

Photo courtesy of Andrew A. Wagner



Executives from leading destination marketing organizations met during the DMAI 93rd Annual Convention in Pittsburgh, Pa.

(Top Row, L. to R.):

J. Stephen Perry, New Orleans Metropolitan CVB; Kevin Kane, Memphis CVB; Stephen B. Richer, Mississippi Gulf Coast CVB

(Middle Row, L. to R.):

Bill Vervaeke, Palm Beach County CVB; Spurgeon Richardson, Atlanta CVB; Doug Neilson, Visit Milwaukee; Daniel N. Fenton, San Jose CVB

(Bottom Row, L. to R.):

Joseph R. McGrath, CDME, VisitPittsburgh; Michael D. Gehrisch, DMAI; Bobbie Patterson, Boise CVB; Tammi Runzler, Orlando/Orange County CVB; Judy Ryals, Huntsville/Madison County CVB; Dan Tavrytzky, Scottsdale CVB; Greg Ortale, Minneapolis CVB

Executive Guide to Meetings: WHAT CEOS NEED TO KNOW

By Susan Burnell

Destination marketing organizations offer new strategies and services for taking corporate meetings and events to the next level.

It's a project that can make an executive look like a hero when it's done right — a successful meeting, conference or event that satisfies attendees and sticks to its budget. CEOs and other executives responsible for the big-picture goals of a meeting have new reasons to turn to local convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) for strategic support.

Experienced meeting planners already know CVBs as the best source for in-depth destination knowledge. Also known as destination marketing organizations (DMOs), these gold mines of local expertise offer services aligned with corporate goals and strategies. Best of all, nearly all their services are free.

“CVBs provide valuable services and resources, at no expense, that can assist in the planning and execution of corporate meetings and social events of all sizes,” says Michael D. Gehrisch, president and chief executive officer, Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI), which represents more than 625 official destination marketing organizations in more than 25 countries.

“CVBs make the success of a meeting their business, and function as a one-stop shop for companies seeking the right meeting space, hotels, transportation, catering and entertainment,” Gehrisch notes. “CVBs assist in site inspections and on-site logistics, and act as a liaison to the community when permits, street closures or other such needs arise. Most importantly, the CVB is the destination expert, and knows which venues fit your needs.”

“Executives may underestimate the value of a CVB’s staff,” says Jorge Pesquera, the new president and chief executive officer of the Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau and a 30-year veteran of the tourism industry. “These are the people who can respond and think creatively about how to provide the highest level of return on investment for a meeting. The best CVBs share a common philosophy. They are not just there to fill rooms or a convention center. They are experts who ask, ‘What will make this meeting, trade show or convention fulfill your mission and goals?’ Then they work to make all those things happen.”

As Predicted, Meetings Gain Budget Dollars, Attendees

The meeting and events industry anticipated more meetings and larger meeting budgets this year, reports Tom Domine, editor in chief, Meeting Professionals International (MPI). According to *FutureWatch 2007*, the organization’s study of global meeting trends published in January 2007, planners expected to manage more meetings in 2007 as well as larger budgets in both dollars and percentage of the total budget.

“We saw a prediction of sustained industry growth for the fourth consecutive year, representative of a strong and thriving economy,” says Domine. “Our MPI conferences in 2007 versus 2006 were definitely in keeping with this prediction. Overall, meeting budgets were expected to increase by 21% for associations and 18% for corporations. Respondents also anticipated more attendees per meeting, whereas the length of meetings was expected to remain the same.

“Globalization is on the rise in all areas of the meetings and events industry,” Domine adds. “Client-side planners, meetings management and services companies, and especially hotel and resort companies anticipated increases in their global presence in 2007. Those with a foot in the global market are more likely than their single-country counterparts to expand that presence over the next year.”

Strategists in Action: CVB Success Stories

The Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau fielded a call last winter from a client hosting an incentive group. The group needed help getting tickets to an international polo match on short notice. The CVB’s relationship with the area’s world-class polo club resulted in premium VIP box seating for the group at no additional cost to the client, along with an invitation to a post-game celebration with the victorious team in the private clubhouse. “That is a perfect example of synergy between our CVB and a tourism business partner,” says President and Chief Executive Officer Jorge Pesquera.

The Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau is a



• Tom Domine
Editor in Chief
MPI

“According to *FutureWatch 2007*, our comparative outlook report on the global business of meetings, overall meeting budgets are expected to increase by 21% for associations and 18% for corporations. ”



• J. Stephen Perry
President and CEO
New Orleans
Metropolitan CVB

“Many corporations don’t take full advantage of CVBs. Sophisticated CVBs can serve as professional consultants and advisers in the local area. We have a set of resources including information, marketing and connections to social responsibility opportunities that outside parties may not be aware of. ”

• Bill Silvermintz
Regional Director -
The Americas, HKTB



“Our responsibility is to better the lives of the individuals who live in our destination on a daily basis. One of the ways we do that is to ‘make marriages’ between visiting organizations and local businesses.”

• Bob Lander
President and CEO
Austin CVB



“When clients utilize the myriad services our CVB offers, we become an extension of their staff. Our experience in the local market and the network of contacts that they access through us cannot be found in any database.”

\$10 million agency charged with marketing and selling Palm Beach County as a travel destination for groups, meetings and conventions as well as leisure travel. The bureau spearheaded the development and opening of the \$84 million Palm Beach County Convention Center in 2004, and it earns awards for its stellar service on a consistent basis.

Pesquera joined the Palm Beach County CVB as president and chief executive officer in November. He formerly served as president and chief executive officer of the Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association and the Puerto Rico Convention Bureau, and has held senior executive roles at Hilton International Company and Conrad Hotels. Pesquera is widely acknowledged as a leader in the hotel and hospitality business as well as a dynamic strategist in destination management. He is expected to successfully drive the economic engine of Palm Beach County’s tourism industry to new standards of excellence.

Well-known for its theme park fun, Orlando is also a place for serious business. Every year the destination welcomes more than 3 million meeting and convention attendees, and it can accommodate groups of 10 to 100,000 at all price points. “Orlando constantly expands its meetings offerings,” says Orlando/Orange County CVB President and Chief Executive Officer Gary C. Sain. “Current developments include bringing high-end hotel properties like Waldorf=Astoria and Four Seasons into the marketplace.”

What surprises some corporate visitors is the wealth of creative, medical and digital resources available in Orlando. The theme parks offer a variety of educational programs on marketing, creativity and customer service. Central Florida already hosts more medical meetings than any other region, and its resources are expanding with a new College of Medicine at the University of Central Florida, the Burnham Institute medical research park and a new Veterans Hospital. The region now has more than 400 companies involved with modeling, simulation, interactive and immersive entertainment including Lockheed Martin, Electronic Arts and the Kennedy Space Center. The CVB can help companies tap these resources for speakers, programs and facility tours.

It is ultimately the Orlando CVB’s service and hospitality that draw rave reviews. “The Orlando CVB went the extra mile in helping to make our first show in their city a great success,” explains Clay Stevens, president, International Air Conditioning, Heating, Refrigerating Exposition. “An event as large as ours requires a considerable amount of cooperation and assistance from the host city. The Orlando CVB acted as our advocate with hotels, restaurants and local attractions and assisted in developing programs to enhance the Exposition.”

The Greater Fort Lauderdale CVB and the City of Fort Lauderdale hosted the 35th Organization of American States General Assembly in June 2005. “With 34 heads of state, plus all the Secret Service staff, this was a very demanding group,” says Nicki E. Grossman, president of the Greater Fort Lauderdale CVB. “We were able to deliver the perfect event, and it was a great opportunity to put Greater Fort Lauderdale in the international spotlight.”

Following the event, the CVB received letters of appreciation

from officials who attended, including then-Florida governor Jeb Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The security effort surrounding the event was massive and drew compliments from Joe D. Morton, OAS Diplomatic Security Service, who wrote, "Due to the efforts of your organization and myriad local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, security for the OASGA was a complete success."

"Visiting groups grade our destination on whether we produce as expected," Grossman notes. "The glowing praise we receive, along with repeat business, is a validation of our ability to produce."

Fort Lauderdale has successfully shifted its image with a full array of new luxury properties and upscale amenities. "Corporate executives who came here for Spring Break in the '60s, '70s and '80s are absolutely stunned at the maturity and sophistication that has occurred here," says Grossman.

The New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc., recently assisted Konica Minolta with a major event. "When conducting a meeting, the last thing we need to worry about is hotel and food service, the safety of our guests, the ambience of the host city and the support services we require," says Bill Brewster, former vice president of marketing for Konica Minolta. "Our experience in New Orleans was, across the board, extremely positive. The event went off as planned and was one of the smoothest-run meetings with which I have been associated. Our dealers, management team and staff were impressed by the spirit, courage and determination of the citizens of New Orleans." Konica Minolta subsequently has pledged \$200,000 to help repair a Katrina-damaged school.

Corporate business meetings are one of the fastest-growing segments in New Orleans' convention industry, which traditionally has attracted large citywide association conferences. However, Maritz Travel, Walt Disney Company, Whirlpool, Coca-Cola, Konica Minolta, Sherwin Williams, Anheuser Busch and many corporations have been drawn to New Orleans for the wealth of "voluntourism" service opportunities available after Katrina to achieve strategic meeting goals, expand philanthropic efforts and strengthen corporate brands.

The Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau is helping an international gathering of engineers achieve its pre-event objectives in a big way. "The advance marketing help of the Austin CVB allowed us to meet our goal of more than 4,000 rooms before 2007," says Patricia J. Teller, Ph.D., a professor at the University of Texas at El Paso, incoming president of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineering (I-EEE) and general chair of the group's SC08 technology conference.

The \$5 million volunteer-run event is the I-EEE's main revenue generator. "ACVB helped staff our booth at the 2007 conference in Reno and provided giveaway merchandise to help promote SC08 in Austin," says Teller. "They're the first source we turn to for any of our planning details."

"When our clients utilize the myriad services that Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau offers, we become an extension of their staff," says Bob Lander, president and chief executive officer. "Our experience in the local market and the network of



• Michael D. Gehrisch
President and CEO
DMAI

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• Nicki E. Grossman
President
Greater Fort
Lauderdale CVB

A CVB can match the diverse needs of corporate executives and meeting planners to the intricate amenities of our destination. We assist in finding the perfect venues for their needs, and the services we provide are free.

Corporate Meeting Hot Spots

AUSTIN

Cosmopolitan yet unpretentious, Austin has a thriving cultural scene and vibrant nightlife. Our state-of-the-art downtown convention center can host up to 7,000 wireless computers at one time.

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Call 1-800-926-ACVB or visit www.austintexas.org.



NEW ORLEANS

Corporate business meetings are one of the fastest-growing segments in New Orleans' convention industry. Our CVB exists to help groups meeting here achieve strategic goals, expand philanthropic efforts and strengthen corporate brands. The cultural riches and unparalleled service that define the New Orleans experience still flourish, and we are fully prepared to welcome all of our visitors again.

Call 1-800-672-6124 or visit www.neworleanscvb.com.



J. Stephen Perry, President and CEO

ORLANDO/ORANGE COUNTY

Visitor-centric with imaginative themed environments, world-class convention resorts, fine dining, golf, entertainment, high-fashion shopping and unmatched service make Orlando an extraordinary place for meetings.

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• Jorge Pesquera
President and CEO
Palm Beach County CVB

“The best CVBs share a common philosophy. They are experts who ask ‘What will make this meeting, trade show or convention fulfill your mission and goals?’ Then they work to make all those things happen.”

contacts that they access through us cannot be found in any database. Working together, we help them to deliver a unique, authentic experience that keeps Austin in their attendees’ minds long after the final session ends.”

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) has been instrumental in the success of the annual Asia Sales Conference held by U.S.-based Fossil Inc. since 2002. “The annual sales conference is the most important event of the year for us and, as a destination, Hong Kong contributes a lot to our success,” says Mark Parker, senior vice president, Asia. “We bring in customers, brand managers and media representatives from all over Asia, as well as from Australia, Egypt, Germany and the U.S., so we need to be at a place which is very convenient to all.”

“As a government-subsidized body operating very much like a CVB, we can open doors for organizations at several levels,” says Regional Director, The Americas, Bill Silvermintz. “Our responsibility is to better the lives of the individuals who live in our destination on a daily basis. One of the ways we do that is to ‘make marriages’ between visiting organizations and local businesses.”

With headquarters in Hong Kong, the HKTB offers a worldwide network of 15 offices. Among the advantages it offers groups planning Hong Kong meetings are an online Request-For-Proposal system and a rewards program for corporate meetings and incentive travelers.

Trends to Watch

Meeting strategists offer tips on what corporate leaders should be watching as they look to achieve greater success for meetings, conventions and other off-site events.

Attendee Demographics

“Meetings have begun catering to younger audiences in addition to baby boomers,” says Dan Tavrytzky, vice president of Sales and Services for the Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau. “There has to be something for everyone at the location, so groups should consider nontraditional facilities with some sizzle.”

Revitalized Areas Offer Great Value

Now recovering from hurricane devastation, Mississippi sees tourism as a lifeline to its economic development, says Stephen B. Richer, executive director for the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau. “Tourism is our number one way to rebuild. We live and breathe corporate meetings with the overall goal of bringing high-level leaders to see what Mississippi can offer.”

Green Locations

More organizations are looking for “green” locations, MPI



• Gary C. Sain
President and CEO
Orlando/Orange
County CVB

CVBs can help visiting groups gain access to resources in the local business community including speakers and facility tours, to add a unique, educational component to a convention or conference.

reports. One of the factors tipping the scales in favor of Pittsburgh as the site for DMAI's 2007 Annual Convention was its environmentally intelligent waterfront convention center, reports Joseph R. McGrath, CDME, president and chief executive officer of VisitPittsburgh. Orlando is also a leading "green" destination, with its Orange County Convention Center, awarded a "Green Certification" for its environmental systems and programs.

Changing Perceptions of CVBs

"Companies miss out on some great benefits if they still think of a CVB as the group that sets up tables and delivers food on time," says Daniel N. Fenton, who chairs Team San José, whose event managers ensure the success of a client's meeting by acting as strategic consultants, helping with programming and marketing to ensure the most valuable event. "Ninety-three percent of our clients say they would return, so we know we're on the right track. Hopefully our example will help change the perception of CVBs on a global scale."

Accreditation Elevates the Profession

DMAI's accreditation program recognizes destination marketing

organizations that provide outstanding services in accordance with international standards and benchmarks in the field.

Twenty-seven DMOs have become DMAI-accredited since the program was launched in January 2007. The program creates a consistent standard of operations while communicating a commitment to industry excellence.

"Accreditation is a wonderful tool for elevating the profession," says Palm Beach County CVB's Jorge Pesquera, a member of DMAI's accreditation board. "The process of accreditation helps sharpen the focus of the entire CVB team."

"By establishing universal standards, the DMAI accreditation program will raise the bar within the industry," adds Doug Neilson, president and chief executive officer of Visit Milwaukee. "It's affirmation that an organization is providing its convention and leisure visitors with the highest level of professionalism and customer service."

The Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) represents more than 625 official destination marketing organizations in more than 25 countries. The association has worked to enhance the professionalism, effectiveness and image of DMOs since 1914. ■

For more information, visit www.destinationmarketing.org or call +1.202.296.7888.
