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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



Jayna Cooke,  
CEO  
EVENTup,  
Chicago,  
Illinois

## Game Changer or Game Buster?

It's Just a Matter of Time for Wearable Tech to Impact Meetings  
**PAGE 12**

## Standing Out From the Crowd

Themed Meetings Ignite Excitement and Spell Success  
**PAGE 22**

# Like a Good Marriage...

Healthy Planner-Vendor Partnerships Require Respect, Communication & Kindness  
**PAGE 18**

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

**Airport Hotels**  
PAGE 32

**California**  
PAGE 38

**Southwest**  
PAGE 44



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ISSN 0739-1587

USPS 716-450

## Contents

VOLUME 33 NO. 8

AUGUST 2015

### FEATURES

**12 Game Changer or Game Buster?**

It's Just a Matter of Time for Wearable  
Tech to Impact Meetings and Events

By John Buchanan

**18 Like a Good Marriage...**

Healthy Planner-Vendor Partnerships Require  
Respect, Communication & Kindness

By Mark Rowh

**22 Standing Out From the Crowd**

How Themed Meetings Ignite Excitement and Spell  
Success All Year Long

By Maura Keller

**28 2015 Greens of Distinction  
Award Winners**



**32 Airport Hotels Grow Up**

Amenities, Services and Meeting Spaces  
Match Those of City Hotels

By Derek Reveron

### DESTINATIONS

**38 California Confabs**

A Wealth of Options in the Golden State

By Christine Loomis

**44 The Great Southwest**

Featuring Some of the Country's Most  
Inspirational Settings for Business

By Christine Loomis

### DEPARTMENTS

**4 Publisher's Message**

**6 News & Notes**

**8 Snapshots**

**10 Perspective**

Four Simple Tips for Making the  
Most of Your Event App

By Alejandro Contreras and Danielle Puceta

**50 People on the Move, Reader Services**



Credit: Koncept Events

A mirrored bar contributed to the innovative themed event  
created by Koncept Events. **PAGE 22**



Credit: Hyatt Regency Mission Bay Spa & Marina

An aerial view of the Hyatt Regency Mission Bay Spa & Marina  
in San Diego, California. **PAGE 38**



Credit: Oklahoma City CVB

Hart Energy's attendance was at an all-time high at their recent  
event at the Cox Convention Center in Oklahoma City. **PAGE 44**

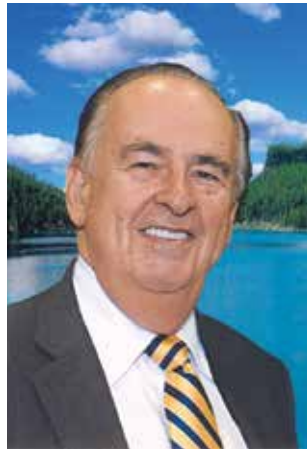
Corporate & Incentive Travel (USPS 716-450) is published monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$12.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$125.00 in the U.S.A.; Canada and foreign is \$165.00. Back copies \$14.00 U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Corporate & Incentive Travel), 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 C&IT of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted, by or to be binding upon, any corporate/incentive travel planner or agent. 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, Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip codes. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2015



# Publisher's Message

## A Thank You Goes a Long Way

"Be thankful," suggests Jayna Cooke, CEO at Chicago-based EVENTup. "Always make sure to thank the service providers after a great event. This is often overlooked, and a thank you goes a long way." Cooke, who graces our cover this month, shares these words of wisdom and more in our cover story, "Like a Good Marriage...Healthy Planner-Vendor Partnerships Require Respect, Communication & Kindness," on page 18.



Jody Brandes, a senior meeting partner at Genentech, a San Francisco biotechnology company, reminds us that "we need each other to be truly successful. It may be possible for planners to plan meetings without creating relationships with vendors, but it's much more rewarding to care about the people you work with."

Brandes urges planners to "be genuine, be honest and be kind. If you don't have any business with a particular vendor, tell them you don't have business for them right now. Don't ignore their emails and voicemails."

Emily Houg, principal of Echo Events in Tacoma, Washington, also advocates respect and understanding in these important business dealings. She says, "The relationship between a meeting planner and a vendor is part of the foundation of putting together a great event. Without mutual respect between the two parties, you might as well kiss having a calm and well-executed event goodbye."

This issue is chock full of enlightening and timely features. What's the latest take on Apple Watch and Google Glass? Check out "Game Changer or Game Buster? It's Just a Matter of Time for Wearable Tech to Impact Meetings and Events" on page 12. And on page 22, "Standing Out From the Crowd — How Themed Meetings Ignite Excitement and Spell Success All Year Long" is full of pointers every event planning pro will appreciate.

Destination reports on California on page 38 and the Great Southwest on page 44 offer the latest updates and inspirational settings for your meetings and events. We're also proud to congratulate and announce the Best of the Best: The 21st Annual Greens of Distinction 2015 Award Winners beginning on page 28.

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Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## News & Notes

### Dittman Incentive Marketing Celebrates HOPE Week

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — Dittman Incentive Marketing, which has a long history of charitable initiatives — contributing to and volunteering with local organizations, embraced The New York Yankees HOPE Week concept.

Introduced in 2009, the HOPE Week initiative (Helping Others Persevere & Excel) is rooted in the fundamental belief that acts of goodwill provide hope and encouragement to more than just the recipient of the gesture. HOPE Week is a time where everyone at Dittman focuses on their relationship to the community as a company and as individuals.

The Dittman HOPE Week projects address fundamental needs: clean water, hunger, clothing and shelter. Dittman employees participated in several programs to support seven non-profits in these areas during August.

Executive Vice President Dave



Donations for Elijah's Promise were assembled by (l to r) Sara McKinney, Monica Hedden, Jessika Vocht, Scott Buono, Susan Adams, Christine Gaida and Jim Dittman.

Dittman said, "Giving back to those less fortunate has always been a core value of our company, and this is really highlighted by HOPE Week. The self-

less and enthusiastic support that everyone has shown for our HOPE Week initiatives has been truly inspiring." [www.dittmanincentives.com](http://www.dittmanincentives.com)

### MPI Foundation Surpasses Fundraising Record for WEC

DALLAS, TX — The Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Foundation set a new fundraising record of more than \$270,000 during MPI's 2015 World Education Congress (WEC) in San Francisco, which exceeded the \$170,000 raised last year. The MPI Foundation held three fundraisers: The Big Deal, an official World Series of Poker satellite tournament; the Not-So-Silent Auction; and Rendezvous, the foundation's signature networking event. All of the proceeds will go towards the MPI Foundation Education Endowment, which provides chapter grants and scholarships to MPI members.

In total, the MPI Foundation has distributed nearly \$1 million in scholarships, grants and research since January 2014. This includes 22 chapter grants and 75 scholarships for members throughout MPI's global community. So far this calendar year, the foundation has funded six chapter grants and 91 scholarships, and there are more opportunities available. For more information and to view the foundation's 2014 annual report, visit [www.mpiweb.org/foundation](http://www.mpiweb.org/foundation).

### MPI Reports Optimistic Meetings Outlook

DALLAS, TX — Meeting Professionals International (MPI) has published its Meetings Outlook, 2015 Summer Edition. The latest installment of the quarterly special report indicates continued intelligent growth in the industry with meeting professionals showing a renewed focus on attendee "wants" — big-name speakers, entertainment and shoulder days — and going beyond "needs" as they strive to do much more with just a little more.

Key findings include:

- 72 percent of meeting professionals expect overall business conditions to improve in the near future — up from the 65 percent reported one year ago.
- Only 17 percent of respondents are doing nothing to plan for the communication styles of the numerous generations of attendees; 40 percent comprehensively tailor planning for every event with this challenge in mind.
- Live and virtual attendance are predicted to grow, according to 62 percent and 57 percent of respondents, respectively.

[www.mpiweb.org/meetingsoutlook](http://www.mpiweb.org/meetingsoutlook)

### 2016 Global Travel Price Outlook Reveals 6 Global Hot Spots

ALEXANDRIA, VA — Findings from the 2016 Global Travel Price Outlook, research from the GBTA Foundation, the education and research arm of the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), and Carlson Wagonlit Travel, provide global, regional and country-by-country projections for air travel, hotel, ground transportation, and meetings and events prices in 2016.

New research identifies six hot spots — India, China, Colombia, Mexico, Singapore and Australia — where increased business travel demand is driving significant air price increases. This is despite global air travel prices displaying signs that they will be essentially flat in 2016.

"Business travel is a leading indicator of global economic activity," said Joseph Bates, GBTA Foundation vice president of research. "The top-line pricing outlook for air, hotel and ground in 2016 is surprisingly stable. But when you dig deeper, the data reveal global hot spots where demand is driving air travel price increases. For 2016, India, China, Colombia, Mexico, Singapore and Australia are projected to top the list."

Across the globe, only modest increases are expected in cost per attendee per day and group size, with the exception of Asia Pacific, which will see a 5 percent increase in cost and an 11 percent increase in group size. Strong demand from China and India is the major driver for the region's increasing cost and group sizes. North America also will see a 4.5 percent cost per attendee per day increase, with food and beverage pressures continuing to be a significant driver of costs. [www.gbta.org](http://www.gbta.org), [www.gbta.org/foundation](http://www.gbta.org/foundation)

### IMEX America Education Program is Now Online

LONDON, ENGLAND — The full learning program for IMEX America — starting with Smart Monday powered by MPI and Association Day on October 12 and running straight through to the show ending October 15 — is now live on the IMEX America website ([www.imexamerica.com](http://www.imexamerica.com)) and is free of charge to all buyers, attendees and exhibitors. Attendees can research upwards of 180 options and create their own custom learning program based on their unique needs, interests and IMEX schedules. More than 75 percent of the education is estimated to qualify for CMP/CEU certification points. Searches are available under 10 specialty tracks including Business Skills, Creative Learning, Diversity, General Education, Health/Wellbeing, Marketing and Communications, Research/Trends, Risk Management/Compliance, Sustainability and Technology/Social Media.

All of the education on the show floor in Las Vegas will be located at the Inspiration Hub, which features five distinct learning formats and setups, and new ways to filter session searches have been created to help pinpoint ideal classes.

Many "wired" sessions include "Beyond the #hashtag" presented by Josh Murray of Extraordinary Events and "Welcome to 2016: Tech You've Never Seen" delivered by Courtney Stanley, marketing and industry relations strategist for EventMobi, to a discussion dubbed "Insights from the C-Suite: How to Have 'the Talk' About Going Digital" presented by Deborah Sexton, PCMA president and CEO, and Carolyn Clarke, leader of Virtual Edge Institute (VEI.)

"We think this year's lineup of education at IMEX America has something for everyone — from newcomers to industry veterans, from the very analytical to the highly creative, from hosted buyers and exhibitors to students and international participants," said Carina Bauer, CEO of the IMEX Group. "Our goal is always to ensure that the education sessions are insightful and practical, with the end result being that learnings can be brought back to the office and put right to work with teammates and clients alike." [www.imexamerica.com](http://www.imexamerica.com)

### GBTA Convention Highlights Hot Issues

WASHINGTON, DC — The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) held its annual convention July 25–29 in Orlando. The convention kicked off with Charisse Jones of *USA Today* asking hard-hitting questions of Southwest Airlines' Gary Kelly and Etihad Airlines' James Hogan. Next, Guy Langford of Deloitte & Touche LLP moderated a panel on differentiating branding in a sharing economy featuring executives from more traditional companies, Enterprise Holdings and NH Hotel Group, and two executives from companies in a sharing economy, Airbnb and Zipcar. A main takeaway suggests that technology is becoming a cornerstone of delivering on the customer experience and companies can either disrupt or be disrupted as they strive to deliver on the three Cs: convenience, cost-savings and customer experience.

Actor, director and musician Kevin Bacon entertained a packed crowd with stories about his career in the entertainment industry; the genesis of the 6 degrees of Kevin Bacon game and his Six Degrees Foundation, which connects celebrities with deserving grassroots charities.

Megyn Kelly, FOX News anchor and a moderator of the first Republican debate, closed the show. She spoke about the most formative events in her life and gave her take on current events. Kelly said moderating the debate is by far the most important thing she has done at FOX.

Attendance figures include 6,389 attendees, including 1,366 travel buyers and nearly 100 journalists, making it one of the largest GBTA Conventions in history and one of the largest gatherings of travel professionals in the world. The Expo floor featured more than 400 exhibitors. Next year's convention will be in Denver, July 16–20. [www.gbta.org](http://www.gbta.org)



# Snapshots

## GBTA Convention 2015 - Orlando



## Caribbean Meeting and Incentive Travel Exchange - Dominican Republic



## Hosts Global Alliance Forum - Boston



## PCMA EduCon - Fort Lauderdale



Credits: GBTA Convention 2015: GBTA; Caribbean Meeting and Incentive Travel Exchange: Questex; Hosts Global Alliance Forum: Ben Crosby, Specialty Imaging; PCMA EduCon: Jacob Slaton Photography

Credits: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9: Orange Photography; 5, 7, 10: C&IT

MPI's 2015 highly successful World Education Congress (WEC) was held August 1-4 in San Francisco. **1** (L to r) John Reyes, EVP, chief sales officer, convention sales and services division, San Francisco Travel; Stephen Revetria, S.V.P. Giants Enterprises; Joey Nevin, president, MPI Northern California Chapter, director of sales and marketing, Giants Enterprises; and Kathryn Horton, V.P., convention services and events, San Francisco Travel, welcomed more than 2,500 attendees to the signature event through which MPI delivers top-rated education, networking and business opportunities to the meeting and event community. **2, 3, 6, 8, 9** Attendees enjoy unique opportunities for ingenious, fun photos. **4** Puppy cuddling, which benefited 4Paws Social Therapy, was a huge hit among attendees. **5** C&IT Publisher Harvey Grotzky poses with (l) Landry & Kling's Jo Kling and Carnival Cruise President Christine Duffy; **7** C&IT's David Middlebrook joins Disney's Mark Sadowski, and **10** (l to r) CIC's Karen L. Kotowski joins HelmsBriscoe's Deanne Vigil, HSMIA's Robert Gilbert and HelmsBriscoe's Richard Harper at an event. To view sessions and more, visit [www.mpiweb.org/events/wec-2015](http://www.mpiweb.org/events/wec-2015).



By Alejandro Contreras and Danielle Puceta

## Four Simple Tips for Making the Most of Your Event App

Not long ago, meeting attendees were bombarded with printed welcome packets, brochures and conference agendas the moment they arrived at an event. Meeting planners had to collect, interpret and store all of the information that attendees provided manually. While they were able to track their attendees' participation, keeping all of their feedback and contributions together posed a serious, time-consuming challenge.

Now in 2015, we are seeing a dramatic shift in the way we run events. Mobile apps are not only making a splash in the consumer world, but the business world also is taking notice, particularly in the meetings and events space. All the paper-

information such as the agenda, maps and background on sessions and speakers. Beyond that, meeting apps also present an opportunity to put the most valuable and timely information at attendees' fingertips, so be sure your app allows you to make changes on the fly. Apps also present planners with the chance to create a closed social network. By leveraging in-app engagement tools (discussed in more depth below), planners have the ability to create a socially connected experience for attendees.

To drive adoption of your event app, display attendees' status updates and feedback in real time on large screens throughout the event venue. These visuals not only add an extra layer of interest to the experience, but also give attendees

“A good event app not only will avoid paper piles but also can add to the overall event experience in a positive way.”

work of the past can be found within a single device in the palm of your hand. And this mobile trend is really taking flight. In 2014, a study by Meeting Professionals International and event technology company DoubleDutch showed that 63 percent of meeting planners are using mobile apps at their events, and this number is expected to jump even higher over the next year.

Although the benefits of event apps are hard to deny, simply having an event app is not enough. A lot of careful planning goes into creating an app that is right for a specific meeting or event. More specifically, there are four critical components that meeting planners should consider when designing an event app.

### 1 Manage the Basics

Event applications can serve many functions, but it's most important to make sure they are easy to use. Many attendees may multitask during the event; therefore it is important that the app is intuitive.

On a most basic level, you want to include event-critical

something to strive for: their name in lights. By giving clear instructions on how to download the application and illustrating attendee engagement and activity, users are more inclined to opt in and join the action.

### 2 Discard Distraction

Attendee distraction is a key concern for planners in today's hyperconnected world. Improving the meeting experience through in-app features such as surveys, live polling, real-time Q&A and other techniques can help keep attendees engaged with your content and out of their inbox. For example, some planners use “the scavenger hunt” concept to tap into attendees' competitive nature. This allows meeting planners to provide a checklist of goals in the app for attendees to find and check off their list. Other engaging activities can include trivia challenges, where organizers ask attendees questions and encourage them to participate by posting status updates to earn points.

Additionally, meeting planners can share important real-time event information using promoted posts, which are up-

dates pinned to the top of the activity feed for a set amount of time, or by designating an “App Champion” to evangelize technology and act as the voice of your event.

Attendees are able to use the app to elevate the conversation by using hashtags, tagging/mentioning other attendees, and posting status updates to the activity feed, similar to popular social networks. For example, attendees can use status updates to post what they're learning about and can write comments to network or arrange meals with others attending the event.

### 3 Emphasize Surveys and Polling

Another benefit of using an event app is the ability to collect attendee feedback at the event, rather than waiting until after its completion. The app uses contextual triggers, such as time and location, to prompt attendees to give their feedback on a particular session or speaker. With the information still fresh in the attendee's mind, meeting planners benefit from more relevant responses and higher completion rates. While paper surveys have a 20–25 percent completion rate, surveys given within a mobile app during the session can have a 60–100 percent completion rate.

Making polls fun is also critical. For example, at an internal company event, meeting planners can implement a company culture trivia quiz into the mix, creating an entertaining new way for attendees to interact during the meeting and also

learn about the company and executive leaders participating in the conference. Live polling is a great way to generate interaction, buzz and get people to use the meeting's mobile app to give feedback in real time. For an external conference, attendees could be surveyed as to what they are most excited to learn about. Events that utilize live polling see an increase in engagement of up to 25 percent.

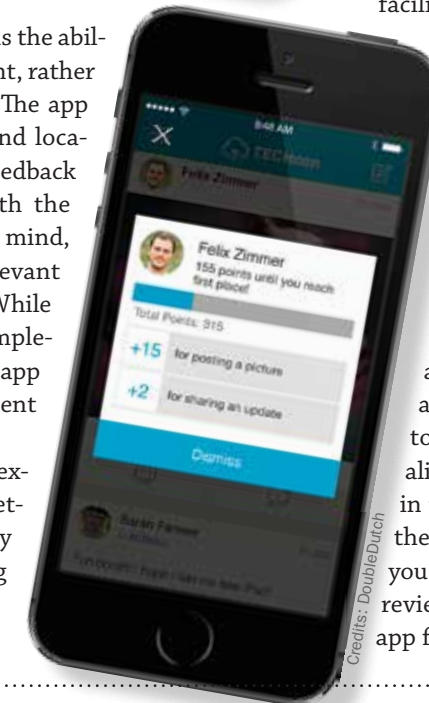
### 4 Use the Data

Meeting planners can use the app to communicate with attendees during the event, gather real-time feedback for course-correction and identify opportunities for improvement that can be used to plan future events. This can include feedback on goals, presenters, facilitators, venue, content, format and design.

By measuring feedback from attendees, planners can evaluate their ROI and make improvements in the moment and for the future. For instance, if certain sessions are more popular compared to others, meeting planners can use this information to adjust the room size and session activities for future events.

A good event app not only will avoid paper piles (and save money on printing costs), but also can add to the overall event experience in a positive way. Although there are many tools to sift through and various levels of functionality to consider, keep your special event goals in mind and only select those that help achieve them. Most important, data is only beneficial if you put it to good use, so make sure to thoroughly review past event data when considering event app functionality.

C&IT



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### Danielle Puceta

is Global Channel Lead, DoubleDutch. DoubleDutch is an award-winning provider of mobile event applications, with a unique focus on capturing and surfacing data from live events.





# Game Changer or Game Buster?

## It's Just a Matter of Time for Wearable Tech to Impact Meetings and Events

By John Buchanan

Over the past decade, relentless technological innovation has transformed meeting planning from a time-consuming and mostly manual process to a streamlined and more efficient automated undertaking.

Looking to the future, technology providers now aim to do the same thing

for both planners and attendees with wearable technology.

And although many planners and attendees consider their smartphones as a permanent fixture at the end of their wrist and thereby wearable, the new horizon points to things that are truly wearable, such as Google Glass and the



If the Apple Watch, which was introduced in April, really takes off, it could prove to be a "game changer when it comes to wearables," says meetings tech expert Corbin Ball.

new Apple Watch. But the hype and hope stretch far beyond just those two devices.

"For much of 2014, wearable technology has been the subject of great hype and even greater skepticism, fueled by speculation around whether these emerging devices will have a positive or negative impact on our lives — if they will have any impact at all," observes PricewaterhouseCoopers in an extensive 2014 report titled "The Wearable Future."

"Our data shows that roughly one in five American adults already owns some type of wearable device — on par with tablets in 2012, when the adoption rate sat at 20 percent after just two years in the market. Today, more than 40 percent of Americans own a tablet. And just as tablets faced skepticism in their early days, with consumers and critics questioning the need for new devices, so too does wearable technology. Issues around cost, style and necessity are holding consumers back. Plus, we already have the perfect device — the smartphone. Throughout our research, consumers repeatedly wanted to lump the smartphone into the wearable category — to them, we are already "wearing" our phones everywhere. For wearable products to take off, they will need to carve out a distinct value proposition that a phone alone cannot deliver. And because the phone is such

The basic concept behind Google Glass holds great promise for meeting-related applications predicts expert Corbin Ball.



### Hilton's Digital Key Unlocks Untold Options

Hilton Worldwide recently introduced Digital Key, which gives frequent guests the option to bypass the hotel check-in counter and access their rooms, as well as any other area of the hotel that requires a key, directly via the Hilton HHonors app on their smartphones. By early 2016, HHonors members will be able to use their smartphones as their room key to enter more than 170,000 rooms at 250 U.S. properties within the Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts, Conrad Hotels & Resorts and Canopy by Hilton brands.

Since Hilton's introduction of digital check-in with room selection last July, HHonors members have digitally checked-in more than 5 million times to date. In that same time period, the HHonors app has been

downloaded more than 2 million times, and customer feedback on digital check-in has been overwhelmingly positive, with 93 percent of guests saying they've felt satisfied or extremely satisfied with the experience.

In addition to checking in digitally, selecting their own room from a floor plan or list and using their smartphone as their key, members can further customize their stay via the app by requesting amenities such as extra pillows, snacks or drinks at any time.

Digital Key will first be available on the iOS platform and, later this year, it will be offered to Android users. Even though Digital Key is not yet available on Apple Watch and similar devices, Hilton says they are always exploring and developing new technology-based advances.

—JB



A guest uses Digital Key to unlock his room.

Credit: Apple Watch

Credit: Hilton Worldwide



# New Wearable Technology Helps Make Groups 'Feel Appreciated'

While he says he has no knowledge of and little interest in the potential of Google Glass or Apple Watches to make life easier or better for him or his attendees, Brian Stansifer, director of corporate events for Italian eyewear company Luxottica North America in New York City, has seen a good example of the future of wearable devices in the meeting industry.

And he likes it.

At a pair of meetings he planned in Canada at the Trump International Hotel & Tower Toronto, Stansifer and his attendees were treated to a genuine innovation: a voice-activated system of wearable devices worn by hotel staff members as a way of personalizing and improving service.

"The way I even found out about it was that after I held my first meeting there last December, I was back at the hotel for another meeting several weeks later and staff people were saying, 'Welcome back, Mr. Stansifer.' And I was just so impressed with that kind of service, as was our vice president of sales and marketing for our Canadian division."

Stansifer learned that the extraordinary level of personalized service was actually based on the new technology the hotel had deployed.



Credit: Trump International Hotel Collection

A classroom setup at the Trump International Hotel & Tower in Toronto where Luxottica's group received personalized customer service courtesy of staff equipped with wearable devices.

In effect, it is a service-based form of guest surveillance. The system, which uses lightweight, voice-controlled, wearable communication devices that are integrated with Trump's hotel service optimization technology, ensures that guest requests are discreetly and

instantly sent to the appropriate hotel team member in real time, which improves response times and creates a wow factor for guests — especially for meeting planners and attendees.

The end result is that all guests are treated as VIPs.

What that means to Stansifer and his attendees is that key members of the hotel's staff are constantly aware of their needs.

"For example," Stansifer says, "if I'm talking to the concierge and I say that I left some stuff in my room that needs to be picked up for dry cleaning, then the concierge can very quickly let housekeeping know that needs to be done."

Another example: When a bellman escorts a guest to their room at check-in, he might notice they have a beverage or a bottle of champagne. He then asks the guest, "May I get some ice for you?" and that need is immediately broadcast to other members of the service team for instant action.

"It's very smart technology, and it helps deliver exceptional service," Stansifer says. "And it's a very seamless process. It's very subtle. But it's also very effective. It assures that you and your attendees

get truly exceptional service — and very quickly. The end result is the experience you have. And it's gracious and warm. It makes you and your people feel good. It makes you feel appreciated."

It also ensures that nothing falls through the cracks, because nothing is forgotten or goes without prompt response.

The bottom line, Stansifer says, is that the single most important thing to meeting planners and attendees is service. And this simple and powerful example of using a new form of wearable technology for key members of the hotel staff is an exemplar of

what is possible in the future — whether or not the Apple Watch or next version of Google Glass ever catch on.

"It's very smart technology, and it helps deliver exceptional service. It's a very seamless process, very subtle...also very effective. It assures that you and your attendees get truly exceptional service."

**Brian Stansifer**  
Director of Corporate Events  
Luxottica North America  
New York, NY



an everyday fixture, for the short term, at least, wearable technology will need to seamlessly integrate with our existing technology. This will lead to two spheres of wearables — primary wearables, those that stand alone or act as centralizing hubs for information, and secondary wearables, which will serve up specific information that then gets relayed to a primary wearable," the report noted.

## A Shaky Start?

Meanwhile, at least one of the initial precursors to the wearable revolution has performed so poorly that it has gone into rehab.

Google Glass, an eyeglass-based device that was loudly heralded as the coolest thing since the Internet, has almost faded from sight. But the technology is not dead yet. "The rise and fall of Google Glass from cool-edge tech to bar room punch line may be about to take another

turn," Mashable noted earlier this year. "A new set of Federal Communications Commission documents filed by Google offers a peek at an upcoming device that is equipped with Bluetooth and Wi-Fi functionality, just like the first version of Google Glass."

The documents detailing the device, called "GG1," don't go into great detail about what the device does, Mashable reports, "but tidbits of information, surfaced by Droid Life, point toward the possibility that it might just be the second version of Google Glass."

*The Wall Street Journal* reports that a new Google Glass model for business applications — a mini-computer attached to a button-and-hinge system that fits on glasses and can be removed — is in the works, and that a new consumer model is "at least a year away."

Corbin Ball, a leading meeting industry technology expert and consultant

based in Bellingham, Washington, acknowledges that, "Google Glass has come and gone, essentially. But the concept is great. It's just that the first versions of Google Glass were just far too geeky for people to accept."

However, Ball believes that despite its initial setbacks, the basic concept behind Google Glass holds great promise in general, and even more promise for meeting-related applications.

Ball says that the interesting area for future development — and impact on meetings — is sensors and digital assistants that will help attendees execute and navigate meetings, especially large, multifaceted ones that represent a logistical or navigational challenge, such as a giant convention center or sprawling metropolis at the destination.

The specific capabilities that a Google Glass-like device could deliver include step-by-step navigation throughout a

meeting venue or an exhibit hall with visual and/or audio directions; real-time video conferencing; note-taking, including video with sound and still picture recording as a result of a voice or touch command; displaying speaker presentation notes and slides; the facilitation of networking; gaming applications; use as mini-teleprompters for speakers; the simple, easy video recording of meeting spaces or other onsite amenities during site inspection trips; and social media interaction using video, geo-location and networking apps.

## Back to the Future

Perhaps no organization knows more about meetings and their future than Cvent. And like Ball, the company touts the potential of wearable technology as a genuine force for innovation in the industry. "It's one trend that event organizers should be paying attention to,"

Cvent reported in an article on the topic. "The idea that technology meets fashion meets efficiency is at the core of wearables. Manufacturers of these gadgets know that if they go mainstream, then they need to look as cool as they seem. And it goes beyond fashion. More and more people will expect that technology makes their lives easier without being intrusive. Wearable technology solves this by seamlessly blending into peoples' lives."

Next-generation technology that is literally wearable also addresses common challenges that users of current smartphone technology face on a regular basis at meetings, Cvent notes. For example, it's often rather awkward to shake hands or give someone a hug with a smartphone or tablet in your hands. That's not so if your computer is worn on your person. In addition, an almost incalculable number of phones and tablets are

misplaced or lost altogether at meetings. Not so with wearables.

Cvent also speculates on the potential meeting-related benefits of wearable technology, which include devices that can serve as microphones that make it easier to communicate verbally, especially in large, noisy spaces. Exhibit managers could use wearable devices to track attendee traffic patterns less expensively than current technologies such as RFID. And in the future, increasingly popular mobile apps will be built into smartwatches so attendees can easily use those apps onsite without the hassle of a phone.

"Wearable technology is still in its infancy," Cvent says, "but has potential to be a great tool for event planners."

## Is Apple Watch the Game Changer?

The Apple Watch, introduced earlier



this year to mixed reviews, could be the device that single-handedly (no pun intended) catapults wearable technology into the realm of practical reality.

"I think that one indicator of how things go when it comes to the future of wearable technology will be the Apple Watch, if it really takes off," Ball says. "If it does, I think it's going to be a game changer when it comes to wearables."

As a result, he says, tech enthusiasts are monitoring the consumer acceptance and performance of the device very carefully. "It has the potential to be the biggest wearable product out there and really open people's eyes to the capabilities of these devices," Ball says. "There were already other smartwatches out there, like Pebble, but the Apple Watch is supposed to take things to a whole new level."

It also has a formidable competitor, the Android watch.

But both types of devices present clear challenges and have uncertain futures, *The Wall Street Journal* noted in a May 27 story. "The [Android] and Apple Watch both suffer from sluggish performance, require some socially awkward behavior like talking to your wrist, and will likely be obsolete in a year."

If rapid obsolescence does indeed kill the first two major iterations of the smartwatch, that certainly does not bode well for the future of the technology. But only time can tell what the outcome will be. Prognostications about new technologies have famously been proved wrong in the past.

And there are major hoteliers who



**"When you start thinking about how all this (wearable technology) is going to come down to meetings and events, it's fun to speculate about it, but it's pretty early in the game."**

are already investigating the onsite use of Apple Watches as tools for improved guest services. "We envision endless ways [the] Apple Watch could help us enhance our guests' experiences at our hotels," a senior executive at Starwood Hotels & Resorts told *Hotel News Now* in February. A watch also could someday enable guests to avoid the front desk altogether at check in, then use the watch for keyless entry into their room, he added.

*Hotel News Now* also reported a genuine innovation that is already in use. "Palladium Hotel Group, a Spanish hotel chain, recently unveiled its own high-tech wristbands at Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel and Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza, both on the Spanish island of Ibiza," HNN reported. "These bracelets allow guests to access their rooms and other facilities, pay for meals and shop using an assigned PIN code and participate in special drink and nightclub promotions."

MagicBands, wearable wristbands, allow guests at Walt Disney World Re-

sort to check in at FastPass+ entrances, enter parks, unlock hotel room doors and more. Now MyMagic+ is reshaping how meeting planners and attendees experience Walt Disney World Resort by allowing them to personalize their Disney Meetings experience. Using the website MyDisneyExperience.com and free mobile app, Disney FastPass+ service and MagicBands, attendees can book dining reservations and reserve access to select attractions before even leaving home. Planners also may select one of the popular MagicBand colors for all of their attendees, so as to complement their event theme.

### Final Thoughts

So, even to doubters of the broader notion of wearable technology as a global consumer phenomenon, there can be no doubt that hotels and other meeting vendors can find creative and innovative ways to provide better experiences for meeting planners and attendees.

The more pressing issue in the meeting industry at the moment is that there is little awareness among meeting planners and hosts about what wearable technology represents and how it could impact their roles and the participation of their attendees.

"We're at the very early stages of deployment right now," Ball says. "When you start thinking about how all this is going to come down to meetings and events, it's fun to speculate about it, but it's pretty early in the game."

There is no question, Ball says, that as yet unseen generations of wearable devices could dramatically impact meetings and events. "But one challenge is the question of how they are going to reach ubiquity, how we're going to get these technologies down to the level of use at meetings and events. Like anything else, for it to really start taking off, you have to reach some kind of critical mass for it to have real impact."

And at its most fundamental and valuable level, Ball says, any new technology must contribute in an innovative way to the ability of meeting planners and attendees to communicate and interact with one another. **C&IT**



Attendees can enter a Disney Park or unlock their guest room at a Walt Disney World Resort hotel utilizing their MagicBand — a colorful wristband.

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## Like a Good Marriage...



By Mark Rowh

Dealing with vendors is a basic part of planning and executing meetings. So it only makes sense to cultivate good relationships with the folks who provide the necessary facilities and services.

"We need each other to be truly successful," says Jody Brandes, senior meeting partner at Genentech, a San Francisco biotechnology company. "It may be possible for planners to plan meetings without creating relationships with vendors, but it's much more rewarding to care about the people you work with."

She says that good relationships with vendors pay off when problems arise.

"It's great when everything runs smoothly, but we know that is not 100 percent of the time," she says. "People are more willing to cooperate when a relationship is there."

## ...Healthy Planner-Vendor Partnerships Require Respect, Communication & Kindness

Brandes likes the ability to count on a vendor for an extra measure of help.

"If my preferred vendor is booked and can't accommodate my meeting, I trust them to provide a good referral for a competitor," she says. "If their referral is great, it makes me want to work even more with that original vendor. Referring a competitor doesn't make someone lose business, it almost guarantees business to come back to them."

Brandes relies extensively on hotel global sales offices.

"Many times I have meetings at smaller hotels, and they are not famil-

iar with Genentech's preferences and agreements," she says. "When I run into trouble with a hotel, I can give my GSO a quick call and email, and they save me time by stepping in and educating their property as needed."

She says the relationship with the GSO becomes even stronger when they've connected on LinkedIn or met face-to-face.

"When you find something in common outside the business it creates a bond," she says. "I do believe that the relationships I have encourage my vendors to work harder for me."

Brandes advises a forthright approach in dealing with vendors.

"Be genuine, be honest and be kind," she says. "If you don't have any business with a particular vendor, tell them you don't have business for them right now. Don't ignore their emails and voicemails."

She adds that you never know when things will change and you could need each other in the future. Or given that job situations change, you could work together someday. In any case, vendors will appreciate your honesty.

"The planner-vendor relationship is a key to the success of both organizations and ultimately a positive impact

on meetings and events," says Kerri Begley, vice president, conferences and special events for the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. She notes that a positive relationship helps develop trust, com-



***"Be genuine, be honest and be kind. If you don't have any business with a particular vendor, tell them you don't have business for them right now. Don't ignore their emails and voicemails"***

Jody Brandes, Senior Meeting Planner  
Genentech, San Francisco, CA

mitment and partnership for successful meetings.

Of course building relationships may not be as important for one-time

situations, notes Jayna Cooke, CEO at Chicago-based EVENTup, an online marketplace supporting selection of event venues.

"We see many clients who are inter-

ested in trying new venues, new service providers, or are planning events in markets other than their own," she says. "So in those cases there isn't a big advantage

## 5 Protocols for Vendor Relationships

Customer loyalty consultant and author Chip R. Bell says that strong relationships with vendors, like other partnerships, are definitely worth cultivating.

"When you invite a colleague to be an ongoing sounding board for your ideas in exchange for your keeping an eye out for assignments for which your colleague might be qualified, you are partnering," he says. "When you offer a vendor a special status with the expectation that vendor will bring you the best solutions first, you are partnering. Given the amount of our life we spend in partnerships, it is important we make them great."

Bell calls the core commitments to such partnerships protocols. Here are Bell's five important protocols for managing a vendor partnership:

- 1. Expect the best.** Great partnerships with vendors begin with a relationship that expects the best. This standard not only serves as a criterion for achievement, it provides a noticeable self-fulfilling optimism. Partners who win have a clear idea of what the relationship ought to be like. They also are quick to give early forewarning of that expectation. They are ever vigilant for evidence that their expectations will be realized or thwarted. And, they enter relationships with optimism, hope and conviction that all will go well.
- 2. Be all there.** Great partnerships bring a perpetual energy and intensity to every encounter. When they are there, they are all there. Partnerships work best when they are wide awake. Partners bring all they are to the relationship, meaning they are never lazy, disinterested or indifferent. In conversations, they are attentive...curious when they listen; animated when they contribute.

They use the same manner of connection they would bring to a conversation with an innocent child.

- 3. Assert the truth.** Great partners work diligently to always assert the truth. This proactive gesture keeps integrity at the forefront of all dealings. The healthy vendor partnership, like the healthy marriage, is marked by candor and welcomed critique. And as candor triggers improvement, those who serve feel responsive, those served feel heard and the partnership feels healthy.
- 4. Honor your partner.** Honor is made of admiration and respect. Honoring a partner is also about providing that person the elbow room to be unique, different and special. Partnerships marked by possessiveness are relationships that cease to grow. Partners in an overprotected relationship may initially feel secure. However, in time they will come to view possessiveness as a form of suspicion or mistrust. An initial feeling of security will ultimately be transformed into one of disdain and an experience of being devalued.
- 5. Keep your promises.** Reliability is the foundation of trust; trust is the glue of partnerships. The manner in which a partnership manages trust will drive every other component of the relationship. Granted, great service recovery can return an aggrieved partner to a pacified one; the residue of betrayal will leave a partner on guard for a time when letdown reoccurs. Bottom line, keeping promises is about protecting the sacredness of commitments. Promises kept give relationships security in the way honor gives it adventure.

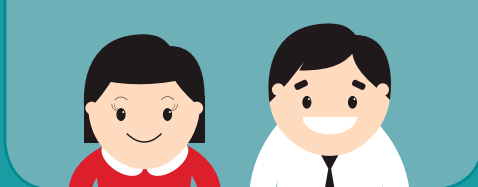
— MR



# R is for Respect

No one would argue against showing respect for vendors. But what is the best way to do that? Consider these simple strategies.

- **Focus on individuals.** When dealing with any but the smallest vendor, it may be tempting to think first of the organization and only secondarily of the people who represent it. But when you make the effort to learn people's names and get to know them as individuals, that can provide an important measure of respect.
- **Value opinions.** When a vendor offers opinions, give them full consideration. That doesn't mean giving up your own ideas or letting someone else run your show. But in listening to offered opinions and making clear that you value them, you will go a long way toward showing respect.
- **Avoid harsh or demanding language.** Harsh wording, even if a problem has occurred, never wins friends. Need a prompt response to an inquiry? Instead of writing or saying "Get this to me by Friday," try something like "Can you please get this to me by Friday?" or "I know you're busy, but I really need this by Friday, OK?" Respecting your contact's time always will be appreciated.
- **Express gratitude.** Just like "please," a word that never loses value is "thanks." When you remember to say thank you — and mean it — your contact will know that he or she has earned your respect. And when appropriate, share positive comments with others. Even an informal comment such as, "Sandy is always so efficient in meeting our needs," may be well-received by a co-worker or supervisor, who in turn may repeat the compliment. — MR



to taking the time to build a relationship." But when a relationship is likely to be continued, she agrees that it's important to cultivate it in positive ways.

In fact, it's hard to over-emphasize the importance of such relationships, according to Sarah Bigorowski, director of events at the Georgia Pharmacy Association.

"Our industry is all about hospitality and when there is a good connection driven by customer service, relationships and trust, we all win," she says. "It shows that we are all in this together, and that there is a commitment by both parties to execute a successful event."

## Showing Respect

Respect and understanding are vital

***"The healthy vendor partnership, like the healthy marriage, is marked by candor and welcomed critique."***

**Chip Bell, Customer Loyalty Consultant and Author**  
Chipbell.com, Greensboro, GA



to a good relationship between planner and vendor," says Emily Houg, principal of Echo Events in Tacoma, Washington.

"The relationship between a meeting planner and a vendor is part of the foundation of putting together a great event," she says. "Without mutual respect between the two parties, you might as

well kiss having a calm and well-executed event goodbye."

Giving credit for the talents that vendors bring to the table is a great first step in fostering productive relationships.

"Respect vendors' time and talents as the experts in their fields," Begley says. "Provide timely communication and expect to pay fair market value. Also refer them to others, the biggest compliment a vendor can receive."

Houg recalls an event where an attendee lost an anniversary ring that had been a surprise gift from her husband. The woman was beside herself. In response, the entire facility staff joined Houg in sifting through garbage until they found it, an action Houg attributes to the excellent rela-

tionship she enjoyed with facility staff. "I can't say that any other facility or staff would have gone the extra mile to help find the ring," she says. "At many places, they would have just taken a description of the ring and promised to contact her if it showed up."

At the same time, don't assume it's

okay to be pushy with a vendor or make unreasonable demands.

"Make sure your relationship is a win-win situation," Begley says. "Don't use your relationship to request special deals above and beyond what is appropriate. At the end of the day, business is business, and we all need to meet our organization's goals."

## Communicating Clearly

Obviously good communication is key when it comes to dealing with vendors. When breakdowns occur, more often than not the problem can be traced to either a mistake in communication or a lack of sufficient exchanges between the parties involved.

"Communication is king," Cooke says. "There are a million things that change and happen with each event. Everyone needs to be on the same page to avoid any potentially costly mistakes."

She tells of a recent communication breakdown where there was confusion about the number of days required for a venue rental.

"We thought it had been adjusted for three days, and initially quoted the client at the two-day price for three days. Everything ended up working out alright in the end, but that could have easily been a big mistake."

How can such errors be avoided? One strategy is to use at least two different forms of communication. If you've been communicating with a vendor rep by email, for example, take the time to connect by phone also. Not only does that help establish or maintain personal relationships, but you can use a phone conversation to confirm details conveyed via email. The reverse also can work well.

"Although it's great to get on the phone, after conversations our event planners make sure to send a recap via email to the service provider to make sure that everyone is on the same page," Cooke says.

Communication after the fact is also important, according to Bigorowski. This applies not only to taking care of event details, but also to the problem-solving process.

"Balls can be dropped and miscommunication happens and then there are the wild cards — the things no one could have predicted but we have to respond to," she says. "It's how we handle these instances by working together

keeping and so forth) really make any event happen. They include the people setting up the room, clearing and cleaning facilities, serving your attendees or otherwise assisting them with a variety of requests.

"They are the faces of your event



***"Be thankful. Always make sure to thank the service providers after a great event. This is often overlooked, and a thank you goes a long way."***

**Jayna Cooke, CEO**  
EVENTup, Chicago, IL

as much as you the planner are," Houg says. "Their job might not be in the limelight and they might prefer to be in the background, but don't forget they are just as important in the process of implementing a great event as the next."

She says that talking with staff and treating them with respect will reap benefits in the long run.

"They will remember you," she says. "And the next time your event is at that facility, they will go that extra mile for you when it is needed the most."

***"Without mutual respect between the two parties, you might as well kiss having a calm and well-executed event goodbye."***

**Emily Houg, Principal**  
Echo Events, Tacoma, WA

and providing honest feedback between client and vendor that can strengthen the relationship."

## Adding the Personal Touch

A strategy anyone can follow is taking the time to connect with key staff and let them know you appreciate their work. That's not only the right thing to do but also a great way to foster cooperation, according to Houg.

"Make an effort to say hello and thank you to everyone that is involved," she says. She affirms that management and sales might be the front of the house and those with whom you work closely and see the most often. But the back of the house staff (catering, custodial, house-

Cooke agrees. "Be thankful," she says. "Always make sure to thank the service providers after a great event. This is often overlooked, and a thank you goes a long way."

Solid personal relationships often form the basis for cooperative problem-solving, Houg points out. Because of the relationship she had with a local facility and caterer, when the numbers for an event increased unexpectedly, the vendors were able to make things happen two days before the event started.

"Space was made available to accommodate the increase," she says. "And F&B made sure there was plenty of food to handle the group, even with an increase in the numbers for special meal requests."

Begley describes a longtime relationship with a provider of audiovisual services.

"We consider them joint partners in the success of our meetings and events," she says. "When we work together onsite I know they will do the

best job possible to make our meeting a success. I trust they will do this, and I shout their names from the rooftop any chance I get."

In one instance, a hotel attempted to deny some concessions that had been promised.

"As the hotel's in-house AV company, my contact went to bat for us and made sure the promises were met," Begley says.

The likelihood for such cooperation may be greater when you treat contacts as individuals and take the time to identify common points of interest, Bigorowski advises.

"Make a point to know one or two things about your vendors on a personal level," Bigorowski says. "What are their hobbies? Where do they like to vacation? It's fun to get to know one another and build connections."

Taking things further, if a vendor of yours is hosting a client event, attend if you can, she suggests.

"They will appreciate the support and a familiar face in the crowd. Even better, bring a fellow planner or colleague so the vendor can grow their network, too."

Certainly, positive relationships are vital in all aspects of business. When it comes to dealing with vendors, successful relationships can assure that everyone comes out a winner.

"Through the vendor relationships I've developed over the years, I have made dear friends and a network of resources," Begley says. "That not only allows me to be successful at my job, but also to have a lot of fun doing it." **C&IT**



## Standing Out From the Crowd



Dynamic Events by David Caruso, an award-winning Milwaukee-based event planning firm, arranged a themed President's Club business meeting for 40 attendees at The St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort, Puerto Rico.

## How Themed Meetings Ignite Excitement and Spell Success All Year Long

By Maura Keller

There is a reason why so many meetings and events seem to be cookie-cutter productions. There are people to please and placate, funds to be allocated, guest lists to be trimmed and complex rules of etiquette to be followed. It is no wonder that so many people end up with the same event year after year. Whether you're organizing a weekend corporate event or an offsite annual sales meeting, creating a distinctive themed atmosphere can play a key role in its success and help these meetings stand out from the crowd.

### Why Themed Meetings

Nowadays, corporations are moving toward themed meetings because they

offer a consistent message to the attendees about the mission or objective of the meeting. Themed meetings also allow meeting planners to create a roadmap with a clear meeting message that is communicated to attendees through the event's theme.

Hillary Smith, CMP, CSEP, and partner at Konzept Events in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, says that themed meetings set the tone for the meeting and build experiential components based on the themed elements you select.

"This helps underline and reinforce the overall message," Smith says. "With themes you can get more creative with the way you display and purpose content. The challenge is making it a consistent

message. A lot of meeting planners don't take the time to build on the theme and thread it throughout the whole event. It's confusing for attendees if you don't highlight the theme throughout and creates the reverse negative effect."

Industry experts agree that larger meetings are the most appropriate setting for themed meetings, and they are usually best for reorganizations, incentive groups or sales meeting settings that have a motivational tone.

"Themed meetings are becoming a hot idea, especially when groups select a reoccurring destination," says Karen Shackman, founder of Shackman Associates New York, a destination management and special events planning firm.

"Using themed meetings is a great way to keep regular meeting fresh and exciting. Millennial attendees love face-to-face interaction at meetings, so any theme that encourages networking could be a home run among that group."

Shackman stresses that themed meetings are ideal for corporate incentive travel program groups. "Because these kinds of programs are designed for top performers, adding themed elements creates more excitement around the entire meeting," Shackman says.

Shackman Associates recently ran a music-themed meeting that included elements throughout the week that focused on New York's rich history of musicians who either got their start there or moved to the city during their careers.

"We incorporated a unique team-building idea where attendees went into a studio and recorded their own rock songs," Shackman says. "Many top instrumentalists are in New York when they are not on tour with major stars, so we were easily able to pair attendees with talent. The attendees then performed their new song live at their corporate gala later in the week. They loved it."

Kara Leodler, manager of conference and travel for Kansas City Life & Old American Insurance Company in Kansas City, Missouri, prefers to use a theme for meetings for her company.

"Themed meetings have a natural progression from the tag line and logo design, to marketing plans, to room décor, tours, speakers and menus," Leodler says. "It makes planning the meeting fun, and as a planner, you get to wear your creative hat, connect the dots, create the flow and allow hotels and vendors to wear their creative hats, too. This year I had two meetings in Colonial Williamsburg and the themes included Capture the Colonial Spirit and A Walk through Colonial Williamsburg. Both lend perfectly to the area, the hotels, the recreation and education the area has to offer."

Konzept Events creates themed meetings by including the theme's creative in every detail of the event from start to

finish. This includes things such as the teaser invite to the online registration, décor colors, event gifts, entertainment, group activities/teambuilders, education sessions, etc.

"Any communication to the attendee or audience of any kind would all be branded with that theme," says Smith, "The entire environment would exude that message. And importantly, the ending of the event would be a catalyst to the theme. It would touch on some manner of recap, reporting or marching orders with that theme in mind so it all comes full circle. This ensures attendees walk away with one consistent message."

### Benefits Aplenty

Kelly O'Neil, events manager for CMA Association Management, Princeton Junction, New Jersey, says that one of the biggest benefits of a themed meeting is that the attendees' overall experience is



Hillary Smith, CMP, CSEP, Partner  
Konzept Events, Fort Lauderdale, FL

*"The event would...touch on some manner of recap, reporting or marching orders with that theme in mind so it all comes full circle. This ensures attendees walk away with one consistent message."*

enriched as they engage deeper and participate more through group activities, teambuilding and networking.

Themed meetings also are likely to encourage attendance as prospective attendees look forward to what is to come.

"Themes can also tie into messages and vital information that the company is relaying to the group in a more exciting format than just a PowerPoint presentation," O'Neil says. "Theming can build the excitement and relay and reinforce a message all year long, not just for one event a year." O'Neil has planned 20 large themed events with more than 500 attendees and many other themed events on a smaller scale.

From this experience, O'Neil has learned that attendees are more likely to remember information that is presented

in a new, exciting and entertaining way as the theme will trigger the memory when the takeaways need to be implemented back at the office.

"Theming is an important part of the meeting follow-up," O'Neil says. "Themed giveaways or email messages afterward can trigger employees to remember what the meeting was about and put into action what they learned. And remember, at the end of one year's event, the reveal of next year's location and theme is always a highlight of the closing ceremony. This creates buzz for the next year."

One meeting in particular that O'Neil orchestrated espoused the far-reaching impact themed meetings can have on attendees. This meeting celebrated the 25th anniversary of an annual client conference.

As O'Neil explains, the meeting was kicked off with a welcome reception that encompassed stations of previous cities that the group attended for this confer-

ence, representing the client's global reach. Stations included themed décor, food and beverage as well as activities that echoed past annual client conferences and brought back those memories. To set the stage, the registration table included street signs from several different locations from previous years.

The conference's final farewell reception was held at a ranch and included activities and food stations that tied the current year's surroundings with fond memories from previous years to link the past with the present. Some examples included mechanical bull riding, a favorite country and western band returned, face painting, cigar rolling, armadillo races, whiskey tasting, ranch tours, character sketches and photo opportunities with a live bull.



“Themed meetings tend to have higher satisfaction ratings because guests are engaged and entertained in unexpected ways, which leads to more positive results,” O’Neil says. “Attendees walk away refreshed and excited for what comes next in their company.”

**“Companies that are restructuring, rebranding or merging with another company provide an opportunity to send a corporate message through a theme.”**

### Making It Work

Themed meetings are appropriate for corporate groups wishing to send a message to employees. “This can be done in the form of creating a fun setting or a teambuilding experience,” says Linda Ilsley, CMP, president and CEO at Winston-Salem, North Carolina-based LPI Events. “Companies that are restructuring, rebranding or merging

with another company provide an opportunity to send a corporate message through a theme.”

From Ilsley’s perspective, themed meetings are becoming more prevalent as corporations use the opportunity to



**Linda Ilsley, CMP, President and CEO**  
LPI Events, Winston-Salem, NC

spread the message about sales of new products or logo launches and the like.

Ilsley also suggests the key is to “show ROI to the key planners and the attendees.” Yet one of the challenges is in selecting the proper venue, especially one that lends itself to enhancing the theme experience. She says her area is fortunate to have a venue such as the Millennium Center in Winston-Salem, which has a

number of options for a themed meeting including “a courtroom, speakeasy, ballroom with a large stage area and an elegant setting. The space also allows for theme transition, which is not easy to find,” she notes.

Examples of successful themed meetings produced by LPI Events include Prescription for Success, which used a logoed, customized prescription pad for notes, a 6-foot prescription pad meeting agenda posted outside the ballroom, ink pens shaped like hypodermic needles, and a character actor in a lab coat who handed out prescription-messaged candy bars inscribed with the meeting message.

Moreover, Ilsley suggests theme meetings can create an energy that comes from the group working together on a CSR project or drumming teambuilding programs, both of which also have lasting impact. “Drumming for the Future teambuilding programs also create awareness of the corporation moving as a team into the future,” she adds.

### Avoid Being ‘Cheesy’

Lisa Schaibly, operations coordinator at Front Burner Brands, a restaurant management company headquartered in Tampa, Florida, recently coordinated the firm’s annual franchise reunion, which typically has a theme that pertains to the event.

“Our annual franchise reunion combines aspects of what is relevant to our business at the time, usually playing off something our host city is well-known for,” Schaibly says. Some examples from the past have been a Path to Greatness in Cancun, playing off the Aztec compass; Mile High Success in Denver, playing off the mountains; and a pirate theme in Tampa, incorporating the theme in breakouts such as Counting Your Coffer for inventory and Salvaging Sunken Treasure for guest recovery.

Front Burner Brands also did a Dining in the Dark dinner for one of the company’s smaller meetings at the Epicurean Hotel in Tampa.

“The diners were blindfolded and then served three courses, each paired with a wine, and they had to guess what they

were eating,” Schaibly says. “It was really funny to watch them poke around for their bites and hearing some of their guesses.”

While Schaibly embraces themed meetings, she also stresses the importance of not crossing the line of being too cheesy or childish.

“You don’t want to make someone feel patronized,” Schaibly says. “You want your theme to be relevant to their business at that time and the theme should carry throughout your meeting and presentations. Don’t just slap a luau theme on your meeting and make them dress up in the paper grass skirts you found at the party store. You are catering to business professionals, not a summer barbecue with the kids.”

### Know Your Group

The key to making themed meetings an attendee favorite is knowing your group. For example, if you are planning a destination meeting in New York City, it might help to start a conversation with potential attendees about what would make them most excited to go there.

“If you start getting common feedback, then that can set the table to be creative and incorporate a really exciting theme,” Shackman says.

For the Capture the Colonial Spirit themed meeting that Leodler planned, she developed a marketing plan the year prior to the meeting, highlighting important characters, locations and events.

“Simple things like highlighting the importance of taverns as a social and meeting location in the day were fun and educational to those on the receiving end of the plan,” Leodler says. One of the tours incorporated lunch at a tavern in the museum of Colonial Williamsburg with the locals who are in character. Some of the speakers for the meeting were “Mr. Thomas Jefferson, former President of the United States” speaking of his time in office and his love of Virginia.

“The meeting space at the Williamsburg Lodge is perfect to work with. The look and feel lends itself to theming and décor of any kind,” Leodler says. “Of course we went to patriotic red, white and blue with a hint of garden for the

## Top 5 Ways to Keep Events Fresh and Exciting

Here’s a case study designed by Konzept Events (KE), a full-service destination management, event design and experiential brand-marketing agency headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. KE has been providing total event services for multiple annual functions for more than six years for their client Nova Southeastern University (NSU). Using NSU’s 2015 Circle of Excellence program as an example, here’s how KE keeps things fresh and relevant when they are tasked with producing the same event year after year.

- **Know where you have been.** The KE team begins by reviewing all of the epic creations they previously have custom-developed for NSU. KE reviews all of their past proposals complete with mood boards and images from the events, and gathers the notes from the post-event wrapup, which includes client feedback on what really wowed guests and what worked from a technical and logistical standpoint.
- **Seek inspiration.** The 2015 event décor was inspired by a beautiful, colorful kaleidoscope event invitation. When the planning process began, it was important to have the same bold colors consistent throughout the space and to find elements of texture that helped project the concept of fragmented glass and light — the very nature of a kalei-

doscope. The team also brainstormed in non-traditional settings such as going offsite and discussing the event look in nature or taking a field trip to an art studio. In this way, the KE team considers the meaning of the theme and then lets the imagination run wild in different environments to encourage out-of-the-box thinking. Teamwork also is crucial to this phase. Often an idea will start in a simple place with one member and develop into a full logistical plan with the encouragement of idea share.

- **Explore the space and evolution of the event.** The KE team always does a complete walk-through of the event space — no matter how many times they have produced an event in the same location. In this case, they explored the courtyard of the NSU campus where plans called for an al fresco cocktail reception and a tented sit-down dinner and presentation. KE was responsible for providing décor that would support the theme the entire evening. By visiting the actual event space, the team — with fresh eyes — thinks through the operational logistics of the event. This important step begins to carve away at challenges that may arise on the “day of” for load-in, staging, weather, etc.
- **Use innovative versions of what works.** The KE team main-

tains the elements that make guests wax nostalgic about the best parts of years past and sprinkles in “newness” that will conjure up feelings of awe. With the unique kaleidoscope theme in 2015, the tent was not left plain white but draped with varying colors to continue from floor to ceiling the rich palette that was visible on all other eye-level elements. Thus, the attendee’s visual stimulation was not limited to just the pillows, table linens and centerpieces but right up to the very top of the event space’s tented ceilings. KE maintains a warehouse of inventory, and for the 2015 event, they utilized new gold geometric centerpieces to weave in vibrant florals. It was the perfect juxtaposition and metaphorical demonstration of a kaleidoscope’s hard pieces of glass blending and reshaping to form soft and beautiful designs.

- **Know what is trending in your industry.** With the advent of 3-D image-mapping, KE introduced this burgeoning technique to their clients. Sometimes new tech-based solutions will not fit a client’s budget so KE prepared a backup solution that still had a lot of impact. By using the most progressive elements of lighting décor, KE provided the client with an affordable solution to 3-D image-mapping that made the star-shaped lights on the out-



The event décor for the NSU event, from the bar, to the table number and the outside lighting, was inspired by a colorful kaleidoscope event invitation.

side of the tent appear to have more depth than traditional lighting design, and motion that gave guests an over-the-top welcome. KE’s repeat clients appreciate new ideas as well as backup solutions that are affordable alternatives to new technology.

— MK



décor, linens and flowers. The sleeping rooms of each property, Williamsburg Lodge and Inn, lent itself to this theming as well. Menu design with servers and staff dressing the parts of old-fashioned garden party, to formal, black-tie events were spot on.”

Ilsley cautions planners to always stay focused on the goal and objective of the meeting. It is a good idea to “survey or have a clear understanding of who the attendees are as well as the best way to convey the information to appeal to the recipients’ learning mode,” she advises.

Ken Malquist, show director, Disney Event Group, says theming, no matter how extravagant, is always in the details.

“For example, let’s say a client chose ‘ignite’ for an event theme,” Malquist says. “Through colorful lighting, electrifying graphics and engaging keynote speakers, the theme can ‘ignite’ attendee imagination and drive action to help the client achieve their meeting goals.”

### The Disney Way

Not surprising, most everything the Disney Events meeting team does at

Walt Disney World Resort is themed. They look at an entire event and the client’s key messages and goals, and tie those elements into every aspect of the meeting. From pre-event communication to onsite décor, entertainment, signage and presentation platforms, they use every detail in creating not only an event



**David Caruso, President**  
Dynamic Events, Milwaukee, WI

*“Well-produced themed meetings motivate employees to get more engaged in the company culture, perform at high performance levels and represent the organization in a positive way.”*

but also an unforgettable experience.

“Themed meetings ensure that every aspect that attendees see, hear, touch, feel, taste and experience reinforce the client’s purpose and business needs,” Malquist says. “It’s a holistic view that drives greater engagement, retention and utilization. Just like a score in a movie should not distract from the emotion of a scene, the theme of an event should not overshadow the message. All event elements should work in harmony

with each other to support the intent of the meeting.”

In his meeting planning experience, Malquist has found that meeting attendees engage more with event content and activities, and with each other, when event elements are uniquely themed.

“Walt Disney said, ‘I would rather entertain and hope that people learned

something, than educate people and hope they were entertained.’ Our Disney team has found that when people are taken out of their regular rivers of thinking, they become more focused and engaged,” Malquist says.

David Caruso, president of Dynamic Events in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, agrees. Caruso has found that well-produced themed meeting experiences help to achieve strategic goals and to differentiate organizations in the areas of creativity, culture and commitment to excellence.

Recently, Caruso orchestrated a national sales meeting in Miami for a company that sells medical devices. Based on the location of the meeting, the company’s strategic plan and the demographics of the audience, they branded the experience with the title “Ignite.”

“The tagline, ‘Excellence. Passion. Performance.’ supported the energizing title and provided a framework for the meeting topics that were focused on how team members can ignite excellence, passion and performance in all areas of their career,” Caruso says. “Ultimately, well-produced themed meetings motivate employees to get more engaged in the company culture, perform at high performance levels and represent the organization in a positive way.”

When it’s time to prove ROI, a creative, well-executed themed meeting will make you stand out from the crowd. **C&IT**



LPI Events arranged this drumming event where the leader instructs attendees on how to drum and sing. As the group experiences the rhythm of working together, they learn tolerance, mutual respect and personal understanding, and take it back to the office.



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### Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa

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### Streamsong Resort

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### Wynn Las Vegas

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## SECOND-TIME WINNER

The Coeur d'Alene Resort is situated on gorgeous Lake Coeur d'Alene and offers a surreal blend of luxury, activities, amenities, wildlife and idyllic natural surroundings with stunning views of the mountains and lake.

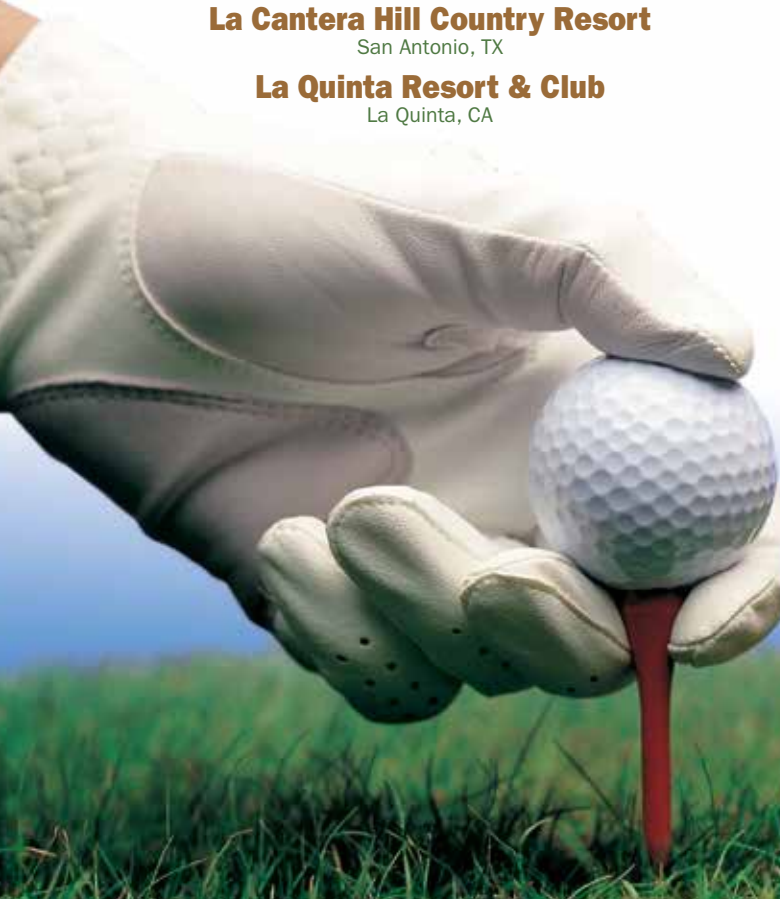
The resort features an 18-hole golf course and luxury spa, both of which have received numerous accolades. The tone for the golf experience is set immediately when guests step aboard the sleek mahogany StanCraft speedboats to make their way to the golf course where they are greeted by their forecaddie. The Coeur d'Alene Resort Spa features signature treatments based on local water and stone

elements that guests will not find anywhere else. A talented team of professionals stage exceptional meetings, conferences and retreats. There are plentiful fine and casual dining options as well as unique entertainment and boutique shopping.

The Coeur d'Alene Resort will spend more than \$1 million in capital improvements in 2015. The golf course has implemented a new state-of-the-art GPS system. Reduced and resculpted bunkers have contributed to an improved playability of the golf course. Also included in these improvements is the redesign of the resort's five-star restaurant, Beverly's, along with the Hagadone Suite. *C&IT*

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Far from Florida's crowded beach and theme park resorts, this iconic destination has all of the ingredients to create a memorable group experience.

### Award-Winning Golf

Opened in January 2013, Streamsong Red, designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, and Streamsong Blue, designed by Renaissance Golf Design (Tom Doak), have ranked on some of golf's most prestigious lists including *Golf* magazine's "Top 100 Courses in the U.S." and *Golfweek's* "Best Resort Courses." Designed to be walked, Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue can host small, intimate groups as well as those of up to 288 players for tournaments, events and outings with the support of its PGA-certified staff.

In 2017, Streamsong will add a third golf course, Streamsong Black,



designed by Gil Hanse. Streamsong Black will feature abundant sand — the common denominator for the world's greatest golf courses — rolling elevation changes, native grasses and stunning views of ridges and the surrounding landscape.

But Streamsong is about much more than golf. From an intimate executive retreat to a grand international gathering, Streamsong is a place to accomplish things of value and return renewed. The resort offers an inspirational, distraction-free environment with 25,000 sf of dedicated meeting space. Thirteen large and small meeting rooms can accommodate 10 to 500 in complete comfort and privacy. General session and breakout rooms are conveniently clustered for effective program flow.

Set on 16,000 acres, Streamsong invites groups to explore the outdoors via guided bass fishing expeditions, sporting clays and a nature trail. Guest favorites for relaxation and rejuvenation include a lakeside infinity-edge pool and the unique grotto-style AcquaPietra Spa. Five distinct dining options include P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>, Restaurant Fifty-Nine, Fragmentary Blue, SottoTerra and Hemy's. The resort's outdoor venues are unlike any other — from the 2,000-sf rooftop terrace to a breezeway leading to the lakeside infinity pool to lawn spaces surrounded by the beauty of natural Florida.

Highlighted by stone, wood and glass, Streamsong's Lodge enables groups to take full advantage of freshwater views, Florida breezes and open vistas that accentuate sunrises and sunsets on the broad land-based horizon.

Modern, sophisticated and meticulous in detail, Streamsong offers 228 spacious guest rooms and suites thoughtfully situated on five levels and featuring floor-to-ceiling glass with custom louvers and striking sunrise or sunset lake views that extend to the natural Florida horizon. Rich linens, plush robes and boutique amenities throughout ensure no element of your stay is overlooked. **C&IT**



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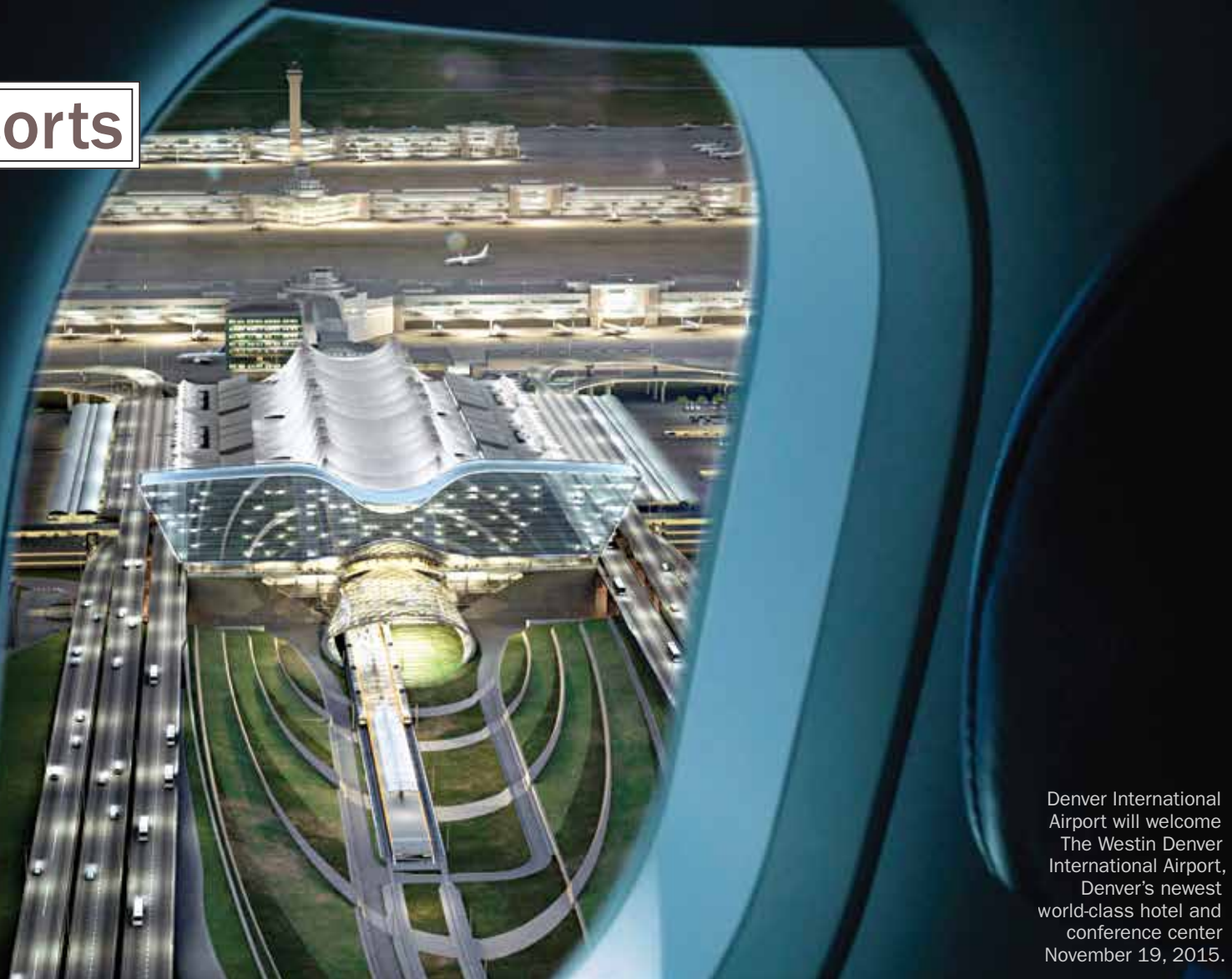
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## Airport Hotels Grow Up

Amenities, Services and Meeting Spaces Match Those of City Hotels



Denver International Airport will welcome The Westin Denver International Airport, Denver's newest world-class hotel and conference center November 19, 2015.

Credit: The Westin Denver International Airport

Airport hotels were once considered the last resort for passengers who miss flights, have long layovers or want to recover from a long trip before continuing. Not anymore. The properties are now the first choice for many planners who want convenient meeting facilities at good value.

By  
Derek  
Reveron

Airport properties, especially major brands, want to grow up and become bona fide meeting destinations like popular convention properties in major cities. Moreover, airport hotels want to improve their meeting facilities, services and amenities to compete with many airports that now feature on-property conference spaces.

Thus, more and more airport hotels are upgrading and adding flexible meeting space. These upgrades and new spaces for meetings are attracting more

meetings, says Bill Jones, vice president, managing director, events, the Channel Company, a sales and marketing solutions provider for technology companies in Framingham, Massachusetts. "Hotel companies are doing a better job of making airport hotels more attractive," he says. "You see some new airport hotels coming up and meeting space that looks good. Some of the brands are doing a pretty good job, like the Hyatt in Orlando and Dallas, which have some significant meeting space. If you are going to do an event that's short, like a day and a half, then it's tempting to do something at an airport hotel."

Most of the meetings that Jones holds at airport hotels are small. "They are usually less than 50 people," he says. "We do local meetings at about 20 cities — usually at airport hotels located outside

the city. It helps with traffic and people getting there. It's easier to do a meeting at an airport like O'Hare than ask people in the suburbs to go into Chicago."

### Airport Hotels Offer Value

Value also is a significant factor when it comes to airport hotels. "You always get a little bit more value outside of a major metropolitan city. If you compare an airport hotel in Orlando versus one near Disney, you get a little more value of the airport hotel. And if you hold a meeting in a property at John F. Kennedy International Airport, LaGuardia Airport or Newark Liberty International Airport, that will be cheaper than doing it in New York City," adds Jones.

Planners can negotiate good deals at airport hotels. The properties typically have lower room rates than downtown properties and cut transportation costs

The 591-room hotel features 30,000 sf of meeting space and 51 meeting rooms.

The Newark Marriott also was convenient because it offered a central location for attendees and is located about a 30-minute drive from the company's headquarters. "We needed the convenience of getting people in and out quickly. It's a centralized location for people flying in from all over the region," says Jeffrey Cesari, CMP, president of Philadelphia-based Shimmer Events, a corporate meeting, incentive and event company.

Value also was a consideration. "If you look at the Newark airport hotels compared to New York City you are going to get a lot better rate," says Cesari. "We are trying to keep costs down. That's the key. There is a better cost per person, and you can negotiate a little better at airport hotels. I see more groups wanting to meet at airport hotels there, and the biggest reason is the cost savings, mostly from the transportation," because attendees don't have to use taxis, buses and rented cars to travel downtown.

But as airport hotels grow up, they offer much more than value and convenience, especially in the very competitive food and beverage arena. "The Newark Marriott implemented the farm-to-table concept at this airport hotel," says Cesari. "The executive chef put in a garden outside the hotel where they grow herbs. We had a reception and cocktail party on

a lawn near where the herbs grow. The chef was showing people around, talking to them about the garden and the herbs used in the food we were eating. It was a fun and casual event to get away from the studying they were doing. Otherwise it was a pretty no-frills meeting."

### New and Improved Airport Hotels

In Phoenix, the former Crowne Plaza Phoenix Airport Hotel, now called the Wren, has undergone an \$8 million renovation. The project included all 290 guest rooms, meeting spaces and the restaurant. In addition, the 257-room Hilton Phoenix Airport Hotel is newly transformed. Conveniently located 1.5 miles from Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport, they offer complimentary 24-hour airport transportation. The recently renovated lobby has stylish finishes, and the guest rooms were redesigned with new furniture.

In California, Sacramento International Airport will get its first new hotel in 30 years. Sonnenblick Development LLC plans to build a new five-story hotel that will be situated within short walking distance of both passenger terminals. The 135-room Hyatt Place will include an indoor pool and spa, fitness room, dining area and 3,500 sf of meeting space.

Overlooking the San Francisco Bay, the San Francisco Airport Marriott Waterfront recently completed an \$18 million renovation of its 688 guest rooms and suites to meet the evolving preferences of its guests. Key to the project was the participation of guests — rang-

for buses and taxis. Also, attendees who take flights can arrive and depart more conveniently, saving travel time to and from airports.

It's possible to stretch tight budgets by holding those meetings that are shorter and smaller at airport hotels, which are increasingly popular for serious training, education and board of director meetings, all of which require attendees to focus and avoid the potential distractions of downtown properties and resorts.

That's why a major pharmaceutical company held a three-day training and education meeting for 175 Northeast region sales representatives at the Newark Liberty International Airport Marriott.

The recently renovated San Francisco Airport Marriott Waterfront also is home to Marriott Hotels' first M Club Lounge.



Credits: San Francisco Airport Marriott Waterfront





A rendering of innovative, new space at the Concourse Hotel at LAX, which will rebrand as the Hyatt Regency Los Angeles International Airport in 2016.

ing from baby boomers to millennials — in the renovation.

Travelers sampled and critiqued three guest room concepts. Their vital feedback influenced the overall guest room design, amenities and technological features.

A few key features include: multiple plug-in units for mobile devices, Samsung 48-inch flat-screen televisions and fast Internet access; open closet shelving design; plush mattresses and choice of down or down-alternative pillows.

The San Francisco Airport Marriott Waterfront features 24-hour shuttle service to and from San Francisco Inter-

national Airport, fresh fruit and sweet treats in the lobby, bike rental, electric car charging stations and a dedicated shoe shine stand.

In 2014, Marriott Hotels launched its first M Club Lounge at the San Francisco Airport Marriott Waterfront. A next-generation concierge lounge built for work and play, the 2,097-sf M Club Lounge features regional food and beverage offerings and convenient tech amenities 24/7.

The Concourse Hotel at Los Angeles International Airport - A Hyatt Affiliated Hotel is the closest hotel to LAX and offers a complimentary airport shuttle offering transportation to and from LAX airport every 10 minutes. After a \$57 million total renovation of the 580 guest rooms and public space, the hotel in spring 2016 will be reflagged and rebranded as the new Hyatt Regency at Los Angeles Airport. The hotel boasts spacious guest rooms, complimentary Wi-Fi and ergonomic workstations. The eco-friendly hotel is a local leader in sustainable business practices, with a platinum-level Green Seal certification and four-key California Green Lodging

certification. New features debuting in 2016 include the new Hyatt Conference Center with convenient street-level access to approximately 10,000 sf of meeting rooms, brainstorming areas and all-day catering; a new event lawn with three distinct lawns of outdoor space to accommodate groups up to 750 attendees; 40,000 sf of totally redesigned interior ballroom and meeting rooms; 55-inch LED TVs in the guest rooms, new F&B offerings including an Asian-Mexican fusion menu in the signature restaurant, and the debut of the Hyatt Regency Concierge Club.

In Texas, the Sheraton Dallas Fort Worth Airport Hotel received a \$7 mil-



A view of the airport from The Westin Los Angeles Airport Hotel, which is located just four blocks from LAX.

lion makeover. The project included renovating the property's 303 guest rooms and lobby.

The 506-room Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport last year revealed \$1.6 million in meeting and banquet space renovations, including a 38,000-sf complete redesign featuring modern finishes, upgraded amenities and more.

Newly renovated spaces include the property's 10,000-sf ballroom; junior ballroom; multiple break-out meeting rooms; amphitheater and prefunction space.

In Colorado, The Westin Denver International Airport, Denver's newest world-class hotel and conference center, will officially open at 3 p.m. on November 19, 2015. The 433,000-sf, 14-story hotel, with 519 guest rooms, will serve both business and leisure travelers at the fifth busiest airport in the United States. The hotel, designed entirely with walls of towering, shimmering glass, overlooks both the mountains and DIA flight paths, and is part of Denver's new Hotel and Transit Center program. Building upon imagery of flight and aviation, the architecture resembles a

bird with its wings extended as it hovers above the public plaza, framing and accenting the acclaimed tents of the Jeppesen Terminal. The floor-to-ceiling windows, which make up the entire wall of every one of the 519 guest rooms and 35 suites, offer expansive views of Denver's signature Rocky Mountains and Colorado's High Plains.

The 37,000-sf conference center is one of the few above-ground conference centers located at an airport, and will feature a grand ballroom, junior ballroom and 15 additional meeting/board rooms, for a total of 19 meeting rooms. The meeting space also boasts a 10,000-sf prefunction area that showcases a panoramic three-story, floor-to-ceiling glass wall that is approximately 100 feet wide, providing a light and airy, unique meeting space. The views are equally impressive from the top-story pool and WestinWorkout Fitness Studio, located in the "saddle" of the building. In addition to the hotel and conference center, there will be an 82,000-sf, open-air public plaza that will become Denver's newest venue for entertainment and relaxation and will create a commu-



A rendering of the new Westin Denver International Airport, designed entirely with walls of towering, shimmering glass,

nity connection between the airport and downtown Denver through special event programming.

The Four Points by Sheraton Chicago O'Hare is getting a facelift that includes new carpeting, color schemes and refreshed bathrooms for guest rooms. The exterior will get a fresh coat of paint, landscaping and canopy. The project also includes new seating areas, colors and light fixtures for the lobby. In addition, the property is strengthening its Wi-Fi system.

## Airport Improvements

Attendees traveling to meetings can arrive in a sour mood after enduring bad experiences with airports and airlines. However, airports are adding a range

## Airport Foodie News

Airport food is growing up, too. And Luxor Limo, one of Manhattan's premium luxury limo and car services, blogs often to keep customers abreast of just how good airport food is nowadays. When flying in and out of the metropolitan area, here are Luxor's latest foodie recommendations for John F. Kennedy International Airport and Newark Liberty International Airport.

### Best Places to Eat at JFK Airport

People dining at **AeroNuova** are usually still struggling to process that they're eating at an airport. The food is rustic, hearty and simple, with well-made pastas and thin-crust pizzas predominating.

**Piquillo**, a tapas restaurant, offers all the dishes you'd expect: ceviche, anchovies, olives, shrimp, deviled eggs, chorizo, and the ever-beloved pairing of jamón and queso. Being tapas, the dishes are small accompaniments to a glass of wine and not a hefty, put-you-to-sleep-for-the-flight meal, but they keep hunger at bay.

**La Vie** is a small, sweet, Parisian-style café that goes some way to helping you forget your surroundings. The food and drink helps keep body and soul together, with

strong coffee and sandwiches including baguettes, croque monsieurs and madames, as well as more substantial fare such as steaks and salmon. Service can be a little on the slower side when it gets busy.

**Deep Blue Sushi** earned some reluctant love from obsessive blogger The Sushi Legend, who praised the fresh fish and room temperature rice — and after 38 sushi restaurant reviews, that has to count for something. Deep Blue also serves ramen, although that gets less acclaim from visitors.

**Bonus Snack: Baked by Melissa** is a staple of New York City, with 11 locations in the city and one in Jersey. Baked by Melissa offers bite-sized cupcakes in flavors like red velvet and cookies and cream. These tiny cupcakes have a big mission: to take the guilt out of sweet treats.

### Best Places to Eat at Newark Airport

Not long ago, the Newark Airport dining experience lagged behind other NYC airports. As both JFK and LaGuardia lifted their game, Newark wasn't keeping up.

That is now starting to change. United Airlines is completely renovating Newark's Terminal C, bringing in celebrity chefs and upscale restaurants. When they're done, it will resemble what Bloomberg News called a foodie theme park



Deep Blue Sushi restaurant at JFK International Airport.

with rotating signs, light-up furnishings and iPads for ordering everywhere.

While some new places have opened already, a lot of the redesign isn't set to open until next year. Here are your best options in the meantime.

### Terminal A

**The Earl of Sandwich** is a chain store with restaurants scattered across nine states, a few airports and Disneyland Village Paris. It offers sandwiches, salads, wraps and desserts. After 4 p.m. it also has a dinner menu featuring pastas, pizza breads and stuffed potatoes. You

also can get a beer here, which many passengers passing through Terminal A seem to need. Otherwise, pre-security you can get a reasonable burrito at **Qdoba**.

### Terminal B

Terminal B is heavy on bars but light on restaurants.

**The Belgian Beer Cafe** offers sandwiches, steaks and burgers to go with the Belgian beer. The consensus seems to be the fare is not bad for a terminal notoriously bereft of food options. Or try **Champps Americana** for a sports bar dining experience.

### Terminal C

**Saison** is a full-service French restaurant (though, like all the restaurants in the new terminal, the service is by iPad) and features excellent steaks, a raw bar and a good wine list, as well as more traditional French bistro food. It's far from the cheapest option at Newark, but has been a pleasant surprise for travelers.

For a glass of wine and something lighter, **Oeno Wine Bar** is a strong choice, with tapas, cheese plates, panini, and even cannoli as a sweet treat to accompany the drinks.

— DR





Renderings of the proposed, new LaGuardia International Airport.

of improvements that will make travel more convenient and less stressful.

After once comparing New York's LaGuardia Airport (LGA) to "some third world country," Vice President Joe Biden recently joined New York Governor Cuomo to announce the ambitious plan to demolish and replace the airport's aging terminals with a modern, unified hub. The LGA is undergoing an extensive capital redevelopment program in an effort to provide world-class airport facilities. The program is expected to include the construction of a new 35-gate terminal building; a new aeronautical ramp; frontage roads that will serve the new terminal; a new central heating and refrigeration plant; and other utilities and site improvements.

Right now a new airport is being built in Mexico City, which is slated for completion by 2020 and will make traveling better for passengers and the environment.

The airport is expected to service 50

***"There is a better cost per person, and you can negotiate a little better at airport hotels. I see more groups wanting to meet at airport hotels. The biggest reason is the cost savings... from the transportation."***

**Jeffrey Cesari, CMP, President**  
Shimmer Events, Philadelphia



million people a year, and the new design is all about energy efficiency. Gates will be within walking distance, and the roof is being built to incorporate solar technology. There also will be an onsite



Rendering of the new international airport to serve the greater Mexico City area. Nearly 10 miles from the current airport, the new airport is set for completion in 2010.

energy plant that will collect, treat and recycle rainwater.

Los Angeles International Airport is in the midst of a multibillion-dollar capital improvements program project-



ed to last through 2019. The jewel of the program, the \$1.9 billion Tom Bradley International Terminal project, will provide greater capacity with a total of 18 new gates, nine of which will comfortably accommodate passenger loads for new-generation aircraft, and a Great Hall for premier dining and shopping. The first phase of this project, which encompassed the gates on the west side of the terminal, the Great Hall, and expanded federal customs and immigration screening area, was completed in

2013. Phase 2, encompassing the east gates, expanded areas for federal passenger security screening, airline lounges and other elements, is scheduled to be fully completed by 2015.

San Francisco International Airport opened United Airlines' new boarding area E. The \$138 million project includes lounge-like seating in waiting areas, new art on the walls and guest amenities such as free Wi-Fi, interactive digital displays and a yoga room. There also are more outlets and USB ports.

Orlando International Airport is undergoing a five-year \$1.2 billion expansion. The project includes expansion of the airport's people mover system, four new international gates and a 3,500-space parking garage.

***"Hotel companies are doing a better job of making airport hotels more attractive. You see some new airport hotels...and meeting space that looks good."***

**Bill Jones, Vice President**  
Managing Director, Events  
Channel Company, Framingham, MA



Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta has proposed a master expansion plan through 2031. The plan includes new parking garages, additional concourses and a sixth runway. The project will extend the "Plane Train" people mover.

Hawaii is spending \$22.6 million for improvements at seven airports. The projects include terminal improvements at Honolulu International Airport, runway refurbishment at Lihue Airport on Kauai, and new roofing for terminal buildings at Kahului Airport on Maui.

### More Meeting Space and Amenities

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport has 8,220 sf of meeting space that includes a conference center, auditorium and flexible meeting rooms from 450 to 1,100 sf, which allows for fly-in and fly-out meetings.

Portland International Airport and Cleveland's Hopkins International Airport have conference facilities. So does Lambert-St. Louis International Airport, Indianapolis International Airport and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, to name a few.



The Westin Detroit Metropolitan Airport hotel features the WestinWorkout Fitness Studio, indoor pool, in-room spa services and much more.

Technology improvements at airports include stronger Wi-Fi, work areas and charging stations for mobile devices.

Airports also are adding lifestyle amenities. For example, Philadelphia International Airport offers stationary exercise bikes located throughout its terminals.

And for those interested in spending extra time for fitness pursuits, airports are responding. As passengers began posting numbers of steps or actual mileage, walking paths began to emerge. Corridors at airports sport health-related messages.

When the walk is in a cool-down phase, passengers can take a gander at the various art galleries and exhibits in many airport concourses. Some airports provide outdoor walking paths complete with observation areas, parks, playgrounds and even doggy parks.

### Airport Hotels Popular with Planners

There are several airport hotels nationwide that have everything planners need including ample meeting space. Here are some of the top airport properties in the nation, according to Yahoo.com's 2014 list of the best airport hotels in the U.S.

The 848-room Hilton Chicago O'Hare Airport features 43 meeting rooms, the largest of which is the 3,500-sf International Ballroom and newly renovated executive boardrooms.

The 298-room Grand Hyatt DFW in Texas offers 34,000 sf of meeting space including 47 meeting rooms, two ballrooms, two boardrooms and 20 conference suites in a convenient setting adjoining International Terminal D at

DFW Airport, which will boast by the end of 2016 an expansive new duty-free shopping experience that includes luxury and premium retail brands. The new stores, comprised of six shopping locations, will include a two-level, 13,000-sf primary store along with an executive lounge and smaller specialty stores and kiosks.

The Westin Detroit Metropolitan Hotel Airport boasts 404 rooms and 26,000 sf of meeting space spread over 28 meeting and boardrooms. The property also features a spa, indoor pool and gym. Hotel guests have access to a private security entrance at one of the airport terminals.

Other top airport hotels include the 445-room Hyatt Regency Orlando International Airport, a AAA Four Diamond Property. The hotel provides 42,000 sf



Keeping up with business is easy at The Westin San Francisco Airport hotel, just 14 miles from San Francisco's downtown.

of flexible meeting and function space, including a 150-seat amphitheater.

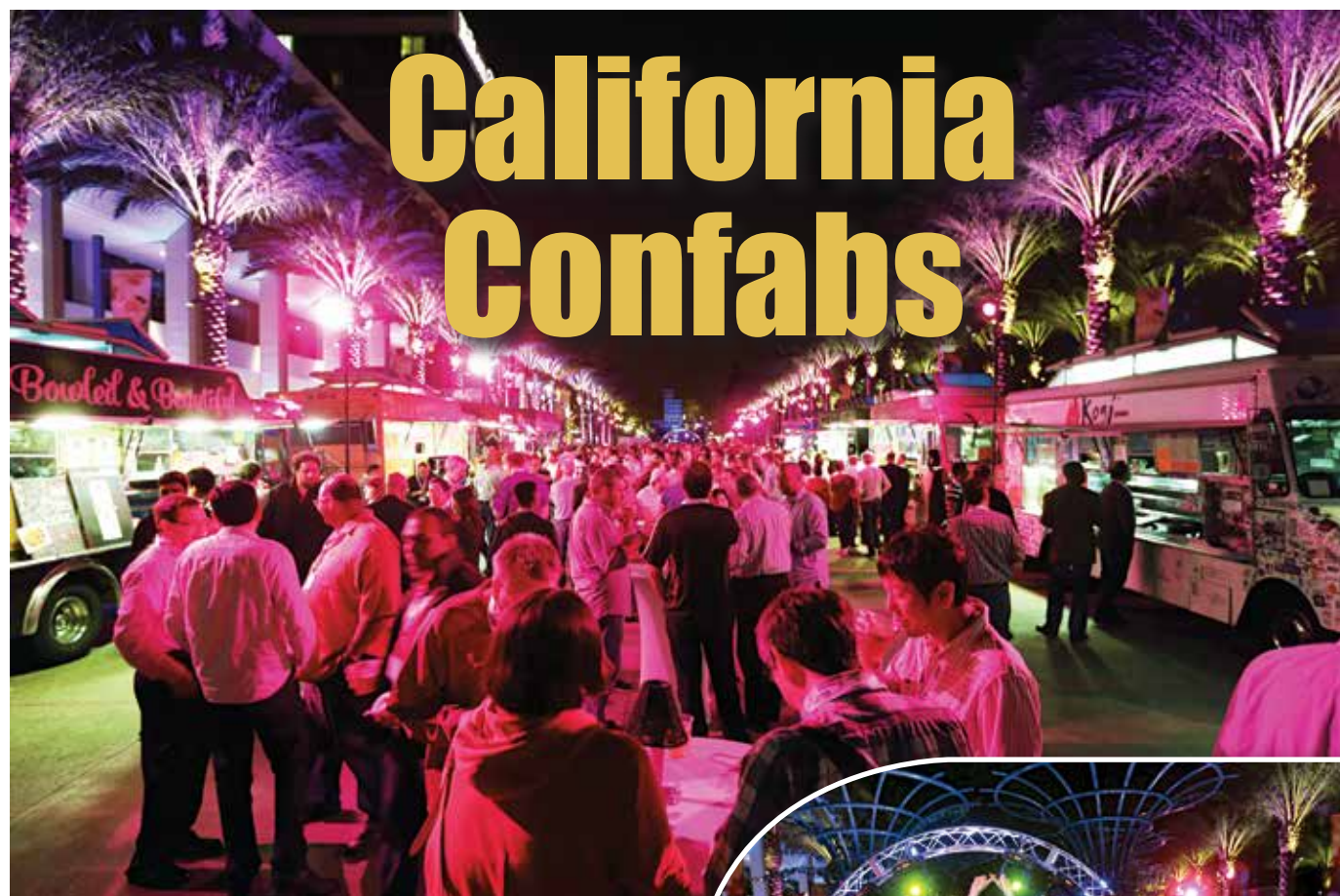
The 815-room Hyatt Regency San Francisco Airport features 52,000 sf of freshly renovated meeting space, including a 18,148-sf ballroom and a 4,750-sf poolside pavilion in addition to two dining options and a 24-hour gym.

Airport hotels may not be right for every type of meeting, such as incentives, large meetings and groups that want easy access to downtown entertainment and restaurants. On the other hand, budget-conscious planners who annually book several work-intensive training and education meetings can benefit from the value and convenience of airport hotels.

**C&IT**



## California Confabs



Credits: Filmaterna Digital LLC

### A Wealth of Options in the Golden State

By Christine Loomis

When it comes to extraordinary and diverse destinations in which to meet, few states rival California. It has nearly 900 miles of coastline, iconic-status beaches, multiple oceanfront cities where it's possible to conduct business in the morning and surf or sunbathe in the afternoon, the dramatic Sierra Nevada range along its backbone and a charismatic ethos powered in part by a bubbling melting pot of cultures that have become integral to the state's identity.

It's not just California movie stars and celebrity athletes whose names are known across the globe; many of the state's entrepreneurial business leaders have become household



Microsoft's annual xDM meeting staged its food-truck welcome reception at Anaheim Convention Center's Grand Plaza.

names, too. And in addition to being celebrated for its inventive cuisine and thriving restaurant scene as well as its beaches, resorts and hotels, California sits at the epicenter of the technology revolution that drives the world today.

#### Los Angeles and Orange Counties

The Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim metropolitan area is the second largest metropolitan area in the United States, yet each city offers planners something different.

#### Anaheim

The city of Anaheim in Orange County is home to Disneyland. While that's a powerful draw for many groups, it's not the city's sole attribute. When Angel Hanson, CMP, event marketing manager with Microsoft, was considering sites for the company's annual xDM meeting in 2014, she turned for the third time to the Anaheim Marriott. The group of 1,100 had 100 percent of the hotel's meeting rooms and 75 percent of its guest rooms.

The hotel is located near the Anaheim Convention Center and a couple of blocks from Disneyland, making it a good choice for location alone. But Hanson says the hotel delivers on many levels. "This property has the latest and greatest in technology combined with top-notch service levels, making it a perfect fit for Microsoft. And the staff is hands down the best I've encountered in my 17 years in the industry. From sales to F&B to production to the events team and everyone in between, the service is amazing.

"The food," she adds, "is outstanding. It has received the highest scores of any Microsoft event that's been held around the world. The lazy-Susan style of buffet is a huge hit with our audience. Food is fresh, it's hot, and it allows a quick turn-around time for attendees to get in and out while also allowing more networking time at the tables."

In addition to hotel space, the group booked outside venues. The welcome reception was held on the Grand Plaza outside of the convention center, and an offsite party was set at the City National Grove of Anaheim. "We used the Grove of Anaheim for our attendee party," Hanson says. "It has a great staff and great location. It's a blank slate, and you can create the space to fit your event theme."

Anaheim offers choices. "Microsoft is a worldwide company, and Anaheim is a great location with many airport possibilities — there are three airports less than one hour away," Hanson points out. "There are also many options for offsite venues, many properties to choose from. It's very affordable from room rates to venue costs. It's a low-cost but a high-quality delivery."

Attendees also have choices when it comes to activities during downtime, thanks to the Marriott's location. "There are many restaurants, shops and entertainment options within walking distance for our attendees," Hanson notes.

It's the hotel itself, however, that Hanson appreciates most. "The Marriott team made my job easy," she says. "There were no surprises. The Marriott team is completely transparent and extremely organized, as is my team. I have three to four planning visits throughout the process, which allows us to do deep dives on the program details. xDM will be returning to the Anaheim Marriott for the fourth time this November, and we are looking forward to another successful event!"

#### Long Beach

The L.A. County city of Long Beach has 5.5 miles of Pacific Ocean beach, dozens of restaurants, plenty of attractions

and the 400,000-sf Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center. It's also the launch point for adventure tours and cruises to Catalina Island, an hour away, where attendees can leave the urban vibe behind for a day of hiking, wildlife watching, kayaking and snorkeling.

"Long Beach, located in the center of Southern California, is one of very few cities that can boast an urban downtown waterfront with a convention center offering panoramic Pacific Ocean vistas," says Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach CVB.

"Long Beach boasts all the amenities and excitement of a big city with the relaxed atmosphere of a seaside resort. The city combines 'big-city vogue' with the friendly attitude of a small beach town.

"Within an eight-block area around the convention center, visitors will discover major attractions, shopping, enter-



*Anaheim "is very affordable from room rates to venue costs. It's a low-cost but a high-quality delivery."*

Angel Hanson, CMP, Event Marketing Manager  
Microsoft, Redmond, WA

tainment, nightlife and more than 125 restaurants serving cuisine from around the world. Plus," Goodling adds, "Long Beach is freeway-close to all the major attractions of L.A. and Orange counties. Long Beach is also easy to get to, with service from three nearby airports — Long Beach Airport, LAX and Orange County Airport—all just minutes away."

#### Los Angeles

The city of Los Angeles itself defies conventional description. Its status as the entertainment capital of the world and the sheer number of celebrities who call it home set it apart. It includes iconic beach towns and canyons (Venice Beach and Laurel Canyon among them), famous neighborhoods and streets (Hollywood Hills, Bel Air, Sunset Strip), one of the largest urban parks in the nation (Griffith Park) and arguably more celebrated entertainment venues and attractions than some countries can offer.

The Los Angeles Convention Center features 720,000 sf of exhibit space, 147,000 sf of meeting space and in June rolled out improvements to enhance customer experience. The city is well equipped to handle every type of meeting, from intimate and high profile with VIPs to mega conventions.

#### San Francisco

This forward-thinking city needs no introduction. It was No. 12 on Cvent's list of 2014 Top 50 Meeting Destinations



in the United States and planners know the city delivers an incredible attendee experience. Moreover, San Francisco is never static. There's a lot of building and expansion going on, giving the city perennial appeal.

"San Francisco continues to be a favorite destination for planners and attendees alike," says Joe D'Alessandro, president and CEO, San Francisco Travel, the city's CVB. "Even those who have been here recently will find new things to discover — transformed hotels, new restaurants, fresh venues and more. And of course, our world-famous scenery and icons never fail to impress. It's really never too soon to return to San Francisco."

In May, the city celebrated the groundbreaking for the \$500 million expansion of Moscone Center. When it opens in 2018, the new space will provide more than 500,000 sf of contiguous space with 80-plus meeting rooms and three ballrooms, including a 50,000-sf column-free ballroom. With extensive sustainable features, the facility also is expected to receive the highest LEED certification possible.

## San Jose

San Jose is experiencing explosive growth, and Team San Jose says attendees will be surprised with the destination's cuisine, vibrant nightlife, major sporting events and unique attractions. San Jose offers attendees the quintessential Silicon Valley experience: serious business done in a relaxed atmosphere. Attendees will experience a range of post-convention activities in downtown San Jose with more than 250 dining and nightlife options, contemporary museums, edgy galleries and vibrant performing arts and entertainment — all within walking distance from the recently renovated San Jose McEnery Convention Center. Not only that, the convention center's \$130-million makeover introduced an additional 169,957 sf of flexible ballroom and meeting space with a modern design and state-of-the-art technology — bringing the new grand total to nearly 400,000 sf of flexible space.

Team San Jose says there are three great reasons for meeting planners to consider San Jose as a meeting destination:

1. Wicked Smart and Wickedly Fast. Upon arrival to San Jose, attendees are imbued by the contagious energy of in-



Credit: Bernardus Lodge & Spa  
Bernardus Lodge & Spa in Carmel Valley was recently remodeled and features a 25,000-bottle wine cellar.

novators, thinkers and dreamers acting as the driving force behind America's smartest city. The capital of Silicon Valley is home to 6,600 technology companies and has helped San Jose forge an unrivaled culture as the epicenter of innovation. Planners and attendees can maximize their connectivity capabilities with Wickedly Fast Free Wi-Fi at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center, Mineta San Jose International Airport and within downtown San Jose.

2. Bright Ideas Beyond the Breakouts. San Jose's revitalized downtown offers a wealth of stimulating attractions and social settings to charge the conversation beyond the breakout session. With a vast selection of alfresco restaurants and cultural spaces, downtown's atmosphere cultivates innovative thinking.
3. Sustainably Savvy San Jose. San Jose's visitor industry is putting its best carbon footprint forward with sustainable contributions from the convention center, airport and downtown hotel properties. San Jose is an environmentally progressive city, and Team San Jose-managed facilities recycle, reuse and repurpose 89 percent of all material waste.

## Monterey County

Occupying an exquisite stretch of coast between San Francisco and Los Angeles, Monterey County is home to Carmel by the Sea, Pebble Beach, Big Sur and the city of Monterey. Collectively and individually, these towns make the county one of the most desirable in the nation. Cradled between the Pacific Ocean and miles of dramatic cliffs and undulating hillsides are sweet stretches of sand, many within state parks. To the east, valleys and vineyards provide a bucolic setting for memorable events, perhaps especially Carmel Valley. It's here that the Forbes Four Star Bernardus Lodge & Spa sits, newly renovated this spring and under new ownership. The 57-room property on 28 acres of vineyards and gardens has long been an ideal setting for intimate groups. Now, with all guest rooms and public spaces redesigned, event spaces reconfigured and a new restaurant including a 25,000-bottle wine cellar, its star shines even brighter.

Sue Van Zeyl, office manager and executive assistant with

Jackson Square Partners LLC, a California-based investment management group, brought a team of 35 to the lodge in May. "We've stayed at Bernardus three times now for our annual offsite, and each time it's been great. Other resorts in the area don't have the same cozy, warm, secluded feel. The location is perfect, and the new remodel is stunning. The property takes you away to tranquility. My team has had an extremely busy past year, so this is just what the doctor ordered."

The lodge features 4,300 sf of indoor meeting space and 5,000 sf of outdoor venues. "Pretty much everything stood out," Van Zeyl says. "The meeting spaces are the perfect size for our group. The staff was more than accommodating in



Credit: Paradise Point, a Destination Hotel  
Rendering of the new waterfront Sunset Pavilion event venue, set to debut this fall at Paradise Point on Mission Bay Island.

*"The highlight was seeing my team happy and relaxed, and Bernardus was the escape we needed. I wish we could do this every six months."*

Sue Van Zeyl, Office Manager/Executive Assistant  
Jackson Square Partners LLC, San Francisco, CA

helping me make our event run smoothly and anything I/we needed, we got."

That included hanging a piñata and assisting with the group's afternoon cocktails-appetizer-bocce-ball event, which Van Zeyl calls "always a must-do on our list."

The group had breakfast and lunch during meetings and dinner onsite both nights. "Everything was mouthwatering," Van Zeyl says. "We were going to have dinner in the Rose Garden but unfortunately it was too cold. The staff was able to set up the Harvest Room (my personal favorite) on very short notice. We will plan on the Rose Garden for next time."

In the past, Van Zeyl says, they have gone offsite at least one night for dinner to Hyatt Carmel Highlands, an outing she calls worth it even with having to shuttle 35 people there. Participants also have played golf at Carmel Valley Lodge, Spyglass Hill Golf Course and others among the renowned courses in Monterey County.

The lodge's newly expanded spa also was popular with the

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Credit: San Jose CVB  
Nemea Greek Taverna in San Jose accommodates private group events with customized menus and service.



group. “The spa was used by everyone and more than once for some,” Van Zeyl says. “To see the relaxed faces on my team members when they came out of a treatment made me feel like I had done my job. The highlight was seeing my team happy and relaxed, and Bernardus was the escape we needed. I wish we could do this every six months.”

## San Diego

When the team from North Dakota-based FBS, which makes an app pertinent to real-estate agents across the country, wanted a site for the company’s 2014 FBS Summit with 100 attendees, San Diego and Paradise Point, a Destination Hotel, delivered.

“We wanted a location that really felt like San Diego and not like it could be anywhere in the country,” says Kendra O’Brien, in the company’s customer projects and relations group. “The hotel grounds and meeting space gave our event the feel that we were going for. San Diego was a good winter destination for our customers and had reasonable flight prices from a variety of locations. We wanted a beachy destination feel for the event, and we got it.”

Tucked on its own Mission Bay Island but connected by road to the mainland and to SeaWorld, Paradise Point is both secluded and accessible. This fall, the resort will unveil its state-of-the-art 15,500-sf Sunset Pavilion featuring sweeping views of Mission Bay.

“Service at the hotel was excellent, and we were well taken care of,” O’Brien says. “Our event was held almost entirely onsite, with the exception of one social function. The hotel grouped our attendee rooms near our meeting space so attendees had an easy walk to our events. Our event manager, Everlyne Lleva, was attentive and easy to work with.”

There was one snag. “It would have been helpful for us to know ahead of time that the main restaurant would be closed during our event,” O’Brien notes. “We were planning on having that option available for our attendees.”

The group used the hotel’s catering extensively, which worked well, though one option was better for the bottom line. “We worked with the catering team to create a custom lunch menu around a carnival theme, and all of our attendees loved it. It included a tater tot bar, popcorn, ice cream treats and more, and it was done beautifully,” she says. “We also ordered a boxed lunch one day, and while it was fine, it reinforced that the lunch buffets are a much better use of budget dollars, as the beverages made it nearly as expensive as the custom lunch.”

The one offsite function was at another San Diego hotel. “We used the Andaz rooftop for a social. People loved the space and views and sitting around the fire pit. We would use that space again,” O’Brien says.

One highlight of the meeting for FBS employees came after the event, when the group gathered around a fire on the beach near their hotel rooms. O’Brien calls it “a nice way to relax after a long event.”

San Diego is a good destination for the FBS group, and

*“(The CVB’s) service was phenomenal and would make us more quickly consider San Diego for meetings in the future.”*

**Kendra O’Brien**, Customer Projects and Relations  
FBS, Fargo, ND

O’Brien says they would return. She does suggest that planners considering the city take advantage of site visits because there’s a wide range of offerings. “Take advantage of the on-site visits to learn more about the service you can expect to receive during your meeting. When we were looking at hotels, there was a big difference in the service and support that we were given during our stay, and we chose based on that service. We were happy with our choice and heard lots of good feedback from attendees as well.”

O’Brien and her team also have high praise for the city’s



Loews Regency San Francisco, a member of Associated Luxury Hotels International, claims the highest event space in the city, the 40th floor Sky Deck, featuring unobstructed views of the bay.

convention group. “We worked with Jenna Bisesi at the convention and visitors bureau and would highly recommend that. Jenna helped us narrow our list of hotels, set up our stays and even picked us up at the airport,” she says. “The service was phenomenal and would make us more quickly consider San Diego for meetings in the future.”

From north to south, California lives up to its nickname. The Golden State offers a wealth of incredible cities, beaches, sun-splashed landscapes, one-of-a-kind venues and so many choices the only real difficulty for planners is narrowing down the possibilities.

## New & Noteworthy

Just five years since the grand opening of the **JW Marriott L.A. Live, Los Angeles**, plans were announced by AEG to develop a 755-room expansion of the hotel. The new project together with the existing JW Marriott L.A. Live and The Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles will contain 1,756 rooms and more than 200,000 sf of function space, making it the second largest hotel in California. Construction is expected to begin in

late 2015 or early 2016, with the new hotel rooms and facilities scheduled to open in 2018.

In May, **Hilton San Francisco Union Square**, with 134,500 sf of meeting and event space, completed a multimillion-dollar upgrade of guest rooms. In February, Hilton Worldwide announced acquisition of Parc 55 Wyndham San Francisco, now **Parc 55 San Francisco a Hilton Hotel**. In April, Loews Hotels & Resorts acquired the 155-room Mandarin Oriental San Francisco Hotel, now renamed the **Loews Regency San Francisco**. Two hotels near Fisherman’s Wharf announced renovations: **Hyatt at Fisherman’s Wharf** completed a refresh of its 18,000 sf of meeting space and **Pier 2620 Hotel Fisherman’s Wharf** announced a multimillion-dollar renovation. Also finalizing renovations this year are **The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco** and **Hyatt Regency San Francisco**.

In San Jose, from sold-out soccer matches to international sporting events and corporate affairs, the 18,000-seat **Avaya Stadium** accommodates groups of all sizes. SoFA Market anchors the **SoFA District**, the visual arts and entertainment district of downtown San Jose. **The Westin San Jose** brand has unveiled an adaptive reuse of the historic Sainte Claire Hotel. The 171-room hotel is equipped with 10,000 sf of meeting space. **The Fairmont San Jose** completed a



The signature Red Marlin restaurant at the Hyatt Regency Mission Bay in San Diego offers several rooms for private parties.

\$524,000 upgrade to its main building breakout rooms and **Hilton San Jose** completed a \$50,000 renovation to the hotel’s patio area.

The grand opening of the newly renovated **Monterey Conference Center**, which offers 41,000 sf of meeting space, will take place in early 2017. The first floor of the rejuvenated center is planned to open by late summer 2016. This modernization will infuse up to \$45 million in physical and technological improvements. Located on Cannery Row in Monterey, the **Wine Experience** offers tastings, interactive classes, wine-blending and winemaking during which a group can create custom-labeled wine.

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## Destination



Hilton Sedona Resort at Bell Rock.

Credit: Hilton Sedona Resort at Bell Rock

# The Great Southwest

## Featuring Some of the Country's Most Inspirational Settings for Business

By Christine Loomis

The Southwestern United States may seem far from the nation's traditional centers of corporate enterprise, but business thrives here. The area is at the center of business for many organizations, including highly respected Fortune 500 and 100 companies — some founded and built here. Not surprising, executives and planners from corporations across the country choose the Southwest for meetings.

### Oklahoma City

Oklahoma City's Fortune 500 companies are major players in the gas and oil industry, making it the go-to destination for meetings related to that field.

"The State of Oklahoma has deep roots in and is a very active hub for the oil and gas industry," says Barry Haest, vice president of events at Houston-based Hart Energy. "Oklahoma City is home to such leading oil and gas companies as Devon, Chesapeake, Continental Resources and American Energy Partners, to name a few. Upon researching and speaking with our clients, an overwhelming majority recommended we host an oil and gas conference in Oklahoma City."

Hart's DUG Midcontinent Conference and Exhibition drew more than 1,800 attendees in March. It was based

at the Cox Convention Center, with room blocks at the Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention Center Hotel and the Skirvin Hilton Hotel.

"We chose the Renaissance as our headquarters hotel because of its close proximity to the Cox Convention Center and convenient skybridge," Haest says. "We also selected the Skirvin Hilton Hotel because of its historic significance and close walking distance to the convention center. This hotel first opened in 1911 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The staffs at both hotels were very professional and accommodating for us and our conference attendees."

Haest says the downtown and Bricktown areas were a draw as well. "A tremendous amount of investment has been made into the downtown and Bricktown areas. We knew our attendees, exhibitors and sponsors would take advantage of and enjoy the excellent local restaurants and bars."

One favorite was Mickey Mantle's Steakhouse, which the group used for its speaker dinner. "It was a big hit with the 25-plus oil and gas executives we had invited to speak at our conference," Haest says. "Named after Oklahoma's baseball legend, this upscale and contemporary restaurant was able to easily accommodate our party. The food and service were out-

standing, and many of our speakers and guests commented on the unique artwork displayed throughout the restaurant, which depicted Mr. Mantle's extraordinary career with the New York Yankees.

"The majority of our other attendees took advantage of the unique restaurants and other nightlife activities in the city's historic Bricktown area. And some of our exhibitors and sponsors hosted private dinners and receptions for clients and other VIPs in Bricktown."

The majority of the conference took place at the convention center, including most meals. "We utilized the entire Cox Convention Center for our conference. Breakfast, lunch and catered networking breaks were hosted in the convention center. And logistically speaking," Haest adds, "the highlight was hosting an 800-person plated lunch on the floor of the exhibit hall."

One challenge at the convention center related to rigging, which Haest says is an important factor for this group. "There are no rigging points in the convention center and the venue is built above the parking garage, so weight limitations were a challenge. These limitations did affect some of our exhibitors who like to bring in and display large industrial equipment in their booths."

On the plus side, transportation was a breeze. "The transportation was easy in Oklahoma City," Haest says. "There were plenty of flights in and out of the Will Rogers Airport. And as Oklahoma City is located in the center of the state, it was easy for our road-warrior clients who like to drive from Dallas, Houston, Denver and other cities in Oklahoma."

Meeting in Oklahoma City proved to be very successful for

this group. "Attendance for the conference," Haest notes, "was at an all-time high."

### Arizona

#### Sedona

Sedona offers a very different vibe, one based on its natural beauty and reputation as a place of healing and positive energy. It's not surprising that meetings focused on well-being are drawn to this northern Arizona town of just 10,000 residents.

"We used to come to Sedona often with our different class offerings," says Colleen Russell, meeting planner with the International Alliance of Healthcare Educators in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. "That slowed and this is our first time back in four or five years. Our staff and attendees really enjoy the red rocks and the general spiritual atmosphere."

The alliance, which includes several institutes, brought 70 attendees to Sedona in January for one of its education conferences. The Hilton Sedona Resort at Bell Rock served as host hotel.

"Since we plan approximately 400 meetings per year, we try to keep them as similar as possible," Russell says. "We always try to find a hotel within 20 miles of the airport and within walking distance of area restaurants and shopping. We prefer that parking be complimentary to our attendees. A big influence for us is the cost of meeting-room rental, food and beverage and the cost of sleeping rooms."

Because the meetings consist almost exclusively of classes, there are not many group components. "When we hold meetings, our attendees are all on their own. We don't hold group functions or excursions," Russell notes. "The only food and beverage we order is a light continental breakfast on the first day, and the next three days we offer coffee and hot tea service in the mornings only. The rest of the meals are on their own."

Sedona's intimacy and beauty come with a price: It's harder to get to than some destinations. "You have to fly into Flagstaff which is expensive," Russell says. "You can fly into Phoenix but then the drive is 115 miles to Sedona, which means renting a car, etc."

Still, the town has great appeal for Institute attendees. "Our attendees are massage therapists, physical therapists, chiropractors, nurses and other healthcare workers," Russell says. "Having the red rocks and the serene atmosphere of Sedona makes for a great backdrop. Being one with nature is very appealing to our attendees."

#### Scottsdale

To be sure, it's not only wellness-oriented companies that find Sedona appealing. When Drusilla Pollick, CMP, manager, global accounts at HelmsBriscoe, was looking on short notice for a meeting site for a chemical manufacturer and distributor, Sedona was the first choice. But with no appropriate availability, she turned south to Scottsdale.

"As I had visited Scottsdale through the CVB and had great meetings and experience with the Waldorf Astoria brand, I sent RFPs to the Boulders Resort & Spa after researching the property. The client's director of national sales and distribution had



*“A tremendous amount of investment has been made into the downtown and Bricktown areas. We knew our attendees, exhibitors and sponsors would take advantage of and enjoy the excellent local restaurants and bars.”*

**Barry Haest**, Vice President, Events  
Hart Energy  
Houston, TX



been to the Boulders previously and therefore felt comfortable placing his group of 42 in the hotel.

It is, Pollick notes, an amazing setting. “This hotel is going through a brand change with Hilton, and we are excited to hear that it will be undergoing a renovation soon,” she says. “It’s a spectacular location in the desert. The casitas are comfortable and, like the junior suites, roomy and in beautiful surroundings. You are immersed in the sights and sounds of the desert.”

“Where else can you hear coyotes, see a bobcat cross the golf course outside of your room, see quail and lizards in their natural habitat, watch sunset colors surround the mountains and hear a waterfall tumble down natural desert boulders? You can also light the fireplace in your casita, go to the spa for a massage and take a dip in the pool.”

While Pollick notes that the group was a little cramped and needed additional meeting space, she says the staff was very accommodating and worked out a viable solution for the breakout rooms.

Food and catering also were excellent. “Food was rated highly. We had a great event in the Cocopelli (outdoor desert location) with a Western/Mexican theme and invited a local mariachi band to add to the festivities,” she says.

While getting in and out of the Phoenix airport is easy, Pollick notes that getting to The Boulders is less so. “A drive to this location takes a little more time from the Phoenix airport, but I would highly recommend it just for the natural desert location. I have only great things to say about Scottsdale as a destination and the CVB, which has been a great partner to HelmsBriscoe and our clients, and many hotels in Scottsdale would be on my recommendation list.”



Hallway outside talking Stick Resort's Salt River Grand Ballroom.

Pollick and her team arranged for a bus to take attendees to one of north Scottsdale’s malls featuring restaurants, retail and entertainment. She also recommends Old Scottsdale, in close proximity to many of the city’s unique hotels, as a location for offsite functions.

“The Saguaro Scottsdale food is excellent (great chef) and it’s close to the spring training baseball park. There’s also Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort — what panoramic views. One unique offsite private venue is the Boulder House, which is catered by The Boulders Resort. Kimpton’s FireSky Resort & Spa is an excellent place for food and parties by the pool, and the Omni Scottsdale Resort has a gorgeous ballroom. The Royal Palms has the most amazing outdoor dining location in the Orange Grove and intimate indoor and outdoor pool patios. There are,” she adds, “too many great hotels to mention them all.”

In the end, it’s about the attendee experience, and Pollick says that the after-meeting survey shows that this experience was rated as one of the client’s best meetings as a group.

“Scottsdale is a beautiful location, natural and relaxing. There are great hotels, a great CVB and great DMC organizations offering tons of group networking activities.”

If other planners are considering Scottsdale for an upcoming meeting, Pollick has just two words: “Do it!”

A Scottsdale option that includes gaming is the AAA Four Diamond, Native American-owned Talking Stick Resort on the Salt River-Pima Maricopa Indian Reservation. The 496-room resort offers nearly every must-have amenity for corporate groups: golf at the adjacent Talking Stick Golf Club; The Spa at Talking Stick, a 13,000-sf open-air venue on the 14th floor that highlights products made with ingredients that are culturally significant to the Pima-Maricopa Indians; gaming at the onsite casino; a 650-seat Showroom; and 100,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting space. Distinctive among the 11 restaurants and lounges is the signature restaurant Orange Sky, located on the 15th floor with floor-to-ceiling windows and available for private events. The casino-level lounge, Palo Verde, was expanded last year.

## New Mexico

### Santa Fe

Larger than Sedona but smaller than Scottsdale, Santa Fe, with a population nearing 70,000, is the Southwest’s mecca for art, architecture, history and shopping. All of those attributes and more played into the decision to hold Dallas-based

Southwest Airline’s Claims Review meeting in Santa Fe in April. The group of 15 was based at the boutique Inn and Spa at Loretto.

“We meet semiannually at different cities throughout the U.S.,” says Mary Mortensen, customer claims administration senior supervisor. “We look for venues that will allow us to focus on business matters, have teambuilding time and fun. Location for this meeting was a key factor. We had attendees coming from New York, Dallas and Houston. We especially wanted to have the ‘Santa Fe shopping experience.’”

After considering several properties, Mortensen says the choice came down to three. “Since cost was a major factor, we found three properties that appealed to us because of their location, room rates and meeting space. Although the Inn’s rates were somewhat higher than the others, they met the other properties’ room rates, waived the charge for usage of the meeting room and seemed genuinely interested in hosting our meeting.”

Inn and Spa at Loretto, a Destination Hotel, was the main site for conference meetings and functions, which worked very well. “We were impressed with the staff’s attentiveness to our group,” Mortensen says. “They were helpful in finding meeting materials that were shipped ahead of time. One staff member actually participated in one of our teambuilding activities. Our meeting room was spacious, seating was comfortable and the audio-visual provider was exemplary.”

Mortensen has positive things to say about the inn’s catering, as well, which the group used for breakfast and lunch in

the meeting room. “The breakfast menu was varied: juices, fruit, pastries, granola, yogurt, tortillas, eggs, potatoes, bacon, sausage, etc. Food that was supposed to be hot was hot, and food that was supposed to be cold was cold. Lunch was excellent. We had fresh, green salad, pasta salad, roast beef, turkey, grilled chicken and tuna, fruits and cookies. The portions were generous, and the wait staff replenished items frequently.”

The only downside at the hotel, says Mortensen, was lengthy delays checking in and checking out.

Santa Fe itself provided an excellent setting for the meeting with its striking architecture and consistently good weather. And though Southwest employees flew Southwest into Albuquerque, an hour away, insurers and brokers made their own flight arrangements and flew directly into Santa Fe.

The group used three of the city’s restaurants during the meeting, with mixed results according to Mortensen. The Shed topped the list with “excellent margaritas, the availability of a private dining room and excellent food and service.” On the other hand, Il Piatto, says Mortensen, offers a limited/acceptable menu but no private dining and only “okay/passing service,” while Santa Fe Bite has “great food and patio seating but slow service.”

For planners considering Santa Fe as a meeting destination, Mortensen recommends making restaurant reservations well in advance, which will give groups more options in this city known for its exceptional Southwestern cuisine.



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**Drusilla Pollick, CMP, Manager, Global Accounts**  
HelmsBriscoe  
Oswego, IL



Mortensen also cautions that groups should be prepared for “poor to no cell phone coverage for certain carriers.”

While that’s a horror story for some attendees, others may see it as a blessing. And for those whose phones do work there’s good news: Tourism Santa Fe visitor centers are now equipped with cutting-edge solar-powered charging stations for phones and other digital devices at no charge.

From its large urban centers to rural retreats, the Southwest delivers what planners and attendees value. It’s business friendly yet with an abundance of extraordinary natural beauty. That’s a combination that makes the Southwest hard to resist.

#### New & Noteworthy

**Oklahoma** **Holiday Inn Express Bricktown** debuted in January and construction is set to start on two additional hotels this fall: a **Hyatt Place** and an **AC Hotel**. Already under construction and slated to open in 2016 is a **21C Museum Hotel** at the edge of the Film Row district. In the Boathouse District, the new **CHK/Central Boathouse** opened with ample rentable space indoors and out. And groups meeting in OKC in 2016 will have another teambuilding option when the Boathouse District’s new whitewater rafting facility opens.

**Arizona** In November, Phoenix’s historic **Arizona Biltmore, a Waldorf Astoria Resort**, completed a major renovation upgrading and modernizing accommodations and public spaces. The city’s stellar **Musical Instrument Museum** added 3,400 sf of event space, including three private meeting rooms with full AV capability, bringing total function space to 40,000 sf.

In March, **Sheraton Mesa Hotel** debuted with 180 guest rooms and 37,000 sf of event space, including a ballroom accommodating 1,500 attendees. In May, **Boulders Resort & Spa** in Carefree was sold. Hilton integrated the resort into its Curio brand and a multimillion-dollar renovation will finish in December. **Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa** is embarking on a \$10 million renovation. It includes the new Spa House accommodating eight for private retreats and will wrap up in early 2016.

In June, **The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess** completed a renovation of its 120 casitas, ideal for executive meetings, and broke ground on a project that will bring 102 guest rooms online for a total of 750. The new Sunset Beach feature pool will accommodate leisure guests and serve as a fun venue for group functions. The resort’s 1880s-era Western town is be-

ing relocated and expanded to include two saloons, a stage, a dance floor and a jail where guests can be “locked up.” Poorly behaved attendees beware...

Scottsdale Resort & Conference Center began a renovation in July with completion expected in September. In addition to an updated look, a new restaurant and new function space, the resort will sport a name: **The Scottsdale Resort at McCormick Ranch, a Destination Hotel**.

In Tucson, **The Westin La Paloma Resort and Spa** completed a \$30 million rejuvenation that included its public



The Inn and Spa at Loretto in Santa Fe, New Mexico

spaces, private rooms and the 60,000-sf conference space.

This summer **L’Auberge de Sedona** will undergo a renewal that will include an enhanced arrival experience, upgraded accommodations, private dining spaces, a new state-of-the-art kitchen and a new indoor-outdoor bar area. The unveiling will take place this fall.

**New Mexico** The **Albuquerque Convention Center** completed a \$23 million renovation in October, including a newly designed ballroom, kitchen and service corridor. The West complex has a new entrance, an entertainment deck off the ballroom, and the lower atrium was remodeled.

Visitors to Albuquerque in 2015 can be among the first to visit **Valles Caldera** when it transitions from a national preserve into one of the nation’s newest national parks.

In Santa Fe, the **Eldorado Hotel & Spa** completed a renovation in June that included a refresh of the 219 guest rooms and a new 7,000-sf ballroom that accommodates 700 guests for a reception. **C&IT**



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# On The Move



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**Nick Anderson** was promoted to associate director of sales at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, responsible for the New York and New Jersey markets. He was group sales account director. **Dan Determan** was appointed group sales account director responsible for the Midwest market. He was senior sales executive for the Orlando World Center Marriott.

**Jay Marsella** has joined the Marriott Marquis Houston as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing for the Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa.

**Christopher Bond** was named vice

president of sales for the Mirage, Las Vegas, responsible for the strategic development and administration of convention sales, convention services and leisure sales teams. He was formerly vice president of sales for New York – New York Hotel & Casino.

Benchmark Hospitality International has named **Diana Bright** as director of national accounts for Santa Barbara Beach & Golf Resort in Curacao. She most recently served as account director, Northeast, for the St. Regis Aspen Resort Hotel in Colorado.

Hawks Cay Resort, Villas and Marina in Duck Key, Florida, has named **Corinne Whittington** as di-

rector of national accounts. She was account director at The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa in South Carolina.

The Renaissance World Golf Village Resort and Convention Center in Jacksonville/St. Augustine, Florida, has named **Laura Capobianco** as event sales manager. She was event coordinator for SMG Worldwide Entertainment and Convention Venue Management.

**Barbara Seiler** was named area director of sales and catering for Davenport Hotels in Spokane, Washington. She was national sales manager with the Grand Sierra Resort in Reno, Nevada. **C&IT**

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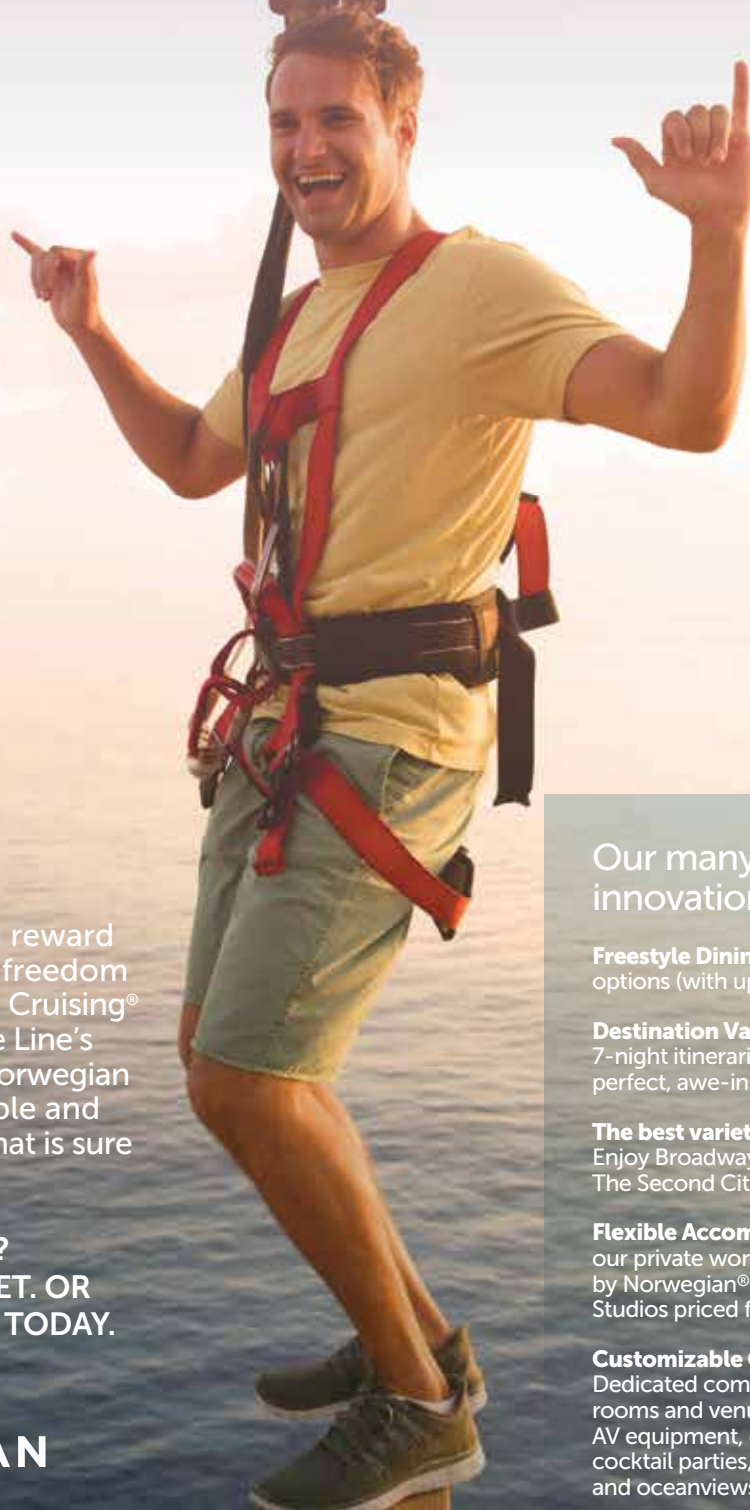
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