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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



The Shape of Wellness

Where Health and Productivity Meet

PAGE 38

Sedona, Arizona, is the ultimate destination for meetings that meld mind, body and spirit.

'The Future Has Arrived'

'Smart' Robots Pave the Way for Eye-Opening Hotel and Meeting Experiences

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NextGen CVBs

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How to Win in a Seller's Market

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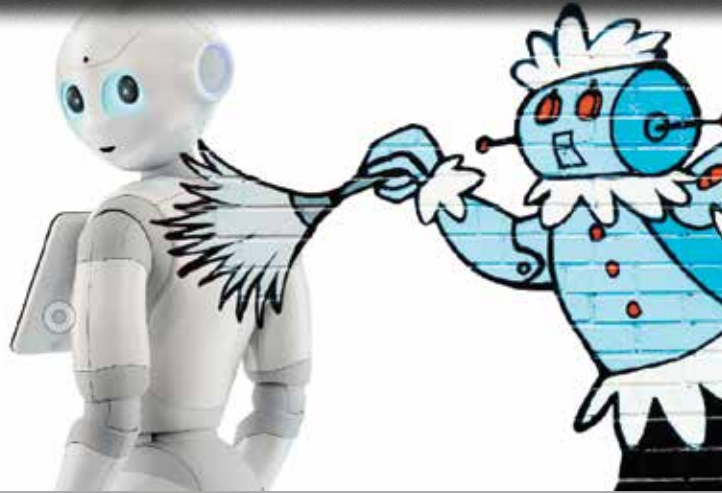
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WESTIN
HOTELS & RESORTS



Rosie, meet Pepper: the Jetson age may soon arrive for real at a meeting or hotel near you. **PAGE 20**



Companies with strong Strategic Meetings Management Programs can meet the seller's-market challenge. **PAGE 32**



The 2,500-acre Ocean Reef Club on Key Largo is an exclusive enclave for meetings and events. **PAGE 56**

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Credit: Ocean Reef Club

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Publisher's Message

Getting in Shape

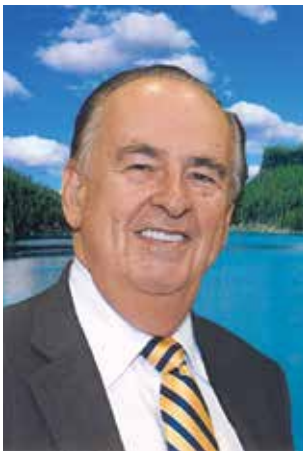
It seems that everywhere you turn, people are working on getting in shape and searching for that perfect combo — a healthy mind and healthy body. In our incredibly demanding industry, professional meeting planners can use every tool and trick in the book to help them manage stress, eat healthful meals and maintain an exercise routine while on the road.

In our cover story on page 38, "The Shape of Wellness — Where Health & Productivity Meet and Attendees Can Be Their 'Best Selves,'" Kial Afton, corporate meeting and event planner at the New York City office of NBCUniversal, shares why she incorporates wellness options into many of their retreat and incentive programs. "Aside from the health benefits, exercising on a regular basis has been proven to help people be happier and more productive in the workplace. It offers a way for people to clear their heads, which allows them to look at a situation, business proposal or presentation with fresh eyes. In short, it helps people to be their best selves," relates Afton.

And Libby Crooker, who handles meeting planning for Hastings, Minnesota-based Anytime Fitness, imparts, "Studies show that one's ability to learn and retain information is increased with movement. ...Therefore, in a conference environment, our goal is always to offer activities that exercise the mind and the body."

On page 50, "Invest in Yourself: Lifelong Learning Options Abound for Career Development," explores options for continuing education and certification. Joanna Oliver, CMP, CMM, manager of business travel and conference planning at EmCare in Dallas, advises planners to "choose the programs that relate directly to your job and you will have more success at retaining the knowledge...and also choose some programs that are outside your knowledge base to stimulate your creative thinking. Just one nugget from a seminar or webinar can spark a wealth of new ideas that could be applied to your programs."

See "The Future Has Arrived" — 'Smart' Robots Pave the Way For Eye-Opening Hotel and Meeting Experiences" on page 20 for more mind-expanding ideas, and meet Pepper — an amazing robot designed to emotionally engage an audience and interact with meeting attendees in a purpose-driven way. From staffing hotels to providing onsite services and ultimately creating the wow factor, the future of "smart" devices and robots is now.



Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

Loews Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando Completes Historic Meeting Space Expansion

ORLANDO, FL — Loews Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando officially unveiled the new meeting space and welcomed Heineken USA as the first group to utilize the expanded meeting area. The company returned to Universal Orlando for its annual meeting, after being impressed by the hotel's meeting space and world-class Loews service during a previous event.

The meeting space at Loews Royal Pacific Resort is part of the largest meeting space expansion in the history of the destination. In summer 2016, Universal Orlando will debut its fifth onsite hotel — Loews Sapphire Falls Resort. Featuring more than 115,000 sf of customizable meeting space, the Caribbean-themed hotel will be connected to Loews Royal Pacific Resort. Together, the two resorts will offer 247,000 sf of combined meeting space and 2,000 rooms. www.umeetingsandevents.com



Executives from Universal Orlando and Loews Hotels welcome Tara Rush, Heineken USA's senior vice president/chief corporate relations officer, and Dayna Adelman, Heineken USA's corporate communications manager, to the new meeting space at Loews Royal Pacific Resort with traditional leis inspired by South Pacific culture. (L-r) David Bartek, vice president of operations for Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando; Kathy Cattoor, vice president of Universal Orlando resort sales; Tara Rush; Dayna Adelman; Larry Beiderman, managing director, Loews Royal Pacific Resort; and Vince LaRuffa, vice president of Universal Orlando resort sales and marketing.

Alex Cabañas Named Global President of the International Association of Conference Centres

CHICAGO, IL — Alex Cabañas, CEO of Benchmark Hospitality International near Houston, will serve a two-year term as head of the International Association of Conference Centres (IACC), which has more than 350 conference and meeting venue members in 22 countries worldwide. Cabañas has been active with IACC for a number of years and serves as vice president of the IACC-Americas chapter, having joined the IACC-Americas Board in 2011 and the IACC Global Board in 2012. He leads the IACC 2020 task force, which is developing a strategy that will take IACC on a five-year journey and will set the goals for the organization to achieve further success.



CABANAS

Cabañas commented, "IACC is a global community of people and meeting venues committed to delivering exceptional meeting experiences. We lead the small meetings industry and create trust with meeting planners and our clients through the delivery of the most productive meeting environments available." Cabañas continued, "Perhaps most importantly, our members support and learn from each other. There is a kinship within IACC like no other association that I've been affiliated with. It is a privilege to step into the Global President's role and support the continued growth of IACC."

www.iacconline.org, www.benchmarkhospitality.com

Business Improves for DMC Members

DAYTON, OH — For the past three years, 75 percent of member DMCs reported that they were experiencing a better year than the year prior, according to the Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI).

Almost 60 percent of the member DMCs of the ADMEI report a stronger 3Q2015 compared to 3Q2014. Seventy-seven percent report their 3Q2015 was as good as or better than their 3Q2014. Eighty-nine percent project that 4Q15 will be as good as or better than 4Q14.

Projections for 2016 are equally positive. Eighty percent predict that 2016 will be as good as or better than 2015 for their businesses.

www.admei.org

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel Completes Swan Guest Room Redesign

ORLANDO, FL — The largest makeover in the history of Orlando's Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel is one step closer to completion. The hotel has completed the redesign of every guest room in the 758-room Swan Hotel. The work is part of a multiphase, multiyear, \$125 million redesign project that will transform every guest room in both the Swan and Dolphin buildings. The first phase of the 1,509-room Dolphin starts later this year.

The new room design is inspired by the resort's water-themed architecture and offers guests a serene and sophisticated atmosphere. The guest room features all-new upgraded furniture and all of the latest technology including large HDTVs. Additional power outlets provide more options for use of multiple personal electronics, and a glass-topped desk on wheels provides guests with a flexible tabletop space.

The hotel's public spaces, restaurants, meeting rooms, shops, pools and recreational areas will not be impacted



The renovated Grand Suite at the Swan Hotel.

and remain fully operational throughout the renovation, which is scheduled for completion by the end of 2017. www.swandolphin.com

Hilton Worldwide Launches Electric Vehicle Charging Program

MCLEAN, VA — Hilton Worldwide announced a major electric vehicle (EV) charging program, which will be available at 50 U.S. hotels by the end of this year with plans to rapidly expand to 100 U.S. hotels by the end of 2016. The program will cover all types of electric vehicles, including Teslas. Current, powered by GE, will provide stations to charge other car makes.

"By teaming with leading organizations like Tesla and GE to add more electric vehicle charging stations, we're making the travel process easier for a growing number of our guests," said Jim Holthouser, executive vice president, Global Brands, Hilton Worldwide. "We believe technology can and should take the friction out of travel — no matter if you're road-tripping in an electric vehicle or flying into town and need to find the best way to get to one of our hotels. Our goal is to support our guests in their travels no matter what technology they're using."

These charging stations are available at a range of Hilton Worldwide properties from luxury to focused service, including The Waldorf Astoria New York, DoubleTree by Hilton Durango, Hampton Inn by Hilton Reno and Hilton Los Angeles Airport. Hilton also plans to expand its charging program internationally in the coming year.

As part of the charging program, Hilton hotel owners can receive free charging equipment to accelerate the adoption of charging solutions at qualifying hotels and resorts. Hilton is working with property owners to install the charging stations, with the only associated cost being installation and electricity usage.

Providing hotel guests with even more choices to manage their environmental footprint while on the road is just one of the ways Hilton is incorporating responsible business options into the guest experience. Earlier this year, Hilton launched Meet with Purpose, a meeting concept focused on sustainable choices for meetings and events. Hilton also manages its own environmental performance through a series of programs, partnerships and hotel activations that improve its overall impact on the environment. www.hilton.com

Wyndham to Develop First Wyndham Grand Resort in Barbados

PARSIPPANY, NJ — Highlighting strong and growing interest in its portfolio of upscale brands in the Caribbean, Wyndham Hotel Group, the world's largest hotel company, announced plans for further global expansion with the development of the 450-room Sam Lord's Castle Barbados, a Wyndham Grand Resort.

Located in the parish of St. Philip at the former site of Sam Lord's Castle — a spot renowned for pirates in the 19th century and one that carries great historical significance in the Caribbean today — the all-new construction resort is being developed with Barbados Tourism Investment Inc. and will be managed by Wyndham Hotel Group. In addition to spacious, elegantly appointed guest rooms, the resort will offer three onsite restaurants, 20,000 sf of state-of-the-art meeting space as well as an expansive luxury spa and fitness center. It will be the first Wyndham branded resort in Barbados.

The company also is scheduled to introduce the first Tryp by Wyndham hotel in Isla Verde, Puerto Rico later this year. www.wyndhamworldwide.com

News & Notes

Rivea and Skyfall Lounge Now Open at Delano Las Vegas

LAS VEGAS, NV — Rivea and Skyfall Lounge, by Michelin-decorated chef Alain Ducasse, are now open atop Delano Las Vegas, the newest luxury hotel on The Strip. Rivea, the first location in the United States, and Skyfall Lounge bring together Riviera-inspired cuisine, celebrated libations, a chic casual atmosphere and the best views of Las Vegas.

"I am thrilled to introduce Rivea and Skyfall Lounge to Las Vegas," said Ducasse. "Upon entering the restaurant and lounge, every detail transports guests to those endless summer nights in the South of France. The seductive menu highlights simple, fresh Italian and French cooking, while the design is sophisticated and laidback, complementing the best view of the Las Vegas Strip."

Influenced by the delectable food markets of Provence and Italy, chef Alain Ducasse and executive chef Bruno Riou's menu at Rivea focuses on simple, fresh Mediterranean flavors made with the best West Coast-sourced seasonal ingredients, such as Provençal caponata with capers and pinenuts or prawn and calamari crostino on the small plates menu; and main course creations such as lobster with purple artichokes and pepper-crusted bison tenderloin. The restaurant's 50-seat private dining room Rivea+ boasts 180-degree views of The Strip through floor-to-ceiling windows.

Located adjacent to Rivea, Skyfall Lounge offers an evolving nightlife experience that gradually increases in tempo as the evening progresses. The 180-degree views make it possible for guests to sip a glass of champagne



(L to r) Chuck Bowling, president and COO of Mandalay Bay and Delano Las Vegas, Michelin-decorated chef Alain Ducasse and Matthew Chilton, general manager of Delano Las Vegas, toast at the opening of Rivea and Skyfall Lounge, which are located on the 64th floor of Delano Las Vegas.

while watching the desert sunset, or to party the night away as deejays spin upbeat house and dance music from 9 p.m. to close. www.delanolasvegas.com

The Grand Floridian Christening

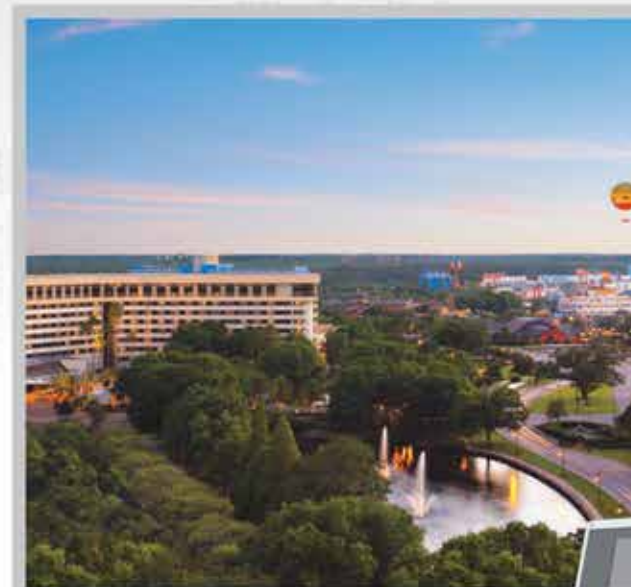
HOLLYWOOD, FL — The luxury yacht the Grand Floridian was christened on October 8 at its permanent home port of Diplomat Landing at the Diplomat Resort & Spa in Hollywood, Florida. Available for meetings, events and gatherings, the yacht can accommodate up to 550 guests and is the newest and largest addition to the Charter One's fleet. The four-deck vessel offers more than 18,000 sf of space, including a covered sky lounge, a sun deck and two after balconies. Features include modern décor and a state-of-the-art media system including 13 high-definition televisions. www.diplomatresort.com



The Grand Floridian luxury yacht was recently christened.

Pictured at the event (l to r) are David Middlebrook, V.P. of operations, Coastal Communications Corp., Judy Erickson, manager of marketing at the Diplomat Resort & Spa, Harvey Grotsky, publisher, Corporate & Incentive Travel, and Jim Curtis, director of sales and marketing, Diplomat Resort & Spa.

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News & Notes



Ray Bloom, Chairman, IMEX Group, is joined at the closing press conference by IMEX America show partners (l to r) Cathy Tull, senior vice president, marketing, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority; Chandra Allison, vice president of sales, The Venetian | The Palazzo, Sands Expo; and Michael Woody, COO, Meeting Professionals International.

Business at IMEX America Achieves New Records

LAS VEGAS, NV — As the fifth IMEX America closed on October 15, IMEX Group Chairman Ray Bloom announced that, in every important facet, the show had achieved new records.

A total of 3,100 companies representing 150 countries exhibited including 80 new booths and 56 expanded booths while the IMEX hosted buyer program brought a record 3,000 buyers from 54 countries to the show. More than 10,600 people participated in the event. There were 66,000 business appointments of which over 57,000 were one-to-one appointments and booth presentations. The proportion of these appointments that had profiles attached online had risen to 51 percent enabling both buyers and exhibitors to be better prepared for their meetings.

More than 40 leading buyers from the corporate sector also came for the annual Executive Meetings Forum. With senior executives from Merck, Cisco Systems and Wells Fargo among them, together they controlled annual meetings budgets in excess of \$3 billion.

Bloom reported that Smart Monday, powered by MPI, and supported by association partners, IAPCO, ICCA, ASAE, PCMA, HSMAI, DMAI, SITE, GBTA, GMIC and ECM, had once again grown and developed.

Bloom said: "I'd like to congratulate

MPI, our strategic partner and premier education provider, on the tremendous success of Smart Monday, which grows year after year. This day of high level education adds a tremendously valuable extra dimension to people's overall experience of the show. The daily MPI key note sessions have also featured very interesting speakers and generated a great response."

A new educational initiative, the Play Room, sponsored by Play with a Purpose, drew 350 participants on Monday and many hundreds more when it moved on to the show floor for three days.

The second PCMA Business School at IMEX America, a business improv workshop presented and led by Bob Kulhan, a professor at the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, also attracted a full house and tremendous acclaim from those who took part. The success of this program has resulted in the introduction of the PCMA Business School at IMEX in Frankfurt in April 2016.

He also said that there had been superb feedback about the many other co-located educational and social events and meetings arranged by IMEX America's industry partners that had taken place in the city during the week. The MPI Foundation Rendezvous, the IMEX America Night, in particular, had once

again been a highly enjoyable networking event while Association Evening and the CIC Hall of Leaders had successfully introduced new formats.

Bloom commented: "We are delighted that so many industry events are coming together here using IMEX America as a hub for successful fundraising events such as the MPI Foundation Rendezvous, the CEIR Golf Classic and SITE Nite as well as education activities, social networking and industry meetings."

The new wellness initiative, "Be Well at IMEX," included a meditation room and the first IMEXrun Las Vegas — Inspired by Rio de Janeiro, in advance of the Olympics. Sponsored by RioTur and Embratur and organized by sports by tlc, the route took in a section of the famous Las Vegas Strip. Fully booked, 412 exhibitors and buyers rose early to take on the course.

Looking ahead to IMEX in Frankfurt 2016, which will be at Messe Frankfurt on April 19–21, a month earlier than usual, Bloom reported that demand for the event from returning and new exhibitors continues to be exceptionally high from destinations, venues and service providers from across the world, and this was already laying down strong foundations for the 2016 event.

www.imexamerica.com



1 Larry Luteran, a hotel sales and marketing leader formerly with Hilton Worldwide and (r) Michael Massari, Caesars Entertainment's senior vice president of national meetings and events, at dinner at Giada, celebrity chef Giada DiLaurenti's first restaurant, which is located inside The Cromwell, a Caesars Entertainment boutique hotel. **2** Chandra Allison, vice president of sales, The Venetian | The Palazzo, the Sands Expo and Marshall Rubin, regional manager, *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazine, at the networking event at Aquaknox at the Venetian. **3** Harvey Grotsky, publisher, *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazine is flanked by (l) Christina Gibbons, national sales manager, Southeast, Caesars Entertainment and Destinee D. Walker, CMP, regional sales manager, Caesars Entertainment. **4** The formation of the Global Association Hubs Partnership was announced at a press conference by (l to r) Hervé Bosquet, director, Brussels Convention Bureau; Steen Jakobsen, director, Dubai Business Events; Jeannie Lim, executive director, conventions, meetings and incentive travel, business development group, Singapore Tourism Board; and Elliott L. Ferguson II, president and CEO, Destination DC. **5** Sung Kyung Kim, MICE manager for the New York office of the Korea Tourism Organization presenting at Korea's booth. **6** Carol Bullock, vice president, global sales, North America and Latin America, Wyndham Hotel Group and Wyndham Hotel Group President and CEO Geoff Ballotti at IMEX America announcing the "world's most generous rewards program for meeting planners." **7** David Middlebrook, vice president of operations, Coastal Communications Corp., stops in at Tryst Nightclub at Wynn Las Vegas for a James Bond-themed event sponsored by VisitScotland in partnership with London & Partners. **8** Richard Knight, director of marketing, the Americas, VisitScotland, addresses attendees at the VisitScotland booth. **9** The MPI Rendezvous at Drai's Beach Club Nightclub — located on the roof of The Cromwell.



By Jeff Hurt

Using Human Sciences to Navigate Your Conference's Future Through the Fog

Our linear and rational conference business models are our default thinking. Unfortunately, those traditional models cause us to navigate in a fog when the conference challenge is less straightforward. There are better ways to understand how to grow your conference than what you've done in the past.

As conference professionals, we are inclined to continue to use models that have always worked enormously well for us. Yet our past has little relevance in the midst of an incredibly shifting culture and context today. We have to unlearn our old flawed assumptions about people — our attendees, exhibitors, sponsors, vendors and stakeholders.

Hat tips to authors Christian Madsbjerg and Mikkel B. Rasmussen* for their insights into applying human sciences to today's business models.

Our Default Thinking for Conference Business Models

Most conference growth plans use a linear model of improvement. They aim at getting the maximum growth and profit through rational and logical analysis. We turn our plans into tasks that use deductive logic, well-structured hypothesis and thorough collection of the evidence — the inputs and outputs.

This traditional linear model borrows business tactics from hard sciences such as physics and math. You learn from past experiences to create new opportunities that you test with your customers. It is extremely successful at analyzing information extrapolated from a known set of past data.

This default thinking helps us improve efficiency, optimize our resources, balance our offerings, increase productivity, improve operations and hopefully get more bang for our buck.

Using the Past to Predict the Future Provides a False Sense of Confidence

But what happens when our conference challenges involve people's behavior? What happens when it involves people's irrational decision-making process such as spending one's personal money for conference attendance?

When it comes to cultural and contextual shifts, a hypothesis based on past examples will give us a false sense of confidence. It will send us astray into turbulent waters and uncharted territories.

Our traditional models of conference planning tend to tell



us the way things are. Those take the center spotlight when we discuss our understanding of the conference audience and its stakeholders.

That default thinking shows us what exists in the foreground. We need to start investigating the invisible background — that layered nuance behind what we perceive and what actually is.

Introducing Human Sciences for Conference Improvements

How our attendees experience a conference may be as important as, or more important than, the hard objective facts about our past conferences. We cannot continue to use our past data as relevant to the future.

The human sciences look at the why of people's decisions.

Why do we need this new conference business practice of the human sciences to understand our attendees' behavior?

Human behavior can change — sometimes radically! During those changes, no amount of hard data can bring the invisible factors to the foreground.

Using human sciences does not provide us with a model, formula or quick equation to apply to our conference planning. It requires studying and making sense of artifacts, observed behaviors, conversations, emotions and images.

A Complementary Toolkit From Human Sciences

We need to combine our default thinking with a complementary set of tools from the human sciences.

- When we use past data to explore a new hypothesis we also need exploratory inquiry — examining attendees' beliefs, attitudes and irrational decisions.

- When we use the past to answer what and how much, we need to ask and answer why.
- When we look at the data on what is and has been, we need to also research on what is to come.
- When we discuss hard, measurable evidence, we need to juxtaposition it with qualitative evidence.
- When we start talking about correctness and corrective measures, we need to discuss truth, not assumptions and beliefs.

What examples have you seen of conference organizers using human sciences to make decisions about their future conferences? What are some tactical questions from the human sciences that we can use?

What are some other ways to reframe common conference challenges as phenomena? How would you describe a premium conference experience? Send your comments to Jeff Hurt at jhurt@velvetchainsaw.com.

This article first appeared on Velvet Chainsaw's Midcourse Corrections.

**Most marketers [including conference professionals] cling to assumptions about their customers' behavior that have been shaped by their organizational culture, the biases of the firm's managers, and, increasingly, the vast but imperfect data stream flowing in, say authors Christian Madsbjerg and Mikkel B. Rasmussen in "An Anthropologist Walks into a Bar," an article published in the March 2014 issue of Harvard Business Review. Christian Madsbjerg and Mikkel B. Rasmussen are the coauthors of The Moment of Clarity: Using the Human Sciences to Solve Your Toughest Business Problems (Harvard Business Review Press, 2014), from which their article was developed. C&IT*

“We need to start investigating the **invisible background** — that **layered nuance** behind what we perceive and what actually is.”



Jeff Hurt

is executive vice president, education and engagement, Velvet Chainsaw Consulting, and is based in Dallas, Texas. Velvet Chainsaw Consulting exclusively services companies and associations with their annual meetings, conferences, education and events. They also help technology, service and membership organizations establish and execute plans and processes that result in improved business results. Hurt has worked in the events/nonprofit arena for more than 20 years including Keep America Beautiful as a consultant/trainer/writer; Keep Texas Beautiful as education coordinator; professional development manager for Meeting Professionals International; professional development manager for Promotional Products Association International; and director of education and events for the National Association of Dental Plans. Originally published by Jeff Hurt in "Velvet Chainsaw Midcourse Corrections." Contact Hurt at 214-886-3174 or jhurt@velvetchainsaw.com.

By Jeff Hiscox

Don't Let Your Event Be Remembered for All the Wrong Reasons!

It is every meeting planner's nightmare: hours are spent arranging the perfect meeting or event but a technical hitch or an unexpected dilemma means that the attendees walk away remembering the day for all the wrong reasons. Who can forget the failure of the Olympic torch to light at the Winter Olympics opening ceremony at Sochi, or problems with the live global Web stream of Apple's launch of the iPhone 6 and Apple Watch? Certainly not an event or meeting planner. Today, as businesses globalize and planners increasingly work on events outside of their local area, the margin for these potential errors is widening.

Without an insider's view of the meeting venue, how are planners to foresee any issues that may arise? Here's how technology can provide this vital "on the ground" insight, instilling

planners with the confidence that their events will run to plan and allowing them to form trusting relationships with the venues that facilitate them.

Keeping Planners in the Picture

According to research by CEB Inc., buyers are on average 57 percent into the buying process before engaging with a sales representative — meaning a lot of the legwork and decision-making has already been done by the planner before a hotel or venue has had any direct contact with them. Additionally, a recent generational preferences survey by the International Association of Conference Centres (IACC) revealed that "Digital information is No. 1 for providing planners with information they need to consider a venue for their meeting, and those who



According to IACC, "Digital information is No. 1 for providing planners with information they need to consider a venue for their meeting."

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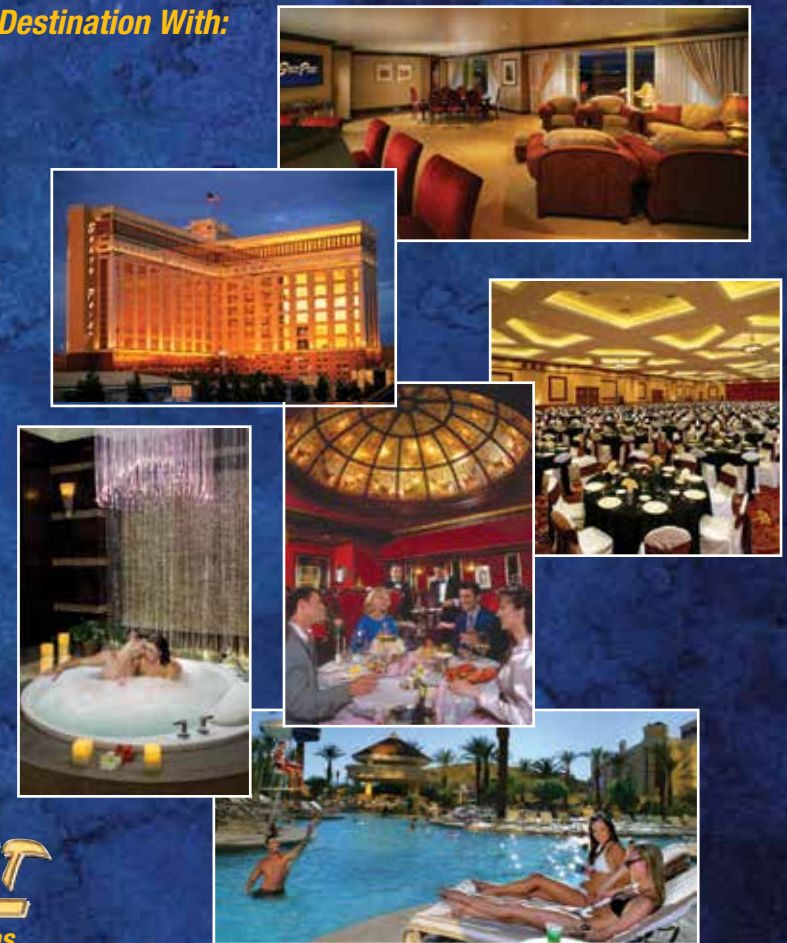
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have creative and effective ways of presenting the best virtual experience will please buyers.”

Venues and hotels seeking to maximize their revenues through corporate meetings, conferences and events need to position themselves as reliable providers of meeting space and be able to demonstrate they can collaborate effectively with planners in the planning, management and execution of events.

There are a number of ways in which hotels and other venues can build up trust and form high-value relationships with planners — and some of them sound deceptively simple. For instance, hotels and venues need to deliver exactly what is marketed and expected by planners — and this means making sure

“Venues that have creative and effective ways of presenting **the best virtual experience** will influence buyers and stand out from the crowd.”

that the planner is aware of the meeting space available, the setups they will support and the room capacities based on the desired setup style. Given the tight time constraints that are often put on meeting planners, venues that are able to provide this information, without the planner spending hours trawling through different pages of their website, will certainly set them apart from competitors.

For example, a planner who is tasked with arranging a corporate training session needs to be assured that all attendees will have an unobstructed view of the speaker and that the room setup encourages discussion and participation. Details such as room capacities based on seating options and seating options supported by each meeting room are must-haves for meeting planners, but often are a challenge as the information simply isn't presented in a way that planners find useful. It can be hard to know how many attendees to seat at a table without visiting a venue, and cramming people in could be just as detrimental to the flow of a meeting as tables that are too large. Allowing the testing of different setup styles in the meeting space under evaluation, enabled by IT capabilities on the venue's website, enables a planner to make this assessment during the evaluation process.

If venues can offer modern visualization tools that show what is on offer for corporate clients, from the seating options right through to different lighting modes, planners can feel confident that they have selected the right venue and can be safe in the knowledge that their attendees will be seated comfortably.



Jeff Hiscox

is president and CEO of Newmarket, an Amadeus company. He focuses on expanding Amadeus' fast-growing Hospitality IT division. Jeff joined Amadeus in 2013 via the acquisition of Newmarket, which he joined in 2004 and where he has served as president and chief executive officer since March 2010. Prior to Newmarket, Jeff served as regional vice president of sales for Surebridge where he was responsible for growth and management of the Microsoft Business Solutions Group. www.newmarketinc.com

Collaboration Is Key

Once the venue is booked and plans are underway, a planner's job is far from over. Often planners must see to last-minute requests from their clients or third-party attendees, such as providing seating for a high-profile attendee or adding a vegan lunch option, and having a quick reaction time is key to keeping everyone happy. In order to ensure everyone stays up to date and critical tasks and requests are dealt with swiftly, collaboration is fundamental, and technology can support this.

For example, successful collaboration between the planner and venue on the final room plan is critical. Through the use of technology, the planner and venue can quickly and effectively

work together to make adjustments to the room plan to create a final version that fits the planner's vision while being feasible for the room selected. This should eliminate the need for a room reset, which can be costly to the venue and create stress and dissatisfaction for the planner as their schedule must then adapt in order for them to problem solve. Increasingly, these collaboration tools are available on mobile devices, making the process even more effective. By enabling planners to use them on the go and keep up with the multiple events they may be working on, they can always remain one step ahead and respond to any issues in an agile manner.

In the “always on” digital world of today, we are accustomed to instant messaging and real-time information and collaboration, and there is no reason why these tools shouldn't be leveraged by meeting planners. It is critically important that the whole travel and events industry works together to deliver the best experience it can to its customers and makes facilitating high-revenue events, such as corporate meetings and conferences, as simple as possible. As the IACC survey revealed, those venues that have creative and effective ways of presenting the best virtual experience will influence buyers and stand out from the crowd.

When working with planners, venues investing in collaboration tools will enable critical tasks to be completed faster and eliminate costly misunderstandings. This will enable the flawless execution of events that lead to satisfied planners who can trust in their partners, which can ultimately lead to more business opportunities. **C&IT**

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'The Future Has Arrived'

'Smart' Robots Pave the Way For Eye-Opening Hotel and Meeting Experiences

For as long as any meeting planner can likely remember, the wow factor has been a key ingredient in the success of meetings and events, with superior onsite service ranking right alongside it. In the hotel of the reasonably foreseeable future, both of those cherished elements will very possibly be taken to a higher level by robots.

By John Buchanan

And this is reality, not science fiction. Hotels are already beginning to use robots to do jobs once done by human

modestly priced Henn-na Hotel, which translates as Strange Hotel, opened in the Huis Ten Bosch theme park in Sasebo, Nagasaki, Japan. The hotel is staffed with robots. Porter robots carry guest luggage.

Housekeeping robots make sure the property is spotlessly clean at all times. A robot holds court in the cloak room. The landmark hotel was designed by Kawazoe Lab, the Institute of Industrial Science at the University of Tokyo and Kajima Corporation. Its other amenities include keyless room entry via facial recognition technology and self-service check-in.

In the U.S., Silicon Valley and the San Francisco area have become the testing grounds for robot technology in hotels.

In August of last year, Aloft Hotels made history when its Cupertino, California, property became the first to deploy a robot butler, dubbed a Botlr. Earlier this year, it added a new one, and shipped the original off to properties in Miami and New York to prepare the hotel world and Aloft guests for the future of hotel service.

In August, InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) rolled out a "relay robot" named Dash, from Santa Clara, California-based manufacturer Savioke, at its Crowne Plaza San Jose-Silicon Valley property. When Dash, approximately three feet tall, rolls up to a guest's room with a delivery such



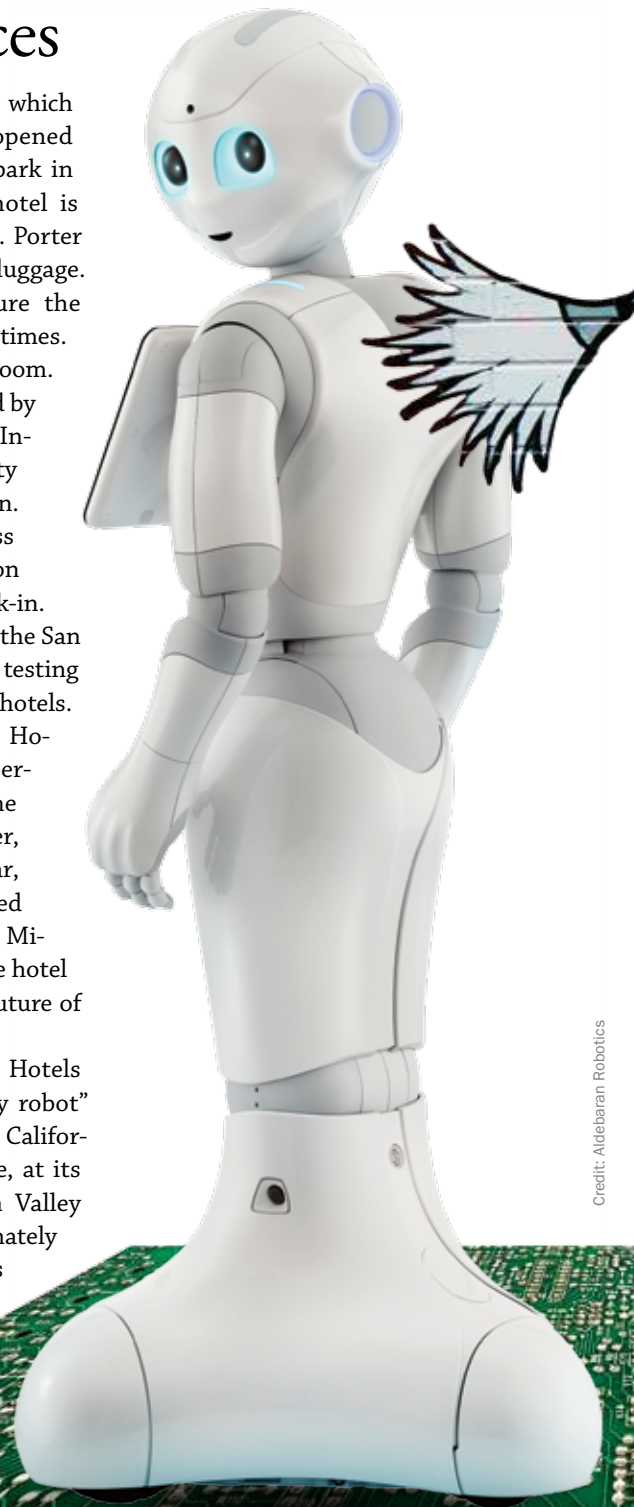
Savioke's relay robot Dash delivers fresh towels to a hotel guest at the Crowne Plaza San Jose-Silicon Valley hotel.

beings. And all indicators suggest the emerging trend will become very mainstream over the next decade.

"The future has arrived," says New York City-based futurist and emerging technology expert Gray Scott. "And so have robots."

For example, last July the 72-room,

Pepper won't be dusting like Rosie the maid (right) did on The Jetsons' animated television series of the 1960s. No domestic functions for Pepper who instead is designed to tug at our heart strings and create emotional connections.

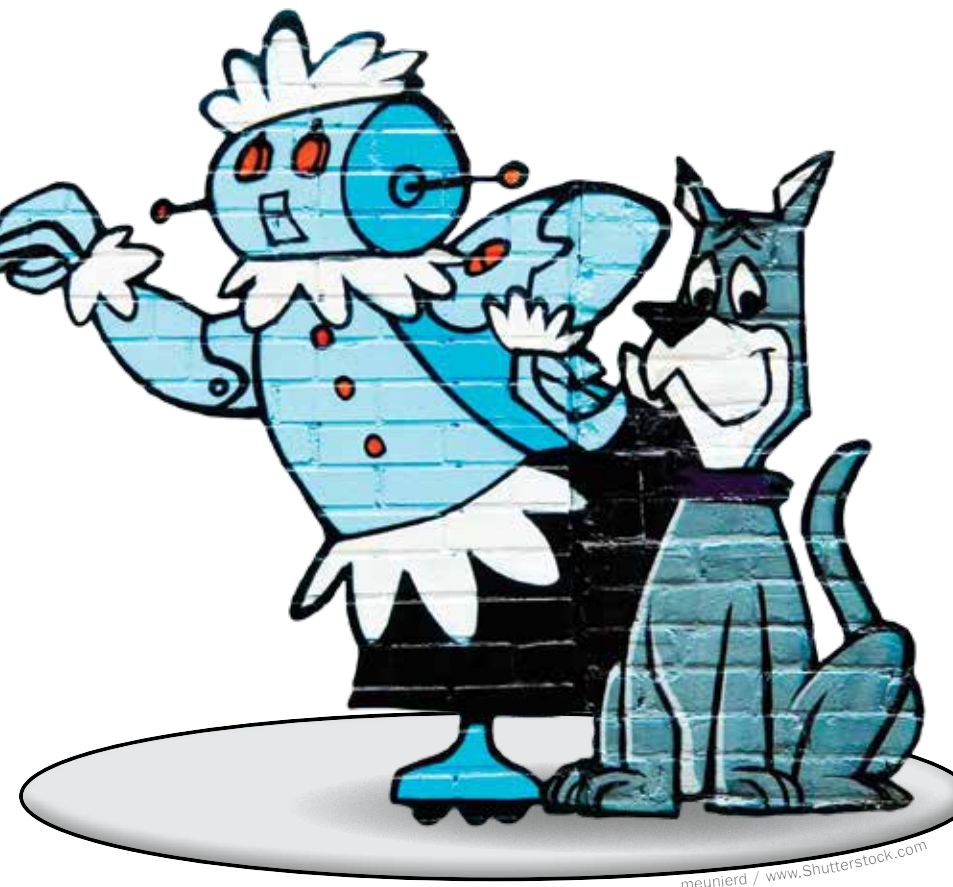


Credit: Aldebaran Robotics

as bath towels, it phones the guest to announce its arrival.

Not to be outdone by its Silicon Valley neighbors, the new Axiom Hotel, set to open in San Francisco this fall, announced in mid-September it will do "pop up" events in the area featuring BeamPro robots from Palo Alto-based manufacturer Suitable Technologies. The pre-opening displays of robotic technol-

"It could then deliver room service to your room," he says. And unlike a human bellhop, a robot bellhop will never forget to transmit your order to the room service department. "And all of that can happen before the robot even leaves your room," Scott says. "Then another robot could be on the way to your room with your drinks or food. That is a clear improvement from a guest services point of view."



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ogy will reinforce Axiom's commitment to cutting-edge technology in its hotels.

There are currently a number of robots capable of doing various tasks in hotels, Scott says.

He cites the Care-O-bot 4, a "modular service robot" whose key target markets include hotels. The Care-O-bot 4, created in Germany by Fraunhofer Institute for Manufacturing Engineering and Automation, can provide reception desk assistance and room service, according to the company's website.

In the foreseeable future, Scott says, Care-O-bot 4 units will function as bellhops and take guests' bags to their rooms.

The most interesting aspect of the Care-O-bot 4, Scott says, is that its modular design means "a hotel can choose the configuration it wants for the tasks it wants done. For example, you can buy just the component that would function as a bellhop and carry luggage. But you can also configure it in other ways for other functions."

In the next few years, Scott says, hotel robots will be programmed to go to the bathroom and get a towel for a guest or clean the room on demand. "And the more progress that is made in being able to program robots to perform specific tasks like that, the more you're going

to see robotic technology being used in hotels," Scott says. "And creating the algorithms and writing computer code to manage specific tasks is more advanced than ever before. And with each iteration, robotic technology is getting smarter and smarter."

The FoldiMate 5000 robot, designed for the simple chore of folding clothes or laundry, will eventually be used by tech-savvy hotels in their housekeeping departments, Scott says.

The current generation of robot technology that most excites Scott is the Pepper model from SoftBank's Robotics Corporation.

Since July, three consecutive production runs of 1,000 units have each sold out in one minute, according to the company's website.

"Pepper is designed to read facial expressions and respond to your emotions," Scott says. "So if you're not happy with your hotel room, Pepper can see your frustration or disappointment and respond with empathy."

In terms of meeting and event applications, Pepper represents a significant advance over robots that can simply perform a mechanical function, Scott says. It can actually interact with meeting attendees in a calculated, purpose-driven way.

And it also creates the ultimate wow factor at an event.

"Pepper is designed to emotionally engage an audience. So imagine Pepper running around a conference where he is having serious conversations with people, but also understanding how they feel about the conversation. And if they see that someone is excited, then they can give the person more information about a product or the company that makes the product. The potential is really limitless." That implication has enormous ramifications for how robots can be deployed at meetings as much more than a gimmick or novelty.

As the technology evolves, Scott says, robots also will be able to offer various kinds of onsite services to meeting attendees, such as facilitating or helping attendees navigate among meeting rooms. More important, such robotic functional-

ity is closer to reality than most people think. And in business terms, it's simply a matter of a hotel brand analyzing the cost-benefit ratio in terms of how they want to present their brand.

Jane Scaletta, general manager of major destination management company AlliedPRA Orlando in the country's No. 1 meeting destination, believes robots will indeed play a role in the hotels of the future. But she's skeptical of their direct value to the high-touch process of hosting meetings.

"I agree that we will see robots in the near future in many customer service-related positions," Scaletta says. "With regards to meeting and incentive programs, I think the most important aspect for the success of a program is the memorable aspect the attendees come away with. I

"Hotel operators are looking...for new ways to offer technology-enabled hotels to those tech-savvy customers. And the use of robotics will become just another example of that. And as they offer more of that, millennials will want even more."

Umar Riaz, Managing Director, Accenture, New York, NY

think 'front of the house' positions need to stay human and emotional, while many 'back of the house' positions could be automated with robots, for instance, in housekeeping, laundry, dish washing, and even valet parking. The auto industry is so far ahead of the game using robots that I can see cars being moved and parked in efficient, space saving, multi-layered garages."

As an event planner, Scaletta says, she "can work with both and welcome the efficiencies of automated rooming lists and flight manifests, or even efficient automated airport check-in and security. But for incentive attendees especially, the interactive experience at a new destination or hotel has to be emotional, elating and memorable. Something you cannot accomplish with robots because humans are unpredictable and exciting. As Andrew Martin, a character in the 1999 movie "Bicentennial Man" said, "As a robot, I could have lived forever. But I tell



Called simply "Beam," the Smart Presence System is your remote physical presence that can be driven around to interact with people.

Credit: Suitable Technologies

you all today, I would rather die a man, than live for all eternity a machine."

Hotel Industry Implications

Extreme innovations in the use of robotic technology in hotels is not just good for guests, says



Umar Riaz, managing director of the hospitality and travel services practice at global consulting firm Accenture in New York. It also is good for the hotel industry from a business perspective.

For example, Riaz says, there is a timely and important demographic element to the topic.

"A lot of hotels now talk about target-

ing millennials as customers," Riaz says. "And they have begun looking at hotel design or the on-property experience as something that must appeal to younger customers, who are very tech-savvy. And those younger customers are going to be much more comfortable with new technologies like robotics. And meanwhile, hotel operators are looking, in a broader sense, for new ways to offer technology-enabled hotels to those tech-savvy customers. And the use of robotics will become just another example of that. And as they offer more of that, millennials will want even more."

From a bottom-line business perspective, the appeal of robotics is tied to logical assumptions about the practical

economic benefits of robotics, such as lower costs and more standardized consistency for the same functions or services provided by a human. And robots will not call in sick or have family emergencies or require health insurance or 401k plans. That could lead to significantly reduced operating costs — savings that theoretically could be passed on to meeting clients.

That would transform robotics from a gimmick or millennial-focused marketing ploy into a genuine bottom-line business benefit of significant importance, Riaz says, just as the technology has done in other fields, such as the automotive industry.

"As these technologies mature and the costs go down, you have to think that at



The Care-O-bot 4's modular design allows a hotel to select the configuration it wants for certain tasks such as this "bellhop" that carries luggage.

Credit: Stefan Hesselwanger courtesy of Fraunhofer Institute

some point, there will be tangible business benefits to using the technology in hotels," Riaz says. "And as the technology becomes more affordable in the future, there will be a strong business case for using it."

The other key benefit is an increase in the level of guest services — meaning that robots can do the same thing over and over again with more precision and consistency than humans, Riaz says.

That also will eventually become a tangible business benefit.

"The other thing that is happening in the hotel industry, especially in North America, and is really fueling the industry is the growth of limited service hotels and the economy brands," Riaz says. "So robotic technology is really tailor-made for those kinds of brands and properties. For example, those properties could provide 'self-service' cleaning. You just push a button and a robot cleans your room for you. And as you start to look at it, you start to see a lot of examples like that — the ways robotics could be used in hotels. The key will be the adoption process and how well guests respond to the use of the technology."

Other Tech Frontiers

As robots assume new and prominent roles in hotels, other futuristic technologies such as keyless entry via facial recognition, will start to become mainstream in their deployment, Riaz says. Today, keyless entry via a smartphone or Apple Watch is a good example of science fiction becoming reality, he says.

"It is more than a novelty now," he says. "It is a clear improvement in customer service and the guest experience."

Marriott, Hilton and Starwood have led the way so far in pioneering innovative uses of futuristic technology such as remote check-in and keyless entry via a smartphone, Riaz says. And in some properties, mobile check-in has gone beyond the pilot phase and is now considered an emerging mainstream practice. The next step will be the accelerating spread of keyless entry.

"The real challenge for the hotel indus-

try will be to keep up with all this new technology and really understand how using it could impact their brand," Riaz says. "One of the big trends in the hotel industry now is segmentation, as major hotel companies create more and more individual brands that try to set themselves apart from everyone else and target a particular customer. So you have to think that the evolution of these new technologies and creative ways to use them will become a way that certain hotels can segment their market

and appeal to a particular customer, such as millennials who love technology."

Given that, he says, hotels will start to think more in terms of a "technology platform" that includes a multitude of elements tailored to their brand based on functionality and guest appeal. "Understanding all that and making the right decisions for their brands, Riaz says, "is going to be the big challenge for the industry going forward."

Futurist Scott agrees that a truly transformational



Gray Scott, Futurist and Emerging Technology Expert, New York, NY

"Meeting planners and the people who attend meetings...want their meetings to be 'smart.' That's the next logical step in the evolution of meetings."

wave of astonishing technological innovation is about to take place in the hotel industry and that it will have dramatic and important impact on meetings and events.

"In the future, you're going to see all kinds of new technology implemented in hotels," he says. "And they have to do that, because as our homes become 'smarter,' we will expect the same kinds of technology and convenience in hotels. And the first places we will start to see it is in the mega-convention centers and the major hotels in the convention industry. And that will happen because meeting plan-

ners and the people who attend meetings know now about technology that they want their meetings to be 'smart.' That's the next logical step in the evolution of meetings."

At the same time, the general pace of technological evolution is faster and more dramatic than ever before, Scott says. Therefore, the innovations and new technologies of the next 10 years will far exceed those of the last decade. "We're going to see exponential growth now in the things technology can do," he says.

"And that's especially true in terms of 'smart' devices."

One example now being developed is next-generation, in-room technology.

"Stepping into the hotel room of the future will be like stepping into virtual reality," Scott says. "Everything in the room will be 'smart.' Walls will be digital displays, so you can have any view you want, whether that's a serene beach or anything else you desire. Imagine hotel beds that use gentle haptic vibrations to wake you in the morning. These kinds of technologies will eventually be ubiquitous, and they will forever change the



Pepper was designed "to make people happy," enhance lives, facilitate relationships, have fun with people and even connect attendees at meetings and events.

Credit: Aldebaran Robotics

way we travel and how we relate to a hotel room or a meeting room.”

Using OLED technology, convention centers, conference facilities and major meeting hotels also will be able to create

“I think ‘front of the house’ positions need to stay human and emotional, while many ‘back of the house’ positions could be automated with robots, for instance, in housekeeping, laundry, dish washing, and even valet parking.”

Jane Scaletta, General Manager, AlliedPRA Orlando, Orlando, FL

event-specific “smart walls” that offer a full spectrum of services for both planners and attendees, Scott says. In effect, the meeting will become a fully immersive technological experience, which will greatly accelerate and facilitate more impactful and successful meetings. And part of that will be much more dramatic such as technology-driven presentations that will render traditional audio-visual technology and PowerPoint obsolete.

The mission of Suitable Technologies, the developers of BeamPro and Beam+: Smart Presence technology products, is to give people of the world broader access to each other through face-to-face interaction. Their products enable users to move about, speak, see and interact with others — regardless of their location. Beams allow employees to be remote attendees at conferences all over the world, attend keynotes, network, explore the expo halls, and even give a keynote on stage.

The Ultimate Future

“And the ultimate use of the technology will be that for the duration of a meeting, using a fully developed technology platform, meeting hosts and planners will literally be able to transform a hotel into a manifestation of their brand,” he says.

Scott expects that the full transformation of hotels will take seven to 10 years.

Meanwhile, Riaz says, consumers will become increasingly excited about futuristic applications of technology in hotels.

“From a service point of view, I think what you’ll find is that the consumer will have a lot more choices in terms of

what type of experience they want in a hotel,” Riaz says. “For example, if you prefer an experience where you do not have to talk to or deal with a front desk agent and you can



try because there is so much real estate that is already established,” Riaz says. “So I think what we will see is a gradual shift toward these new kinds of technology.

Ten years down the road, the way you interact with a hotel is going to be very different from the way you do it now. As more and more new technology gets introduced, the experience of staying in a hotel will be transformed dramatically. And then that change will be segmented, according to brand and type of customer.”

Based on the rapid evolution of modern robotics and automation over the past decade, in the future it is possible — and perhaps even likely — that in order to reduce costs and simultaneously increase the consistency of customer service, robots will largely replace humans as hotel staff members, Riaz says.

“I think it’s very possible that at some point in the future, you will see a hotel that has only two human beings working in it,” he says. “The rest of the work will be done by robots. Based on what we’ve seen with the new hotel in Japan, for example, I think it’s possible that within five to 10 years, we could see such an automated hotel.”

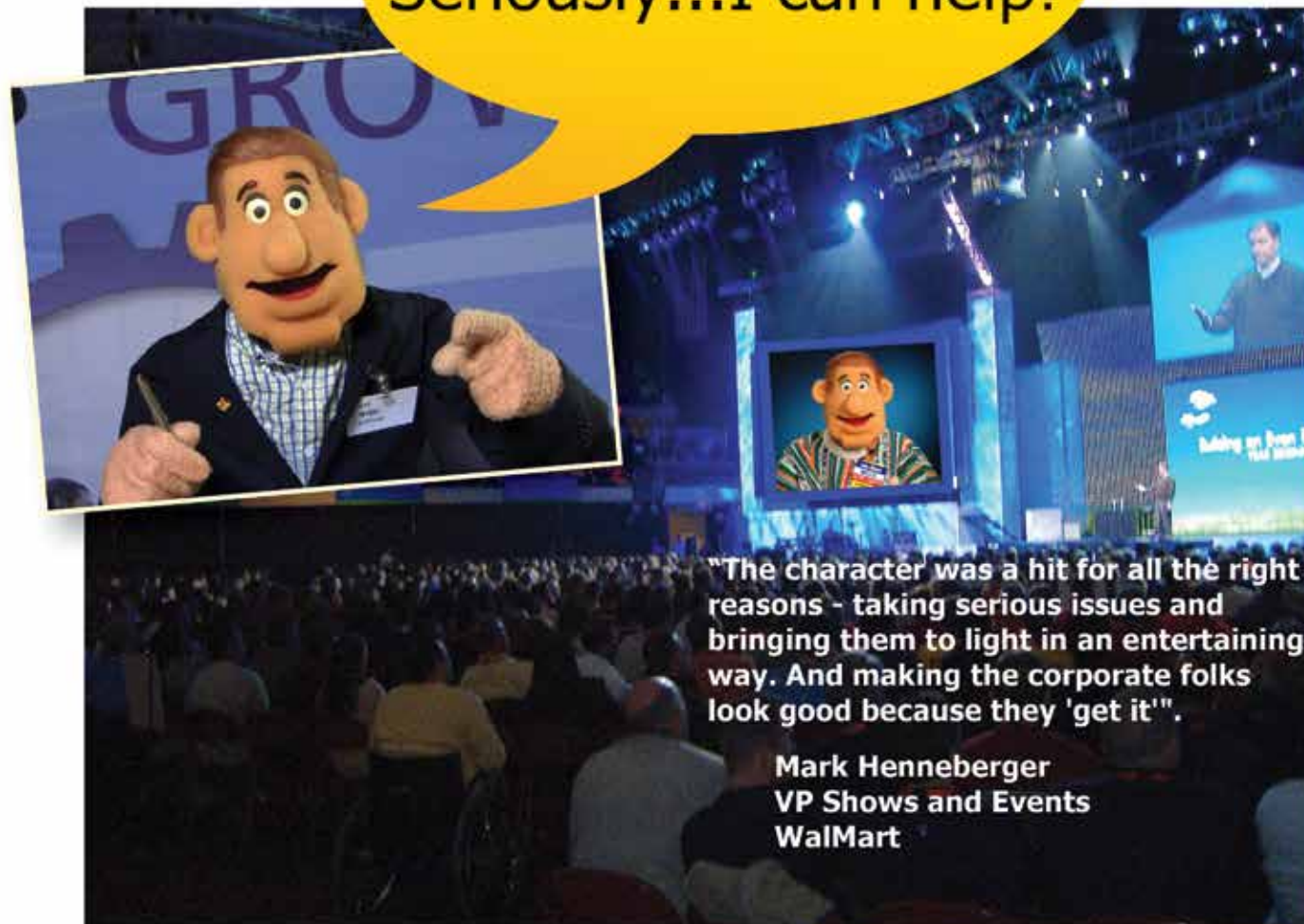
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NextGen DMOs

The Changing Role of Destination Marketing Organizations

By Karen Brost

Destination marketing organizations (DMOs), such as convention and visitors bureaus and tourism boards, have always served as prime sources of information for planners considering various cities for meetings. But now that we live in a digital world, and so much information is avail-

able online through websites and social media, the role of DMOs is evolving to meet the changing needs of its markets. "The evolving role of destination marketing organizations is undergoing unprecedented shifts due to systemic changes in travel consumer behavior and expectations, advances in technology

and digital communications, and market forces demanding that DMOs develop more sophisticated business models that can support their ability to meet these demands," explains Michael Gehrisch, president and CEO of Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI). (Gehrisch recently announced



"DestinationNEXT signals a pervasive strategy realignment among DMOs globally to engage with their clients in new ways, promote their destinations more productively and offer a more well-rounded destination experience with better business deliverables. Planners live in the middle of all of that."

Michael Gehrisch, President and CEO, Destination Marketing Association International

that he is stepping down after 15 years with the organization.)

DMAI has responded to these shifts in the marketplace by launching a groundbreaking, three-year research project called DestinationNEXT. For the first phase of the project, DMAI sent an extensive survey to industry leaders in March 2014. The organization received one of its strongest responses ever: 327 DMOs from 36 countries responded, giving DMAI a wealth of information that they could use to chart its future course.

"So what does this mean for meeting planners?" Gehrisch asks. "DestinationNEXT signals a pervasive strategy realignment among DMOs globally to engage with their clients in new ways, promote their destinations more productively and offer a more well-rounded destination experience with better business deliverables. Planners live in the middle of all of that."

"DestinationNEXT is about where the industry is heading," he continues. "So what I would say to planners is, look at what the industry is recognizing and doing around these buckets of transformational opportunities, and then understand they affect you and potentially open areas for deeper collaboration with DMOs."

DestinationNEXT Phase One

The phase one survey identified a number of key opportunities, including how DMOs can play an expanded role in the community on broader economic development issues, how they can improve the branding of their destinations in the leisure and meetings and conventions markets, and how they can capitalize on social media and smart technology to engage and access residents, industry and markets.

For example, when Alison Best took over as CEO of Visit Oakland just a few

years ago, her first mission was to "reconnect Visit Oakland with Oakland" because she felt that tourism had never been understood or valued in her destination. Visit Oakland's staff began reaching out to the city's business owners and cultural influencers to encourage them to use the hashtag #oaklandloveit. This resonated with the community in terms of building community pride and enabled the DMO to discover stories

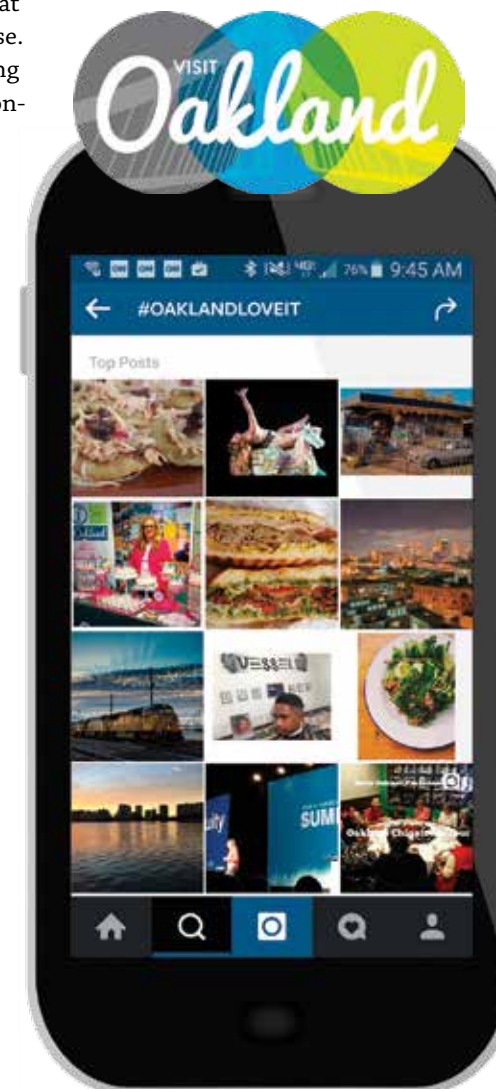
about their city that they didn't know. By focusing on a hashtag instead of a tagline, Visit Oakland has been able to bring more attention to its destination and showcase a variety of experiences. As Andy Levine, president and chief creative officer of the DMO consulting firm Development Counsellors International, noted in an ebook published by DMAI, "DMOs are becoming content curation platforms because content is experience-driven rather than product-focused."

On to Phase Two

Phase Two of DestinationNEXT was unveiled during DMAI's 2015 Annual Convention. "While phase one was all about research and uncovering the major opportunities in our industry, phase two is all about action and what steps different DMOs can take to meet these opportunities," Gehrisch notes.

"It included the release of an online diagnostic tool which presents a framework that DMO leaders and communities can use to critically assess the destination. The tool is not intended to be a benchmarking index to rank DMOs or destinations. Instead, it measures the effectiveness of the destination as a whole and helps to start a conversation and provide focus on what needs to be done in the future. What makes this interesting is that because the destination is being assessed rather than the organization, DMOs, just as well as community stakeholders, can go through the self-assessment process. Everyone else, from convention centers, hotel/restaurant associations, city councils to economic development agencies, also can participate."

Gehrisch continues, "Additionally, a comprehensive portfolio of DMO Practices was developed to help destinations capitalize on the three trans-



Visit Oakland encourages the community to share photos of their city's many virtues via #oaklandloveit on Instagram.



“DestinationNEXT has been an incredible source of inspiration. ...We have enhanced our services, we have listened to our customers and implemented tools that help them have more inspirational and successful meetings, and we have seen business grow significantly.”

Tammy Blount, FCDME, President and CEO, Monterey County CVB

formational opportunities outlined in phase one. Some practices are well established, but not necessarily universal, while others are more groundbreaking in their vision. Some are basic, others are complex and require significant resources. Some practices enhance internal capability, some create customer and stakeholder value, while others do both. Their relevance to a specific DMO will depend on the destination’s overall strategy and the position of tourism in the community.

“Overall, the response to phase two of DestinationNEXT has been incredibly positive,” Gehrish describes. “One of the most profound shifts revolves around the important role of DMOs to

development organizations, and DestinationNEXT is helping all DMOs gain a similar seat at the table.”

Teaming Up for Success

According to Richard Scharf, president and CEO of Visit Denver, DMOs have always been involved in economic development, but they are now becoming much more strategic and collaborative with segments such as the high-tech industry. Over the past decade, the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce has identified growth industries where Denver has a strong presence, such as aviation, aerospace, bioscience, energy, telecommunications, health care and information technology. Visit Denver is

bringing the World Conference on Lung Cancer to Denver.

Building the Brand

Tammy Blount, FCDME, is co-chair of the DestinationNEXT Advisory Group and president and CEO of the Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau. “DestinationNEXT has been an incredible source of inspiration,” she explains. “The three transformational opportunities (dealing with the new marketplace, building and protecting the destination brand and evolving the DMO business model) are key, and have been woven throughout our strategies for more than a year. In the fall of 2013, we launched our new brand campaign — in the consumer market the tagline is ‘Grab Life by the Moments,’ and in the meeting space, it’s ‘Inspired Moments in Meetings.’ In collaboration with our Customer Advisory Board, we have integrated brand messaging and content marketing strategies with traditional sales approaches to have a more personal relationship with our customers, both existing and prospective. We have enhanced our services, we have listened to our customers and implemented tools that help them have more inspirational and successful meetings, and we have seen business grow significantly.”

According to Milton Segarra, president and CEO of Meet Puerto Rico, some people simply have the wrong idea. He says, “The biggest misconception about DMOs is that we’re a room-night producing machine. And you know what, we’re not.”

Over the past decade or so, Meet Puerto Rico has kept its focus on promoting the island as a convention destination and touted its convention center facilities and hotel meeting space offerings. But that meant it was often shying away from the island’s real appeal:



Visit Denver is becoming much more strategic and collaborative with business segments such as the high-tech industry and other growth industries.

convince governments and stakeholders that tourism promotion should be viewed as an investment in a destination’s economic growth and community well-being, versus an expense line item for ‘tourism promotion.’ Today, the DMOs with the highest impact in their destinations are actively engaged in destination development in collaboration with their city councils and economic

now targeting these industry segments, and one example is the close alliance it has developed with Anschutz Medical Campus in Denver, home of the University of Colorado Health Science Division, to identify and promote new sources of local expertise to international groups. This collaboration between the DMO, the local economic development team and the medical community resulted in



“The team at LA Tourism was such a great partner that we viewed them as an extension of our own planning team. They had our best interests in mind while coordinating the many hotels and vendors we work with in LA. I’ve never worked so closely with a tourism board or felt so supported through the entire process and life of the event.”

Allison Nunes, Global Internal Events Manager, LinkedIn, Mountain View, CA

its unique culture and geography. So to remedy this, Meet Puerto Rico shifted its focus in 2014 and launched a new website and branding campaign called: “On a Tropical Island. In The Caribbean.” The goal of the campaign was to showcase the destination in a more experiential way by tapping into the island’s dramatic tropical environment, which is what makes it truly unique.



The Monterey County CVB has enhanced its services for meeting planners.

Connecting Like-Minded Attendees

The Singapore Tourism Board has taken the novel approach of helping convention organizers cluster their programs around similarly themed conventions to expand the networking and educational opportunities for visiting attendees. Each month, Singapore’s convention calendar has a specific theme such as sustainability, fashion, media, medical or automotive. This strategy is also good for the destination, because attendees often stay longer to see what the other events in their industry are all about.

DMAI asked Kershing Goh, regional director of the Americas for the Singa-

pore Tourism Board, if companies are comfortable with sharing their knowledge like this, and her response was, “I think increasingly, events are beginning to feel that rather than competing with each other, they’re often complementary. In this time and age where obviously, it’s expensive to travel, and there’s so much digital technology, it becomes, ‘Why do I need to go?’” Goh says, “They want to come because the whole ecosystem is there, and everybody is in town for those two weeks.”

The Power of Technology

San Jose, dubbed the “smartest city in America” as the Capital of Silicon Valley, flexed its high-tech muscle in 2014 when it launched “Wickedly Fast Free Wi-Fi” at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center, Mineta San Jose International Airport and within downtown San Jose — a smart marketing move to meet the ever-increasing bandwidth demands of meeting and convention attendees armed with multiple devices to stay connected. And as a further reflec-

tion of its culture of innovative thinking, San Jose boasts a unique, one-stop-shop destination marketing model, which allows planners to book the San Jose Convention Center, hotels, unique venues, menus, CVB services and more through one source: Team San Jose.

Other DMOs are developing more video content for the meetings market. Last year, Visit Anaheim launched the Faces of Tourism video series featuring real-life stories of local hospitality industry veterans who can promote the economic value of tourism on a very personal level. In one video, Judy Hamrick describes how working her way up over 25 years from a server to catering captain at the Anaheim Convention Center has helped her raise her three kids.

Visit Bloomington (Indiana) wanted to get the message out that Bloomington welcomes all people, so the DMO filmed a number of gay and straight local small business owners who wanted to communicate how their city is open for business for everyone. “We



The goal of Meet Puerto Rico’s campaign “On a Tropical Island. In The Caribbean.” is to showcase the destination in a more experiential way.



“I would really love it if the CVBs and DMOs would really get to know what hotels and restaurants are in town that accommodate different dietary needs. ...I think that a CVB that delves a little bit more into their city to find out these things would be more valuable to planners.”

Tracy Stuckrath, CSEP, CMM, CHC, President, Thrive! Meetings & Events, Atlanta, GA



San Jose, the Capital of Silicon Valley, offers citywide Wi-Fi. Pictured is the Idea Tree, a technology-inspired artwork in front of the San Jose McEnery Convention Center.

manager for LinkedIn in the San Francisco Bay area, explains, “I mostly rely on tourism boards or similar organizations when planning events internationally in countries I may not be as familiar with. I will also work with some of our partners in the U.S. if I need some specific information and guidance on a destination/venue in a short amount of time.”

Nunes shared details of a positive experience she had while working

uploaded that, and we pushed that information out to communicate that Bloomington has always been a welcoming place,” says Erin Erdmann, the organization’s director of convention sales and travel media. “Our local industry partners were really appreciative and thankful that we actually put ourselves out there.”

Steady Support

CVBs and other DMOs continue to provide the types of support planners have come to rely on. “For me, CVBs and tourism boards act as a marketing arm for the destination — in raising awareness and providing a link to the local providers,” explains Tiffany Cohen, CMP, director, client services for the Beaverton, Oregon-based event marketing, management and production company Opus Agency. “I find many times that I start a conversation with a CVB long before I actually ‘need’ them — and that it’s through the relationship that I might consider the destination when it’s finally time to source.”

Allison Nunes, global internal events

closely with the Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board on a huge program that she ran in Los Angeles. “They were involved from the initial site visit and negotiations, all of the planning, and then post-event, providing support where needed. The team at LA Tourism was such a great partner that we viewed them as an extension of our own planning team. They had our best interests

in mind while coordinating the many hotels and vendors we work with in LA. I’ve never worked so closely with a tourism board or felt so supported through the entire process and life of the event.”

Tracy Stuckrath, CSEP, CMM, CHC, president and chief connecting officer for Atlanta-based Thrive! Meetings & Events, says that she really appreciates it when CVBs send out RFPs on her behalf and then consolidate the responses into a single, manageable report that not only lists room rates, but other factors such as concessions.

In regard to the changing roles of CVBs and DMOs, Stuckrath has several requests. “I would really love it if the CVBs and DMOs would really get to know what hotels and restaurants are in town that accommodate different dietary needs,” she explains. “Who are your halal caterers? Who are your kosher caterers? Where are the best gluten-free and vegan meals found? This is especially important if the client is not hosting meal functions at their event and you need to provide options for the attendees. So I think that a CVB that delves a little bit more into their city



In Visit Anaheim’s Faces of Tourism video series, Judy Hamrick describes how she worked her way up from server to catering captain at the Anaheim Convention Center.



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Tiffany Cohen, CMP, Director, Client Services, Opus Agency, Beaverton, OR

to find out these things would be more valuable to planners.”

Stuckrath also would like CVBs to put together running and walking routes that attendees could use. “Make it fun,” she says. “Maybe it goes by the top picks of the city, so attendees are also getting a good look at the city when they’re on their walks or runs. (CVBs) could be great advocates for wellness in their communities. We’re all trying to promote walking to venues as much as possible, so I think that’s a great opportunity for them.”

Susie Weibel, design and purchasing manager, event solutions, for Minneapolis-based BI Worldwide, sometimes relies on CVBs for collateral or digital images, or when her company is not us-

ing a destination management company (DMC) and needs expert recommendations for items such as local entertainment or venues.

She also appreciates the incentives some bureaus offer. “Tourism/CVBs promote their destinations and offer incentives, which we, in turn, pass on to our customers. For example, Maui CVB is offering incentives for 2016 business booked by December 31, 2016 (i.e., comped entertainment, hula dancers or lei greeting at the airport, etc.). We have also used comped air for site inspections offered by Irish Tourism. That was a stand out. We offered that as a concession in an RFP in a competitive bid situation during a proposal where bidders

could present different destinations. BIW presented Ireland. We won the business. Others did not present Europe, and it helped us get Europe in the budget.”

So what’s next for DestinationNEXT? “We understand that in order for DestinationNEXT to remain relevant, we must continually assess trends, adapt to changing customer expectations, and discover and drive new opportunities,” Gehrisch explains “When the travel landscape changes as quickly as it does today, a strategic road map needs to be constantly updated. Because of this, DMAI is committed to ensuring that DestinationNEXT is a living, active, ongoing initiative that blazes a trail for the road ahead.”

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Meetings Management

How to Win in a Seller's Market

Companies With Strategic Meetings Management Programs Negotiate Better Dates, Rates and Terms

By Patrick Simms



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The pendulum is not likely to swing back from the seller's market in the near future, at least according to CWT Meetings & Events' 2016 Meetings and Events Forecast. The study predicts a 4.3 percent increase in lodging costs next year in North America, along with higher F&B prices and less flexible hotel attrition and cancellation policies, particularly in high-demand markets. The same study suggests strategies planners can use to cope with this challenge, the first one being "consolidate for control and cost savings" via a strategic meetings management program (SMMP).

Companies that have SMMPs in place are better positioned, even in this seller's market, to realize savings and more favorable contract terms since they know precisely their meetings history with hoteliers on a company-wide scale.

"It's a challenging market now, and having a vision of what meetings we are doing year over year enables me to take multiple meetings to a supplier table and be able to negotiate better dates, rates and terms," notes Kathy Hastings, CMP, CMM, senior manager events with technology solutions company Teradata, based in Waxhaw, North Carolina. The idea is echoed by third-party planner Deborah Borak, CDS, CMM, SMMC, director of global accounts with ConferenceDirect: "Being able to go back to the same hotels we've used in the past and show what we've booked with them helps immensely."

Knowledge Is Power

Thus, the slogan "Knowledge is power" certainly describes the value of an SMMP.

Especially in today's market conditions, planners need full knowledge of their company's meetings activity to optimize negotiating power with suppliers. They need data that is on par with the kind of information travel departments have on transient business travel, and in fact, the combination of both data sets further improves leverage.

Strategic meetings management at Cisco Systems includes that best practice, notes Carolyn Pund, CMP, CMM, global events, strategic meetings management. "Cisco has major chain partnerships for their transients, and we piggyback on that volume to get the best value for Cisco meetings and events."

Of course, SMM is not merely about knowing what the pattern of supplier use has been, but actually identifying and driving business to preferred suppliers in order to forge and maintain partnerships. Those vendors will usually be happy to partner with the client's SMMP "because they know that the next program that's going to come along is going to be

steered to them because of the partnership," Pund explains.

Valuable Partnerships

And such partnerships are valuable to planners not only in a seller's market. "Anybody who has been around in business (long enough) understands that everything is cyclical," she says. "We're in a seller's market now, and in eight months we could be in a buyer's market," she says. "But if you don't have an established SMMP with really strong relationships in a seller's market, how are you going to trust that you're getting really good deals in a buyer's market? So I think it needs to be equally strong in a buyer's market; the relationship and the business is based on trust either way. And the SMMP should be in it for the long haul."

The extreme of a buyer's market took place during the recession when companies were canceling meetings, and during that time, Cisco's SMMP was valuable in softening the blow of cancellation fees, Pund feels. "We still paid a lot, but not to



Carolyn Pund, CMP, CMM
Global Events
Strategic Meetings Management
Cisco Systems
San Jose, CA

“If you don’t have an established SMMP with really strong relationships in a seller’s market, how are you going to trust that you’re getting really good deals in a buyer’s market?”

the point of what we would have paid had we not had those relationships, because as soon as that business came back, it went directly to those partners where we had had cancellations.”

Meetings Spend Data

Negotiating leverage and strong supplier partnerships are among the results of a successful SMMP, and they are motivations to engage in the significant amount of data collection needed to start a program. A company first needs to get a handle on the numbers and types of meetings being held across the organization, and the spend in the different categories. For Teradata, it started with a request for the former information: “They wanted one global calendar capturing all the meetings and trade shows,” Hastings recalls. That led to the purchase of an en-

terprise software solution that included that function, and the SMM journey began from there.

For Cisco, in the early days of the SMM program, there were requests for company-wide meetings spend data, Pund relates. The first step to capturing meeting spend was consolidating the related general ledger meeting codes. “Over a period of about a year we worked with the finance and other stakeholder teams to come up with very tightly defined general ledgers codes to categorize all related spend. So if you were opening a PO, any type of expense that had to do with a meeting or an event, it would align to a meetings GL code. It’s since expanded to about 12 GL codes.” The GLs correspond to all the different types of meetings, from trade shows to sales conferences, advisory boards and much more. “We also established a Global Meetings portal driven by a Global Meetings & Events Policy that requires everyone to register their meetings in the portal, which for a company the size of Cisco is a pretty daunting task,” says Pund. Seven years later, “I would say that we are in a better place than we ever have been at close to 85 percent compliance. SMM is a long journey, especially with a multinational operation.”

SMMP Champion

A major challenge with any company-wide initiative is getting buy-in from the many stakeholders. Helpful in that regard is to have a high-level “champion” of the SMMP, a “leadership voice,” says Hastings. But given the length of time it takes to get company-wide acceptance of the program and education in its protocols, a planner should not depend on the same champion staying the course throughout. “We had many roadblocks in our journey. Our champion changed jobs, and it was difficult to find a new champion,” Hastings relates.

Thus, anyone involved in backing the SMMP should be capable of making a case for its benefits to various stakeholders. Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM, global manager, strategic meetings management with safety science company Underwriters Laboratories LLC, currently works with Borak on the sourcing piece

of the company’s SMMP. But her role in founding the program goes back to 2006 when she earned her CMM, and designed the program toward completion of the degree. In her view, it’s key to show the distinct value to each different stakeholder in order to get buy-in. “We have a lead-with-carrot vs. beat-with-stick culture, so you have to show people the benefit of why you would use this (program), the ‘what’s in it for me,’” she explains.

For example, the legal department should understand the risk mitigation features of the program, with its control over who reviews and signs supplier contracts. The C suite, and particularly the CFO and procurement, should be made aware of the cost savings potential through strategic supplier relationships. Buy-in from leadership also can be furthered by showing them how SMM has benefited similar companies.

“We looked at companies that were even larger than our company, and we were very interested in companies who are in the technology arena, whose portfolio of meetings and trade shows is similar to ours,” says Hastings. “I knew that some of those names would draw attention to our leadership, and mostly they were companies who had mature SMMPs in place.”

And as data become available from expense tracking as well as the cost savings through preferred supplier relationships, the C suite can be further “reassured” as to the SMMP’s ROI. “I believe that data

“Having a vision of what meetings we are doing year over year enables me to take multiple meetings to a supplier table and be able to negotiate better dates, rates and terms.”

Kathy Hastings, CMP, CMM
Senior Manager Events
Teradata
Waxhaw, NC



reporting that we’ve done in the last 60 days has really opened eyes, and now leadership is very eager for what the next steps are going to be,” says Hastings.

Cost avoidance also should be showcased — for example, where a cancellation penalty at a hotel has been avoided or ameliorated by a rebooking effected through the SMMP’s centralized oversight.

Buy-in from marketing and sales is achieved by focusing more on the improved customer relations and brand representation across meetings. For example, UL’s SMMP will enable an “understanding of what customers have we invited to which events,” Johnson says. “Business unit one might ask a client to go to their golf outing, and the client may say to them, ‘I’m not allowed to accept that.’ Well then along comes business unit two and says to the same client, ‘Hey, would you like to come to our golf outing?’ So it starts to look a little silly when we have no central place for understanding (customer-facing meeting and event data).”

Control Over Branding

The quality of the meeting experience and branding also can be kept consistent when there is control over who does the planning. “Each and every meeting may look different if we’ve got different planners,” says Johnson, “and furthermore the planners are not professional planners but employees who lack the expertise a professional planner has and do it as a secondary part of their primary role, which we call ad hoc planners.”

Preventing this is clearly of interest to marketing representatives as well as C-level executives who are concerned with the company’s image. In fact, the focus



Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM
Global Manager
Strategic Meetings Management
Underwriter Laboratories LLC
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“We have a lead-with-carrot vs. beat-with-stick culture, so you have to show people the benefit of why you would use this (program), the ‘what’s in it for me.’”

on brand delivery through meetings can be more important to “selling” the concept of SMM than the cost-tracking and savings benefit, says Pund, whose team sits within Cisco’s global marketing organization. The corporate brand and values are not only represented to clients at external events, but also to supplier partners.

“Everything about an event in part

represents your brand: The way that you source, contract, show up onsite, treat the convention staff, reconcile your bill and pay them,” she says. Ensuring that valuable supplier partnerships are maintained is not just about identifying them as “preferred” and bringing business to them, but also about how the business is conducted. An SMMP helps to preserve that integrity across all of a company’s meetings by having protocols in place.

Selling the Program to Planners

Apart from upper management, legal, procurement and marketing, those on the front line of meeting planning clearly must also be on board with the program and its development. That process “includes continual communication, because people forget (the protocols),” Johnson says. “So I’ve done a lot of lunch-and-learns.”

They also may lack the time to do the reporting on each event they plan as dictated by the SMMP, and this is an issue that should also be addressed. “I think the biggest (problem) is that companies don’t take the time to go back in and actually put in what they spend at every meeting, including F&B, AV, etc.,” Borak observes. Resolving such issues needs to be motivated by re-emphasizing the value of the program, the reason these planners bought into it initially. At the lunch-and-learns, for example, Johnson stresses “what’s in it for you, making it relevant to the executive assistants, because they plan a lot of meetings themselves. I ‘sell’ them on the fact that by coming to this process you can report to your boss that you saved a certain amount of money and show your value.”



It's also important to convey to these planners that they are not relinquishing control over meetings under the SMMP, but rather aligning to protocols of meeting registration, approval, sourcing, reporting and so on.

"Many times the planners don't want to give away what they're doing; they think somebody is going to come in and take over and they won't be needed anymore, and that's not the case whatsoever," says Borak.

In certain ways, the SMMP makes their planning work easier. For example, many hotels now want advance deposits in addition to setting up direct billing, and one of the protocols of the SMMP can be that all planners are provided with the appropriate credit forms, Borak suggests.

Internal planners and meeting managers also are important to retain under an SMMP as they are the best advocates for its success and the company overall, Pund maintains. Cisco's global SMMP, she notes, is directly managed by Cisco employees, no matter the location. "Corporate America respects vendors and consultants, but at the end of the day, they're not coming from a place of 'we're all stakeholders together and doing this because it's the right thing for our company,'" she says. A reason why some SMMPs are struggling, she holds, is that they are being overseen entirely by third parties, as opposed to company employees. Just as a program needs an internal "champion" to get it off the ground, it arguably needs company representatives doing the "maintenance work": driving adoption, educating on policy compliance, having stakeholder meetings with new acquisitions and so forth.



Deborah Borak, CDS, CMM, SMMC, Director Global Accounts ConferenceDirect Littleton, CO

"Being able to go back to the same hotels we've used in the past and show what we've booked with them helps immensely."

Supplier Partners

External partners, including hoteliers, DMCs, transportation and AV companies, also need to be on the same page with regard to the SMMP. "Your external partners are the people who are 'policing' and helping you with your policy for all the people that think that the policies don't apply to them," says Pund. For example, "when somebody (from the company) calls the hotel and says, 'I want to do a meeting,' that hotel partner's first comment would be, 'Great, do you know what

your Cisco url is for the meetings portal so you can register your meeting and get a meeting ID? Then we can get your program contracted.'"

Cisco also conducts biannual reviews with its external partners. "We collect information about how our programs operate and what our volumes look like, how many times RFPs are denied, etc., and we provide feedback as to their hotel performance on our program, what planners liked or didn't like, and how they can improve in operations," Pund relates. In turn, the suppliers report on any contracting issues, use of rebookings based on cancellations and so on. That deep level of communication with suppliers comes with their partnership in the company's SMMP, as opposed to their merely being used for one-off meetings.

Mature SMMP

While an SMMP may begin with a "champion," a mature program should not depend on any one catalyst, or even just a few. It should maintain itself through the best practices of all the internal stakeholders and external partners.

"My goal is for the business practices of SMM to become part of the DNA of how Cisco does their meetings and events," says Pund, "so that if I'm not in the driver's place in six months everything doesn't fall apart. The infrastructure needs to be set in place between finance, governance, travel, event marketing and other parties, so that it's not dependent on a name or personality anymore."

Such a well-grounded SMMP will preserve the efficiency of a company's meetings operations through staff changes, new acquisitions and any pendulum swings of the market. **C&IT**

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The Shape of Wellness

Where Health & Productivity Meet and Attendees Can Be Their 'Best Selves'

By Maura Keller

Finding the energy to keep up in today's fast-paced world has led many Americans to improve their diets and increase their activity and exercise. According to the Global Wellness Institute, wellness retreats within the corporate environment now account for 14 percent of all tourism expenditures, and are expected to surpass 23 percent over the next two years. Indeed, today's corporate environment has embraced the wellness trend — incorporating wellness and fitness activities, and healthful food options throughout all facets of their meetings.

Kial Afton, corporate meeting and event planner at the New York City office of NBCUniversal, is a perfect example of a corporate planner who tries to incorporate wellness options into many of NBCUniversal's retreat and incentive programs.

"Over the past 1½ years, we've seen a surge in requests for fitness-based

teambuilding activities, including group spin classes and morning hikes where attendees have a working breakfast upon arrival," Afton says. "We also incorporate Radius, a fitness Internet subscription video service, into client programs to alert them to new ventures."

Additionally, many of NBCUniversal's programs offer optional activities — ranging from spa treatments to golf to early morning boot camp classes.

"As each client has different interests, we offer a wide variety to ensure there's something for everyone to enjoy," Afton says. "Aside from the health benefits, exercising on a regular basis has been proven to help people be happier and more productive in the workplace. It offers a way for people to clear their heads, which allows them to look at a situation, business proposal or presentation with fresh eyes. In short, it helps people to be their best selves."

NBCUniversal recently held a retreat for powerful women within the indus-

try at Cal-a-Vie, located just north of San Diego in Vista, California. Voted one of the top destination spas in the world by *Condé Nast Traveler*, the resort frequently caters to corporate and incentive groups for wellness-focused retreats.

"In just a few hours, we saw the women leaving stress behind, letting their guard down, letting loose and enjoying themselves," Afton says. "Any destination where guests can be surrounded by colleagues and clients, and feel comfortable wearing no makeup and spandex while sprinting up a hill, is a rarity."

Cal-a-Vie is a serene French Provençal-styled destination spa featuring 32 elegant villas surrounded by 200 rolling acres of citrus groves, vineyards and lavender fields. The private spa creates a serene setting for tailored incentive programs that ignite productivity, inspire teambuilding and bonding, recharge the body and rejuvenate the spirit.

"Companies are starting to realize the

Greeting the day at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa in Ojai, California.



North of San Diego, California, Cal-a-Vie Health Spa is one of the top spas in the world. The resort offers everything from (l) aqua cycling to informative seminars on how to recharge the body and rejuvenate the spirit.

importance of investing in the health and wellness of their employees," says Cal-a-Vie's onsite group sales manager, Colleen Cosenza. "Planners are now more focused on booking experiences that will benefit attendees long after the retreat is over."

Groups can personalize their Cal-a-Vie experience with professional guest speakers, tailored activities and the full range of Cal-a-Vie amenities and services such as more than 150 fitness classes, nutritional experts, sunrise hikes, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, tennis clinics, spa treatments and an 18-hole golf course. Group teambuilding activities can include sand and water volleyball, scavenger hunts, water relay races,

forefront, which allows for deeper and more honest communication moving forward, which ultimately is a win-win for all parties involved."

Benefits Aplenty

By adding a health and wellness component to corporate retreats, companies can help employees jump-start a healthier, more productive lifestyle by teaching them how to eat better and incorporate fitness into their busy professional lives.

"Attendees appreciate the fact that their employers care about their health, which inadvertently creates a sense of loyalty to the company," says Cosenza. "When employees are healthier, they

ways to offer activities that exercise the mind and the body."

In addition to incorporating early morning workouts during their meeting and incentive travel programs, Anytime Fitness also arranges for at least one speaker to talk about a relevant medical advancement around optimum health.

"While in Scottsdale we hired Dr. Tieraona Low Dog, the chief medical officer of Well & Being, whose engaging message on nutrition was one of the most popular of all the sessions at our conference," Crooker says.

Well & Being is an innovative spa/wellness concept at luxury hotels. Well & Being has developed a meetings-focused Wellness Menu for groups with a variety of fitness options and workshops on how to use packing items that can double as fitness equipment.

Brennan Evans, the managing director of Well & Being Spa at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess has found that corporations are looking for ways to entice their attendees

with a unique point of difference that sets their conference apart from others.

"The opportunity to tap into the variety of fun and innovative health and wellness options is enticing to meeting planners as it allows them to use the spa facility as a true educational moment and not just a luxury amenity," Evans says. "At Well & Being, we use a wide array of fitness programs and special wellness offerings to provide energizing educational and informative classes or teambuilding events to provide groups with networking opportunities in a less intimidating environment."

The challenge courses on the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess property have been especially popular with

"Exercising...offers a way for people to clear their heads, which allows them to look at a situation, business proposal or presentation with fresh eyes. In short, it helps people to be their best selves."

Kial Afton, Corporate Meeting and Event Planner
NBCUniversal, New York, NY



obstacle courses, golf and tennis tournaments and interactive cooking classes.

"There is always a high level of interest in events that focus on wellness and exercise," Afton says. For example, the chairman of NBCUniversal advertising sales and client partnerships incorporates exercise into her daily routine, as well as many of her client and senior leadership programs.

"We are currently planning to return for our third visit to Cal-a-Vie in February 2016," Afton says. "The feedback we've received from attendees who have participated in Cal-a-Vie retreats in past years is unlike any other event we host. People find themselves interacting at a personal level, even if business is at the

have more clarity and become more productive, which in turn benefits the company as a whole."

Libby Crooker, vice president of international support at Hastings, Minnesota-based Anytime Fitness, handles meeting and event planning for the company. Crooker agrees that incorporating wellness has long-term benefits. She brought 2,100 attendees to the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess in September for the company's annual conference.

"Studies show that one's ability to learn and retain information is increased with movement," Crooker says. "Sedentary learning, while common, is simply less effective. Therefore, in a conference environment, our goal is al-

large groups who want to provide a pre-meeting workout that is fitness-focused while helping guests improve their teamwork skills.

"One recent meeting group — Anytime Fitness — incorporated a session on aerial yoga into their day of meetings, and it was a big hit," Evans says.

On the educational end, Well & Being has incorporated nutrition programs into group classes focused on education and teambuilding. Groups also can incorporate integrative health programs — such as mindful eating or women's health — featuring insightful sessions with Well & Being coaches.

"Businesses have noticed a connection between a healthy lifestyle, employee productivity and a positive work environment — not to mention the financial savings that come to a company that has healthier employees," Evans says. "Health education offers long-term, takeaway benefits. A wellness program during business travel allows guests to learn and experience wellness options that they can incorporate into daily life."

Since the Well & Being program launched, Evans and his team have seen a significant jump in group activities, such as exercise classes and workshops, and a 50 percent increase in individual bookings.

"With this in mind, we've tripled the number of onsite group wellness programs," Evans says.

Productive Synergy

Due to the nature of the industry in which they work — natural health products, health and wellness — a wellness component always has been integrated into the corporate and incentive travel programs for the Salt Lake City, Utah-based United Natural Products Alliance (UNPA), an international consortium of forward-looking companies dedicated to providing consumers with natural health products of superior quality, benefit and reliability, says Kira Olsen, director of operations and member services at UNPA, who plans the company's meetings and events.

"Organizations are beginning to see

the success of incorporating fresh, new elements into their conferences and programs," Olsen says. "Years ago, we decided to incorporate the wellness concept into our annual member meeting, therefore morphing it into what we so proudly refer to as our Annual UNPA Members Retreat. That's when we decided to step away from the typical conference and meeting format, and make our retreat a unique experience."

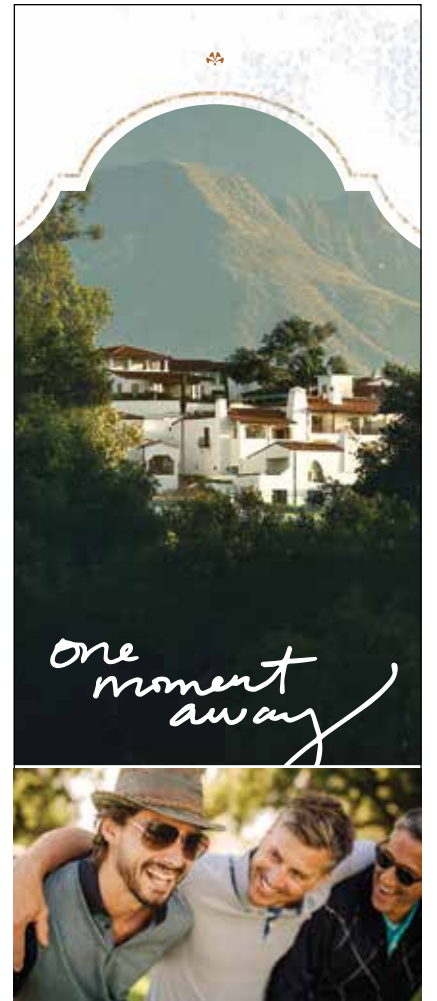
In the past, Olsen has incorporated activities such as river rafting, river jetboat rides, golf, spa services, aerial hammock yoga, circuit classes and acupressure demonstrations into the company's retreats.

"We've heard it said time and time again that our annual event is different than most due to the incorporation of wellness components," Olsen says. "Our attendees look forward to it and know that they will not only receive valuable information but will enjoy themselves — that's when the magic happens. We've found that combining business and pleasure is extremely rewarding, personally and professionally. It creates a very productive synergy. There are many workaholics out there that will discredit the activities by saying that they are not productive or necessary. I couldn't disagree more; in my experience, incorporating wellness concepts really brings people together. It helps provide opportunities to practice what we preach."

Immersion Programs

While some corporate and meeting event planners sprinkle various wellness components throughout a function, others incorporate complete wellness immersion programs. For example, The Ranch at Live Oaks Malibu offers an active and intense seven-day program along with education about health and wellness combined with measurable results and fat loss.

"Like The Ranch at Live Oak Malibu seven-day stay, the daily routine at The Ranch 4.0 consists of eight to 10 hours per day of rigorous exercise including four hours of morning mountain hiking and an afternoon full of exercise classes," says Alex Glassock, co-founder of The



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Wellness components such as this aerial hammock yoga program make for unique, memorable experiences at the annual meetings of United Natural Products Alliance.

Ranch at Live Oak Malibu. “The intense daily physical regimen is complemented by a daily 1,400-calorie diet of vegetarian fare served in a charming, private greenhouse setting.

The Ranch 4.0 program, while still strenuous, can accommodate larger groups than the traditional Ranch at Live Oak Malibu program, allowing for more flexibility in the programming. The group-friendly option can work for groups of up to 200 or 300 attendees.

The program and daily schedule can be tailored for each group’s needs including breakout sessions during the day.

“Being in a group environment creates a special dynamic and bonding experience. People tend to come away from the program with measurable results both physically and mentally,” Glassock says.

Corporate Culture Extension

Jack Ezon, president of NYC-based Ovation Vacations, believes wellness options at meetings and events breed all-around good will. “Focusing on wellness shows participants that their company cares about them personally — their health, their well-being, their lifestyle,” Ezon says. “It shows that the company cares more than just their work output and wants to lend a hand in improving their lives beyond the office or bottom line. In addition, participating in challenging physical activity together brings people closer.”

Ezon says that adding wellness components to meetings he’s orchestrated has led to an overwhelmingly

positive response. In fact, one company group experimented with a 7:00 a.m. yoga class. They expected five people, but 50 showed up.

Jeff Vivacqua, senior vice president of marketing at Fairfield, Iowa-based Cambridge Research, helps with the company’s corporate travel programs. Vivacqua notes that Cambridge has an active wellness committee, and the company’s events team is very mindful of wellness as a relevant aspect of the event planning process. The company is recognized for its culture and values, and their wellness approach is an extension of that.

“A focus on wellness communicates to our attendees that we care about all aspects of their lives while providing a well-rounded event experience. We seek to incorporate wellness in ways that make sense for our event attendees and their guests,” says Vivacqua. “We plan events for the whole person, which means more than providing content intended to stimulate think-



“Sedentary learning, while common, is simply less effective. Therefore, in a conference environment, our goal is always to offer activities that exercise the mind and the body.”

Libby Crooker, Vice President of International Support
Anytime Fitness, Hastings, MN

ing. We recognize that wellness is an important part of an attendee’s everyday lifestyle, and we want to reflect that in our events.”

Cambridge offers a variety of wellness-related activity options during events such as yoga and Pilates classes, sports and physical activity-driven off-

site options, such as horseback riding, paddleboarding and bike riding.

“We also host an annual 5k fun run at our national conference, offer spa activities, as well as expand our offerings of healthy food at events,” Vivacqua says. “Our events team sees more companies incorporating exercise into their event schedules while more are getting creative with healthy menus for meals and breaks, as well as ensuring down time is available for individual or group exercise and use of spa offerings.”

Taking the Spa to the Meeting

JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa’s Mindy Miller worked with a corporate event planner who requested a wellness break to refocus the meeting attendees and provide them a relaxing breather during a long meeting.

“Our Lantana Spa, at the JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa, brought spa treatments to them at their meeting space and provided hand massages for tired hands that were taking notes or typing on laptops,” Miller says. “A scent journey of essential oils created an added element of uniqueness as employees could breathe in different essential oils to wake up the senses and re-energize before returning to the meeting.

Brain breaks with healthful, homemade granola bars, mixed nuts, fruits and smoothies is another popular option for meeting planners to request

and fend off the afternoon slump that everyone can experience.”

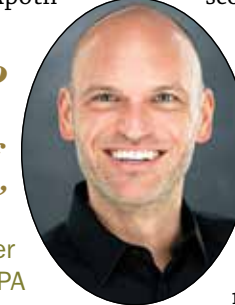
For Jeffrey Cesari, CMP, corporate meeting planner at Philadelphia-based IHG Meetings & Events, wellness is something that is often forgotten about during corporate and incentive programs. By building an optional well-

ness plan to include food and beverage options and fitness, it allows those who want to do something healthful the opportunity to take action because it’s now easily accessible.

“Seeing a fitness option as an agenda item, one is more likely to participate versus hitting that snooze button one more time,” Cesari says. “Many of our

“One new trend we’re seeing is to incorporate fitness with giving back to the community — as part of corporate social responsibility.”

Jeffrey Cesari, CMP, Corporate Meeting Planner
IHG Meetings & Events, Philadelphia, PA



clients are requesting some time of activity. It’s great for teambuilding and health. One new trend we’re seeing is to incorporate fitness with giving back to the community — as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR). We’re now talking with ZogSports to bring them in to help us with a client event. This company organizes sports like kickball or basketball, and the teams from the company compete and play to win a company-sponsored donation to a charity of their choice. It’s a great idea, and clients love it.”

Kavin Schieferdecker from Hilton Anatole Hotel in Dallas, Texas, agrees that there is a rising demand for health and wellness offerings, especially when the activities can be tied in to a larger community involvement component.

“Fitness culture has become an increasingly popular trend within the mainstream market, and it seemed only a matter of time before this trend permeated the meetings industry,” Schieferdecker says. “One experience that stands out in particular is an educational software company that utilized a portion of our outdoor park for a high-energy, deejay-hosted sunrise fitness class for 1500+ people — it was so much fun. It’s great when this emphasis can continue during that company’s corporate meetings or incentive trips, and hopefully serve as a tool to boost productivity and teambuilding.”

Resort Spa News

Surrounded by the inspiring Topa Topa Mountains of Southern California, the 31,000-sf day spa at **Ojai Valley Inn & Spa** is the focal point of this serene resort village, which includes two pools, a fully equipped workout room, Mind and Body Studio, Spa Boutique and Artist Cottage and Apoth-

ecary, one of the few authentic resort art studios.

The resort offers such Mind & Body programs as guided meditation, Pilates mat work, Pilates on the roller, Qi Gong and several types of yoga from gentle to strength and stretch.

In a setting as natural as Ojai, it is only fitting that it is home to one of America’s premier Southern California golf resorts and championship golf courses. This 18-hole golf course plays 6,292 yards with a par 70, rating of 71.0 and a slope of 132.

Forbes Travel Guide recently awarded Eau Spa with its Five Star rating. Situated on the grounds of **Eau Palm**



Guests enjoy vegetarian fare while dining al fresco at The Ranch at Live Oaks Malibu.

Beach Resort & Spa in Palm Beach County, Florida, Eau Spa is one of fewer than 50 spas around the world to earn the prestigious rating.

Catherine Warren, director of Eau Spa, said, “This reflects our team’s dedication to providing guests with unparalleled luxury spa experiences that underscore the ‘Pause, Play and Perfect’ vision — which is where time stands still, worries are forgotten and well-deserved “me time” is all that remains. An Eau Spa visit is a total sensorial experience that’s customized to what your mind and body need at the time with effective and precise technique...always injected with fun.”

Eau Spa is a 42,000-sf adult retreat featuring personalized experiences that are fun and free of judgment. Guests are greeted by “spa fairies” offering gourmet cupcakes and chilled champagne. Nineteen treatment rooms set the stage for beauty and wellness treatments, with technology that customizes light and aroma therapy in addition to musical soundtracks to each guest’s specification. The expansive salon earned a perfect score from the Forbes judges. Relaxation areas include private garden villas with alfresco soaking tubs and waterfall showers; bath lounges; scrub and polish bars; and the Self Centered Garden with airy cabanas, dipping pools, suspended swinging chairs, music and refreshing cocktails.

In addition to the inviting spa treatments, the resort offers several wellness-themed teambuilding and meeting breakout programs, such as a professional deejay mixing class, artistic painting with wine-pairing and group fitness classes including chair yoga, group cycling and meditation.

Enchantment Resort & Spa in Sedona, Arizona is home to Mii amo, recently named one of the world’s top destination spas by *Travel + Leisure*.

Mii amo, a 24,000-sf destination spa at Enchantment offers full- 60- and 90-minute treatments, including massage, wraps, facials, Reiki, Aura-Soma, Watsu, and signature therapies. Highly trained therapists pro-

vide a number of restorative therapies using Mii amo signature blends of oils and lotions. Ongoing activities include high intensity interval training, yoga, Pilates, guided meditation, wellness lectures, and demo classes in cooking, juicing, teas and organic gardening and composting. An additional 16 guest rooms are located at Mii amo. These are available as part of an all-inclusive package, ideal for individual incentive and reward programs.

Enchantment offers guests the opportunity to play Seven Canyons, a private golf course designed by Tom Weiskopf. Tournaments and challenges may be customized for groups, and The Clubhouse offers a spectacular setting for offsite events.

Enchantment Resort provides an excellent location, atmosphere and facilities for teambuilding. Outdoor programs include golf challenges, scavenger hunts, Jeep tours, GPS missions and athletic challenges. Popular indoor activities involve music and film creation,



Eau Spa in Palm Beach County, Florida, is one of fewer than 50 spas around the world to earn the prestigious *Forbes Travel Guide* Five Star rating.

Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

tennis and golf clinics, fitness classes, art classes, Native American programs and stargazing, all of which can be customized for groups. Area activities include jeep tours, horseback riding, hot air ballooning, aerial tours by plane and helicopter, Native

at the Biltmore initiative, an ongoing series of interactive programming designed to inspire guests to pursue a healthful lifestyle. The new program includes fitness classes, healthful cooking courses, the latest trends in spa, tailored menu items within the hotel, and a robust selection of wellness activities throughout the property.

In the future, The Biltmore plans to add Benessere Breaks to its corporate group offerings, designed to provide unique experiences that nourish and motivate attendees ranging from meditation to Zumba. Benessere Wellness Days will include programming aimed at detoxification, enhanced energy and stress release, and will change seasonally. These days will begin with a targeted fitness activity and fresh juice from the Succo Juice and Smoothie Bar, followed by a carefully selected spa therapy that supports the day's objective and a relevant interactive culinary class. The day culminates with a leisurely afternoon at the hotel's iconic pool.

"We've found that combining business and pleasure is extremely rewarding, personally and professionally. It creates a very productive synergy."

Kira Olsen, Director of Operations and Member Services
UNPA, Salt Lake City, Utah



and culinary-themed events such as chili cook-offs, margarita/salsa making and wine tasting.

Also, more than 100 activities are offered weekly, including guided hiking and mountain biking excursions,

American ruin sites, kayaking, wine-tasting, ghost town tours, Grand Canyon excursions, and boutique and gallery shopping.

The culinary team creates customized menus, artfully presented to complement the event's theme and attendees. Meals can be designed to meet gluten-free, vegan, vegetarian or other dietary requests. Healthful, energizing breaks might include colorful handmade artisan sodas, nutrient-packed smoothies, and a tea bar featuring Mii amo's private label white, green and black teas.

The Biltmore Hotel, located in Coral Gables, Florida, debuted the new Benessere

Marriott Caribbean & Latin America Resorts launched a new Fit in Paradise initiative with fitness personality Sarah Dussault also known as Sarah Fit.

As part of the initiative, Sarah Fit is visiting each of the collection's eight resorts to film a series of workout and lifestyle videos, which will be rolled out across her social media channels, as well as those of Marriott Caribbean & Latin America Resorts.

Sarah also is developing property-specific fitness and wellness tip sheets, highlighting the coolest ideas to stay active and the most delicious ways to eat healthfully at each destination. In addition, Sarah is creating menu recommendations highlighted at a designated restaurant in each resort, in addition to crafting a signature Sarah Fit cocktail.

The Dolder Grand in Zurich features a new Meet in Balance package including a new Life Balance spa menu. Groups partake in one of four wellness programs: Relax, Beauty, Vitality and Detox, each of which are customized to meet the group's needs. **C&IT**



Resort at Squaw Creek is a AAA Four Diamond resort nestled in the heart of Squaw Valley, five miles from Lake Tahoe. Surrounded by towering pines, quaking aspens, and massive granite peaks, Resort at Squaw Creek invites you to experience the outdoor adventure and lifestyle of the Lake Tahoe region, and to reconnect with colleagues and friends in a relaxed and comfortable retreat.



The exquisite pool area at Enchantment Resort & Spa in Sedona, Arizona — one of the world's top destination spas.

Credit: Enchantment Resort & Spa



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Lasting connections

HOW
TO BUILD
ENGAGED
COMMUNITIES
FOR THE
LONG-TERM

By John Buchanan

Over the last several years, event marketing has become more important than ever before. What began as a fairly rudimentary process based on rather obvious tactics such as the use of a dedicated website or a Facebook page to generate interest in a meeting or event has steadily evolved into a more complex discipline that increasingly demands precise knowledge of the tools available and how to use them in an integrated way to create excitement and enthusiastic attendance at a company's most important meetings.

"Event marketing has changed over the last year or two, and it continues to change," says Kati Quigley, CMP, senior director, partner community marketing, at Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft, whose Worldwide Partner Conference each July draws 15,000 attendees from 156 countries. "And there are a couple of things that I think stand out recently. One is around creating immersive experiences. Companies are getting better at thinking holistically about their meetings and events and how they get attendees to actually engage with

them from start to finish — before, during and after the meeting. But the point is to have two-way conversations and not just the old one-way conversation."

Another key requirement for successful event marketing today, Quigley says, is "thinking about every aspect of the event and how to ensure that all of them are connected in a way that immerses people in your brand and in the event. And it has only been fairly recently, maybe going back to last year, that more and more companies have really started to think that way."

In a larger sense, that means not thinking of meetings and events as isolated incidents, but as part of the company's ongoing annual and long-term marketing plans, she says. "We don't talk so much anymore about 'events.' We talk now about building communities that can be engaged over the long term. And by engaging them over the longer term, you engage them with your brand and also with your overall marketing plans. It's about more than whatever the next meeting is about. It's about creating those communities and

keeping them engaged and connected 365 days a year."

Tactics and Tools

DG Garrity, CMP, corporate events manager at Chicago-based global business software provider Infor, thinks of cutting-edge event marketing in terms of technology. "For example, we now have pretty robust mobile apps for our meetings and events," she says.

For their citywide user conference in New Orleans last year, which attracted more than 7,000 attendees, Infor created an event-specific, state-of-the-art website. "We built the buzz around our innovations as a company. We focused on our product innovations and the cutting-edge kinds of things we're doing with the cloud. So we built our marketing plan around the idea of creating excitement about our products and the innovation that we bring to our products in a range of different industries."

As primary marketing tools, Garrity and her team used the content-rich website, social media, blogs and email marketing.

Infor has been using an event-specific

website for its annual user conference for nearly a decade, but has also worked steadily to improve upon it each year. The single most important evolution over the last year or two has been the increasing use of creative elements by Infor's in-house design agency, Hook & Loop, which was launched in 2012. "They've continued to improve the website in terms of design and text and made it very easy to use," Garrity says. "But it's also beautiful. It just provides a great user experience. And that's why it is so effective for us."

In its social media platform, Infor used integrated event campaigns for Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. "And we tied them all together with imagery and messaging," Garrity says. "We promoted every aspect of the event, from registration to speakers to educational content and the entertainment that would be presented at the event. We also promoted New Orleans as the destination. So we really focused on promoting all of the reasons why people should want to come to the conference. We didn't just focus on any one thing."

One major key to the success of the social media campaign was to create an interactive experience with customers, not just push out information about the meeting, Garrity says. And that strategy worked well in creating various kinds of conversation and feedback — and excitement — prior to the conference.

Microsoft is also making increasingly aggressive and sophisticated use of social media in the marketing and promotion of its major events, Quigley says. "We have a new strategy now where every single day we put out new content, both externally and internally, through a variety of portals. And those portals include social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. But it's no longer enough just to say you have a Facebook page or a Twitter account. You have to be able to say you're regularly sharing content that is actually important to people. And the frequency of that content is now more important than ever in terms of engaging people and keeping them engaged."

The trick for a global behemoth like Microsoft is to create a sense of intimacy with the company and the brand, and not simply come off as an enterprise blasting

out information to a massive worldwide audience, Quigley explains. "We have to get the message across to every single partner that they are part of our corporate ecosystem and that they matter to us. And that is not easy for a company the size of Microsoft to do. You have to really work at it. But we always strive for that personal connection with every partner. In our social media campaigns, we can't just



Kati Quigley, CMP
Senior Director
Partner Community Marketing
Microsoft
Redmond, WA

"We don't talk so much anymore about 'events.' We talk now about building communities that can be engaged over the long term. ...It's about creating those communities and keeping them engaged and connected 365 days a year."

give the impression that we're pushing out content. We also have to make it clear that when our partners are making comments that we are responding, that we are super-active in communicating with them every day. That's why we have dedicated people that monitor and manage our social media channels. And they respond very quickly to make sure a conversation takes place. That's what is required for real engagement. And that is a constant process that represents a lot of work."

Another vital and highly effective weapon in Garrity's Infor arsenal is blogging.

"In order to have consistent messaging, we used a lot of the same basic kinds of information we used on the website and for the social media campaign," she says. "And we also focused the blogs on the same major milestones we did in the social media campaign — things like registration, education sessions, speakers, entertainment and the destination."

Quigley is also finding that event-related blogging is now one of the most powerful ways to market an event. "The reason blogs work so well is that you're hearing a personal voice, a personal message," she says. "And we offer blogs from the executive perspective and the partner perspective. And a blog is yet another way to turn communication into a two-way conversation and allow people to respond." And the steady trend, Quigley says, is now toward more and more response from and meaningful dialogue with partners.

Looking to the Future

As technology-based event marketing has matured over the last several years, many major companies have focused on being pioneers in the next generation of genuine innovation.

One of those companies is Cisco in San Jose, California. "What we have been doing over the course of the last 10 years is undertaking an evolution toward a more data-driven and strategic approach to our events," says Mary Fehrstron, Cisco's director of global event strategy, global marketing and corporate communications. She oversees planning of about 110 meetings and events each year, both domestic and international.

"My job is to be the link between the integrated marketing organization and the global events planning team."

Defining Success

Her team's mission is to drive a portfolio of meetings that are most related to Cisco's overall marketing plan. "And within that, we drive what we call the 'experience design process' for each of those individual events," Fehrstron says. "So we really focus on what events we want to invest our resources in, and then the

Mary Fehrstron

Director Of Global Event Strategy, Global Marketing and Corporate Communications
Cisco, San Jose, CA

next step is when it's time to kick off the planning for that event, we focus on what we actually want to accomplish with that event. We define what success will look like. And then my counterpart on the planning side takes our blueprint and executes it."

Fehrstron believes that the most cutting-edge way to market meetings and events is to position them as a strategic marketing platform for the company as a whole. "We are the only discipline within marketing that actually has a very rich opportunity to engage directly with customers and partners, as well as the press and analysts," she says. "Then we allow all of the other marketing disciplines within the company to take advantage of the foundational work that we do."

She also believes that such a strategically focused meeting model is of extreme importance to the meeting industry at large, particularly since post-recession budgets are under more scrutiny and require more justification than ever before.

"That means that meetings need to be positioned as more of a strategic marketing asset and not just an event," she says.

The key to future success, she says, is intense focus on key attendees such as major customers.

"I think the area where there is the greatest opportunity moving forward as an industry is much more of a targeted marketing approach for events," she says. "For example, Cisco has identified about 526 companies that we care deeply about and which we consider 'transformational accounts,' or key accounts from a sales perspective. Those companies are the ones we focus on in terms of evolving our services and relationships over time. So what we try to do in the global events organization is to really figure out how to treat them differently and how to engage with them. We look at things like how we know when they show up at our booth and how we can engage with them when they do. We also look at what success will look like when they walk out the door after engaging with us.

"So based on the massive and growing amount of data we have been able to collect, we have a lot of important information before one of those customers ever

"We take the approach that marketing ourselves to them (customers) is about becoming a 'matchmaker' of solutions with challenges. That's how we make sure we make their attendance at one of our events a really valuable experience for them."

shows up," she says. "For example, we know what they care about, what is most important to them in terms of their relationship with Cisco. We also know what they worry about, what keeps them up at night in their business. We know the problems they are trying to solve. So we take the approach that marketing ourselves to them is about becoming a 'matchmaker' of solutions with challenges. That's how we make sure we make their attendance at one of our events a really valuable experience for them."

Laser-like Focus

That kind of laser-like focus on major customers is a fairly recent development, Fehrstron says. "It takes time to be able to develop the resources to be able to do that in a way that is truly meaningful. But now, we're able to get a lot of information during the registration process or from third-party trade show organizations so we are able to know who is showing up, who they are within their organization and what they care about. And then from there, we look at the best way to engage with them at the meeting in a way that is meaningful for them and successful for us. It's almost like creating individualized little programs within the bigger picture of the meeting program."

The bottom line result of such focus is more precisely targeted marketing based

on a specific subpopulation of attendees. "Once the right customers have been targeted, then it's a matter of creating the right content and having the right assets to delve even deeper into the customer-focused marketing strategy," she says. "And those are the kinds of things we are working on now."

That data-driven approach will continue to evolve over the next few years, with the clear objective being ever more granular data on customers and their needs, Fehrstron says. "And in terms of my job and my team, the focus will be more and more on what are we doing for the targets rather than what are we doing for the masses? And that will represent a fundamental shift in the way we market our events."

The innovative tactic will become increasingly dependent on the sophisticated use of data mining and analysis tools that are now being developed and brought to market under the banner of business intelligence.

"It's sort of like creating a customer relationship management (CRM) system for our events," Fehrstron says. "And part of it is about deploying the latest marketing apps that determine who someone is before they even get to the company's website. For example, you can now read from an IP address that the company is a health care provider. Then in turn, you see to it that the health care provider gets information and case studies and so on that are directly related to health care. And that makes their first landing experience on your website much more relevant and valuable to them. And from there, you just constantly look for ways to make your engagement with people more personalized and precise in terms of why they should come to your conference."

Quigley agrees that the use of business intelligence technologies will ultimately become the most cutting-edge marketing tools of them all.

"In the future, that is the way more and more business at meetings will be driven," she says. "And it will be about the fact that the more you know about people, the more likely you are to be able to do business with them at your events and maintain that relationship over time." **C&IT**



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Credits: Orange Photography



Many participants at MPI's 2015 WEC, held in August in San Francisco, earned certificates at pre-conference sessions.

Lifelong Learning Options Abound for Career Development

By Maura Keller



Attendees at WEC learn about certifications, certificates and designations in the meetings and event industry and how they can help propel one's career.

Continuous learning is essential for everyone, but especially in the meeting industry as meeting professionals face increasing demands from their clients and employers to prove their skills in a constantly changing industry.

Just ask Joanna Oliver, CMP, CMM, manager of business travel and conference planning at EmCare in Dallas, Texas, who participated in the first CMM program in November 2014, which was jointly sponsored by MPI and GBTA at the Hard Rock Hotel in the Riviera Maya. Professors from the Darden School of Business presented three full days of intense training in topics such as negotiation, operational and financial performance, leadership strategies, flexible budgeting, balanced scorecard, continuous improvement programs and root cause analysis.

Oliver believes it is very important for meeting planners to participate in certification programs and continuing education to enhance respect for the profession and advance individual careers.

"Choose the programs that relate directly to your job and you will have more success at retaining the knowledge," Oliver says. "However, also choose some programs that are outside your knowledge base to stimulate your creative thinking. Just one nugget from a seminar or webinar can spark a wealth of new ideas that could be applied to your programs."

Continuing education, including certification programs, helps meeting planners stay abreast of the latest trends, technology and regulations. Programs with designations such as the Certificate in Meeting Management (CMM) and the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) allow meeting professionals to showcase their skills and knowledge, putting them ahead of their competition in the job market.

Today's programs are far more learner-centered, innovative and relevant to immediate meeting planner and company needs than ever before. No longer simply a reward for high-potential planners or a chance to renew an individual's knowledge base, certification programs are increasingly harnessed as strategic

tools for companies and their employees to stay ahead of the game. At the same time, these programs also have been undergoing profound changes — resulting in leaner and meaner training options.

In August 2015, Meeting Professionals International (MPI) formally introduced the new MPI Academy, an entity that encompasses and connects all of the education and learning experiences MPI delivers within the meeting and event industry and beyond. In addition, the association has unveiled enhancements to its professional development offerings, including a variety of new certificate programs and experiential events.

The MPI Academy aligns with the Meeting and Business Event Competency Standards (MBECS) and is designed to provide multifaceted learning opportunities for meeting professionals at all lev-

els. Its portfolio is comprised of training courses, certificate programs, streaming sessions from MPI events, webinars and tools such as the new MPI Professional Development Roadmap, which helps individuals map out their career, pursue continuing education, and supplement their professional development.

According to Stephanie Arehart, senior director of professional development at MPI, the MPI Academy is an exciting new entity that showcases professional development and educational opportunities in the meeting and event industry.

"It was started to provide an easy way for those in the industry to gain access to the certificate programs, training courses, webinars and other education — both MPI-developed as well as partner offerings — that will help them with

Guide to Industry Certifications

What do these acronyms mean?

CMP: Certified Meeting Professional

CMM: Certificate in Meeting Management

CMMM: Certified Medical Meeting Manager

CMP-HC: Healthcare Certification

CAE: Certified Association Executive

CDME: Certified Destination Marketing Executive

CEM: Certified in Exhibition Management

CGMP: Certified Government Meeting Professional

CHA: Certified Hotel Administrator

CHSE: Certified Hospitality Sales Executive

CHME: Certified Hospitality Marketing Executive

CITE: Certified Incentive Travel Executive

CPCE: Certified Professional Catering Executive

CSEP: Certified Special Events Professional

CSP: Certified Speaking Professional

DMCP: Destination Management Certified Professional

SMPC: Sustainable Meeting Professional Certificate



MPI's 2015 World Education Congress (WEC) was held in August in San Francisco and delivered 140 total education sessions plus the keynotes, of which most qualified for clock hours.



“In our industry, there are always new, improved and more efficient ways of doing things. Keeping abreast of these things will, in turn, make us as planners more valuable employees.”

HEATHER BORNEMAN, CMP, CMM
Manager, Meetings, Events and Tradeshow
Teleflex, Reading, PA

their individual learning goals,” Arehart says. “The MPI Academy makes it very easy to identify professional development options that make that most sense for each individual.”

Currently, the CMP, CMM and Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate (HMCC) are the most popular certification and certificate programs available to meeting professionals at the MPI Academy.

As Arehart explains, the CMP allows meeting planners to demonstrate that they are certified on the basics of meeting and event planning. The CMM provides a more distinguished designation for senior level meeting professionals and provides education offered at an MBA level. And the HMCC is crucial for those meeting professionals working with medical meetings as this certificate program provides knowledge regarding related government regulations.

“Stacked credentials and specialized certificate programs are current trends

for all adult learning, and that includes meeting professionals,” Arehart says. “As the industry evolves, meeting professionals want to demonstrate specific expertise, and certificate programs such as the Sustainable Meeting Professional Certificate (SMPC) are a great way to do that.

Stacking credentials allows learners

to take various pieces that eventually add up to a higher-level designation. The MPI Academy is currently exploring some options including four certificates in the MPI Experiential Events Series where meeting professionals could achieve a higher designation by obtaining all four.

Heather Borneman, CMP, CMM, manager of meetings, events and trade shows at Teleflex in Reading, Pennsylvania, recently attended a multiday training session for her CMM, along with 20 or so other meeting and event professionals.

“During that training we heard from industry experts, examined various case studies and financial statements, completed multiple teambuilding exercises, and learned to look at obstacles from the point of view of others in order to determine better, more efficient ways of doing things,” Borneman says. “We also completed a Darden 360 exercise where we learned a lot about ourselves and

“Choose some programs that are outside your knowledge base to stimulate your creative thinking. Just one nugget from a seminar or webinar can spark a wealth of new ideas that could be applied to your programs.”

JOANNA OLIVER, CMP, CMM, Manager
Business Travel and Conference Planning
EmCare, Dallas TX



New Academy Offerings

Earlier this year, MPI began launching new education programs and has more planned in the coming months — most of which are eligible for clock hours and are designed for both planners and suppliers. Recently launched programs include the following. The HMCC and CMP-HC were offered as pre-conference sessions prior to WEC 2015.

Meeting Essentials – Designed for novice and mid-level professionals, this program will help participants enhance their skills and competencies. The courses cover fundamental knowledge needed to execute and deliver high-quality, relevant meetings, and are recommended in preparation for the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) exam.

Sustainable Meeting Professional Certificate (SMPC) – This intensive certificate course provides education, tools and applicable instruction to immediately begin practicing sustainable meeting planning. It is built around learning and using the Sustainable Meeting Planning Program (SMPP), which is the only sustainable meeting planning tool independently certified by iCompli Sustainability, a division of BPA Worldwide, the premier sustainable meeting planning audit firm in the U.S. for ISO 20121 and APEX/ASTM compliance. MPI delivers the program in partnership with Avila Government Services Inc.

Meetings and Events at Sea Certificate – Presented in partnership with the Cruise Line International Association (CLIA), the certificate course explores the advantages of hosting events on cruise ships compared to traditional venues. This interactive session highlights which types of meetings or events should be conducted onboard as well as provides valuable cost comparisons.

New programs slated for release late in 2015 include:

Experiential Event Series – MPI is partnering with high-profile events in key areas such as sports, entertainment, culinary and mega-events to provide unique, intimate education experiences, including behind-the-scenes tours and discussions. These programs will include certificates in areas such as event production and sports event management. The first two events include the production of the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City this September and the Epcot Food & Wine Festival in Orlando in November.

Sustainable Practitioner Certificate (SPC) – The SPC program is an interactive training session designed for individuals wishing to focus on sustainability within the meeting and event industry and covers the basics of sustainability, how to create a sustainability policy, measurement, reporting and more. MPI is partnering with Positive Impact, a UK-based not-for-profit corporation, to deliver the courses. Class dates will be published online soon.

Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate (HMCC) Refresher – Launching in October, this webinar has been developed to keep MPI's HMCC recipients abreast of constantly changing health care meeting compliance regulations, cross-border compliance, and other health care trends. It is endorsed by St. Louis University and is required every two years to maintain the HMCC and related seal of endorsement.

CMP-Healthcare Certification (CMP-HC) Boot Camp – This MPI training is intended for meeting professionals working within the life sciences sector and will commence in fall 2015. It serves as a comprehensive study preparation course for the CMP Healthcare Certification exam and will utilize an instructional design program that includes an implementation guide, instructor notes, participant workbook and an app.

— MK

what our managers/colleagues thought of our capabilities. After the group training sessions, we were tasked with completing a number of online classes. Following that, we had to complete a project, utilizing what we learned and how to implement moving forward.”

Expanding Your Reach

Laura Bell Way, CMP, CMM, senior manager, global customer events at Autodesk, applied for the CMM program in the first year of taking on a new strategic meetings management role at her company. She had already passed the CMP exam more than 10 years earlier, and felt that this was the time and the job role in which the CMM

certificate process would help her succeed in her job.

“After my application was accepted, it took me over a year to start the course, as there were some changes in the structure of the CMM program taking place, as well as limitations of my time due to travel schedules,” Bell Way says. “The first stage of the process was a week-long program run by the University of Virginia Darden School of Business. It was long days of business strategy, process and real-life scenarios that are helpful for planners to craft and communicate their programs and goals to the corporate executive level.”

The second stage of the process was done in a virtual environment, review-

ing industry sessions in the GBTA online portal and submitting takeaways on each one. The third stage of the CMM was to create a project using the skills and strategy learned through the program, and put them into a thesis paper to be presented to the CMM board.

“Beyond what is learned in the sessions offered, the networking offers opportunities to hear from planners and managers who may share some of the same challenges — and may also share great recommendations on destinations, venues and vendors. It is such an important part of ‘staying on your game’ in your job role,” Bell Way says.

Lynnette Offen Gerber, M.A., CMP, CMM, manager of global accounts at



“The networking offers opportunities to...share some of the same challenges and recommendations on destinations, venues and vendors. It is such an important part of ‘staying on your game’ in your job role.”

LAURA BELL WAY, CMP CMM
Senior Manager Global Customer Events
Autodesk Inc., San Francisco, CA

HelmsBriscoe in Adams, Minnesota, stresses that the biggest trends regarding certification and continuous education involve taking key general business subject matter and principles and applying them specifically to this industry — whether it is ROI, social media marketing, app development, participative (versus passive) learning, financial fitness and multigenerational participants.

Indeed, while the above topics are applicable to this industry, Bell Way, also advises planners to look outside the immediate hospitality industry for certifications that really can help in a job role. “Certification and education

in procurement or project management, for instance, would be great additions to a planner’s resume and help vault a planner into a higher level role,” Bell Way says.

In the Know

Borneman believes it is important for meeting professionals to continue their education in order to keep up on current trends and technologies.

“Having that knowledge will help show your company or organization the value you bring to their organization,” Borneman says. “In our industry, there are always new, improved and more

efficient ways of doing things. Keeping abreast of these things will in turn, make us as planners more valuable employees.”

Kelly Bishop, CMP, CMM, manager, meeting and event strategy for Liberty Mutual Insurance in Boston, Massachusetts, agrees. “Our industry is constantly being challenged with the latest trends and new ways of doing business. The education piece that is learned from these certification programs is valuable and helps support the day-to-day work,” Bishop says. “For example, in the CMM course I recently attended, we learned about root-cause problem-solving. My company is moving into a ‘lean type’ workplace environment in which the practices I learned at the CMM training have helped me embrace the implementation here at work.”

Bishop’s advice to corporate meeting and event planners is to target a certification. Understand what you need to possess to qualify for the certification and ask your manager to help create a plan with you that can give you the right tools needed to apply and qualify for the program.

“There is never the perfect time — select a certification and go after it,” Bishop says. “Make the time you need to invest in yourself, because no one else will.”

Offen Gerber recently earned her CMM designation and believes corporate meeting planners need to pick a certification program that they are passionate about and want to learn about.

“Then it becomes not something else on your to-do list, but rather something that inspires you and motivates you to learn,” Offen Gerber says.

“Remember that it’s very important to keep growing and expanding your knowledge base and staying on top of industry trends. It’s important to always evolve as a meeting professional. If you don’t, you will become extinct. Even if you have been in the industry for 20 years and think you know it all, the learning process itself is good for your cognitive abilities and there are always new avenues to explore in our ever-changing industry.” **C&IT**



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Destination

Most people don't think "diverse and varied" when they conjure up images of Florida — but they should. Jacksonville and Naples are nothing alike. Ditto Destin and Palm Beach. Orlando and the Florida Keys are worlds unto themselves — very different worlds. And the Atlantic Coast offers a completely different history, aesthetic and vibe than the Gulf Coast. Tying it all together is abundant sun and sand, and in Miami, a sizzling Latin beat adds spice to the mix.

ORLANDO

Inland and without the inviting presence of the ocean, Orlando sets itself apart with a heady mix of thrills, sports, theatrical entertainment, an ever-evolving dining scene, urban sophistication with international flair and, of course, magic — magic that includes all the ways Orlando and Walt Disney World combine to increase attendance numbers.

That was one reason Amanda Young, Americas event leader with GE Healthcare, set her annual IT educational conference Centricity Live at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin

Hotel in May 2014. The conference offers thought leadership, best-practice sharing, interactive demos, continuing education credits (CEs) and more.

"We chose the Swan and Dolphin because we thought it would not only provide the meeting space we needed to produce a conference for 1,700 people, but also because the hotel paid attention to our goals and objectives for the event and worked with us to ensure the hotel could help us succeed," Young says. "Since Orlando is a tourist destination, it gave us a chance to provide our attendees a good experience with access to the amusement parks. We knew we could grow the attendance numbers in Orlando, so we made sure to produce a quality conference that attendees benefited from in terms of education and experience."

The entire event was held in the hotel, including a performance and talk by singer-songwriter Melissa Etheridge and an appearance by Mickey Mouse at the awards ceremony, as was 75 percent of the room block. Overflow housing was within walking distance. The hotel, Young says, "offered everything we needed."

Including a top-notch staff. "The staff was so passionate about service and quality of product," Young notes. "You could tell they enjoyed what they were doing. The GM was down to earth, the convention services manager had just won best

CSM for Sheraton worldwide, and our sales manager had won sales manager of the year for Sheraton worldwide. Accolades aside, their expertise and professionalism really impacted our event for the good."

Food, Young says, was integral to the overall success of the event. "The presentation of food was part of the experience. They used all the latest gadgets and presentation trends to feed our group. We hosted an interactive drink station at one of our receptions that customers are still talking about. You could rim your glass with different sugars, pop rocks or chocolate, and then the bartender would fill the glass with a drink. It was so clever. It shows you don't have to spend a lot of money on food or beverage to have an interactive experience. They came up with those ideas for us."

The hotel is not owned by Disney but they have a special relationship that allowed Young to get Mickey at her event, which she calls a "major hit for the audience." The hotel and Disney also worked with Young to provide park passes and tour options and set up a special website that attendees could link to, and they made sure not to sell activities during meeting times.

Orlando, Young adds, proved to be customer-friendly in terms of access to the city and rates. "Orlando gives you the chance to enhance the experiential elements of your event as

well as use a geographic location to grow attendance. Focus on those two areas when building your marketing plan," she suggests. "But remember you have your own company and conference brand so don't let your conference be overwhelmed by the Disney brand; use it to complement your conference experience."

Then again, there's no holding back on some Disney elements. "I got to meet Mickey Mouse in private," Young says. "I was star struck!"

In addition to offering up Mickey and other Disney elements, the hotel, which is midway through a \$125 million renovation, also offers a provocative and creative collection of spaces and venues for functions. Groups can hold events in the hotel's giant freezers, banquet kitchens and back hallways, among others.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Palm Beach County extends from Boca Raton in the south to Jupiter in the north. Its heart is Palm Beach, which has been a haven for the well-heeled since Henry Flagler opened his first hotel there in 1894.

Today, Palm Beach retains its Gilded Age glamor, but adds nature, sports, and contemporary aesthetics and amenities appreciated by travelers of all ages and interests.

FLORIDA

Variations on an Already Near Perfect Theme

The Naples Grande Beach Resort offers 83,000 sf of meeting space and a spectacular setting on the Gulf of Mexico.

By Christine Loomis

Destinie Ames, executive assistant with Moe's Southwest Grill, part of the Focus Brands group of restaurants, set Moe's FAC Meeting at Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa in June for 26 attendees. One criterion for the meeting site: that it be on or near a Florida beach. Additionally, Ames was looking for an



A boardroom at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel.

Credit: Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel

affordable room price and quality. With the help of Susan Raible from HPN Global, Ames found just that. Eau Palm Beach was exactly what the group wanted.

"Our event manager, Carrie Zimmerman, stood out," says Ames. "Carrie was fun and helpful. She handled last-minute changes with ease and went above and beyond to ensure that our needs and expectations were met. The hotel is also a beautiful property, from the gorgeous spa to the fun and bright hotel décor."

"Orlando gives you the chance to enhance the experiential elements of your event as well as use a geographic location to grow attendance."

Amanda Young, Americas Event Leader
GE Healthcare, Daniel Island, SC



Ames lauds the room amenities (beach bag and flip-flops) and the fact that hotel staff was flexible, accommodating and helpful, including poolside servers whom Ames calls "attentive and fun."

The hotel served as the primary meeting venue. "Our meeting was held in the Ocean II Ballroom," Ames says. "Our breakfast and lunch were held in the other side, the Ocean I Ballroom, and we used catering for breakfast, lunch and din-



The oceanfront Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa on Palm Beach island has more than 30,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

ner. We set a dinner in the Angle Restaurant one night, a night that the restaurant was closed so we had the place to ourselves. During the summer months, the Eau has a summer menu offering discounted pricing, which is helpful if you are working with a smaller budget."

Ames says Palm Beach County was the destination of choice for several reasons, including the beaches and the variety of dining, shopping and activities. "On the nights when no group dinner was planned, smaller groups ventured to Delray Beach for dining," she says. "Delray is about a 20-minute drive south and offers a multitude of restaurant options. Cut 432 is a modern steak house, Vic & Angelo's offers classic Italian with alfresco street-side dining and Buddha Garden & Buddha Sky Bar had delicious sushi. John G's, right near the Eau, was a popular breakfast spot for those days when breakfast wasn't catered by the hotel."

Among the highlights of the meeting was a group tour on a catamaran. "We used Kirkland Event & Destination Services for the excursion. It was a great way to cruise around Palm Beach County and see the beautiful homes and enjoy the water."

Transportation was a positive as well. "Getting in and out of the airport was easy," Ames says, as was travel around town. "There is little to no

traffic and there are a multitude of transportation options including car services, taxis and Uber, which is what our group used to travel into Delray."

While Ames calls the hotel "a gorgeous property with wonderful staff," she notes a few things planners should consider when booking a meeting there.

"If you plan to have an evening event by the pool, it will require lighting. Due to its beachfront location and the preservation of the sea turtles, the hotel's outdoor lighting is minimal and therefore requires you to purchase lighting," she says. "Additionally, there are limited offsite restaurants within walking distance. Fortunately, the onsite restaurants are delicious, and both Delray and West Palm are just a short car ride away, but it is something to keep in mind."

The hotel underwent a recent update of all 309 guest rooms, its fresh look created by potter, designer, author and part-time Palm Beach resident Jonathan Adler. Think Isle of Capri, Santorini and Palm Beach fused into one sophisticated seaside location — with every guest room offering a view of the ocean.

JACKSONVILLE

At the northern end of Florida's Atlantic shoreline, Jacksonville gets much of its character from the 310-mile-



The Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront convention hotel features prime event space along the St. Johns River.

Credit: Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

long St. Johns River, which flows through downtown and out to Jacksonville's beaches where it empties into the Atlantic. Many of the city's top meetings hotels, including the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, the region's largest convention hotel, stand along the river's urban banks, and the revitalized riverfront area offers plenty for attendees and planners. The hotel has just completed a major renovation of all 963 guest rooms, the rooftop fitness center and Regency Club Lounge. In addition, the Hyatt Regency, which boasts more than 110,000 sf of flexible meeting space, has added six hard-walled meeting rooms, located on the fourth level of the hotel's Terrace Building. The 354-room Omni Jacksonville, with 14,000 sf of meeting space, is also located along the Riverwalk on the St. Johns River.

Jacksonville boasts 22 miles of beaches, providing ample opportunities for water sports and activities — one of the favorites being deep-sea fishing charters. Foxy Lady Cruises offers private yacht charters for up to 149 for corporate events. A popular oceanfront lodging option is One Ocean Resort & Spa in Atlantic Beach, which offers 193 guest rooms and 10,000 sf of meeting space.

Jacksonville claims a long and diverse list of unique offsite venues. Among those most frequently touted by Visit Jacksonville are the Epping Forest estate, the Atrium at the Jacksonville Main Library, Tap Room at Aardwolf Brewing Company, the rooftop at the Museum of Science and History, the Skyline Dining and Conference Center on the 42nd floor of the Bank of America building, the Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum, The University Club of Jacksonville, The River Club, The Jacksonville Equestrian Center, The Ritz Theatre and Museum and the grounds at the Beaches Museum & History Park.

GULF COAST & DESTIN

Destin is part of Florida — but not. For one thing, it has more of a Southern vibe than the rest of the state thanks to its closest neighbors, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. Set between the striking green Gulf waters on one side and Choctawhatchee Bay on the other, the area provides extraordinary visual appeal. Among planners' top choices for meet-

ings here are Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort, which can accommodate groups of up to about 1,600 people, and Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, which recently added a third ballroom to its meeting space and can accommodate groups of up to 2,000 attendees. The resort also expanded its spa and over the last three years has put more than \$30 million into transforming much of its space.

Sanibel Island on Florida's southwestern Gulf Coast sits just off Fort Myers, about an hour northwest of Naples. Connected by bridges to the mainland on one end and Captiva Island on the other, the 12-mile-long barrier island offers far more than its diminutive size suggests. There are plenty of hotels and restaurants to choose from, and enough activities and sweeping beaches to keep attendees well engaged.

Sundial Beach Resort & Spa provided a good base for Sarah Brozna, senior program manager with Road Scholar educational learning adventures, created by Elderhostel Inc. She brought a group of 34 to the resort for a week in February — just one of 12 Road Scholar groups at Sundial in 2015.

"Sundial is located in an ideal setting right on the beach, has nice-sized meeting space and is reasonably priced for Sanibel," she says. "The staff went above and beyond to ensure we were accommodated. Given that many members of



The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa in Northwest Florida's Panhandle overlooks the Gulf of Mexico.

Credit: Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

our group were seniors, staff went out of their way to assist them, using a golf cart for transportation on resort property. They were very pleasant to work with while planning the group events and took excellent care of our participants."

Brozna used the resort's meeting space for lectures and meals several times during the week. "One room we used for our private lunches had floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Gulf, which created a perfect setting and added to the special event. The rooms were comfortable and the resort had a variety of AV options."

The catering staff worked with Brozna and the participants.



Credit: Sundial Beach Resort & Spa

Sundial Beach Resort & Spa on Southwest Florida's Sanibel Island offers 11 event rooms, many with Gulf views.

"We had preselected meal options that the group was able to select from on the day of the event," Brozna says. "Options were varied and featured a variety of local produce. The staff customized meals for members who needed to make modifications due to dietary requests and they were extremely attentive to our needs."

Brozna also used offsite options. "There are many local venues that are able to accommodate groups for meals," she

"(The catamaran excursion) was a great way to cruise around Palm Beach County and see the beautiful homes."

Destinie Ames, Executive Assistant
Moe's Southwest Grill, Atlanta, GA



says. "We particularly like working with Cip's Place, George and Wendy's Corner Grill and The Jacaranda. Also, Rosie's Grill has the best ice cream on the island!"

Sanibel is known for exceptional shelling, something Brozna's group took advantage of. "We had a lecture by a conchologist who later took the group shelling on the expansive beach at the resort," she says. "Our marine expert was able to later describe and identify what the participants found. After the event, our expert mentioned that the beach by the Sundial had the best shelling on the island."

Shelling wasn't the only activity. "The participants enjoyed lectures about the history, nature and ecological challenges the island faces, and they were able to visit many of the local sites, including J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, the Bailey Shell Museum and Sanibel Historic Village, to name a few," Brozna says. "The chartered Tarpon Bay Refuge Tram through Ding Darling was a standout activity for our group. The naturalists are knowledgeable, and the excursion featured local wildlife with many photo stops. Mornings are the best time for spotting wildlife."

The iconic Fontainebleau Miami Beach has earned AAA Four Diamond status every year since 2008.



Credit: Fontainebleau Miami Beach

MIAMI & THE KEYS

Miami infuses its city sophistication with Latin heat. Add a long strip of beaches, bright sun, easy access, fabulous dining and eclectic nightlife options, and it's a setting that easily draws attendees from the Americas and beyond. The city has multiple convention centers. Miami Convention Center is located beside the Hyatt Regency Miami while Miami Airport Convention Center is adjacent to the airport. Miami Beach Convention Center is currently undergoing a \$500 million expansion and renovation. Phase one will wrap at the end of this year, phase two in December 2016, phase three a year later with final completion set for summer 2018.

Of particular interest to corporate and incentive planners is the 2015 suite upgrade at the Fontainebleau Miami Beach. Four luxury suites ranging from 950 to 2,400 sf now feature curated art, marble and a soft, neutral palette with sweeping water views.

The Florida Keys, where nature is front and center, could not be more different. Laidback and enhanced by national parks at both ends of the island chain and a marine sanctuary offshore, the Keys give planners opportunities to mix casual with quintessential barefoot elegance.

Key Largo, at the northern end of the Keys just 68 miles from Miami, is home to the Ocean Reef Club, a private membership facility that welcomes select groups for meetings, corporate retreats and conferences. The property — which has a range of accommodations that include 175 inn rooms, 100 spacious one-, two- and three-bedroom villas and private homes — spreads over 2,500 acres and boasts its own private airport and private 175-slip marina, two golf courses, tennis, croquet and 30,000 sf of meeting space, including a ballroom that can hold 700 and a rooftop terrace for 175 with views of the marina.

Attendees can take advantage of a range of group activities beyond golf and spa at Ocean Reef Club: Angling aficionados can experience deep-sea, flats, reef or backcountry fishing off the shores of the resort; other group activities can include chartered yacht dinners, beachside events, eco-tours and



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Credit: Ocean Reef Club

Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo will unveil its newest meeting venue, Carysfort Hall, in February 2016.

teambuilding programs such as golf cart scavenger hunts, cardboard boat regattas and beach olympics, to name a few.

In the end, Florida's perennial sun, sand and surf are just part of the attendee draw. Creative meeting space, settings from low-key beachy to supremely elegant, Gulf and Atlantic and a range of amenities mean choosing just one city or town is the hardest part.

NEW & NOTABLE

ORLANDO

I-Drive 360 opened in May. The \$200 million retail, dining and entertainment complex revolves around the 400-foot-tall Orlando Eye observation wheel. In addition to a range of restaurants the complex includes a 420-foot-tall spinning attraction, the StarFlyer; Madame Tussauds Orlando; Sea Life Aquarium; and Skeletons: Animals Unveiled.

Escapology Orlando brings a new kind of entertainment to I-Drive with its first U.S. location. The attraction challenges guests to be their own heroes in a thrilling game of adventure and mystery. Teams of up to six players are locked in a themed room with just 60 minutes to combine clues, solve puzzles and discover the key to escape.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel has completed the redesign of all 758 guest rooms at the Swan Hotel. It's part of a multiphase, multiyear, \$125 million renovation plan to transform every guest room in both the Swan and Dolphin hotels. The first phase of the 1,509-room Dolphin starts later this year.



Credit: Visit Orlando

The Orlando Eye observation wheel anchors the new I-Drive 360 retail, dining and entertainment complex, which opened in May.

Embassy Suites by Hilton Orlando - Lake Buena Vista South recently completed a \$13 million dollar renovation to all 334 suites, creating the new prototype of the entire Embassy brand.

The 400-room Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek is currently undergoing a meeting space expansion set for completion in May 2016.

Opening in phases through 2016, Downtown Disney will transform into Disney Springs. The first two restaurants to be announced, The Boathouse and Morimoto Asia, will feature private dining rooms. Disney's MagicBands, which attendees can use to make dining reservations and access attractions, also can be color-coordinated to a company's brand or meeting theme.

Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista recently completed a large remodel of public spaces and guest rooms, and a \$7 million renovation of the meeting space and function area. A new walkway bridge between the hotel and the new Disney Springs is set to be completed this fall.



Credit: Disney Parks and Resorts

Rendering of the marketplace in Disney Springs — formerly Downtown Disney — which opens in phases through 2016.

Loews Sapphire Falls Resort will become the fifth onsite hotel at Universal Orlando Resort, featuring 1,000 rooms and suites with a casual Caribbean theme, when it opens summer 2016. That should be in time for the opening of Universal's highly anticipated new attraction, Skull Island: Reign of King Kong.

Another entertainment option in town is SeaWorld Orlando, which recently debuted a new Clyde & Seamore's Sea Lion High show in April. SeaWorld also has a variety of venues, and groups can book some of its furry and finned residents to make guest appearances.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

The new 400-room Hilton West Palm Beach, being constructed next to the 350,000-sf Palm Beach County Convention Center, has announced that it will open ahead of schedule in January 2016. The convention hotel, which will house 24,000 sf of meeting space, will be accessible via covered walkway from the convention center.

JACKSONVILLE

Several "Jax" hotels are getting an update. The Crowne Plaza Jacksonville Riverfront is undergoing a full-scale ren-



Credit: Hilton West Palm Beach

The Hilton West Palm Beach opens next to the Palm Beach County Convention Center this January.

ovation and will be re-flagged as the DoubleTree by Hilton Jacksonville Riverfront when it reopens this fall.

The Courtyard Oceanfront in Jacksonville Beach completed a \$1.3 million renovation in March.

As for new venues, the most intriguing may be The BARge, a floating, flexible rental venue on the St. Johns River, scheduled to open late 2015.

In nearby Ponte Vedra Beach, the AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club recently completed a multimillion-dollar renovation of its Peyton House accommodations and oceanfront Surf Club, while also introducing the new Tavern Lounge and upgrading the complimentary Wi-Fi system property-wide. The resort will complete a multimillion-dollar renovation of its Ocean House accommodations in fall 2017.

Shoot for the Pin, a new interactive golf-oriented group activity is being offered to inject a little friendly group competition into the meeting agenda.

SOUTHWESTERN GULF COAST

Following an \$18 million renovation completed earlier this year, the Waldorf Astoria Naples in Southwest Florida transitioned to the independently owned Naples Grande Beach Resort & Naples Grande Golf Course. The 474-room hotel has 83,000 sf of meeting space, five restaurants and bars, three pools and 100-foot waterslide. A scenic boardwalk to the beach winds through a protected mangrove sanctuary.



Credit: Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando

Loews Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando has just completed a major meeting space expansion.



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Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

Loews Sapphire Falls Resort will become the fifth onsite hotel at Universal Orlando Resort when it opens in summer 2016.

“We had a lecture by a conchologist who later took the group shelling on the expansive beach at the resort.”

Sarah Brozna, Senior Program Manager
Road Scholar, Boston, MA

MIAMI AND THE KEYS

The Miami Worldcenter, which breaks ground later this year, will be anchored by a new, \$750 million 1,800-room Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter Hotel & Expo Center that will include more than 600,000 sf of convention facilities, including a 100,000-sf ground floor exhibition hall, a 65,000-sf main ballroom, a 1,500-seat theater and 390,000 sf of meeting rooms and event space.

The hip YVE Hotel Miami recently added more than 2,000 sf of meeting space to its Bayfront venue, expanding to 3,000 sf in total.

Loews Miami Beach Hotel upgraded its 28,000-sf Americana Ballroom and additional indoor function space.

In May, Miami International Airport joined the growing list of airports using “Clear,” making it easier for passengers to speed through security.

Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo will unveil its newest meet-

ing venue, Carysfort Hall, in February 2016. Able to accommodate up to 300 guests, the hall will include a 5,607-sf ballroom; five breakout rooms, all with natural light; an expanded, 3,000-sf interactive cooking school where up to 150 attendees can participate in tasty teambuilding activities; and wraparound outdoor decks with breathtaking views of the marina.



Credit: Naples Grande Beach Resort

The newly named and remodeled Naples Grande Beach Resort on the Gulf boasts 83,000 sf of meeting space.

In the lower Middle Keys, Hawks Cay Resort on Duck Key has undergone a redesign with new walls, carpeting and even fixtures now reflecting the aquamarine ambience that surrounds the resort. Walkways and meeting room entrances are now located outside under a covered awning to better integrate the waterfront. For the first time, the resort can accommodate large groups of up to 600 people and provide the flexibility of the entire group being able to meet in one room and dine in another. A new Marina Walk, serving as an entertainment destination within the resort, will include the new Angler and Ale Restaurant, which will feature indoor and outdoor function space for groups large and small. The Marina Walk and restaurant are scheduled to open in January 2016. **C&IT**



Credit: Hawks Cay Resort

The Marina Walk at Hawks Cay Resort in Duck Key will feature the new Angler and Ale Restaurant, offering group function options when it opens in January.



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On The Move



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John Dominguez was appointed director of sales and marketing for Waikoloa Beach Marriott Resort & Spa on Hawaii Island. He was director of sales and marketing at Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay.

The Shores Resort & Spa, Daytona Beach Shores, Florida, has named **Chris Pranis** as director of sales. He was most recently senior sales manager at Casa Monica Hotel in St. Augustine, Florida.

Lauren Dooley was named southeast sales manager at Ponte Vedra Beach Resorts in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. She most recently was social sales manager at Ponte Vedra Beach Resorts.

Discover The Palm Beaches, the official tourism marketing corporation for Palm Beach County, Florida, has announced that **Kelly Cavers** was named senior vice president, group sales. She most recently served as vice president, intermediary sales for Choose Chicago.

The Westin Riverfront Resort & Spa at Beaver Creek Mountain, Colorado, has named **Chris Cofelice** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing for the Vail Marriott Mountain Resort.

Trump SoHo New York in downtown Manhattan has appointed **Brian Honan** as director of sales and marketing. He most recently served as director of marketing at the New York Palace Hotel. **C&IT**

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Incredible week so far in Orlando! Reconnected with reps from other regions at the #OrlandoEye yesterday. Took some time between sessions to soak up this awesome view from my room. Then “sparked” some great new ideas at the evening reception with an amazing show! #ThisMeetingRocks #OrlandoMeeting



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