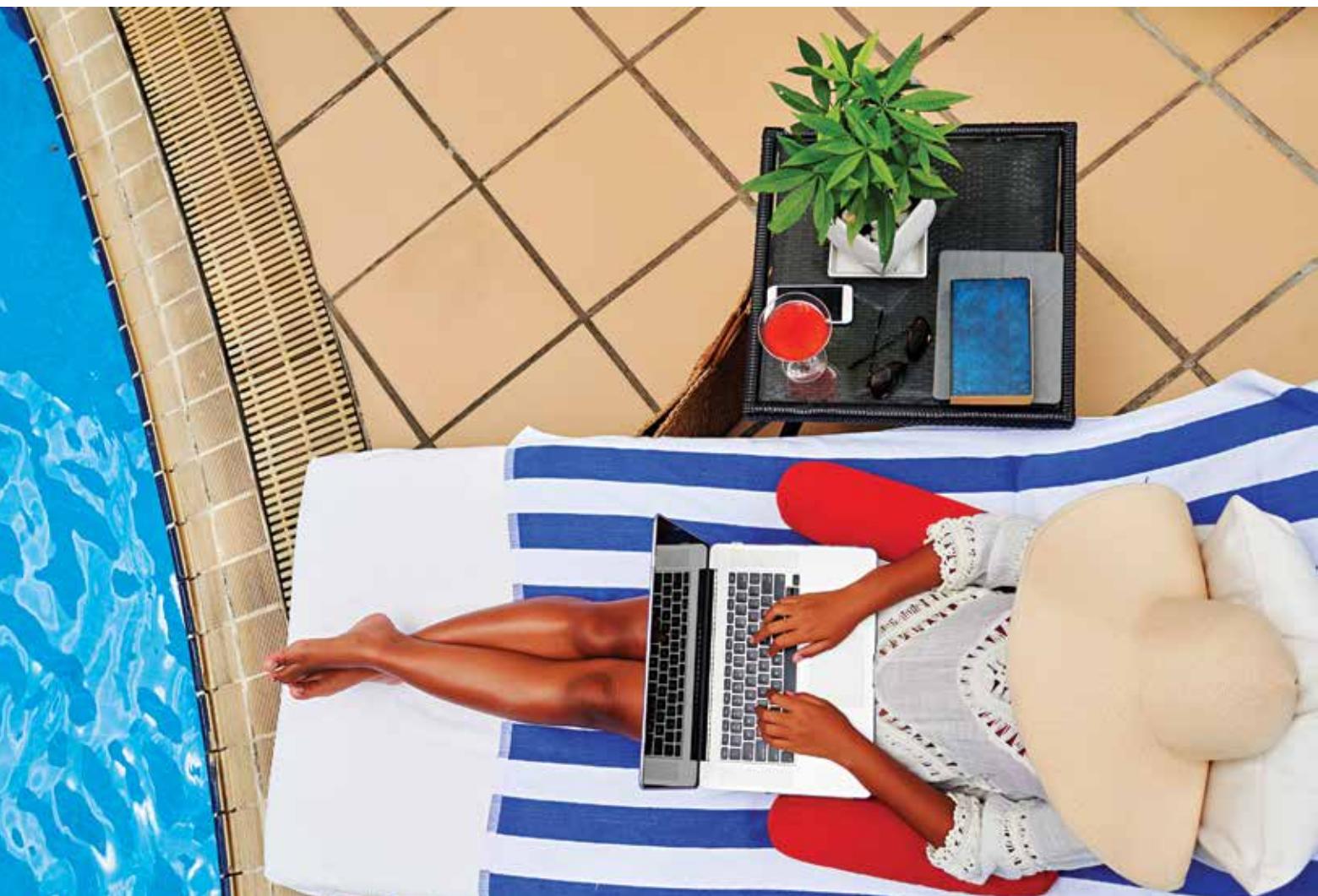
- Choose technology based on the desired attendee engagement experiences and goals for each association event.
- Select tools based on the adoption tendencies of attendees. Will they only use familiar, proven technology or are they willing to try something new?
- Notify attendees and provide online demos and a how-to guide to familiarize them with new technology prior to introducing it an event.
- Don't overuse technology. It's a big mistake to add technology just for the sake of it. "Planners may want to avoid causing sensory overload for their attendees at events," says Radabaugh.

Failure to choose the right app for the right meeting can create unhappy attendees. According to Spellos, "I've gone to conferences where attendees are upset with the apps. They weren't easy to download, they weren't updated or the information contradicted what they had heard otherwise. That tends to be a symptom of a lack of focus on customers. Good apps focus on the attendee and looks at the meeting experience from their perspective."

Engagement technology can connect attendees based on common interests and allow them to build lasting professional relationships by personalizing exchanges. However, the wrong technology can distract from engagement and provide little return on experience or investment.

Getting Familiar With Potential Destinations

Onsite Visits Sponsored by Local CVBs or DMOs Are a Win-Win For Planners and Venues Alike



Familiarization or FAM trips allow meeting planners to visit a destination and determine if it's a good fit for future conferences or other events. They usually last two to three days and provide opportunities to see a wide variety of hotels, event spaces, restaurants and local attractions. Trips are typically sponsored by a local CVB or DMO and their member organizations, which means they're provided at no expense or a low cost for planners.

"FAM trips are an inexpensive way to see a destination and cram in as much information about a ton of different hotels as possible," says Lynn Beierschmitt, CIS, CMP, executive director, sales and operations for Liaisons Meetings & Incentives, a division of World Travel Service, Inc., which is a full-service meeting and incentive planning company based in Knoxville, Tennessee. "When you're looking at a city, it's nice to get an overview of that city and see as many potential properties as you can that might fit your needs."

CVBs work to make FAMs fun and entertaining, but they're far from a vacation. Attending one means taking time away from the office and spending long days touring a high volume of properties. Keep in mind, too, that while there's no requirement to take a meeting to every destination you visit, you should only attend if you think there's a good chance you'll eventually do business there.

When should you say yes to a FAM? Here are some tips to assess whether a trip is right for you, and what you should expect before, during and after each visit to a new destination.

ADVANTAGES OF FAM TRIPS

Andy Smith, program manager for the Road Runners Club of America in Arlington, Virginia, the largest and oldest national association of running organizations in the United States, recently attended his first FAM in Orlando. He spent two packed days visiting properties and local attractions. The staff at Visit Orlando also showcased the many fun things attendees could do in town. "There's a perception that [a theme park] is the primary reason to go to Orlando," he says. "They did a good job of identifying ways to include [that] in your event, but they also showed us that there's more to Orlando."

This ability to become familiar with the nuances of a destination is one of the primary advantages of FAM trips. There are some things you can learn about a destination

from reading about it online, talking to a CVB or hotel representative or asking association members who live there for advice. But there's a lot you don't know unless you experience it firsthand.

That's one of the things Darla Huckaby, CMP, a global account executive with ConferenceDirect, an event management and meeting planning agency, likes about FAM trips. "I walk through a new destination almost like an attendee would," she says. "Your first touchpoint would probably be the airport, so I look for the ease of getting in and out and

"As far as taking the trips, I say the more the merrier. I've been on many FAMs that have introduced me to a destination I didn't think I'd like, and I'm surprised by it."



Lynn Beierschmitt, CIS, CMP
Executive Director,
Sales and Operations
Liaisons Meetings & Incentives
Knoxville, TN

the cleanliness. I walk the hotels and learn everything I can about the city. What is the transportation like? Is it a safe city? That's especially important for women." FAM trips allow her to work out details that are hard to ascertain over the phone.

In addition to learning the specifics of a destination, FAMs can give planners concrete ideas for how to partner with the CVB and local vendors. "Understand how the destination organization, such as Visit Orlando, can help make your planning life easier," says Stephanie Naegle, the organization's vice president of convention sales operations. "Our team of



Part of Visit Orlando's orientation itinerary for meeting and event planners is a stop at SeaWorld Orlando, a popular theme park at the destination.

destination experts can assist with everything from comprehensive site inspections to attendance-building and share those local insider tips to make your event unforgettable.

"We highly encourage planners to interact with our members and learn as much as they can from each location we include on the destination orientation itinerary," she adds. A destination's hotels, offsite event venues, excursion organizers and other service providers are in the best position to offer memorable, one-of-a-kind experiences that will have event participants raving.

There are also benefits to FAM trips that aren't readily apparent from reviewing the agenda. Because they bring a group of peers together, they provide great opportunities for networking and learning.

"Those of us on the trip connected really well," Smith says. "You get ideas from other people and pick up on things they're asking. You become inspired and have questions or turn over new leaves in your own planning by being with other people who do this."

He notes that while some of the planners on his trip had larger groups with different needs than his, hearing how they made events more efficient or overcame problems gave him a new perspective on how to solve challenges with his own conference.

Huckaby says some FAMs she's attended recently have offered an educational component, which she really likes. "They'll bring in a speaker of some sort, so you're learning, as well. Perhaps you can bring in that speaker for that conference, or they can just help you understand trends. It could be food trends, it could be technology trends, it could be a CSR project trend. Providing education at a higher level like that is really beneficial to someone considering attending a FAM. I look for that because I want to go back to my association clients and be better equipped to assist them," she says.

MAKE A FAM TRIP WORK FOR YOU

While FAM trips offer many advantages, there are some disadvantages. "The downside is probably the time away from

the office," says Huckaby. "When you're on a FAM trip, you're there for a reason — to scope out the city, the destination, the properties — and you don't have a lot of free time. It becomes difficult to stay on top of office needs."

Some trips build in an afternoon break, she notes, but others don't allow much time to catch up on emails or return phone calls.

Smith found his first FAM trip a bit overwhelming. "There's a lot packed together," he says. "It's an intense experience and by the end, you're a little worn out. I tend to have a pretty good memory, but it's amazing how when you're seeing your seventh hotel for the day — aspects of one run into the other. Be aware of that and take good notes."

Although this isn't always possible, Smith found it helpful to go into the FAM with a good sense of his event's needs and requirements. "Think about the event that you're having — the size, the feel you want it to have — because that will help you be able to spot specific things and ask the right questions at spaces that meet your needs," he says. "It can be easy to get overwhelmed going in if you don't have a vision for what you're trying to create."

Huckaby has additional advice for making FAMs a positive and productive experience. The host should present an itinerary well in advance of the trip so you know what you'll be seeing and who you'll be meeting on the trip. Use that to educate yourself about the properties and attractions, she says.

Let the CVB know in advance if you need to learn about specific things at a hotel or restaurant. "If I have a wellness client, I really need to understand what the hotel would offer in a gym," Huckaby says.



"I walk through a new destination almost like an attendee would. ...I walk the hotels and learn everything I can about the city."

Darla Huckaby, CMP
Global Account Executive
ConferenceDirect
Frisco, TX

If there are several places you want to see that aren't on the itinerary, it's fine to ask the host if you can come a day early or leave a day late so you have time to meet with other potential partners. CVBs want you to have all the information you need to make a decision about their destination, and can often accommodate pre- and post-trip meetings. If the host

has built downtime into the agenda, it may also be possible to schedule appointments during those breaks.

Don't feel pressured to commit to a destination by the end of the trip. "I approach FAMs as an opportunity to get an overall view that gets the ball rolling," says Beierschmitt. "It's a start. I'm

"Think about the event that you're having — the size, the feel you want it to have — because that will help you be able to spot specific things and ask the right questions at spaces that meet your needs."



Andy Smith
Program Manager
Road Runners Club of America
Arlington, VA

definitely not going to finish any decision-making on the trip."

Many CVBs also organize FAMs for journalists. If you're exploring whether a destination has an upcoming FAM, make sure you look for one geared toward meeting planners.

ETIQUETTE AND ETHICS OF FAM TRIPS

There's certain etiquette to pay attention to on FAM trips, as well as some ethical considerations to take into account before committing to one. "A FAM is a business trip, so you want to wear business-casual clothing and look professional," says Smith.

Naegele concurs. "For a planner attending a destination orientation in Orlando, we recommend business-casual dress with comfortable shoes," she says. The latter part is important because you'll be doing a lot of walking.

Although CVBs do their best to meet the needs of everyone on the trip, there will always be times when you visit a hotel or attraction that isn't appropriate for your group. Beierschmitt stresses that it's important not to skip hotel or other visits because you think they aren't a match for your association.

"The etiquette is to attend everything because you're a hosted individual," she says. "You're basically going to do whatever the destination has planned for you. On most FAMs I've been on, there's very little personal time. It's busy seeing properties and venues and going out to dinners with the group. It's very important that you do what they want you to do. These trips are sponsored, which means the sponsors are paying for you to be there. Ethically, you should be doing what they say."

Planners should attend every site visit and event during the destination orientation and be ready to engage with the staff," says Naegele. "Be on time and be respectful of the work that is involved."



As is true of any event, it's possible the tour will run into some snags along the way. "If something goes wrong, be patient and don't be afraid to offer suggestions for future destination orientations," she says.

When you end up at a property that isn't right for your event, listen to the salesperson's pitch and allow people who are interested in the property to ask their questions without



Stephanie Naegele
Vice President,
Convention Sales Operations
Visit Orlando
Orlando, FL

"We highly encourage planners to interact with our members and learn as much as they can from each location we include on the destination orientation itinerary."

distractions. "You shouldn't be saying things on the side or talking on your cellphone," Huckaby says. "I've seen people do some obnoxious things. It goes back to respect. You have to be respectful. The word gets out if you aren't. It's a very tight industry, and it's all about reputation."

After the trip concludes, it's a good idea to send the host agencies (and potentially some of the partner companies) a

thank you note. "Relationships are very important," says Beierschmitt. "It's important to leave a nice, lasting impression."

In most cases, the destination with follow up with additional information about the properties visited and people you met. If they don't, reach out with questions soon afterward so you can get them answered before they slip your mind.

When you get invited on a FAM trip, think carefully about whether there's a good chance you'll be able to give the host a good return on their investment. "Although Orlando destination orientations are very fun, they are an educational business trip for the planner and should be treated as such," says Naegele. "When the planners sign up to attend a destination orientation, they should have legitimate business opportunities that would consider the destination."

It's appropriate to attend any FAM offered by a city that seems to meet your association's needs. "But if you already know a destination isn't going to fit within your criteria, don't go," says Huckaby. If it's a place you'd like to explore for a future event, consider asking the destination to keep you in mind for later trips.

That being said, there may be circumstances when it's appropriate to attend a FAM even if you don't have a specific event in mind for that city. "As far as taking the trips, I say the more the merrier," says Beierschmitt. "I've been on many FAMs that have introduced me to a destination I didn't think I'd like, and I'm surprised by it."

Whenever you can afford time away from the office and potentially bring value to a destination, FAM trips are worth the investment.

ONE OF ORLANDO'S MOST **IMPRESSIVE** HOTELS
IS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING.

Independently owned and operated, Rosen Shingle Creek is the ideal Orlando meeting hotel, able to deliver the quality incentives you expect from a AAA Four Diamond property. We invite you to experience the Rosen Difference for yourself by selecting one of our Added Value offerings:

- Signing bonus starting at \$5,000 applied to master account*
- Discounts on meeting Internet
- Complimentary coffee break
- Suggest your own incentive, designed just for you

To take advantage of these limited-time concession offerings, call **407.996.4890** or email Sales@RosenShingleCreek.com.

No Resort Fee • Complimentary In-room Wi-Fi • RFID Key Locking System

*Concession offerings are valid for NEW bookings received on or after January 1, 2019 for meetings booked and consumed over select hot dates in 2019 (call or email for hot dates). Bookings must meet a minimum of 250 room nights and a designated minimum of food and beverage contributions at Rosen Shingle Creek. After signing, bonuses will be awarded starting at \$5,000 and applied to master accounts.

**ROSEN SHINGLE CREEK™
ORLANDO**



Credit: Cathy Breden / Center for Exhibition Industry Research

Event space is an important part of the puzzle — make sure it's the right fit for your needs.

Strategies to Drive Trade Show Growth

Ways to Increase Revenue, Attendance and Exhibitors

By Christine Loomis

When it comes to growing a trade show, planners have critical questions to ask. Should the focus be on growing the number of attendees? What about the quality of attendees? Does growth come from adding new exhibitors? Increasing space? How does a show's design, content and location impact growth?

In fact, all of these elements are important.

We asked several high-level industry experts to weigh in on how best to drive trade show growth. Their answers were not always identical, but they were always enlightening and insightful.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

In considering the most important elements to growing a successful trade show, Cathy Breden, CAE, CMP, CEO of the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR), says each owner defines the critical components of a show.

"Some shows may not have the traffic density or number of qualified buyers attending, and growth needs to come from

attendee acquisition," she says. "Others might find additional niche markets within their event's industry and might grow that way by attracting exhibitors and attendees from that niche group. Of course, everyone wants to increase revenue, and that is the desired outcome of the above decisions."

Michelle Crowley, vice president, global growth & innovation at PCMA, says it depends on the organization's goal for growth. "In most cases, this is going to be related to revenue growth, but that can't be the only goal. Audience growth should be considered, as audience growth is associated with value."

David Audrain, executive director of the Society of Independent Show Organizers (SISO) and CEO and partner of Exposition Development Company, Inc., points to growth on multiple fronts.

"For a show to have sustainable and continuous growth — the ultimate goal for all shows — you must have both attendee and exhibitor growth in relatively similar percentages, assuming that the balance between attendees and exhibitors was appropriate to start with. Revenue growth will come automatically along with exhibitor and attendee growth," he says.

However, he adds, "The focus on growth is different for non-profit association show owners compared to for-profit independent show-organizing businesses. Associations typically produce shows to bring their communities together, create visibility and value for the association and to generate funds for the association's member service and government affairs activities. So for associations, the growth of a show will usually reflect the growth of the market, and revenue growth is typically not the primary objective. A for-profit show organizer will typically place growth as its No. 1 objective, along with maintaining an appropriate balance of attendees and exhibitors to ensure happy customers on both sides.

Trina M. Jordan, CEM, manager, meetings & expositions at Kellen, an association management company, puts the emphasis squarely on attendees. If growth is the goal, she says, planners should focus on the needs of the attendee.

"Your main question to think about while planning is, 'What is the original purpose of the annual event?' Education and networking are often the top reasons for attending," she notes. "If attendees are looking for new products and services, the exhibit hall is going to be their main focus. Be patient and don't expect to have growth overnight. When trying to grow an event, it can take three to five years of planning and execution to see results. And, as the show grows, all components will grow — attendance, exhibitors and revenue."

Naturally, there are also challenges. Breden says that "doing the same show year after year, not rethinking it each year," can negatively affect growth. "Organizers must review and decide what was successful and needs to be repeated, what needs to be changed and what shouldn't be done again."

Audrain says lack of sufficient qualified attendees is the No. 1 issue, and acquiring them the No. 1 goal, for all show organizers.

For Jordan, "Cost and budgets are the biggest impediments."

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPACE & LOCATION

Experts note that keeping space adequately filled is crucial.

"If you don't have sufficient attendance to keep the exhibitors busy during the show or to keep the aisle space relatively occupied, then the show can look 'empty,'" says Audrain. "That impression alone can create a negative feeling among exhibitors and attendees, which could create a downward spiral going forward. Ensuring that you have sufficient exhibit hall space for the amount of growth you're hoping for or expecting is ideal, but sometimes you may have to 'sell out' existing space and then move to a bigger hall in a future year. This is not the worst outcome, as a sold-out show can create positive impressions and a higher demand for the future."

Jordan agrees. Ideally, she says, you want a space that's adequate size. "If the exhibit hall is too large for your trade show, the show floor will always seem empty." Moreover, she notes,

"Doing the same show year after-year, not rethinking it each year [can negatively affect growth]. Organizers must review and decide what was successful and needs to be repeated, what needs to be changed and what shouldn't be done again."

it's best to slowly grow the show floor. "Let the hall sell out and have a wait list. This will generate buzz within the industry."

And, if you're contracted to be in the same location or facility year after year and the space isn't exactly right, Jordan advises getting creative. "Use pipe and drape to mask off unused parts of the hall. Add other functions to the exhibit hall, such as registration, publication booths, product theaters, speed session breakouts, etc. If, however, you're in different locations each year, be sure your facility choice grows with the show, as well," she says.

Breden says it's a balancing act in terms of having the right amount of space for current needs and thinking ahead to the future.

"It's important to set goals for growth. It might be 5 percent, 10 percent or some other percent growth goals, and over a certain period of time," she notes. "Additionally, many shows contract with venues up to 10 or more years out. If it turns out there's too much space, there are ways to fill in space, including adding learning theaters on the floor, creating lounge seating in areas and masking drape to create a smaller appearance."

Planners are thinking differently about space today, notes Crowley. "It's not just about the square meters or feet in the immediate venue. Instead, planners seek to incorporate the host city and the local industries. Brands want to activate and differentiate themselves. They're looking for ways to do this beyond the traditional show floor. Organizations should offer a menu of ways to be involved beyond a booth or risk exhibitors doing it on their own. That's a missed opportunity and revenue stream," she says.

Location is also key, though a destination that draws attendance for one group may not be right for another.

"Some destinations gain more attention than others, but that doesn't mean it is the right place for every trade show," Crowley says. "It all comes down to the purpose of the event and your audience. If you're trying to attract a specific industry or sub-segment, then go to the destination where they are more densely populated, as long as that place doesn't alienate the current audience. No matter where you are, engage with the local community. Destinations have universities, research



Cathy Breden, CAE, CMP
CEO, Center for Exhibition Industry Research
Dallas, TX



Credit: Jacob Slaton Photography
Michelle Crowley
Vice President
Global Growth & Innovation
PCMA, Chicago, IL

If you're trying to attract a specific industry or sub-segment, then go to the destination where they are more densely populated, as long as that place doesn't alienate the current audience. No matter where you are, engage with the local community."

organizations, think tanks, startups, consulting firms, etc., that should be engaged — it is the organization's job to push the destination partners and local leaders to make those connections. This is how real influence and economic and social progress can be made."

Although the very largest shows can get some attendees to travel around the world to participate, Audrain points out that all shows have a local factor.

"The reality is that every hour of additional travel time to get to the venue will reduce — often significantly — the percentage of a target market that's willing or able to attend. So ease of travel is the first key element of location," he says.

The second element, he continues, "is the attractiveness of a location, which depends somewhat on the nature of the audience. For example, if the target audience is made up primarily of family businesses, these attendees might bring their spouse or family to an event, and having a location that's attractive as a destination can bring higher attendance. The third element is one of variety. In some cases, attendees are comfortable going back to the same venue and location year after year, but in others, they want a change of scenery. Or it may be that you need to move around the country or the world in order to allow attendees from different regions easier access to attend."

Jordan also speaks to the makeup of the audience. "If your attendees are interested in activities outside of the event, then location will be important. But if you're interested in keeping the attention of the attendees and want them to attend only events at the show, you can educate and entertain your attendees from 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., making location less important. Regardless, choose locations that are convenient for everyone to get to via airplanes, trains, even cars."

Breden agrees that some cities are a larger draw for attendees than others. "It just depends on the audience and perhaps the industry it serves," she says. "A state association in Florida, for example, may be restricted from holding its event outside the state. For national or international events, the industry sector they serve may dictate location. For instance, it makes sense for the Detroit Auto Show to be held in the Motor City, while an international fashion event might be held in Milan."

INFRASTRUCTURE MATTERS

Can a convention center's loading facilities, infrastructure, union requirements and other specifics impact the success of a show? Absolutely. Some issues can mean extra costs for exhibitors, for example, and that can have a direct effect on a show's success and growth.

"The loading dock must be well-functioning. If the loading dock isn't functional, it will affect the exhibitors' drayage (material handling) costs," says Jordan. "Older exhibit halls tend to be darker and have more columns. This can be somewhat difficult when designing and laying out your exhibit hall. Union requirements can either benefit your exhibitors or not. Union rules are nothing new. Smaller exhibitors might have trouble understanding the union rules, which can create cost for exhibitors, so be sure this is not something that will make or break your exhibitors' presence."

Breden and Audrain agree. "If it's a heavy equipment trade show and the venue only has five loading docks, for example, and there's another show moving in or moving out the same time the current event is moving in, that can impact the overall experience of exhibitors," Breden says. "If the Wi-Fi in the venue isn't state-of-the-art, that can also impact the event — perhaps not the current year's event, but future years' attendance."

Audrain notes, "Most venues have sufficient infrastructure to accommodate most shows' needs to move in and out, but when a venue has restrictive union rules, or a shortage of loading docks, then it can cause a higher labor cost, which will increase the exhibitors' costs."

CONTENT & DESIGN

Breden believes that education typically is a valuable part of the experience for attendees. "Each event is different, and for associations, especially, understanding the learning needs of their attendees is important. It's also important, as the information can be provided to the exhibitors. Exhibitors might want to offer education in their booths," she says.

Jordan also sees conference content as significant. "Speakers and educational sessions are what drives attendance for most shows," she says. "If sessions and speakers are well-known by attendees, it will draw a larger audience, which in turn, will bring more activity to the exhibit hall."

As with other elements, the importance of education depends on the show and its purpose.

"Ultimately, the most important thing is providing value to various audiences," Crowley says. "That may be in the form of education sessions, unique experiences, gaining consulting advice from someone you can't normally reach, etc. Knowing who makes the decision on whether someone attends can help personalize the marketing. Focusing on the why,

Resources For Driving Growth

Nancy Drapeau, PRC, senior research director at the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) points out that CEIR has an array of resources available. Among them are studies that focus on attendees, studies that focus on exhibitors and a variety of studies on industry trends, from how exhibitors can use games and contests to drive greater trade show growth to best practices for exhibit booth design.

"CEIR's Index and free Event Analyzer Tool offer planners a way to assess the bottom line of how well their event is faring compared to their peer set and the B2B exhibition industry overall," she says. "The four key performance metrics used are number of attendees, number of exhibitors, NSF of paid space and organizer revenue."

CEIR also offers a forecast through 2020

in its most recent edition. "The outcome of doing this comparison helps focus strategic discussions on how to shore up areas of weakness and how to take advantage of areas of strength," Drapeau says.

However, she adds, "That's only one piece of the pie. It's essential to monitor why brand marketers/exhibitors choose to use the channel and why business professionals attend, as well as the outlook moving forward. Other CEIR research goes deeper to provide these insights." AC&F

personalized by customer segment, and what outcome will be the result, is not simple to transition to, but it is right direction."

Some shows don't even offer education sessions. "They may not need them to drive attendance because equipment and products on display may well be the primary attraction for attendees," Audrain says. "However, many, if not most, shows use educational content to help drive attendance, and offering speakers and topics that will help potential attendees justify their attendance either to their manager or themselves is often highly valuable."

MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Planners should have the needs of multiple stakeholders in mind if they are to successfully increase show growth.

"You must know your prospective audience's needs, you must know who they are, and you must communicate the appropriate information to them to answer their needs and show them they will get the ROI for their time and expense of attending," Audrain says.

He also believes that if planners focus on quality attendees, the rest should follow. "If attendees are happy with a show and are the attendees that exhibitors want to see, then exhibitors will be happy," he says. "And, if the attendees and exhibitors are happy, then the show organizer will usually be very happy, as well."

Naturally, there are different ways to measure success. "Various stakeholders have different measurements and definitions of success, which is why building personas is important," Crowley says. "Focus groups and advisory groups can help this. At the same time, it's important to recognize the echo chamber most organizations are in when they seek feedback. It's important to look beyond the core and understand how people measure value, and determine if, and how, you could support that."

One way to keep attendees and exhibitors happy, Jordan says, is to continually survey them to make sure you're meeting their needs. "Attendees come to conferences and trade shows with different agendas. For some, meetings and educational training sessions are important. To others, exhibit hall and networking events are key," she says. "Either way you look at it, as

a planner you have to be sure to have equal focus on all functions of your event. It's best to survey your attendees, as well as your exhibitors."

Breden sees four "top needs" as deserving of planners' attention in terms of meeting all stakeholders' needs: attendee acquisition, re-energizing a show, creating partnerships with exhibitors and others, and effective budgeting and strategic planning.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Asked to provide trade show planners three top strategies for driving successful trade show growth, our experts came up with a compelling list.

Breden advised, "Understand the needs and preferences of attendees and buyers, understand the environment of the market segment the show serves and have an innovative strategy."

For Jordan, the top three strategies are, "Study your market and keep up on industry trends and topics, choose influencers as speakers to help draw attendees and keep in mind that you need ample, dedicated exhibit-hall hours."

To facilitate that last one, she advises planners to add compelling functions in the hall that bring attendees face-to-face with exhibitors.

Audrain believes just one strategy will elicit the desired results. "Focus on the right quality attendees," he says. "Everything else will come from successfully growing the right attendees."

Crowley says planners must first evaluate the customer's persona. "Is it still who you thought it was? How has it changed, and how will it change in the next five years? Next, focus on value and ease. Simplify your communication and process. Make a five-step process only two steps so customers can move faster. And, finally, lead with the why. Tell your audience why it's important to attend instead of what they are going to experience or who they'll meet. What is the action they can take because of it? What is the value to them?"

Whichever strategies seem right for you and the trade shows you organize, one thing is clear: Planners have to re-evaluate each show every year. In the world of creating highly successful trade shows, there's no resting on laurels. AC&F

Keeping Meetings Calm *and* Cool in Colorado

"Mile High City"
is Abuzz With Attendees
Who Want to Stay Low-Key



Credit: Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center

The staff from Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center — and their pets — welcomed the American Animal Hospital Association.

By John Buchanan

Colorado, a vast and beautiful state highlighted by the Rocky Mountains and featuring numerous individual destinations large and small, has become popular with meeting planners who want to escape a typical urban setting and enjoy spectacular scenery. Colorado's location, which makes it convenient for attendees from both the east and west coasts, has been another factor in its steady ascendance as a meetings destination during the last decade.

DENVER

Over the past few years, the "Mile High City" has seen its inventory of meeting hotels grow and diversify, while its 2.2 million-square-foot Colorado Convention Center launched a major \$233 million expansion project. In addition, because Denver is a major hub for United Airlines, it also offers excellent airlift.

Michael Wilson, CMP, division director and convention and meeting planner at the Schaumburg, Illinois-based American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), chose Denver for the organization's 9,175-attendee, five-day, four-night citywide annual meeting last July. AVMA had previously been to Denver in 2014.

"The biggest driver of attendance at our annual meeting is the destination," Wilson says. "All of the improvements that Denver has made since we were there in 2014 have made the city an attractive destination for many people who want to bring their families to the meeting. And, we have a lot of folks that want to do that."

"Another thing about Denver that makes it a very good

meetings destination is that it's very walkable. That is key for us because our attendees don't like to use shuttles. We always look for cities where a lot of hotels are close to the convention center so everything is very convenient for attendees, and they can walk."

A third attribute that AVMA's attendees liked about Denver, Wilson says, "is the growth of the dining and entertainment options, especially in the downtown convention district. There are lots of options for attendees in their free time."

The net result of those key factors? Last year, Denver attracted 2,000 more attendees than Indianapolis did in 2017.

AVMA's headquarters hotel — in a total room block that included 19 properties across a range of price points — was the 1,100-room **Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center**, which features 60,600 square feet of meeting space.

"The obvious factor in naming the Hyatt Regency our headquarters hotel was that it's adjacent to the convention center," Wilson says. "But it also has a great meeting space that was a good fit for all of the different types of things we do during the meeting ... and other meetings that take place before the annual meeting starts. The staff is also extremely knowledgeable and very friendly. That's another thing that is very important to us."

Located just two blocks away from the Hyatt Regency is the AAA Four Diamond, 516-room **Grand Hyatt Denver**, which features 52,600 square feet of meeting space.

COLORADO CONVENTION CENTER

AVMA used the Colorado Convention Center for the more than 1,000 continuing education sessions it conducted during the meeting.

"The space at the convention center is really great," Wilson says. "They have really large breakout rooms. The facility is also very easy to navigate. We used the Bellco Theatre for our keynote session because it has built-in AV capabilities — that saved us some money."

The Bellco Theatre, a 5,000-seat venue, is one of the most technically advanced theaters of its kind in the U.S. It features state-of-the-art acoustics.

Because Denver is gaining popularity as a convention destination, last year, the Denver City Council greenlighted a \$233 million rooftop expansion project. Plans call for the addition of 250,000 square feet of new space atop the Champa Street side of the complex, including an 80,000-square-foot ballroom and a large outdoor terrace with mountain and downtown views.

As for Wilson, he liked Denver so much that he agreed

Credit: Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center

One of the area's only outdoor meeting spaces, the terrace at Hyatt Regency Denver can host a banquet for 180 and a reception for up to 300.

to join the advisory board of Visit Denver, the city's CVB. He will also take AVMA back to town for its 2023 convention.

Erin Parrott, CMP, senior manager, meetings and events, at the Lakewood, Colorado-based American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), also chose Denver last September for her six-night, five-day annual meeting for 650 attendees. Lakewood is a suburb of Denver.

"It's our hometown, and we had recently changed our meeting model," Parrott says. "We downsized from a larger citywide meeting so that only accredited members could attend the meeting. So, we wanted to bring our annual

"... there is an onsite AV control room that is located behind glass [at Embassy Suites by Hilton Colorado Springs], so it's a real control room right where you are meeting."

David Geddes, Co-founder and CEO
International Sports Technology Association, Marietta, GA

meeting home to Denver for the first year the new meeting was held. Denver is just a great city. It has grown so much in recent years, and there is so much to see and do."

AAHA also used the Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center.

"We did an RFP that included seven cities, as far away as Florida and California," Parrott says. "We ended up choosing Denver and the Hyatt Regency because they were willing to work with us on rates, so we got good value. Their meeting space was also perfect for us, so we signed a two-meeting contract, and we're going back in 2020."

Parrott gives the Hyatt Regency high marks for its room product. "The rooms are great," she says. "They have a lot of light. The rooms are very clean and very well-maintained. We also got upgrades for our senior executives, and the suites are gorgeous."

She also praised the hotel's food and beverage services.



Hilton Denver Inverness features more than 60,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor meeting space and an 18-hole championship golf course.

Credit: HiltonDenverInverness

"We did all of our meals at the hotel, all as buffets," Parrott says. "I worked very closely with the chef to create our banquet menus, so we did some very cool things. For example, we did a 'Welcome to Colorado' reception that he created from Colorado food options like lamb, smoked trout, elk carpaccio and locally made cheese. He also worked with us to do some breaks that were very creative and also to create some 'grab-and-go' options."

[The Broadmoor] is very high-end, but also laidback. I call it comfortable luxury. It's not stuffy, like a lot of luxury resorts. You don't feel like your luggage is not good enough."

Ann Arnott, Executive Vice President and CEO
Power Transmission Distributors Association, Chicago, IL

A key local food vendor was Fruition Farms, which was featured on the TV show "Top Chef" in 2017.

"The food was great," Parrott says. "Everybody loved it. We got a lot of feedback from attendees about how good it was."

The meeting space at the Hyatt Regency was also ideal for AAHA. "It was just perfect for us," Parrott says. "Their ballrooms were also ideal because we hold our exhibits in the same space as our general sessions. And, their upstairs ballroom was perfect for our breakouts."

The factor that truly set the hotel apart, she says, was its service. "I've never had a hotel go so far above and beyond what my attendees and I expected," she says. "Once they understood the purpose of our meeting, they came up with some great ideas that helped us create a better event. For example, they hosted a pet Halloween contest in the lobby, and our attendees voted on the winners. They also created animal-themed drinks. They just did so many little things that were really creative."

As a resident of the Denver area, Parrott notes that the

city is still not as well-known or respected among association meeting planners as it deserves to be.

"A lot of meeting planners still think of Denver as a small 'cow town,'" she says. "But it's definitely not. It's now a very cool, very sophisticated city. There are lots of things to do. We actually lost some attendees during the day because they wanted to go explore the Denver area."

Other major meeting hotels in the Denver area include the AAA Four Diamond, 302-room **Hilton Denver Inverness** in nearby Englewood. The property features more than 60,000 square feet of IACC-certified indoor/outdoor meeting and function space, a full-service spa, and an 18-hole championship golf course. The hotel's flagship restaurant is The Fireside Bar & Grill, which serves American cuisine.

Another top-rate meeting property, located between Denver and Boulder, is the 390-room **Omni Interlocken Hotel** in Broomfield. It features 40,000 square feet of meeting space, as well as 27 holes of championship golf.

COLORADO SPRINGS

Located 60 miles south of Denver is Colorado Springs, which by virtue of its extraordinary roster of renowned resort hotels — including the legendary **The Broadmoor** and **Cheyenne Mountain Colorado Springs, A Dolce Resort** — is a perennially popular association meetings destination.

Ann Arnott, executive vice president/CEO of the Chicago-based Power Transmission Distributors Association (PTDA), used The Broadmoor for the first time last October for PTDA's five-day, four-night annual meeting for 725 attendees. It was the 100-year-old, widely acclaimed resort — considered by consensus the best resort-style meeting property in the country — that attracted Arnott to Colorado Springs, rather than the destination in general.

The 784-room hotel — which holds the record for most consecutive years as a Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five Diamond property — features 185,000 square feet of meeting and function space, including spectacular outdoor venues.

The Broadmoor also includes 10 restaurants and 10

cafes and lounges. Its flagship Penrose Room is the only Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five Diamond restaurant in Colorado. Other amenities include a Forbes Five-Star spa and two championship golf courses, designed by the legendary Donald Ross and Robert Trent Jones Sr.

"I've been an association manager for 25 years, but I had never been to The Broadmoor until 2015," Arnott says. "But in 2015, I was there for three different meetings as an attendee. And the first time I went, I took my family with me, and they said, 'Mom, you have to hold a meeting here so we can come back.' It's just a fabulous property."

Last year, Arnott got to experience, as a meeting planner, why The Broadmoor enjoys its singular status.

"We often do our meeting in a resort-style property," she says. "But what attendees get at The Broadmoor is a true resort experience. It isn't just a really nice hotel that has a golf course and a spa. It's a real resort. You never have to leave the property for anything, and there is more to do than you can actually do. But even more important is the culture of The Broadmoor. It's very high-end, but also laid-back. I call it comfortable luxury. It's not stuffy, like a lot of luxury resorts are. You don't have to feel like your luggage is not good enough."

The rooms at the resort are just as luxurious, as what one might expect from its accolades.

"Even their standard rooms have fantastic bathroom amenities, like glass showers, big towels and gorgeous views," Arnott says. "And beds that look like they're fit for a king. The rooms actually feel like a suite. You feel like you

"[Hyatt Regency Denver] came up with some great ideas that helped us create a better event. They hosted a pet Halloween contest in the lobby, and our attendees voted on the winners. They also created animal-themed drinks. They just did so many little things that were really creative."

They hosted a pet Halloween contest in the lobby, and our attendees voted on the winners.

They also created animal-themed drinks. They just did so many little things that were really creative."



Erin Parrott, CMP
Senior Manager,
Meetings and Events
American Animal Hospital
Association
Lakewood, CO

could live there and be really happy. But there's also a price point for every level of attendees."

Likewise, Arnott says, the hotel's F&B is phenomenal, as is the meeting space. But it is The Broadmoor's standard of service that supports its reputation.

"The service is the thing that really came out in our post-meeting evaluation from attendees," Arnott says. "We usually get ratings between 'satisfied' and 'highly satisfied' that total 92 or 93 percent. At The Broadmoor, we got 99.5 percent. That's never happened before."

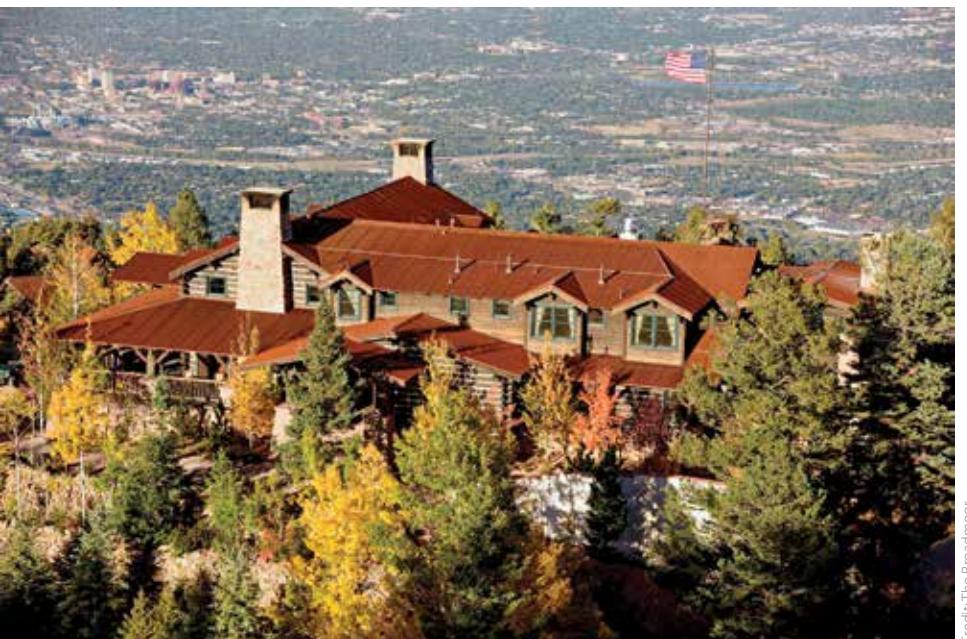
As a result, she says, her attendees are "already asking when we're going back."

The IACC-certified, 217-acre, 316-room **Cheyenne Mountain Colorado Springs, A Dolce Resort**, features 40,000 square feet of meeting space, including 38 meeting rooms. Amenities include an 18-hole, Pete Dye-designed championship golf course, 11 outdoor tennis courts and five indoor tennis courts.

ANOTHER UNIQUE AND SPECTACULAR VENUE

David Geddes, co-founder and CEO of the International Sports Technology Association (ISTA) in Marietta, Georgia, is another fan of Colorado Springs as a meetings destination. And like Arnott, he was drawn to it because of the existence of a singular, world-famous venue. In ISTA's case, that was the U.S. Olympic Training Center.

In 2017, Geddes hosted ISTA's inaugural annual meeting, a two-day, two-night event for 50 attendees, at the **Embassy Suites by Hilton Colorado Springs** — and used the Olympic facility as his meeting venue.



Credit: The Broadmoor
The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs is considered by consensus the best resort-style meeting property in the country, with 10 restaurants and 10 cafes and lounges.

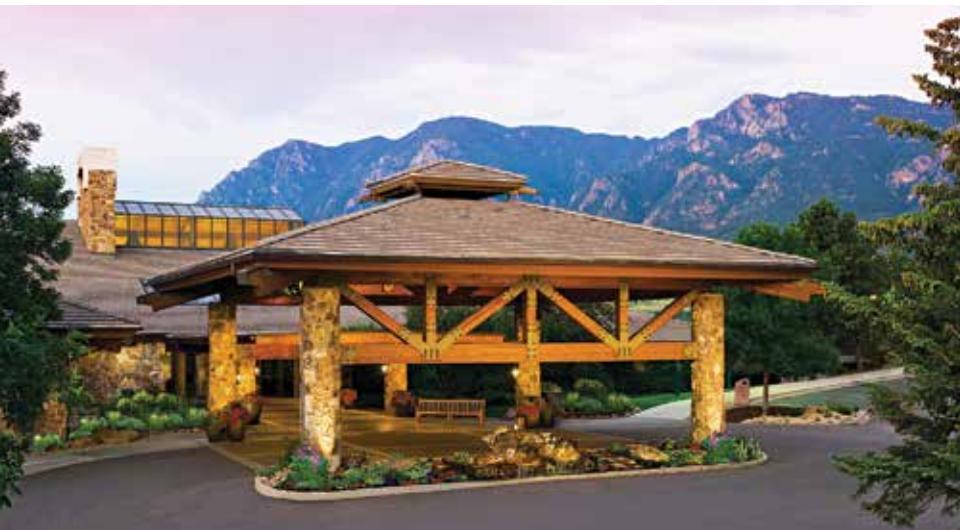


"The obvious factor in naming the Hyatt Regency our headquarters hotel was that it's adjacent to the convention center. But it also has a great meeting space that was a good fit for all of the different types of things we do during the meeting."

Michael Wilson, CMP
Division Director/Convention and
Meeting Planner
American Veterinary Medical
Association
Schaumburg, IL

"Colorado Springs is a very unique destination," Geddes says. "The factor that was most responsible for bringing us there was the U.S. Olympic Training Center. One of the initial objectives of our conference, from the beginning, was to foster relationships with elite sporting organizations. That's important because there is immense pressure on governing bodies and national organizations to perform at their optimal potential. That means, among other things, having good feeder systems through sporting organizations. And, the U.S. Olympic Training Center represents the country, it represents America, so it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many athletes to experience it. It also goes directly to our underlying focus on high performance."

Geddes chose the Embassy Suites property because its value proposition, but also because of his intimate knowledge of the brand. At the time it was launched, Geddes worked for Promus Hotel Corporation, which created and launched the brand.



A popular association meetings destination, Cheyenne Mountain Colorado Springs has 40,000 square feet of meeting space, an 18-hole, Pete Dye-designed golf course and 16 tennis courts.

Credit: Cheyenne Mountain Colorado Springs

Another popular meeting hotel option in Colorado is the **Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa**, located in the tony ski resort of Beaver Creek in Vail Valley. The 190-room Park Hyatt Beaver Creek features 20,000 square feet of meeting space. AC&F

"The thing I like about an Embassy Suites hotel is that it's an affordable, all-suite property," Geddes says. "It also offers some unique amenities. For example, we did an opening night reception in the lobby atrium. Every Embassy Suites hotel has a great atrium. You get a free happy hour in the early evening, so that is a great advantage of the brand for a small group because you can hold a free cocktail reception in a beautiful atrium."

Geddes also hosted an opening night plated dinner at the hotel.

"The food and service were both excellent," he says. "I paid very close attention to everything, and everything was just perfect — from the quality of the food to the size of the portions and the presentation. As a planner, you couldn't ask for more."

For the meeting's other evening, Geddes took attendees offsite to the Old Chicago Pizza & Taproom restaurant near the hotel. "It's very casual," he says, "but the food is really excellent. And everybody had a really fun time."

All of ISTA's meeting sessions and activities were held at the U.S. Olympic Training Center. The facility features 65,000 square feet of meeting and event space, including 10 individual meeting rooms.

"We used a meeting room in the main facility and did classroom-style setups," Geddes says. "One thing I really liked about the space is that there is an onsite AV control room that is located behind glass, so it's a real control room right where you are meeting. And, the AV capabilities at the Olympic facility are truly state-of-the-art."

Colorado Springs also features another unique and sensational offsite venue which Geddes took advantage of — the Garden of the Gods, a vast and scenic public park that was designated as a National Natural Landmark in 1971.

It offers dramatic panoramic views of towering sandstone rock formations against a backdrop of snow-capped Pikes Peak. Its world-class Visitor & Nature Center and museum is the most visited attraction in the region and features interactive educational exhibits.

"It's just spectacular," Geddes says. "Our attendees loved it."

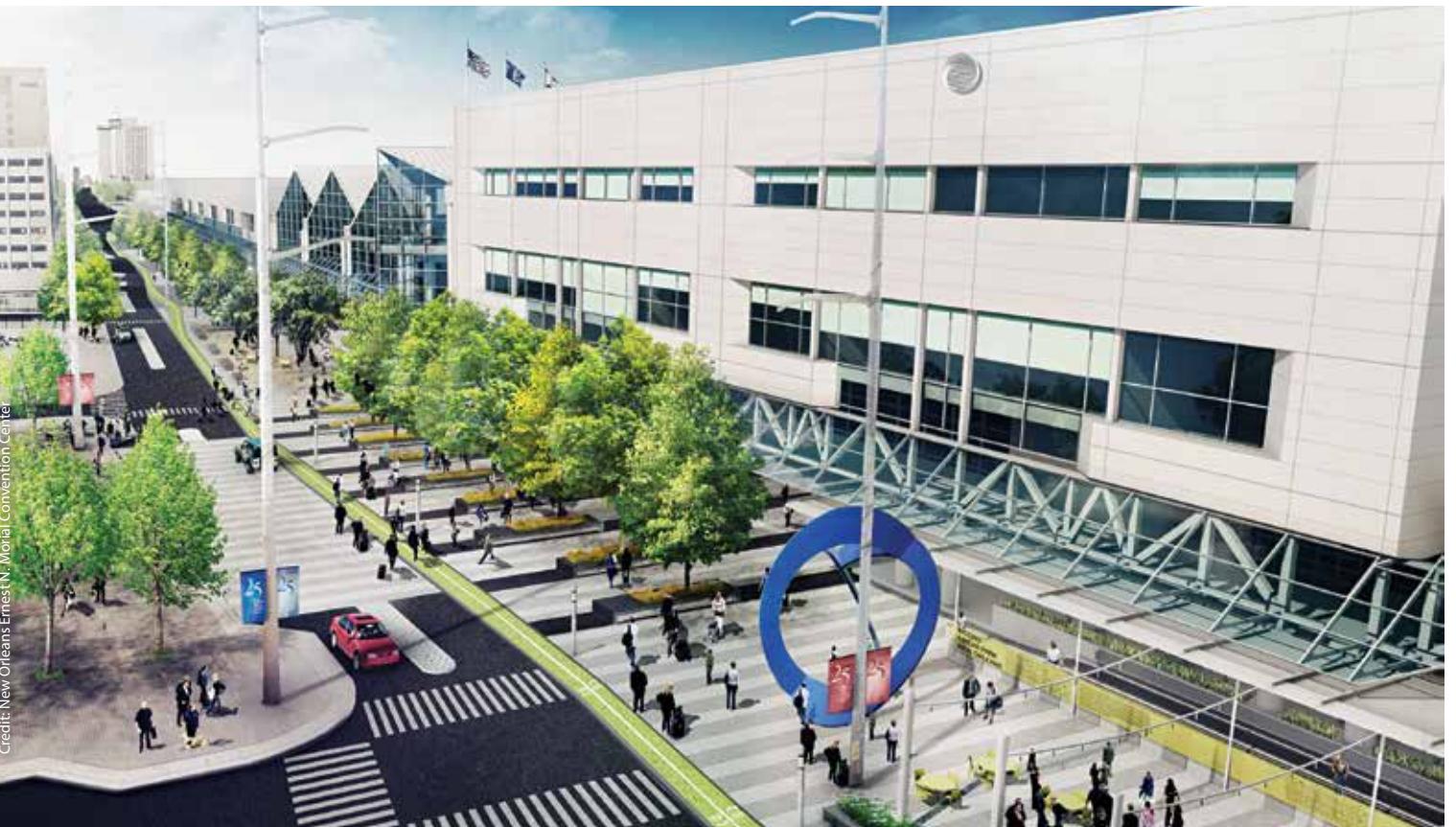
The Broadmoor's facilities are well-suited for meetings and events. The hotel's 185,000 square feet of meeting space include 10 ballrooms, 100 meeting rooms and 100 breakout rooms. The hotel's 18-hole, Pete Dye-designed golf course, spa, and restaurants provide additional options for attendees.



Meetings and events take on a special energy at The Broadmoor. Our magnificent Colorado setting will inspire your people. Our world-class golf, spa, dining and more will refresh them. The unique venues and activities of our Broadmoor Wilderness Experience properties will challenge them and change their perspectives. Our 185,000 square feet of meeting space is flexible enough to meet your most demanding requirements. And amidst it all, The Broadmoor's legendary tradition of quality and service will ensure your event is a success. Contact us today and start planning your meeting now at broadmoor.com.

THE BROADMOOR
LEGEND[®]
Preferred
Hotels & Resorts
Five Diamond Award





The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is undergoing a five-year, \$557 million renovation to upgrade the facility and its surrounding areas.

Credit: New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

The Big Easy

While Planners Are Drawn to New Orleans, Other Louisiana Cities Also Have Lots to Offer

By Derek Reveron

Any association group planning a meeting with "authentic" and "unique" as part of its theme should consider New Orleans because those two words perfectly describe its singular culture, food and music.

Small and large groups that repeatedly return to the

"AORN has found New Orleans to be a very successful city for our annual conference. They take the time to understand both our conference needs and budget."

Emily O'Connell, CMP

Meetings Manager, Association of periOperative Registered Nurses, Denver, CO

Crescent City have a different kind of good time every time. That's because New Orleans has everything planners need, including Creole, Cajun and Southern cuisine; jazz clubs and venues; a mélange of French, African and Spanish culture; and an expanding meeting infrastructure that promises to attract growing numbers of meetings and conventions.

No wonder the number of visitors to New Orleans last year increased 5.7 percent, according to research by D.K. Shifflet & Associates for New Orleans & Company (formerly the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau). Spending on lodging surged by 12.3 percent to \$1.7 billion.

New Orleans' success stems largely from its ability to draw a variety of different-sized groups.

According to Stephen Perry, president and CEO, New Orleans & Company, "New Orleans enjoys a healthy mix of every size group, from 10-[people] meetings to 20,000-[people] international conventions. New Orleans currently hosts a wide variety of meetings with 70 percent coming from associations and 30 percent from corporations. This is a great mix for us that gives a variety of opportunities to our diverse venue inventory to shine among a wide variety of industries."

REPEAT CUSTOMERS

Groups that meet again and again in New Orleans have been crucial to its success.

"With 80 percent of our groups having met in New Orleans before, it's clear to us that planners and attendees enjoy its cultural uniqueness," says Perry. "Many groups welcome record attendance, thanks to the natural appeal of the city. The types of groups we work very diligently to attract are those that have not met in New Orleans yet, as we know once they experience the charm and hospitality of our destination, they will become loyal fans."

Another key is the ongoing efforts by New Orleans & Company to seek feedback from planners and other partners before making improvements and changes.

Says Perry, "New Orleans & Company regularly hosts a Customer Advisory Council to gain insight from valued partners and maintain our standing as a top-rated meeting destination. We also partnered with leadership from the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (ENMCC) and hosted focus groups in large association markets to gather firsthand knowledge and feedback from planners that have future meetings at the center and even tapped into those with large events with nothing on the books."

"We are committed to supporting our local economy, the 100,000 individuals employed in the industry, and focusing our efforts in preserving the authentic culture bearers who make New Orleans the unique destination that it is."



Stephen Perry
President and CEO
New Orleans & Company
New Orleans, LA

New Orleans works relentlessly to offer planners and attendees even more. According to Perry, "We are working diligently to ensure that the continued growth of our hospitality and tourism industry is sustainable on all fronts. We are committed to supporting our local economy, the 100,000 individuals employed in the industry, and focusing our efforts in preserving the authentic culture bearers who make New Orleans the unique destination that it is."

The uniqueness of New Orleans continues to draw groups that have never met in the city before, including the Chicago-based American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA). The organization attracted 2,700 people to its annual Marketplace and Academy event earlier this year at the ENMCC, while utilizing the **Hilton New Orleans Riverside** as its headquarters hotel.

"New Orleans had been on our list of highly desirable cities for years, and then in 2013, we found out they had availability in 2018 [on] our preferred dates," says Laura Dann, ASTRA meetings and exhibit coordinator. "New Orleans represented a unique opportunity for ASTRA to book



Credit: Hilton New Orleans
The Hilton New Orleans is a great fit for groups who want to take advantage of outdoor event spaces for their receptions and meetings.



a highly desirable, first-tier city at competitive rates. The city was also going to be celebrating its 300th anniversary in 2018 and had some exciting improvements planned for its milestone."

HOTEL FLEXIBILITY

The Hilton turned out to be the perfect fit, partly because of its ability to adapt to ASTRA's changing plans. Dann explains, "When we contracted with Hilton, we had

"New Orleans represented a unique opportunity for ASTRA to book a highly desirable, first-tier city at competitive rates. ... The Hilton turned out to be the perfect fit, partly because of its ability to adapt to ASTRA's changing plans."

Laura Dann, Meetings and Exhibits Coordinator
American Specialty Toy Retailing Association, Chicago, IL

just an informal meet-and-greet planned for the night before the event kicked off where attendees would get together at the lobby bar of the main hotel. But in late 2017, as planning was underway, sponsors came forward wanting to support ASTRA in making this a more official event. With the help of the Hilton team and its large, outdoor Jean Lafitte Pool Deck, the event was transformed into a successful Welcome Pool Party that attendees loved and sponsors valued."

The Hilton staff provided an uncommon personal touch during one of her pre-convention visits. "I traveled to New Orleans with my one-year old son and had family come care for him while I worked," says Dann. "Our Hilton sales manager went out of her way to upgrade us to a suite with more space and brought her personal supply of baby gear from her grandkids. We had a room full of toys, highchair, playmat, picnic table, you name it. This amazing kindness and service provided the added comfort and convenience that made it easier for me to focus on our event."

The ENMCC also completely accommodated ASTRA's meeting and convention space needs. "The convention center was easy to navigate with a big exhibit hall to accommodate our approximately 500 exhibitors plus show management booths and zones," says Dann. "There were plenty of meeting rooms with options for various configurations and sizes, expansive lobby space for registration and showcases and the Great Hall prefunction space for our interactive Game Night reception."

The ENMCC has been a meetings and convention

While ASTRA was a first-time visitor to New Orleans, Denver-based Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) are repeat customers.

AORN held its Global Surgical Conference & Expo for 9,300 attendees at the ENMCC earlier this year after having met at the facility four times over the past 25 years. The group plans to return in 2022.

According to AORN meetings manager Emily O'Connell, CMP, the association repeatedly returns to New Orleans and the ENMCC because doing so yields good results.

"AORN has found New Orleans to be a very successful city for our annual conference," says O'Connell. "They take the time to understand both our conference needs and budget. And, they provide value with fair pricing, attentiveness and a collaborative approach to the conference's requirements. The staff at the ENMCC is very accommodating and supportive, and they consistently go above and beyond to provide exceptional service."

PLENTY OF SPACE

In addition, the ENMCC was a good choice because of AORN's 80 education sessions and exhibits representing 450 companies.

"Our rental contract included Halls F-J, the La Nouvelle Orleans Ballroom, the New Orleans Theater and meeting rooms 260-399," says O'Connell. "All of our conference functions fit well into these spaces. It was especially nice to have use of a unique space like the La Nouvelle Ballroom and New Orleans Theater, as they can be configured in multiple ways depending on the needs of the group."

A bottom line for all planners is whether attendees enjoy a destination, and New Orleans passes that test among AORN participants with flying colors.

"What brings ACS back to New Orleans is the relationships created with the CVB and hotel partners in the city ... as well as its history ... and incredible food."

Bethany Kashawlic, Assistant Director, Meeting Logistics
Department of Meetings & Expositions Services, Washington, D.C.

"Our attendee satisfaction score for the 2018 AORN annual conference was the highest score since we started tracking it nine years ago," says O'Connell. "Several factors determine that score, including the conference destination and venue. Attendees and exhibitors enjoyed the destination and the convention center."

The ENMCC has been a meetings and convention

magnet that promises to become even more powerful due to a five-year, \$557 million upgrade underway.

The project includes improvements to meeting rooms, public areas, audio-visual equipment, escalators and elevators and a new 7.5-acre pedestrian park and walkway along Convention Center Boulevard.

According to Perry, "The Convention Center District Development Project will vastly improve the customer experience for planners and attendees. The addition of a headquarters hotel will provide easy, walkable access to the upriver end of the center, and the increase in inventory will bring new opportunities for business and provide better flexibility during major city events."

Another big project will increase the number of direct flights to New Orleans. Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport is building a \$1 billion state-of-the-art replacement terminal, scheduled to open in May. The terminal will have 35 gates to accommodate increasing arrivals.

New Orleans' ongoing improvements in meeting infrastructure promises to attract even more citywide meetings and conventions, such as the National Meeting of the Washington, D.C.-based American Chemical Society (ACS), which convened at the ENMCC last year.

The four-day convention included more than 16,000 attendees, who occupied hotels throughout New Orleans. The ACS has held its National Meeting in New Orleans four times since 2003 and returns every five years.

According to Bethany Kashawlic, ACS assistant director, meeting logistics, New Orleans is one of the group's favorite destinations for several reasons.

"What brings ACS back to New Orleans is the relationships created with the CVB and hotel partners in the city, as well as its history, the accessibility of the airport, the convenient location of hotels in the downtown area and the incredible food," she says. "We have had very good attendance each time our National Meeting was held in New Orleans."

SERVICE FOR CITYWIDES

Timely service from hotels for a quick turnaround helped the ACS convention proceed without a hitch. "The level of service received from the hotel staffs was great in helping the planning team make the meeting successful from pre-planning to reviewing program details, attendee arrival and departure experiences, meeting room setups, etc.," says Kashawlic. "ACS also effectively utilized the space contracted, and when additional space was required, we reached back out to the hotels, and they were very accommodating."

Associations such as the ACS have their choice of more than 25,000 hotel rooms, many located in or near the French Quarter. Additional rooms are on the way. Developers are



Credit: The Roosevelt New Orleans

The Roosevelt New Orleans is a popular meeting hotel located near the French Quarter.

negotiating with the New Orleans Exhibition Hall Authority to build a new 1,200-room Omni-branded hotel with 150,000 square feet of meeting space near the ENMCC.

Existing meeting hotels include the Royal Sonesta New Orleans with its 483 reimagined guest rooms, new fitness center and more than 20,000 square feet of remodeled meeting space; Sheraton New Orleans Hotel; Hyatt Regency New Orleans; The Roosevelt New Orleans; Hotel Monteleone; New Orleans Downtown Marriott at the Convention Center and Omni Riverfront Hotel. The aforementioned hotels offer a total of more than 288,000 square feet of meeting space.

Growth in meeting and hotel space is a prime reason that New Orleans has been able to draw more meetings and conventions.

According to Catherine Chaulet, president of Washington,



"Our company has seen New Orleans growing in popularity in recent years as a destination for meetings, groups and incentives. New Orleans is in Global DMC Partners' Top 10 List of U.S. Meeting/Incentive Cities for 2018, falling in at No. 6."

D.C.-based Global DMC Partners, "Our company has seen New Orleans growing in popularity in recent years as a destination for meetings, groups and incentives. New Orleans is in Global DMC Partners' Top 10 List of U.S. Meeting/Incentive Cities for 2018, falling in at No. 6," says Chaulet. "This list is based on how much business they have booked with Global DMC Partners for 2018," says Chaulet.

In addition, the number of leads Global DMC has sent to its New Orleans DMC partners for meetings and event increased to 46 in 2018 from 33 in 2015. "Some of this growth can be attributed to increased airlift from European cities such as London," adds Chaulet.

BATON ROUGE

While New Orleans is by far Louisiana's most popular meetings destination, other cities in the state attract their share of business as well. Baton Rouge, Louisiana's capital, is just 80 miles from New Orleans and offers its own unique culture, history and cuisine.

Baton Rouge's prime meeting space is the recently expanded Raising Cane's River Center, an entertainment complex, offering more than 100,000 square feet of contiguous exhibit space and 17 breakout meeting rooms.

Among hotels, the 299-room **Baton Rouge Marriott** completed its \$28 million renovation this year. The project remodeled meeting space and expanded it to 29,979 square feet. Another property, the 290-room **Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center** sits next to the River Center and offers 20,000 square feet of flexible meeting space.

Baton Rouge offers everything that planners need, and attracts groups that also meet in New Orleans, including the Los Angeles chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (LAAAP).

More than 92 pediatricians, nurses and healthcare professionals attended the LAAAP's Annual Pediatric Meeting last year at the **Embassy Suites by Hilton Baton Rouge**. It was the group's second meeting in Baton Rouge.

According to Taryn Daigle, LAAAP's director of education and membership, "We have a rotation that allows us to host our meeting in cities around the state. Cities included in the rotation are Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Shreveport and Lafayette."

Value and service were among the prime reasons for selecting Embassy Suites. "We chose the hotel because of its location, competitive room rates and food and beverage prices," says Daigle. "The value was exceptional as we received inexpensive room rates, free AV and a wonderful staff that was attentive, polite and accommodating. Our hotel sales director went above and beyond to get us the best possible room rates and amenities that were very competitive to other properties. He also coordinated our lunch, breaks and social event on Saturday to accommodate our delayed schedule."

Meeting space was also a factor. "We were able to hold 23 six-foot tabletops in one space set classroom-style for 120 attendees and hold lunch in the Atrium for 120 people," says Daigle. "The Atrium was the perfect space and conducive to networking and education. Following the educational sessions on Friday and Saturday, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres were served in the Atrium, allowing attendees and guests to socialize."

SHREVEPORT-BOSIER

The Shreveport-Bossier Convention & Tourist Bureau (SBCTB) promotes the region as "Louisiana's other side" due to its location in northwest Louisiana, 300 miles from New Orleans, near the Texas and Arkansas borders. Groups are attracted to what the SBCTB calls the region's "wide open Texas spirit" combined with Cajun cuisine and culture.

Meeting space is anchored by the 350,000-square-foot Shreveport Convention Center along with 10,500 hotel rooms. Popular properties include several 24-hour resort-style riverfront casinos offering top-level entertainment. Attractions include Gator Raceway at Gators & Friends, an adventure park and animal petting zoo. The raceway features go-carts and a challenging curving racetrack that presents teambuilding opportunities.

While Louisiana offers a handful of destination options, New Orleans remains the prime draw and one of the nation's surest bets for a successful meeting.

The Crescent City has variety of hotels with a range of large and small meeting spaces with flexible configurations along with a premier convention center. Unforgettable food, music and a cultural joie de vivre complete the package.

As some New Orleans residents say, "If you can't have a good time here, it's your own fault."

**WE TAKE CARE
OF THE DETAILS.
THE GOOD TIMES
TAKE CARE OF
THEMSELVES.**

Discover an award-winning culinary scene paired with world-class local entertainment. Enjoy state-of-the-art accommodations in centuries-old neighborhoods. And experience a culture that doesn't just thrive on creativity—but inspires it. Because when you meet in New Orleans, You're in Good Company.

NEW ORLEANS & COMPANY

NEWORLEANS.COM/MEETINGS



Attendees can enjoy dining, shopping, entertainment and an authentic glimpse of the American West at Fort Worth Stockyards.

Meet Me in Texas

Large Venues, Great Service Give Associations Many Options

By Christine Loomis

Texas is a big state with big options for planners. While its cities share similarities, even embracing a few Texas stereotypes — cowboy hats and boots come to mind — each has a distinct personality.

North, east, south or west, there's a city that will welcome your group with Texas-sized warmth and hospitality.

FORT WORTH

When it comes to cattle, Fort Worth is a natural choice, so it's no surprise the American Angus Association had its 2017 annual convention there. Jaclyn Upperman, director of events and education for the association, says it's all about location.

"Location is the best description of why our 2017 National Angus Convention was so successful. The American Angus

Association's membership is very strong in the Midwest and southern United States. Fort Worth's unique cattlemen theme draws to our membership and allowed us to have 2,400 participants at our convention."

The group's primary base was the **Omni Fort Worth Hotel**, ideal, in part, because of its location near the convention center.

"Proximity to the convention center was a plus with all three of the headquarter hotels," Upperman says, adding that design was a consideration, as well. "The overall look and feel of the Omni western décor and design fit our audience and made our attendees feel at home."

In general, Upperman notes, Fort Worth has plenty to offer for planners. "There are a lot of different areas that can be used for meeting spaces," she says, "and the extra-nice

piece is that the downtown area is safe and very close in proximity to all different types of venues and hotels."

She calls the convention center and its staff "outstanding to work with." Her praise for the hotel facilities and staff is similar.

"The hotel staff was very accommodating, even allowing us to use their bell carts to move a few boxes from the hotel to the center," she says. "We used the ballroom and Angus Board Room, as well as the second-floor prefunction space. The events held in these areas went off without any issues. The staff was accommodating and helpful through the setup and teardown of the events."

Best of all, the hotel has represented Fort Worth well. "This hotel definitely fits in with the Fort Worth culture and Texas hospitality," Upperman says.

Although there were no organized offsite functions, many attendees did dine out in the downtown area. "We got great comments on the quality and hospitality of the restaurants," Upperman notes.

"The only downfall is the distance from an airport" she adds. "However, once you get to the hotel, you are within walking distance from downtown and minutes away from the historic Fort Worth Stockyards!"

Fort Worth has two new hotels opening in 2020: **AC Hotel by Marriott** with 246 rooms and the 200-room **Hotel Drover**, another Autograph Collection property.

In addition, the \$540 million, 14,000-seat Dickies Arena is set to open later this year. It's located just 10 minutes from downtown.

HOUSTON

The National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) chose Houston for its 2018 training conference with 5,000 attendees. Jennifer Lubold, CMP, director of conferences, and Mike Soussi-Tanani, associate director of conferences, were impressed.

"Houston is a perfect fit for our group of 5,000 judges, lawyers, coordinators and treatment providers helping to serve over 3,000 drug treatment courts," Lubold says. "The convention center is also the right fit for a group our size, with over 40 breakout rooms, over 50,000 square feet for general sessions and a large exhibit hall. The convention center sits in front of beautiful Discovery Green and between **Hilton Americas** and **Marriott Marquis** (our two headquarter hotels), making it easy for attendees to get around."

Lubold says the city's hotel package and ease of access into the city were elements that boosted the conference's growth.

"The Houston CVB helped secure many more hotel room nights than we originally contracted due to the increase in attendance, which helped us capture the largest room block

"The Houston CVB helped secure many more hotel room nights than we originally contracted due to the increase in attendance, which helped us capture the largest room block we've ever seen."



Jennifer Lubold, CMP
Director of Conferences
National Association of Drug Court Professionals
Alexandria, VA

we've ever seen. We were fortunate to work with CVB housing manager Rose Moreno during this time. She went above and beyond what any housing manager had ever done for us. We truly felt like she was an extension of our staff — always there any time we called or emailed."

Soussi-Tanani notes that Houston made sense for the budget, too.

"Houston was very cost-effective for a small association's annual conference with a limited budget," he says. "This was the first time we met in Houston, and we had such an overall fantastic conference, our leadership is thinking about re-booking for a future year. The staff at the CVB, the center and the hotels were stellar, and the package was a great value for us."

In addition to using space at the convention center, the group had a private function and concert at Discovery Green.

"We had food trucks on the green for attendees to enjoy before the concert," Soussi-Tanani says. "We were worried about the heat, but it wasn't bad at all. Our attendees sat on the grass with NADCP blankets we passed out, and they enjoyed the concert. It was such a nice event — the venue was beautiful, and the staff at Discovery Green was easy to work with."

Houston offers a couple of programs that worked well for this group, including a "green link" to transport attendees between the convention center and hotels, and "Six in the City," which lets attendees take a cab anywhere in downtown for \$6.

In addition, Lubold says, "There's an art district, baseball, football, basketball, rugby, NASA and children's museums. We organized a baseball outing for our attendees, which many took advantage of since it was just a block from the convention center."

While value and the right hotels were important, Lubold points to the Houston First staff as an incredible asset.

"They went over and above to make sure our conference was a huge success," she says. "Natalie Young helped



"We chose Hilton Americas-Houston because of the number of guest rooms available, the amount of meeting space available.... The downtown location was also great so that our attendees and staff could access dining, attractions and more, all within walking distance."

Lizzy Seymour, CMP
Manager, Conference Services
American Society of Heating,
Refrigeration and Air-
Conditioning Engineers
Atlanta, GA

schedule our site visits, worked with us to make sure the appropriate conference signage was in the airport and hotels and continued to help during the conference. She was onsite every day. Nathan Tollett helped us work out contractual issues and was very supportive when we really needed him. We've just started working with Amra Elmore, and she is outstanding — we love her."

To planners thinking about Houston, Soussi-Tanani says, "This is a fantastic middle-of-the-country destination with all the hotel amenities you could want, including a Texas-shaped rooftop pool at the new Marriott Marquis. If you haven't been to Houston in a while, you need to go. It's been upgraded."

Lizzy Seymour, CMP, manager, conference services, with the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), also found Houston to be ideal for her group of more than 2,000, which held its annual conference in the city last June.

"Our conference is space-heavy, and the amount of meeting space and the layout of space at the **Hilton Americas-Houston** was perfect for us," she says. "We also used a portion of meeting rooms at the George R. Brown Convention Center (GRB), near where the Hilton connects to the center. This was incredibly convenient for our attendees."

Seymour also used Discovery Green. "ASHRAE held a Welcome Party for 550 people at The Grove at Discovery Green, right across the street from the Hilton. The Grove was a wonderful location for our welcome party," she says. "We did a buy-out of the space. The restaurant was spacious, and the cuisine was top-notch."

In addition, there was a Women in ASHRAE function in one of the rooms at House of Blues Houston. "This was short walk for our attendees and a fun venue with great space," Seymour notes.

The group also held events at the Hilton and the convention center. "The space we used at the convention center was

on the same level that connected to the Hilton Americas," she says, "so it was very easy for our attendees."

Seymour calls the layout at Hilton Americas-Houston well-thought-out. "The meeting space is three floors stacked on top of one another, and two of the floors connect directly with the GRB. Walkways between the Hilton Americas and the GRB are inside and air-conditioned, so our attendees didn't even have to go outside (in June in Houston). The Hilton also has more than 1,000 guest rooms; however, there are many overflow options within walking distance for a convenient experience for attendees," she says.

In addition, Seymour adds, "We held a small ICW at the **JW Marriott by the Galleria**, about a half-mile away from the Hilton Americas. The JW is a great property with some unique space (hardwood floors in meeting rooms!) and excellent guest accommodations."

Hilton Americas-Houston hosted the majority of the convention, with good reason. "We chose Hilton Americas because of the number of guest rooms available, the amount of meeting space available, the layout of space between the Hilton and GRB, and because the room rate and other meeting-related expenses were reasonable," Seymour says. "The downtown location was also great so that our attendees and staff could access dining, attractions and more, all within walking distance."

She says the hotel's convention services staff was excellent. "Our planning team had a great experience with the entire Hilton Americas team. The reservations team was also on top of our room block. The entire team was very responsive in the pre-planning stage, as well as onsite during the conference. We even received some great feedback from our attendees about the Hilton Americas staff and how responsive and helpful they were."

Additionally, Seymour notes, the Hilton banquet staff was superb, and Encore Event Technologies, the in-house AV company, was "excellent, responsive and detail-oriented." And, that extended to every department. "We worked with most of them," she adds, "and they were professional, responsive and easy to work with."

In terms of challenges, Seymour says they were initially worried that the weather in June would be a problem.

"We are an association of HVAC engineers, so air-conditioning is something we are well-versed in. The Hilton worked with us to make sure our attendees were comfortable. We did have a few challenges with temperature control in the meeting rooms, but again, the hotel staff was on top of it and worked with us closely almost every day to keep our attendees comfortable."

For groups meeting in Houston in the summer months, she says, "Work with your convention services and

engineering teams at the property in advance of your meeting. Come up with a temperature that your attendees will be comfortable with, and make a plan to keep the temperature in check and in control throughout your conference."

Beyond that, she says, "Make sure to eat a meal at The Grove — the shrimp and grits are great!"

GALVESTON ISLAND

Kristy Breaux, associate director, Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA), considers Galveston a good choice for a conference. "Our attendees are educators, and Galveston works well for them to pair professional development with leisure travel."

The association held its TCEA Elementary Technology Conference at the **San Luis Resort** last June, drawing 800 attendees. Breaux points to convenience, flexibility and pricing options as the positives of the destination.

"The convention center and San Luis Resort packages offer a great option for various price points, and it's all within walking distance. And, for those who prefer not to walk, there's the convenience of a shuttle and plenty of onsite parking," she says. "The flexibility of the convention center is great for our group because we like to utilize a lot of public space for networking. The layout and helpfulness of the staff combine to allow us to transform the space and maximize our offerings."

San Luis Resort exceeded Breaux's expectation in multiple ways. "The food and beverage package is unbeatable when it comes to pricing and offerings. This is not what you expect from a convention center catering team. The infrastructure is truly up to par, and the team is dedicated to making sure your event runs flawlessly," she says.

But there are some things that aren't quantifiable that also make a destination feel exactly right for planners and attendees.

"Our group feels valued in Galveston. From every aspect, we are treated as if we are a top priority," Breaux says. "That's a great feeling as a planner — to have a commitment from the destination, the venue and everyone in between."

To groups considering booking Galveston, Breaux advises, "Make sure to take advantage of your destination services team so they can create a discount program for your attendees that includes discounts on attractions, dining options and shopping."

EL PASO

El Paso is a city on the move, and it ticks off all the necessary boxes for groups, from affordability to an enviable collection of venues and restaurants and a walkable downtown. Mike Sullivan, future festival site coordinator for the

International Jugglers' Association, had the group meet there a couple of years ago with about 600 in attendance.

"El Paso has what we need, at very reasonable prices, in a clean, compact downtown area with excellent airlift to the world through ELP. The magnificent Plaza Theatre, the beautiful El Paso Convention Center, a choice of several first-class hotels all within a short walk of our other venues and plenty of places to eat and drink made for a great fit for our group," Sullivan says. "Visit El Paso / Destination El Paso / El Paso Live all worked hard to get us a great deal on the venues, and then helped us with outreach to the community for our public events. We never thought we'd be able to bring our week of carefree fun to such a large city, but El Paso was custom-made for our group and provided a hassle-free week of fun. Our attendees were also delighted with the incredible hospitality and support we got from everyone we worked with and met before, during and after our week."

The group used one of the city's historic venues for competitions and shows. "We held four nights of world-championship competitions and public shows in the Plaza Theatre, as well as a large nighttime show with fire juggling and more in Convention Center Plaza. We received excellent support from the local community for all our events," Sullivan says.

The group's main event space was in the convention center. "We used the exhibit hall, meeting rooms and the huge atrium area all weeklong," he says. "We loved the convenience of having all our juggling venues within a very short walk of each other, the hotels, convention center and theater, and even our late-night show venue was just steps away from the other sites."

About the city, Sullivan says, "El Paso was a great find for our group. The facilities and people are first-rate, and we're excited to be returning in 2020, when downtown will have even more to offer. New hotels, a new streetcar, more restaurants and shopping are now in place or on the way, and we can't wait to get back to El Paso."

The group's primary hotel is historic and currently undergoing a massive renovation and rebranding. It was the Camino Real at the time the jugglers were in town but will reopen this year as **Hotel Paso del Norte**.

"We're thrilled to be coming back to this historic property, which will be part of Marriott's Autograph Collection when we return," Sullivan says. "We were also glad to have a choice of several other name-brand properties in downtown before, and we understand there will be even more downtown properties online by the time we return."

The only real challenge, according to Sullivan, was convincing the organization's members to give El Paso a try. "Many had preconceptions about the July climate and



"There are a lot of different areas that can be used for meeting spaces, and the extra-nice piece is that the downtown area [of Fort Worth] is safe and very close in proximity to all different types of venues and hotels."

Jaclyn Upperman
Director of Events and Education
American Angus Association
Saint Joseph, MO

getting to the city from their hometowns. We worked hard to show them that El Paso had so much to offer us, and all who came to the festival were very glad they did. Our week was one of the smoothest and most hassle-free festivals we've had in a long time," he says.

To planners considering the city, Sullivan says, "Come and see what El Paso has, like we did, and you will probably be as impressed as we were. In downtown El Paso, our group found everything we wanted in a festival home for our week, and at a great value. Hundreds of jugglers, variety performers and competitors from every corner of the world came to our festival week in El Paso, and they all had an unforgettable time in a friendly and safe downtown with world-class venues at their feet."

DALLAS

Association planners are familiar with Big D, a top meeting destination for conventions of all sizes — but there's always something new to love.

Last October, VisitDallas, the city's CVB, celebrated a year of record visitation, booking and economic-impact figures and announced a new VisitDallas Experience Center as part of the Klyde Warren Park expansion. The \$76 million project will add more than an acre of land to the park and a 20,000-square-foot pavilion to serve as the new home of the VisitDallas Experience. VisitDallas President and CEO Phillip J. Jones says of the project, "We couldn't have imagined a better location for clients, visitors and locals to learn about all the great things happening in Dallas."

Among the city's top meeting hotels are **Sheraton Dallas Hotel by the Galleria**, **Hyatt Regency Dallas**, **Omni Dallas Hotel** and **Hilton Anatole**. This year, the ever-hip Virgin group will open a 200-room **Virgin Hotel** in the city's equally hip Design District. The \$80 million lifestyle hotel, with all the amenities and social components one expects, will be the fourth hotel in the U.S. for the brand.

Also opening this year is **The Drever**, formerly the historic

First National Bank Tower, currently undergoing a \$380 million mixed-use redevelopment that will include a 218-room luxury hotel. And, **The Pittman Hotel** will open as part of **The Epic**, another mixed-use redevelopment project. The 164-room Pittman will be located in the city's landmark Knights of Pythias Temple.

On the F&B front, VisitDallas recently introduced the Margarita Mile, highlighting 18 of the city's best places to have a margarita, from traditional to such southwest-inspired concoctions as the Summertime Sadness Margarita, infused with jalapeno and mint. Planners can tell attendees to download the app, or they can incorporate some of the Margarita Mile restaurants into conference functions.

SAN ANTONIO

There's never been a better time to meet in San Antonio, the third-fastest growing city in the country. Last year, San Antonio celebrated its 300th anniversary with a slew of openings and renovations. The city's top industries include healthcare/bioscience, manufacturing, IT and aerospace, making it a perfect fit for any associations in those fields, as well as others.

The first Thompson hotel in the city, **Thompson San Antonio Hotel** and The Arts Residences, is scheduled to open this year. The design-forward, mixed-use hotel and condominium tower sits along the River Walk and will feature 167 rooms.

Also scheduled to open later this year is the 22-story **Canopy by Hilton San Antonio River Walk**. The hotel will integrate the historic Alamo Fish Market building into its design. In addition to 195 guest rooms and a restaurant overlooking River Walk, the hotel will feature 3,000 square feet of meeting space.

Last November, **Makara Hotel & Spa** unveiled renovations to its lobby and meeting space, blending the hotel's rich history with contemporary design elements. The refresh included the opening of the Tejas Boardroom, a 222-square-foot space for board meetings, executive conferences and other small meetings. The room features tall-back, Spanish-inspired, carved leather chairs around a handsome conference table, upgraded technology and a large-screen television.

Last year, **Grand Hyatt San Antonio**, located on the city's famed River Walk, announced completion of a \$19 million renovation, which included guest rooms, meeting spaces, bar, corridors and lobby. In its 10-year history, the hotel has hosted more than 5,000 meetings.

In October, American Airlines announced new nonstop service from JFK to San Antonio, making it easier than ever for international delegates flying into JFK to attend meetings in San Antonio.

AC&F

it's the Texas MEETING you want

FORT WORTH

YOUR MEETING DESTINATION IN THE LONE STAR STATE.

VISIT FORT WORTH

FORTWORTH.COM/ACF



Joe



Ribordy



Gerdes



Johns



Godsey

Maria Joe has been named event manager at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. Her former position was meeting manager at Fernley & Fernley. She has more than 11 years of event management experience.

Boise Centre, Idaho, announced **Ali Ribordy** as the new director of sales. Prior to this, Ribordy was with the Austin Convention Center in Texas.

Dave Gerdes has been named director of sales and marketing for the Central Pennsylvania Convention & Visitors Bureau. Most recently, Gerdes was vice president of sales and marketing with Southern California-based Pacific Hospitality Group, LLC.

Visit Indy has hired **Baylee Johns** as senior sales manager covering the Midwest

market. Most recently, Johns was senior sales manager at the Omni Severin Indianapolis Hotel.

Visit Indy has promoted **Brooke Godsey** to sales manager covering the Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia market. Godsey brings five years of industry experience to the position.

Visit Indy has promoted **Ashley Sisson** to meetings express sales manager. Sisson began her tenure with Visit Indy in 2008.

Visit Indy has promoted **Emily Scheiderer** to senior sales manager of business development and customer relations. Scheiderer began her tenure with Visit Indy in 2013.

Hyatt Regency Austin has named **Jeff Ouradnik** as director of sales and

marketing. Prior to this, Ouradnik served as both director of sales and marketing and director of sales and events at Hyatt Regency Mission Bay Spa & Marina in San Diego.

Omni Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Dan Boyer** as director of sales and marketing for Omni Oklahoma City Hotel, set to open in 2021. Most recently, Boyer was director of sales and marketing at Sheraton Grand Phoenix Hotel.

Emily Hixon has joined Louisville Tourism as a convention sales assistant. Her responsibilities include coordinating leads, collecting hotel responses, creating bid books and organizing site visits for clients. She will also assist three convention sales managers in their goal to seek out and secure conventions in Louisville.

AC&F



Sisson



Scheiderer



Ouradnik



Boyer



Hixon



Tracy T

May 17 at 11:22pm

After talking R&D all day, it's time for a little R&R. So nice to be outside, we almost feel bad for everyone back home. 😊😊 #BestMeetingEver #OrlandoMeeting



Like • Comment • Share

217 Likes

Locations, top: Universal CityWalk™; bottom left: Private event at Discovery Cove®, bottom right: Mango's Tropical Café Orlando.

For planning assistance, visit OrlandoMeeting.com

VisitOrlando
Imagine the possibilities.

150+ MEETING HOTELS

38 CONVENTION HOTELS

200+ UNIQUE VENUES & EXPERIENCES



Shedding light on new possibilities.

this is how we vegas™

A spectacular glass wall overlooking the pool lets light in. Sustainable materials keep waste out. Our high-tech space ensures you stay connected with your meeting expectations. Media walls, news tickers, recharge areas and industry-leading Wi-Fi are just the beginning.

Aria.com • 866.718.2489

Aria
RESORT & CASINO

LAS VEGAS
An MGM Resorts
Luxury Destination



GREEN KEY
Eco-Rating Program



East Primrose Veranda

Discover our newly expanded meeting and convention space. Where we not only welcome innovation, but we inspire it with breathtaking, open-air spaces and award-winning amenities.