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WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT BUSINESS EVENTS IN

2023

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Get Ready for 2023

A look at trends in three key areas—event design, technology and logistics—that are likely to shape meetings in the next 12 months.

Meetings and events are percolating once again, but not in the exact same way as they did before the pandemic. With the industry evolving in new ways, 2023 will be a time of rapid change.

Event design

One key trend that will shape the entire industry is a focus on strategy. This strategy extends to developing an event purpose statement, SMART goals, measurable objectives and KPIs that lead to demonstrable outcomes and ROI.

"If the event does not meet the intended goals or ROI, then it's a waste of money, time and resources," says Tammy Kockaya, CMP, CMM, chief strategy and growth officer at the Event Leadership Institute. "So, one of the things I've heard planners talk about over and over the last year is the re-focus on the need for developing a comprehensive event strategy, which should drive elements of design."

This ROI-focused approach stems

from the uncertainty that persists in the industry.

"Many people are wanting to get together, wanting to get back to hugs and handshakes," Kockaya says. "But I do think there are a number of people for personal, professional and health reasons who aren't willing to get on a plane or train and drive downtown to go to an event."

Ultimately, this means people are making individual decisions about how they will spend their time that are not always predictable.

"Any time you're doing event design, it's important to take a step back and think about 'Who are we doing this event for? Who are the personas?'" Kockaya says. "You know who this event used to be for in 2018, 2019. Who is this event for in the future? Who are the people who are really showing up? You can't really base it all on demographics. You have to base it on that buyer profile. Why do they want to come? What are their motivations?"

It will be more important than ever for marketers, content professionals and meeting planners to come together in this environment.

"Those three groups have to

BY ELAINE POFELDT

work together more seamlessly than in the past," Kockaya says.

They will have to make decisions



Corbin Ball

If anything, the pandemic has pushed society ahead in terms of digitization by more than a decade.

about how much of the event to cater to people who have chosen not to come to the in-person component—and how to integrate them into the meeting.

"They still want to be a part of it," Kockaya says.

Meanwhile, difficulties in travel have led organizers to scale back some longer meetings to just a few days or to a combination of in-person and hybrid presentations.

"Now attendees expect some level of content to be delivered to them virtually but certain aspects will continue to be in person," Kockaya says.

Technology

One pandemic trend that is likely to persist is the growing use of



Tammy Kockaya, CMP, CMM

If the event does not meet the intended goals or ROI, then it's a waste of money, time and resources.

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technology in meetings, whether it's the use of QR codes to view a menu online or contactless check-ins.

"If anything, the pandemic has pushed society ahead in terms of digitization by more than a decade," says Corbin Ball, event technology analyst. "That change has been evidenced in event technology. In the last three years, there has been unprecedented growth. A huge amount of funding was dumped into virtual and hybrid event technologies. We are farther ahead in those areas than we were when it started, and when it comes to all the best practice learned."

The major event technology platforms made great strides in building out their virtual and hybrid meetings

meetings in the months ahead include the use of AI language translators for face-to-face meetings, automated check-ins, facial analytics, chatbots that match in-person attendees based on their profiles, social Q&A through lightweight websites where attendees can submit questions, more exploration of the metaverse and NFTs and more advanced software production studio technology, according to Ball.

"People are used to television broadcast standards," he says. "You can't just put a camera in a back room and stream it."

Logistics

With remote and hybrid meetings going strong, some organizers are assigning C-level executives to manage these meetings, according to Courtney McGee, CMP emeritus, owner and CEO of Event Logistics in Nashville, Tenn. They are also looking for ways to create engagement with remote attendees via experiential events.

"If you normally do a concert at the closing session, what we are trying to do is make it more personal," McGee says. "We'll have that artist do an interview so we can broadcast or livestream it. If they are sitting in the audience, they see the behind-the-scenes action. They get to have that different kind of engagement, so they

don't feel completely disconnected."

The search for venues has continued to require that public health concerns stay top of mind.

"I think COVID did change the world," McGee says. "We are all more aware. Ventilation is super-important."

In an environment of rising costs, meeting professionals will be looking for ways to reduce costs on logistics.

"We just did a meeting in Dallas where our production company is also in Nashville," McGee says. "Instead of them taking two box trucks, we went ahead and got a tractor trailer. We were able to put our material and all of the production equipment on the tractor trailer and have them drive it themselves. We saved a ton of money. We will start doing it all the time. Everyone and their brother was taking trucks to Dallas. There has to be a way to consolidate things and make them cheaper."

With the metaverse and NFTs catching on, these trends are likely to affect the logistics of meetings, too, McGee believes.

"Coachella used NFTs to create tokens, instead of tickets," she says. "It also turns into a souvenir. That's something that's going to be really attractive to people."

There will also be more hosting of musical performances in the virtual world, not just at concerts but also at meetings, McGee predicts.

"It will be bigger and bigger," she says.



**Courtney McGee,
CMP emeritus**

If you normally do a concert at the closing session, what we are trying to do is make it more personal.

platforms and online registration systems, Ball notes.

"Those are available now in one unified system, providing those options for meeting planners," he says.

One issue that has not been resolved is rising costs.

"Meeting planners have found that hybrid events can be twice as expensive and twice as complex," Ball says.

Another key trend is analytics.

"Virtual events have great analytics," Ball says. "That expectation is coming to face-to-face events. Many event-tech companies use platforms that can go back and forth."

Other advances likely to shape

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Designing the future of work:

Why Millennials Leave Their Jobs

Leaders need more information on exactly who exists in today's workforce to know how to better engage them.

BY DANI KLOAP

MPI's Thought Leaders Summit, held in September in Mobile, Ala., featured conversations and education focused on how to make careers in the meeting and event industry more attractive, elevate the industry's brand and create work environments that foster belonging to both attract and retain talent. The following excerpt is from "Better 4 Business: Designing the Future of Work 2022," a white paper that highlights the myriad learnings gleaned from attending the Thought Leaders Summit. [Download the free report, sponsored by Louisville Tourism.](#)

Labor crisis

Altat Sovani, founder and CEO of Alzen Consulting Inc., shared his research on the labor crisis in the hospitality, tourism and event industry. From his research emerged eight key themes of why Millennials are rapidly leaving their jobs.

- 1 Inconsistent application of organizational policies by supervisors.** Leaders are not implementing policies in a consistent manner. Sovani's research showed if the manager likes the employee, the employee will receive preferential treatment for trainings, promotions and more. Supervisors are not always properly trained, making for an inconsistent management experience for employees.
- 2 A culture of favoring seniority.** Millennials want promotions and opportunities to be based on how hard they work and not how much seniority someone has at a company. A culture of seniority and favoritism will only hold organizations back, Sovani said.
- 3 Opportunities for advancement.** Millennials will remain loyal if presented with opportunities to advance and grow their career with an organization. They have the degrees and education, but do not often have the experience and grow frustrated with limited opportunities to grow that experience, Sovani shared.
- 4 Baby Boomer culture.** Sovani's research found a clash of cultures between Millennials and Baby Boomers. Millennials do not want to be "parented" at work. Leaders should examine which generations are present in their organization and work to help these cultures mesh.
- 5 Communication with Millennials.** Typically, less feedback is given the higher you move up in a company, Sovani shared. Feedback is being given only when someone has not done well. Millennials want to receive feedback and truly feel a part of the organization. Sovani recommends that supervisors build relationships and get to know Millennials in their workforce to build a rapport that allows for consistent and frequent feedback.
- 6 Training and development.** Millennials indicated to Sovani in his research they felt only those the company wants to retain receive access to additional training and development. Those who end up in supervisory roles are leaving if they feel they have not been adequately trained.
- 7 Compensation and affordability.** Sovani said his research found that compensation plays a huge factor in Millennials switching roles in the industry, looking for an employer that pays a little more on their journey to find higher wages.
- 8 Work-life balance.** While this topic was widely discussed pre-pandemic, trying to balance work and life has become a huge consideration for Millennials in the present. "For (Millennials), it's not a choice, it's a right," Sovani said of work-life balance. "There are too many competing needs to get done that it feels like you have to take work home." Sovani recommends employers be flexible and even consider a four-day work week for increased productivity, looking to how resilient employees have been while working from home during the pandemic.



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Designing the future of work:

Developing Skills

In an age when many new supervisors are in need of education, here's how to fill the gap.

BY DANI KLOAP

The following excerpt is from “Better 4 Business: Designing the Future of Work 2022,” a white paper that highlights the myriad learnings gleaned from attending the Thought Leaders Summit. [Download the free report, sponsored by Louisville Tourism.](#)

Thought leaders identified a critical missing piece in workforce development today: development of skills for current employees. Those who suddenly found themselves in supervisory roles had no experience and did not know where to turn for education. Employees who had to take on new functional areas or roles during the pandemic had little to no training. Onboarding can be rushed and not fully cover all aspects of the role. Here are some of their suggestions for ensuring your team is developing critical skills.

- **Utilize each employee's talents.** Employees leave when they feel undervalued or underutilized. Build relationships with your employees to understand what exactly their talents are and how those can best be put to use by the organization.

- **Expose employees to other divisions or job functions.** With all of the investment that goes into training and developing an employee, it makes sense to expose professionals to other areas of the company and other job functions beyond their own. This could help retain top talent as they look to build additional skills or advance their career.
- **Help with transferable skill development.** Look for educational opportunities for employees to develop future critical skills in areas outside of their immediate job function. A micro-course focused on persuasion or critical thinking can help the employee develop skills that could transfer to another department at your company or section of the industry, while also helping them provide additional output in their current role. Employees who feel their managers invest in them will feel more aligned in their personal values with those of the company.
- **Create stretch assignments to tap into passions.** This is another way to assist with transferable skill development. Work with

employees to create these assignments they are passionate about, which will lead to more productivity from the employee and a greater sense of accomplishment.

- **Provide better and more thorough onboarding.** Onboarding should be re-evaluated to make sure it ties back into the mission, vision and values of the organization. It should be thorough in training for all aspects of the job role and the company. Employees who do not feel properly trained will leave.
- **Trust and empower employees to have authority.** Leadership should find ways to build that empowerment within employees to have authority to make decisions. Train managers on how to lead a team, avoid micromanagement and coach others.
- **Embrace and balance organic passion.** Building meaningful relationships with employees can help managers find that person's organic passion with a plan to help foster it for a more engaged employee in the workplace.

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Designing the future of work:

Hiring Practices and Talent Attraction

To evolve for today's workforce, industry businesses must be flexible and examine how they not only attract talent but how they hire and fill vacant roles.

BY DANI KLOAP

The following excerpt is from “Better 4 Business: Designing the Future of Work 2022,” a white paper that highlights the myriad learnings gleaned from attending the Thought Leaders Summit. [Download the free report, sponsored by Louisville Tourism.](#)

Transparency and flexibility will be key to attracting top talent and retaining them through the hiring process.

- **Change hiring requirements.** Consider hiring for potential and not just experience. Research shows Millennials want to see fairness in the workplace when it comes to valuing work being done over seniority at a company. Train hiring managers to recognize potential and transferable skills, which could result in filling vacant roles with long-term employees who value the opportunity for a career, not just a job.
- **Attract those who want a career change.** With the reshuffling

throughout the pandemic, opportunities are endless to attract potential employees looking for a career shift. Again, the ability to identify those transferrable skills and help those looking for those changes to see themselves as a fit for the role can help in attracting new talent with a fresh perspective. Consider transparency in your job listings about hiring not just based on experience and encouraging those to apply who are looking for a career change.

- **Lure talent with incentives.** While this may not always be possible, consider what incentives could be attractive to someone just coming out of high school, college or looking for a change in their career. Perhaps loan forgiveness, flexible work locations, unlimited paid time off or other programs would entice top talent.
- **Emphasize skill development.** So many people in the meeting and event industry are entrepreneurs who have created their own

businesses and agencies. Much of this work requires skills in project management and being strategic. Highlighting these skills will help talented candidates see the value of joining this industry.

- **Consider entry-level options in event management.** Look beyond the need for formal education or years of experience to create opportunities for those with potential, but no experience, to enter the industry. There must be more entry-level jobs created that funnel candidates with potential into roles in event management to learn and then move up in the organization for more long-term retention.
- **Create transparency for interview demographics.** Be honest with your current employees, and even potential ones, about your interview demographics. Demonstrate you are focused on diversity by seeking out diverse candidates.

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Designing the future of work:

Company Branding and Messaging

The meeting industry has a messaging problem. Much of the public does not understand that meeting planning reaches far beyond planning menus.

BY DANI KLOAP

The following excerpt is from “Better 4 Business: Designing the Future of Work 2022,” a white paper that highlights the myriad learnings gleaned from attending the Thought Leaders Summit. [Download the free report, sponsored by Louisville Tourism.](#)

Many do not understand the transferable skills and opportunities that are available by working in hospitality and events. Organizations must align their branding and messaging to demonstrate the value of working in this industry.

- **Consider branding.** What messages are we sending young people who could move into roles in our industry even out of high school? How does our brand attract those who wish to make a career change later in life? We must consider what is important to our audience and how that will resonate with their values—perhaps the organization’s focus on sustainability or helping to chart career paths? Craft branded messages specific to the audience you want to target.

- **Evaluate values.** The company’s values should be effortlessly infused throughout the brand and be easily understood by those who we wish to attract to the industry. Connecting the audience’s personal values to those of the company will help clear up messaging and help top talent see themselves as a viable candidate for your available positions.

- **Tell stories.** Learning how to tell the story of the industry and your specific organization matters. We must find what resonates with top talent we want to attract. What might resonate with a Millennial may not resonate with a Gen Z staffer. We should look at the platforms our audience uses and find them there, such as TikTok or Instagram.

- **Look at different career paths and connect the dots with transferable skills.** Potential employees want to see that the organization cares about them as human beings. Embrace being a part of upskilling the workforce with transferable skills,

rather than fearing investing in an employee only for them to leave. Creating avenues for those employees to be ambassadors for your brand, not only referring potential business but future employees to your organization, will help create that pipeline of talent.

- **Consider guest speaking opportunities.** Venture into high schools for career days and attend job fairs at colleges and universities. Seek partnerships to highlight what your organization does and how to chart their career path in this industry.
- **Help employees build a brand.** Your employees can be your biggest advocates and ambassadors to show potential candidates the value of building a career at your company. Provide training on building a personal brand on LinkedIn and teach them how to promote the industry through various social media platforms.



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DESIGNED TO LEAD INTO THE Future

Having a [Certified Meeting Management \(CMM\) designation](#) opened new doors for Kyle Rugletic, CMM, PMP, personally and professionally.

“In many ways, the CMM has significantly contributed to my success as a meeting and event professional,” says Rugletic, a senior meeting planner with Chicago-based Progress In Planning Inc. “Specifically, my work-based business project that I completed in the final phase of the CMM program has been instrumental to what I can offer to the industry and bring to the table. I constantly lean back on the lessons and skills mastered throughout the program and apply them in my career.”

Businesses today realize the power live events have on customer acquisition, affinity and retention. But their great return on engagement is no fluke—it’s due to the meeting and event professionals who design them.

“This is a far more elevated role than we have seen in the past where many event professionals and their successes were attributed to metrics such as satisfaction with food/service,” says Nancy Snowden, former manager of educational experiences for MPI.

And as automation continually progresses, Snowden says, the need for event professionals to align themselves as business strategists for their organizations becomes even more pertinent.

“With more meeting professionals being ‘housed’ departmentally under

Earning a CMM is a way for experienced meeting and event professionals to better speak the language of stakeholders and help grow their organizations through meetings and events today and into the constantly evolving future.

BY JASON HENSEL



marketing and demand generation and being asked to report on metrics such as return on engagement, understanding the critical and strategic elements of business is important to ensure meeting professionals can speak the language of their stakeholders,” she says.

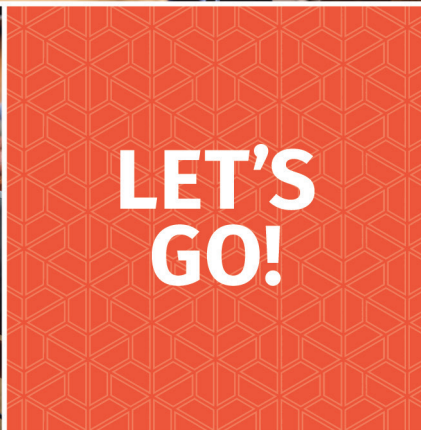
A management leadership role

Early in Rugletic’s meeting and event management career, he knew he

wanted to invest in his professional development education. It wasn’t until he entered the corporate world that he got hit with names and post-nominal letters signifying their professional designations.

“I especially worked closely with Certified Meeting Professionals (CMPs) and CMMs and began to study their workings and core

Continued on page 21



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competencies,” he says.

Both designation credentials dominate the meeting and event industry, Rugletic says. He initially had his eyes set first on earning a CMP certification with the Events Industry Council, however, his research divulged that the CMM was more suitable for him.

“Having already had more than a decade of professional work experience in the meeting and event industry, the CMM was more appealing than the CMP,” Rugletic says. “The CMP measures mechanical ability and provides a certain level of understanding and shared knowledge of the industry. But the CMM provides the management leadership role.”

Earning a CMM is an optimal way for many experienced meeting and event professionals to better speak the language of stakeholders and take the lead in growing their organizations through meetings and events.

“If you are a seasoned meeting professional at the management level or higher, earning your CMM can take you to even greater heights and goes a long way in your career!” Rugletic says. “The CMM is your key to becoming an industry leader not just in the U.S. but worldwide due to its international recognition and prestige.”

Strategize and lead teams

Gaining your CMM, and the associated necessary knowledge, means you can take on more specialized types of complex business problems, Rugletic says. It also shows that you can successfully strategize and lead teams.

CMM education is delivered through a three-pronged approach focusing on business management, leadership and meeting management.

“It helps event professionals to look at their role in a business or organization at a macro and not just micro level,” Snowden says.

CMM education is delivered through a three-pronged approach focusing on business management, leadership and meeting management.

“By learning more about how to be a leader, how to use events as a marketing tool or how to make smart financial decisions to really ‘own’ a company’s meetings and events as a business function, it helps to ensure that the meeting professional is integral to the success of the organization rather than dispensable.”

While the CMP designation is mainly based on industry competencies and skills as defined by the Events Industry Council’s strategic domains, the CMM is aligned with the kind of strategy-based business education found in an MBA program.

“At its core, it seeks to educate and align meeting professionals from a business strategy perspective rather than [from] tactical skills and [an] application approach you might associate with the CMP,” Snowden says. “This is reflected in the prerequisites that serve as the minimum threshold for application.”

Those prerequisites are seven-plus years of professional experience in the meeting and event industry, three-plus years of management experience and two-plus years of profit-and-loss responsibility.

“One of the most known factors for me in deciding to pursue the CMM is that once one earns their CMM,

they hold the designation indefinitely,” Rugletic says. “No continuing education credit hours are needed, and no additional renewal fees are associated with maintaining the CMM.”

Alive and thriving

The most recent cohort completed the CMM program in June, and there are now 1,456 CMM designees worldwide.

And the program is alive and thriving in partnership with the Indiana University Kelly School of Business, which MPI strategically partnered with to ensure the program was aligned with a best-in-class, accredited educational institution. In fact, the credit earned from this program is transferable masters-level credit, so it is a high-caliber and rigorous program.

It was the school’s reputation as a world-class business school that helped influence MPI to partner with the university. The association also wanted to academically, and from a brand perspective, align the CMM with credentials and prestige beyond the four walls of MPI or even our industry, Snowden says.

“To be seen as a strategist and leader in and outside of our community of meeting professionals was a way to further solidify the legitimacy of our profession in the larger business world,” she says.

While the pandemic hit the meeting and event industry hard and brought face-to-face meetings to a near standstill, companies and people are quickly getting back to work.

“In fact, people are meeting so much again, there are not enough of us event professionals to go around,” Rugletic says. “Sadly, I’ve noticed that many seasoned meeting and event pros have either taken early retirement or changed industries entirely.”

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THE FUTURE of Industry Education

A look at how the higher-education landscape and MPI are evolving to support future meeting and event professionals and overcome workforce challenges.

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA

As the meeting and event landscape continues to grow and evolve, it's not just students and the public at large that needs a clearer, more accurate understanding of the event manager role—schools also need to embrace meeting professionals on campus and organizations need to leverage the concentration of potential future employees found there.

"Virtually no organization [in the meeting industry] has a college recruiting effort," says Carl Winston, director of the school of hospitality & tourism management, San Diego State University. "That does represent an opportunity on the industry side—they've never come to campuses for talent, which is pretty interesting. It's a real process of educating the campuses and the students that these jobs are out there and where they are. It's natural to partner with a trade association that actually has all of those people as members and has

created this integrated marketplace."

Jodi Braverman, manager, constituent engagement, systemwide advancement and associate executive director of the CSU Alumni Council for The California State University Office of the Chancellor, notes a program from about a decade ago that brought together students and industry.

["SDSU and Pebble Beach partnered together,](#) and they had a program where essentially 30 students get recruited, they get interviewed and then they work the Pebble Beach Pro Am golf tournament," Braverman says. "It's an example of some of the ways that CSU campuses are creating partnerships with the event industry to serve their students and meet the needs of organizations."

One important way in which the realities of the events business can be succinctly revealed to students, according to Alex Beall, writer and editor, The California State University Office of the Chancellor, is by examining the local opportunities and event

niches. The event management program at the CSU San Bernardino Palm Desert campus is an example of the education going to where the jobs are.

"In Palm Springs/Palm Desert, a huge percentage of the people who live there actually work in hospitality because of all the golf courses, hotels, restaurants, Coachella, etc.," Beall says. "That particular program actually opened at the beginning of 2020, right before the world shut down, with the idea of bringing that program to an area that is going to be hiring people into hospitality jobs."

"I'm glad you said that Alex. I think people who are going about their day-to-day lives professionally don't think about universities as being particularly innovative or flexible," Winston adds. "I think one of the things about the CSU system is that we're very applied, very aimed at serving our communities and creating that ecosystem where we bring young people in, those young people go into careers, they do really well and can

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move up—and that serves everybody in a really transformational way.”

It’s important to recall that event management higher education is, by and large, still very new.

“There are literally no formally educated folks in the event industry—think about that, four years ago, we launched the first [U.S.] master’s degree in event management; there’s no Ph.D. for this,” Winston says. “So where are the educators coming from?”

Educators are coming from industry. But more are needed. Take Cal State Fullerton, for example. Braverman says that program is split between hospitality and entertainment, while housed in the college of business, and is co-chaired by Amani Roberts (MPI Southern California Chapter).

“There’s a trend of some campuses hiring people like Amani to come teach and lead and show the current faculty some different ways to do things and engage with industry,” Braverman says.

Winston says that if he had a plea for meeting industry veterans, it’s that “we need people to become educators in this space and to teach this profession. The campuses are hungry for qualified instructors to help us figure this out. Even the campus understanding of what the needs are is limited, unless we have conversations with [experienced meeting professionals].”

Higher education needs experienced meeting professionals to help teach students and faculty in order to maintain a healthy workforce pipeline into the future, according to Winston.

Such involvement with industry veterans is incredibly important for

the continued growth and fluid relevance of formal education for event professionals.

“I just attended a really cool meeting [and] the exuberance of these people who have haven’t seen one another for three years—it was just like a party,” Winston says. “I think that’s a natural human condition, we love to meet. It’s coming back. Look at attendance at sporting events,

pain employers have had who can’t find talent—we have open arms. ‘Help us help you’ is the message.”

Regarding the impact of these programs, Winston says he’s got some very concrete thoughts on what success could look like in five years.

“I think we’d see growth in partnerships, more instructors coming into the campuses from industry,” he says. “I think we’d have a lot more

understanding from employers if they’d come to the campuses and actually recruit students. Event firms do not [typically] come to college campuses to recruit—period. It’s really an interesting missed opportunity.”

Continued success going forward, for students and the industry, will require buy-in,

passion and deep involvement across the board.

“There’s a huge willingness in the CSU campuses to partner with meeting professionals to up everybody’s game,” Winston says. “I know from my conversations outside of California with other hospitality school leaders, the same attitude is really across this country and beyond: People are hungry to understand what the needs are and how to serve it better. This is really an emerging field. I don’t think any of us believe that we can up our game without partnering with the professionals in the industry. I’ll say again to [meeting professionals], reach out to your local campus—they really want you, there’s a program leader who wants to talk to you to figure out how to help you help the campus and help students end up in great careers.”



festivals and everything else, we are craving meeting again. Meeting face to face is here to stay. Partnering with organizations like MPI, we need to get that talent pipeline going. We have a sustained need for people and not enough people wanting to do those roles. It’s very hard for an organization to say, ‘Let’s plan a college program so that we have talent three years from now.’ But [for many], I don’t know where else they’re going to get their talent if they don’t do that.

“The California State University has actually invested money in helping hospitality and tourism and event programs grow across California. We have a budget from them to help grow these programs and improve the quality of them. We’d certainly invite MPI stakeholders and others to join us so we can help build a terrific workforce for event professionals in the future. Thinking about all of the

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Celebrate Your Natural Gifts

Kai Kight, a keynote speaker at IMEX America in October, enthralled the crowd without uttering a single word.

BY BLAIR POTTER

Kai Kight opted to set the tone for his Smart Monday powered by MPI keynote address by playing a beautiful violin solo. The brilliant composer/performer followed the musical performance with an engaging, funny and thought-provoking presentation.

Kight told the audience about visiting a tea house where the owner chided him for taking out his phone, lecturing him on the importance of being present and pointing at the “no phones allowed” sign. (Of course, Kight didn’t have an opening to explain that he was actually just turning his phone to “do not disturb.”)

“In life, so often we say, ‘be present,’” Kight said. “We say, ‘be in the moment.’ But in music, if people in the audience aren’t engaged, it’s just a sign that the music isn’t doing its job correctly. What if the present isn’t actually up to par? It’s like we’re blaming the observer for their factual response to what’s in front of them, instead of looking at how the creatives can make something that’s actually engaging.”

“We’re so harsh on ourselves for the ways we might disconnect from reality. But I think a more important question to ask is, what’s actually going on in reality that makes us want to disconnect in the first place?”

Kight said he recently presented to a large group of mostly accountants who essentially apologized for being less creative than him.



“I had like 10 or 12 of these interactions and I just walked away thinking, ‘Why do we need our accountants to be creative?’” he joked. “Creativity is instability. Raw imagination. It can be disorienting, all over the place. So, I was there at this conference all designed to help these accountants be more creative and it just brought up a theme that I experience a lot. I was wondering: Are we creating these moments, these experiences, these events for people in an attempt to fix them? In order to get them to be something that they’re not actually built for? Or are we creating these moments to help people learn how to use themselves correctly? Use themselves in their totality? And what would that look like? As we think about the content we create, a lot of times it is beautiful to bring in these outside voices, but I think a big part of it



is also elevating just who they are naturally.”

Kight said that when creating moments of content for people, try to help them reach a point of clarity.

“Perhaps that clarity could be helping them bring to language things that they’ve done over the past few years that they had to make up on the spot and now they have this sense of wisdom in themselves that could only come from that,” he said. “When we think about content, it’s not just what we deliver to other people, but it’s also creating space for people to receive it.”

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Costs Rising Greater than Business, Budgets

Despite the surging industry recovery, the immediate path forward is challenging for many, with insufficient resources widely reported. The good news: The industry knows how to proceed in a successful manner; the bad news: Outside factors could delay the industry's full recovery.

By Elaine Pofeldt

Although the meeting and event industry has been making a comeback from the pandemic, there's no denying the pressure of rising costs—and insufficient budgets to cope. And it could get worse before it gets better. The majority of respondents (53%) to the [latest Meetings Outlook survey](#) said they are preparing to deal with inflation and/or a potential recession, up from 40% this summer.

Price hikes have hit virtually every area of the industry, adding pressure for planners in a business landscape that 64% of all respondents—planners and suppliers—see as a seller's market.

"All costs are up—guest room rates,

meeting space rates, F&B and audiovisual," wrote one U.S.-based planner, who requested anonymity. "We have seen our AV costs go up over four times what we were paying in 2019. This is forcing us to rethink the [number] of meetings we do at hotels, and we are looking at working with more conference centers with everything included. We all suffered during the pandemic, but it seems like hotels are really trying to make up for lost time. Rates are sky-high and service levels are at an all-time low."

And there seems to be no end in sight.

"Costs are out of control," wrote Jana Atlas, CMP, the San Mateo-Calif.-based chief designer at Create365, which

helps clients design programs to motivate and reward teams, in her survey response. A big challenge, she said, is "trying to provide competitive services while helping clients understand that costs have increased by 40%-100% in different areas and that everything needs to be negotiated."

While 65% of respondents expect their budgets to increase over the next year, any such growth isn't likely to keep pace with rising costs. For instance, only 21% of respondents to the survey anticipate a budget increase of more than 10%. And the purse strings will need to get much tighter for the 13% of respondents who expect a decrease in budget over the next 12 months.

BACK TO BUSINESS

One year ago, a scant 3% of respondents said their business levels had returned to pre-pandemic levels—now, nearly 10 times as many say the same. However, a growing percentage of meeting professionals have pushed back their business recovery timeline with, year over year, a 68% increase in respondents anticipating to see pre-pandemic business levels in 2024 or later (from 22% to 37%).

When do you anticipate your business levels will be back to normal?

	Fall '21	Fall '22
Already back to pre-pandemic levels	3%	32%
Sometime in 2023	35%	31%
Sometime in 2024 or later	22%	37%

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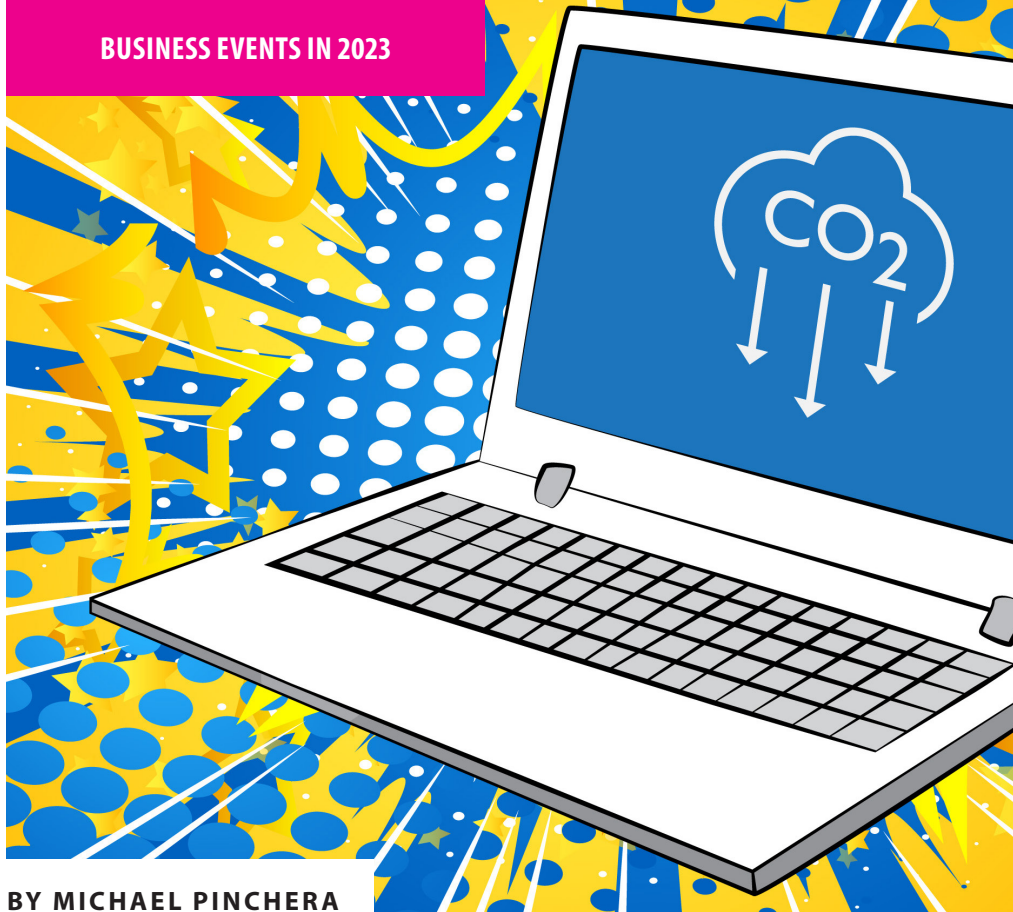
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MASK ON: Mirroring Those in the Know

When air quality experts met for the American Association for Aerosol Research Annual Conference in late 2022, COVID-19 protocols remained.

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA



While masking requirements and other COVID-19 protocols seem to be increasingly pushed aside for meetings and events—a sentiment largely mirroring the public at large—such safety mandates continue to be upheld at events ranging from the New York Comic Con to the American Association for Aerosol Research (AAAR) Annual Conference.

On Oct. 6, tweets about the COVID protocols for [AAAR's 40th Annual Conference](#) at the Raleigh Convention Center popped up in my Twitter timeline.

Dr. Dustin Poppendieck, an environmental engineer in the Indoor Air Quality and Ventilation Group at the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), was live-tweeting his experience at the event—the tweets that brought this event to my attention.

His onsite coverage concluded with, “And yes, mask adherence was nearly 100% during talks, CO₂ was never above 850 ppm. And most food was

eaten outside. Hopefully these layered mitigation [tactics] minimized disease spread among attendees.”

It has become common on COVID Twitter for event participants armed with portable CO₂ monitors, such as the Aranet4, to live tweet the carbon dioxide concentrations encountered

It has become common on COVID Twitter for event participants armed with portable CO₂ monitors, such as the Aranet4, to live tweet the carbon dioxide concentrations encountered throughout their event journey—from airport to airplane and meeting room to exhibition hall.

throughout their event journey—from airport to airplane and meeting room to exhibition hall. While these monitors don't measure contagion in the air, they do provide real-time insight of the air quality, which does correlate to viral spread potential. For reference, less than 600 ppm of CO₂ is widely considered an “acceptable level,” drowsiness, like that experienced on an airplane, can be expected with CO₂ levels of 1,000-2,500 ppm.

The more people in a shared space, the greater the CO₂ levels in that space—the same, generally, also applies to SARS-CoV-2, if it is indeed present to begin with.

Many events and venues have shown that with proper ventilation and air refresh rates, CO₂ levels—and

the corresponding potential SARS-CoV-2 risk—can be successfully managed. If nothing else, consider general onsite stakeholder wellness: With greater clean air, you're helping participants to be their best selves, to experience your event with greater mental acuity.

In a curious note, just days after the AAAR conference, the White House held its first ever Summit on Improving Indoor Air Quality. The topic is

Continued on page 33

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clearly getting some much-deserved attention beyond the quick-thinking troubleshooting that sprang up during the pandemic's first year as venue's sought potential solutions.

"Twenty years ago, I got my start in indoor air quality, helping learn lessons from the anthrax attacks on the Senate Hart Building," Poppendieck tweeted. "I don't think I ever would have thought enough people would ever care enough to hold a White House Summit on Indoor Air Quality."

Considering that many localities and events have given up requiring masking indoors, I reached out to Virtual Inc., an association management and event planning firm that's worked with AAAR for years—including for the 2022 annual conference—to learn more about the event's onsite COVID protocol.

"Since the attendees of this conference study and work within aerosol particles, and are very involved in COVID, the conference chair and board thought it would be important to have stricter-than-normal policies," says Sammie Blizzard, events specialist, Virtual Inc. "There is some fear that if this event were to be a super spreader that it could negatively impact their association, but I think they also wanted to just show that they are taking this virus seriously (regardless of other conferences removing mask guidelines)."

Blizzard explains that the board discussed which protocols to put in place for the event and that masking, specifically, is still a very normal practice for most of the event's participants.

The essence of the event's COVID protocols were nothing new—they're the tried-and-true basics that emerged as public health necessity early in the pandemic and remain important for risk mitigation. Ventilation and disease transmission, for instance, were sufficiently understood following the 1918 flu pandemic that

numerous Orpheum Theaters were purpose-built to provide fresh air. It shouldn't be surprising to see event professionals maintaining common-sense safeguards, however, with masking requirements gone from most day-to-day activities, AAAR's decision does stand out.

"Basically, the protocols we had were masks required for all attendees, and proof of both vaccines or a negative test," Blizzard says. "If an attendee

Many events and venues have shown that with proper ventilation and air refresh rates, CO₂ levels—and the corresponding potential SARS-CoV-2 risk—can be successfully managed.

did not have proof of either, they were not allowed in. A couple people did show up without [proof], but luckily had a picture [of their status] on their phone...almost all of them were prepared."

Event organizers bought the CLEAR Health Pass, according to Blizzard, to make it as simple as possible for U.S. citizens to upload their COVID-related information; those from outside the U.S. had to physically provide their vaccination or test info.

"This was communicated almost monthly, and posted on the website, for quite some time [in advance] so people were aware," she says. "We did not get any negative feedback."

Blizzard notes that the Raleigh Convention Center was great, overall, but specifically when it came to the venue staff's own understanding of indoor air quality.

"The [convention center] staff all followed our guidelines, and what AAAR loved was that their COVID policies already had outlined the air

filtration and air recycling which is something [the association was] wanting to know about," she says.

Intelligent cooperation with the venue is key to ensuring indoor air quality—venue staff, after all, should know more about the facility than anyone. Blizzard adds that the planned venue for last year's conference "did not know how to measure how often the air was being recycled." Ultimately, the 2021 event—as an in-person gathering—was cancelled (just like in 2020), and this professional community came together virtually. Considering this tumultuous recent history, for this year's event planners did maintain a virtual back-up plan in case pandemic conditions made an in-person gathering untenable.

The safety protocols for the 2022 AAAR Annual Conference do not appear to have negatively impacted attendance even though many organizations are still seeing attendance below 2019 numbers.

"In past years, we [typically] have around 800 attendees, and this year we were around 730, I believe," Blizzard explains. Sponsorship and exhibitor numbers were also "about where they usually are."

In thinking about adherence to the protocols, Blizzard did share one important caveat.

"I do think that this group is a special case, these requirements are still part of their day to day which made it easy to implement," she says. "If it were another group, I'm not so sure people would be so willing to adhere to it."

That begs a question for all meeting and event professionals, a flexible species with a long history of incorporating best practices from outside their direct industry: If indoor air quality experts are still requiring masks and proof of vaccination or a negative test for their events, should you?

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Born of FRUSTRATION

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA

Meeting and event venues are, by and large, enjoying a seller's market, according to the majority (64%) of respondents to MPI's fall 2022 Meetings Outlook report. As a result, now is not a time during which planners should expect to successfully inject increasingly favorable terms or safeguards into their contracts; venues and other suppliers have many other clients from which to choose.

Among the hard business facts that the pandemic has made exceptionally clear: Force majeure is more limiting than many would have thought as recently as early 2020. After nearly three years of stressful uncertainty for professionals working in an already stressful role—meeting and event planning—many are understandably frustrated and trying to identify established legal ways to protect their organizations financially.

In these challenging times, there's a lot about which you may be—or even should be—frustrated. When it comes to meeting and event contracting, however, there's no legal golden ticket to absorb or absolve your frustration.

Frustration of Purpose, a legal term new to many that's making the rounds throughout the meeting and

event industry, is not the balm you're seeking. However, since the community is talking about it, here's what a couple of industry lawyers have to relay about Frustration of Purpose.

Frustration of Purpose

"There are certain legal principles that form a part of every contract, even if they're not explicitly stated in the contract," says Steve Rudner of Dallas-based Rudner Law Offices—a firm that specializes in legal work for hotels—citing common law doctrine. "As an example, in most states, there's something called the Implied Duty of Good Faith and Fair Dealing—that's a part of a contract even though it doesn't appear in the writing of the contract."

He says this is the case with Frustration of Purpose.

"When we've had a situation that seemed like it was in the neighborhood of force majeure and, for whatever reason, it didn't fit squarely in the definition of force majeure, the law

of force majeure or the language of the contract, a group could argue that the common law doctrines excused its performance—and Frustration of Purpose is one of those," he says.

Tyra Warner, CMP, PhD, JD, chair of the department of hospitality, tourism and culinary arts at the College of Coastal Georgia, says when people ask her about adding a Frustration of Purpose clause into an event contract, the first thing she explains is that it's not a clause, it's a defense.

Frustration of Purpose, she says, really means that if the purpose of your event becomes moot through no fault of your own, then it's a defense to not have to perform the contract.

"So, in that way, it is similar to force majeure, but it has to do specifically with the reason the contract was entered into in the first place," Warner says.

However, that appears to be where the real similarities between force majeure and Frustration of Purpose end.

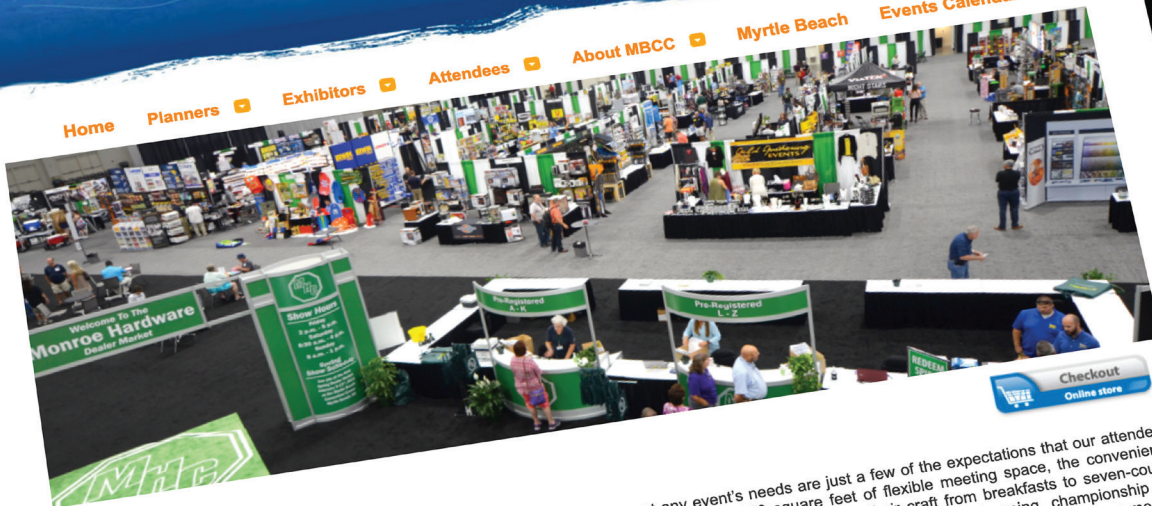
"The trend in the law in most states that have addressed this issue



Steve Rudner



Tyra Warner, CMP, PhD, JD



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is that if there is a force majeure clause or impossibility clause in the contract, courts are no longer willing to consider Frustration of Purpose as a defense,” Rudner says. “Now, that’s not in every state, but there are several where the courts have made that explicitly clear. I bring that up as the first basis from which to say that I don’t think anybody should bank on Frustration of Purpose protecting them in any kind of way if there’s a force majeure clause in the contract—and almost every hotel contract that I’ve seen has a force majeure clause.”

Hope and misunderstanding

As with many legal concepts when first perceived by non-legal professionals, Frustration of Purpose is widely misunderstood.

“As a result of that, we have some groups trying to insert language into their contracts that says, ‘Parties agree that the following is the purpose of the meeting,’” Rudner says. “And, of course, hotels will not agree to that because that’s essentially the group trying to find a new way to get out of its performance.”

One reason many in the industry are hearing about concepts such as Frustration of Purpose is as a possible hedge against legislation deemed offensive by the organizing group. A group may no longer wish to bring its business to and support a destination that’s passed “offensive” laws, or they may be concerned that attendance and their investment in the event will take a big hit if attendees back out, en masse, because of such legislation. For planners thinking that Frustration of Purpose will apply in such instances, these lawyers suggest otherwise.

Warner says Frustration of Purpose could apply, but only in the narrowest of circumstances.

“Say a national association of nurses decides that they’re against [certain reproductive healthcare legislation], but it’s not their main

focus—I don’t think they could say the legislation frustrates the purpose of holding their entire meeting,” Warner says. “It really has to be something that renders the whole purpose of entering into the contract moot.”

Does it even apply?

“Frustration of Purpose applies

is also limited to cases of extreme hardship.

“When we’re talking about extreme hardship, we’re not talking about if 20% or 80% of your people can’t get [to the event],” Rudner says. “For example, if I go forward with a meeting and only 10% of attendees can get there, it doesn’t get you close



when the purpose is shared by both parties—that’s the threshold question,” Rudner explains. “When we enter into a contract, from a hotel’s perspective, our purpose is to provide you with rooms and meeting space and F&B services—that’s our purpose in entering into the contract. The group’s purpose may be to get its people together, have a speaker, have an intimate dining experience—whatever the case may be. If and when that all becomes not possible because of changed circumstances, that may affect what the group understood the purpose of the meeting to be, but it does not affect what the hotel understood the purpose to be.”

Additionally, he contends that the application of Frustration of Purpose

to Frustration of Purpose. Or, ‘If I go forward with this meeting, I’m going to lose a lot of money’—that doesn’t get you close to Frustration of Purpose. The law says that the risk has to be one that was outside of what the parties contemplated, when we have an attrition clause or cancellation clause in a contract, that makes clear that we have contemplated those risks and that loss.”

Extrapolating with additional ways in which Frustration of Purpose won’t likely apply as planners may wish it would, he says there can’t be any other purpose to which a group could use the space.

“For example, if we’re talking



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about a corporate event to roll out some new product and, for whatever reason, that new product can't be rolled out, if that corporation can turn [the event] into an incentive for their top performing salespeople...or if they could do anything else with that space then, again, the purpose has not been frustrated," he says. "I think when people first hear about [Frustration of Purpose], they think, 'Oh, that's the solution to my problem.' The doctrine is much more limited than that, which is why we don't often hear of cases on Frustration of Purpose."

Going off of a hypothetical based around newly implemented laws to which a group is vehemently opposed, Rudner posits that the hotel probably didn't enter into the contract with an understanding that the deal would be void if the jurisdiction changed its laws.

"Even if the meeting has to be cancelled, [the group] has to pay for it," he says. "That's a loss already contemplated in the contract—assuming there's a cancellation clause in the contract."

Why now?

It's very clear to Rudner as to why Frustration of Purpose is increasingly being discussed among industry professionals: Planners are disappointed by what force majeure did and did not cover during the pandemic.

"There are a lot of instances in which groups did not want to go forward with meetings, didn't feel they could, had a lot of attendees that didn't want to go, etc., but where the meetings were supposed to be held, holding a meeting was legal, the hotels were open, the meetings could have gone forward with social distancing and adherence to all local requirements, and, in those circumstances, performance was not illegal or impossible and was not covered by a force majeure clause," he says. "So, groups found themselves having

to pay to cancel meetings they thought they wouldn't have to pay for. I think that frustrated and surprised a lot of groups. I think the reason we're hearing about Frustration of Purpose is that people are finding the force majeure clause doesn't necessary apply when they think that it should or expect that it would. And that leads them to Frustration of Purpose, which will help them even less."

Given the industry's recent pandemic-related turmoil, it makes sense that there's a great deal of frustration, disappointment and, surely in some instances, desperation when it comes to navigating these choppy business waters.

"I think everybody's looking for that magic language right now," Warner says, recalling the North Carolina "bathroom bill" controversy and backlash in 2017.

The viability of Frustration of Purpose as a defense may, at times, come down to the specificity of contract language—however, even assuming that slim possibility, Warner is doubtful.

"I don't think there's truly defensible language that is general enough to say, 'If your jurisdiction passes any law that we find objectionable, we can terminate the contract without liability'—I think that's too broad," she says. "You can drive a truck through that language—I

can't imagine a venue or destination accepting that."

Fix your focus

Rudner recommends meeting professionals take a step back to evaluate their options and possible actions.

"I think the real question is not, 'What should I use when a force majeure clause does not apply?' he says. "I think the real question is, 'Why didn't the force majeure clause apply and what implications should that have had for my meeting?' Nobody wants to hear this: A force majeure clause says what it means and means what it says, and it is not comfortable for a group to find out that it owes money for cancelling a meeting that, in the pit of its stomach, thinks it shouldn't have to pay for. But those decisions are not guided by emotion, those decisions are made as a matter of law."

If an organization is deeply concerned about the financial consequences of cancelling, if and when force majeure or Frustration or Purpose aren't viable options, Rudner suggests insuring the meeting against cancellation.

Having said that, he notes that every hotel he's ever worked with has been willing to, upon being contacted by a group seeking to cancel, have a conversation to discuss ways in which the parties can work something out.

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We recently spoke with Codi Missimo, national sales manager for the Grapevine CVB, about what makes the city a great fit for meetings and events.

What's one thing you enjoy about Grapevine?

I love my job and I feel truly honored to represent a destination like Grapevine that lives and breathes hospitality. The warm and welcoming spirit of Grapevine is evident wherever you go. From the staff at the front desk to the smiling faces that greet you around every turn, visit once and you'll understand why guests love coming to Grapevine.

What recent (and upcoming) developments in Grapevine are noteworthy for meeting planners?

It's always been a wish of mine to have a marquee hotel that's within walking distance to Historic Downtown Grapevine. My wish came true with the development of the Grapevine Main Station and its adjacent Hotel Vin, a six-story, 120-room Marriott Autograph Collection property.

Located in the heart of Historic Downtown Grapevine, the 42,000-square-foot Grapevine Main Station consists of Harvest Hall, a European-style food hall with seven globally-inspired kitchens; Third Rail, an indoor/outdoor entertainment and event venue; a 38,000-square-foot expansive outdoor plaza; and a 150-foot-tall Observation Tower with 360-degree views of the city. Steps away from the Trinity Metro TEX Rail platform is a 27-mile commuter line that offers a 10-minute ride to Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) International



Airport and also connects to downtown Fort Worth.

This development is an invaluable part of how our team will continue to connect people to Grapevine as a premier destination for meetings for years to come!



Codi Missimo
National Sales Manager,
Grapevine CVB

What makes Grapevine a convenient destination for meeting groups?

Being centrally located in the United States with proximity to DFW International Airport is a major draw for meeting planners who are looking for convenience. Couple that with 1,800 daily flights and being less than a 2.5-hour flight from either coast, and getting to Grapevine is a breeze.

Grapevine is known for its ability to host the grandest events with thousands of attendees thanks to its world-class meeting spaces. Can

you tell us more about how Grapevine responds to small and medium-sized events?

We pride ourselves with giving each and every guest, regardless the size of their group, an unmatched level of hospitality and support. We know that not every event is going to draw thousands of attendees. In fact, we understand that meeting planners are shifting gears and are looking for smaller, more intimate venues for their next meeting.

It's a win-win for everyone because the small meeting market is more flexible, which allows us to offer competitive rates that keep costs low, while providing the same high level of customer service that our clients have come to know and love. Our top priority is always client satisfaction. Big or small, our team is ready to help you plan your most successful event yet!

To learn more, contact Codi Missimo at (817) 410-3533 and CMissimo@GrapevineTexasUSA.com.

GrapevineTexasUSA.com/grapevine-meetings

MEX:ICAN CARIBBEAN



Why Hold an Event in the Mexican Caribbean?

BY MARIA LENHART



The reasons are many.

This multi-faceted region hugging the eastern side of the Yucatan Peninsula in the state of Quintana Roo is endowed with all the elements that make for a world-class MICE destination. There's convenient international air access, state-of-the-art hotels and venues, rich cultural heritage and a stunning tropical landscape replete with white-sand beaches, jungle foliage and coral reefs beneath a turquoise sea. With destinations ranging from the sophisticated resort meccas of Cancun and Riviera Maya to secluded islands and timeless towns with intact Mayan roots, there's something to fulfill almost any meeting objective.

Getting to the Mexican Caribbean, which offers three airports (Cancun, Cozumel and Chetumal) with 116 direct flights from cities around the world, is easy, often just a few hours from the U.S. Cancun International Airport, the region's main air hub and the second largest in Mexico, offers air connectivity with nearly 40 cities across the U.S. and Canada as well as with major gateways in Europe and Latin America. Cozumel International Airport offers connections to 10 cities in the U.S. and Canada, while Chetumal Airport offers service from within Mexico.



On the ground, a diverse and top-quality range of hotel accommodations, venues and support services are equipped to handle everything from international conventions to luxury incentive programs and board retreats. In total, the Mexican Caribbean offers over 130 hotels with 1,677,450 square feet of meeting space. All-inclusive resorts as well as European Plan properties are in the mix.

In terms of technology and services, the Mexican Caribbean is on par with other major meetings destinations around the world, offering access to top-quality DMCs, corporate event planners, audiovisual, transportation, customs services, catering, simultaneous translation and more. Organizers of international congresses and exhibitions will find zero value-added tax (VAT) for these events.

Sustainability is a high priority in the Mexican Caribbean, with hotels, vendors, DMCs and other event service providers following eco-friendly practices to protect this fragile paradise. Groups who would like to participate in activities that

benefit local communities and the environment will find no shortage of opportunities to do so.

A vibrant gastronomic scene embraces the hottest international food trends as well as local specialties reflecting centuries-old culinary traditions. Equally important, warm and caring Mexican hospitality and commitment to service add to the quality of the guest experience.

What really sets the Mexican Caribbean apart, however, are its abundant and unique opportunities for outdoor recreation, teambuilding and ways to form deep and lasting connections with the culture and natural environment. Just to name a few, there's the chance to explore majestic Mayan archaeological sites on cliffs above an aqua sea, swim in the crystal waters of an underground river or *cenote*, explore flooded caves and lagoons, snorkel or dive in marine wonderlands, zipline above a jungle canopy, connect with local artists or play a round on some of the world's finest fairways.

Cancun

Located on a sun-kissed sandbar

between a picturesque lagoon and the Caribbean Sea, Cancun is a world-renowned destination for leisure travel as well as meetings and events of all sizes. Its main venue is the Cancun Convention Center, which offers 152,847 square feet of meeting and exhibition space in a prime location with spectacular Caribbean views and a short walk from accommodations and restaurants in the city's hotel zone, Boulevard Kukulcan. Among the large groups that have recently met at the center are the International Association of Pediatric Dentistry, Panamerican Ophthalmology Congress and International Society of Arthroscopy Knee Surgery and Orthopedic Sports Medicine.

Already boasting over 200 hotels with a total of over 42,000 rooms and nearly 1 million square feet of meeting space, Cancun's hotel inventory continues to grow with international brands. New and upcoming properties with large meeting facilities include the Grand Fiesta Americana Riviera Cancun, Live Aqua Beach Resort Riviera Cancun, Grand Hyatt Cancun Beach Resort, Waldorf Astoria

Cancun and Wyndham Altra Cancun All-Inclusive Resort.

With both an urban vibe and nearby access to outdoor adventures, Cancun shines with a wide variety of options for offsite events, teambuilding and activities that attendees can enjoy during free time or on extended stays before or after the meeting. Within the hotel zone groups will find an array of dining choices, nightspots, attractions and shopping malls such as La Isla Shopping Village with its hundreds of specialty stores, restaurants and theaters. The hotel zone also offers an introduction to Mayan history at the Maya Museum of Cancun.

Cancun's wide sandy beaches that beckon just beyond the hotel rooms are a prime draw for visitors as are water activities. A unique option is the Underwater Museum of Art (MUSA) where snorkelers, scuba divers and passengers on glass-bottom boats can view over 450 life-size statues set along the ocean floor. For a more adrenaline-pumping experience, there are speedboat tours through the channels of mangroves on the Nichupte Lagoon. Also popular are boat excursions to Isla Mujeres, a delightful car-free island where visitors ride golf carts to enjoy some of the region's most beautiful beaches and a temple devoted to Ixchel, the Mayan goddess of the moon.

Cancun is also a golfer's paradise with seven golf courses designed by such luminaries as Greg Norman, Robert Trent Jones, Jr. and Jack Nicklaus—all featuring spectacular settings amid mangroves and views of the sea and lagoons.

Costa Mujeres

Just north of Cancun and a half-hour from the Cancun International Airport, Costa Mujeres is the Mexican Caribbean's newest tourist spot, ideal

for small groups seeking a relaxing atmosphere in an exquisite setting of mangroves, lush vegetation and pristine beaches. Accommodations are in 11 exclusive luxury hotels, offering a total of 90,269 square feet of meeting space as well as fine dining, spas, wellness centers and other upscale amenities.

Attendees will also find the Greg Norman-designed Playa Mujeres Golf

international and national events, there are over 50 group-friendly hotels, ranging from beachfront all-inclusive resorts to boutique hotels and secluded lodges, offering a total of 342,954 square feet of meeting space. Recently opened or upcoming hotels include the Riviera Maya EDITION, St. Regis Kanai Resort Riviera Maya, Hilton Tulum Riviera Maya and Conrad Tulum Riviera Maya.

RIO SECRETO



Club, beachside seafood restaurants at Puerto Juarez and the peaceful Isla Blanca, a favorite spot for kite surfing. At the El Meco archaeological site, there are spectacular views of the coast from its main structure, El Castillo.

Riviera Maya

South of Cancun on an 80-mile stretch of coastline from Puerto Morelos to Tulum, Riviera Maya draws meeting groups with its blend of luxury resorts, abundant teambuilding opportunities, outdoor adventures, natural wonders, dining and archaeological sites. Equipped to handle large

At the heart of Riviera Maya is Playa del Carmen, a lively resort town where a five-mile-long pedestrian walkway called Fifth Avenue is lined with art galleries, specialty shops, boutique hotels, restaurants and clubs. Another major town is Tulum, most famous for its stunning archaeological site where the vestiges of a Mayan city of over 60 structures are spread over cliffs above the Caribbean Sea. Elsewhere in Tulum groups will find a top-quality culinary scene that has drawn chefs from around the world and an expanding choice of event-friendly hotels and resorts.

While the Riviera Maya offers

some of the best beaches and golf courses to be found anywhere, its opportunities for outdoor adventures, including snorkeling and swimming in more than 2,500 *cenotes* and flooded caves, are truly unique. Group-friendly adventure parks offer hiking, ATV drives through the jungle, ziplining, rafting and much more. Among the region's most wondrous natural areas is the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, over 600,000 acres of protected lands for tropical plants and wildlife, including the rare and elusive jaguar.

Cozumel

The largest island in the Mexican Caribbean and a renowned diving spot, Cozumel features an impressive array of hotels and venues for small and mid-sized meetings. These include a convention center accommodating up to 1,279 attendees and 15 hotels with a total of 38,617 square feet of meeting space. Its international airport offers service from Mexico City, Toronto, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Philadelphia and other North American cities. The island is also accessible by ferry from Playa del Carmen.

With its abundant wildlife and natural areas, Cozumel offers a variety of immersive experiences for meeting attendees, including the chance to snorkel with manta rays or visit a turtle camp to help release endangered sea turtles back into the ocean. Wildlife, including crocodiles and some 224 bird species, can be observed on a swamp boat excursion at Punta Sur Park. Mayan history and heritage abound in Cozumel, where sites include San Gervasio, an important place for pilgrimage and trading in ancient times.

Grand Costa Maya

Located in the southern part of the region near the Belize border, Grand

Costa Maya is one of the Mexican Caribbean's hidden gems. Chetumal, gateway to the region as well as the state capital of Quintana Roo, offers group-friendly hotels and the Chetumal International Business and Convention Center, a stunning modern facility with a Mayan-inspired design that accommodates events for up to 2,400 people with a total of 36,597 square feet of meeting space. The city's waterfront Boulevard Bahia is a prime spot for enjoying sunsets,

marine reserve that is part of the world's second largest barrier reef, an underwater wonderland of tropical fish, turtles and sunken Spanish and English galleons dating back to the 16th century. Bacalar, designated one of Mexico's "Magic Towns," offers Spanish colonial history, charming boutique hotels and the Lagoon of the Seven Colors, a spectacular setting for kayaking, boat rides, swimming and snorkeling.

As its name suggests, some of

BARCELÓ RIVIERA MAYA



Mexican street foods like crispy crepes called *marquesitas* and live entertainment.

A four-hour drive from Cancun, Chetumal can also be reached by air from Cancun, Mexico City and Guadalajara.

Chetumal and its surroundings provide myriad ways to enjoy marine sanctuaries, jungle preserves, Mayan culture and leisure activities that even include casino gaming in the nearby Commercial Free Zone in Belize. Mahahual, a cruise port and diving mecca, is situated on a

Grand Costa Maya's most fascinating sites are those left behind by the Maya, including Chacchobén, Oxtankah, Dzibanché, Kinichná and Kohunlich, the latter with its Temple of the Masks, a 4th-century pyramid with stairways lined with carved stone masks. ■

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MEET ME AT THE MEX:ICAN CAR:IBBEAN

130 hotels with over **1,677,450 sq. ft. of meeting space**, beautiful natural sceneries, great air connectivity and easy budgeting are just a few of the things that make the **Mexican Caribbean** the perfect place for holding your meetings.



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