

APRIL 2014
VOLUME 30 • NUMBER 9

Convention South

south's best
executive
board
rooms
pg. 16

Bringing You The South's Differentia.

AIR-*ttraction*

There's a new attraction to *fly* as
business meetings surge & the U.S.
welcomes more international groups.

- 7 Surprisingly International Southern Destinations
- 6 Airports Lifting Off To New Heights
- How To Grab Your Group Fares

ALSO:

Insider Tips
For Planning High
ROI Meetings
(for mid-sized companies)

+15 CASINOS
Mystery Shopped
Reveals Premier
Gaming Resorts
For Groups

Destination Showdown:

Austin
Charlotte
Huntsville
Northwest Florida
Monroe/West Monroe
Oklahoma City
Richmond

meet in the middle

Planning ROI Meetings For Mid-Sized Companies

The Power Of Mid-Sized Companies:

Encompasses
businesses of
all industry
segments.



Generate
annual revenues
between
\$10 million and
\$1 billion.

82% survived
the recession years
of 2007-10, com-
pared to 57% of
small firms.

Added 2.2 million
jobs during recession
years of 2007-10. Set
to increase employ-
ment in 2014.

The nation's 200,000 middle market businesses don't get as much attention as small businesses or *FORTUNE* 1,000 companies, but don't let these overlooked—and often misunderstood—companies fool you. They are an economic engine driving the U.S. recovery. According to the National Center for the Middle Market—one of the only organizations that monitors this segment—mid-sized companies grew their revenue last year at a rate five times higher than the S&P 500.

Face-to-face is a major reason why these companies—most of which are business-to-business operators—are growing and adding jobs, according to Chris Cote with Omnience, a global leader in marketing event management solutions based in Atlanta. "With signs of economic recovery and following two years of modest activity, many corporate leaders are looking to reintegrate meetings into their marketing plans and budgets, positioning themselves for the growth years ahead," Cote affirmed. "Events are a great investment—research shows that there is no substitute for the increased sales and customer loyalty that face-to-face events can offer."

**Mid-sized companies, while growing,
continue to encounter a host of challenges when it
comes to planning their meetings, including:**

- **proving the value of face-to-face to weary stakeholders,**
- **providing "Corporate America expectations" on a limited budget, and while avoiding an overspend-perception backlash,**
- **balancing participant incentives in a business environment,**
- **finding what works and what doesn't to get the best ROI,**

To tackle these challenges, Cote provided ConventionSouth with his insider tips for mid-sized business-to-business companies.

The Meeting Needs Of Mid-Sized Companies:

29% of top
performers
emphasize training
compared to
17% of slower-
growth
firms.

Nearly 75% face
difficulties in pursu-
ing the level of
training they need.

Visit
OmnienceEvents.com
to learn more about
Chris Cote &
Omnience's event
services.

Source: National Center for the Middle Market

Look for expertise...not extra bodies. All hands on deck? Not necessarily. Instead of using an inexperienced internal team to manage your event, find an independent meetings planning company that complements your staff and enables the focus to be on activities and mission. In addition, it's more cost-effective to hire planners than to manage your

event internally. This team should have expertise in everything from venue selection to registration management to meeting logistics and follow-up.

Content is key. There is a delicate balancing act between cost and creating a quality event. There is no substitute for quality content, even

when budget constraints are present. You should justify your meeting's return on investment by demonstrating that content offers added value and will help you meet your event's goals. Intelligence regarding how your attendees value your events is important in both reporting your event ROI and in shaping future meetings.



Southern elegance. Undeniable charm.

Recently named to *Travel + Leisure's* "Top 500 Hotels in the World," The Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa was also recognized as a great value, proving that elegance and refined service doesn't have to break the bank. With 405 plush guest rooms, 37,000 square feet of indoor meeting space plus 600 acres of outdoor property, this Four Diamond resort will fit any type of event. Your attendees will be entertained with two Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail courses, 10 tennis courts, a European spa, three swimming pools and endless walking trails and beaches. The Grand is the perfect place to host your next meeting.

BIG REWARDS. Book any group value date in 2014 and receive: One complimentary room for every 40 revenue generating rooms » 10 percent off Food & Beverage » Five complimentary guestroom upgrades » Five complimentary welcome amenities for five VIP's » Two 60-minute spa treatments » 10 complimentary rounds of golf including cart rental » \$3000 credit for a welcome reception.

To learn more call 251.928.9201 or email sales@marriottgrand.com.

**GRAND HOTEL MARRIOTT
RESORT, GOLF CLUB & SPA**
One Grand Boulevard, Point Clear, AL 36564
Phone 251.928.9201, MarriottGrand.com

A part of Alabama's Resort Collection on
The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail



Valid until July 31, 2014. Not valid for existing contracts, special offer must be listed in sales contract, for groups booking 400 or more total room nights. © 2014 Marriott International, Inc.

Fun promotions create excitement. All the buzz about integrating games into events reflects a huge trend called "gamification," which uses games to make content more appealing and easier to understand. Gamification engages people – by giving the meeting agenda a fresh feel. Gaming can go beyond digital. You can gamify events just by the way you present content, and how the schedule is built: announce a surprise speaker; give out prizes; reward great ideas. Attendees want playful, memorable and relevant ways to interact with each other and their company host.

Mobile devices advance interaction.

Whether through personal mobile devices or sophisticated virtual meeting suites, technology is revolutionizing the way meetings content is communicated—both in and out of the meeting room. Not only are people outside the room drawn in, but those within the room experience a heightened degree of interaction. Smart phone meeting applications can enable everything from networking and lead exchanging to real-time audience surveys and course notes. From a map of the facility to session schedule changes, mobile technology now affects nearly every aspect of meeting planning and production.

Use social media to build a community. A strong social media presence has become key to the way people gather and digest information. Event planners need to understand and leverage Twitter and LinkedIn to promote their message and reach potential attendees in the

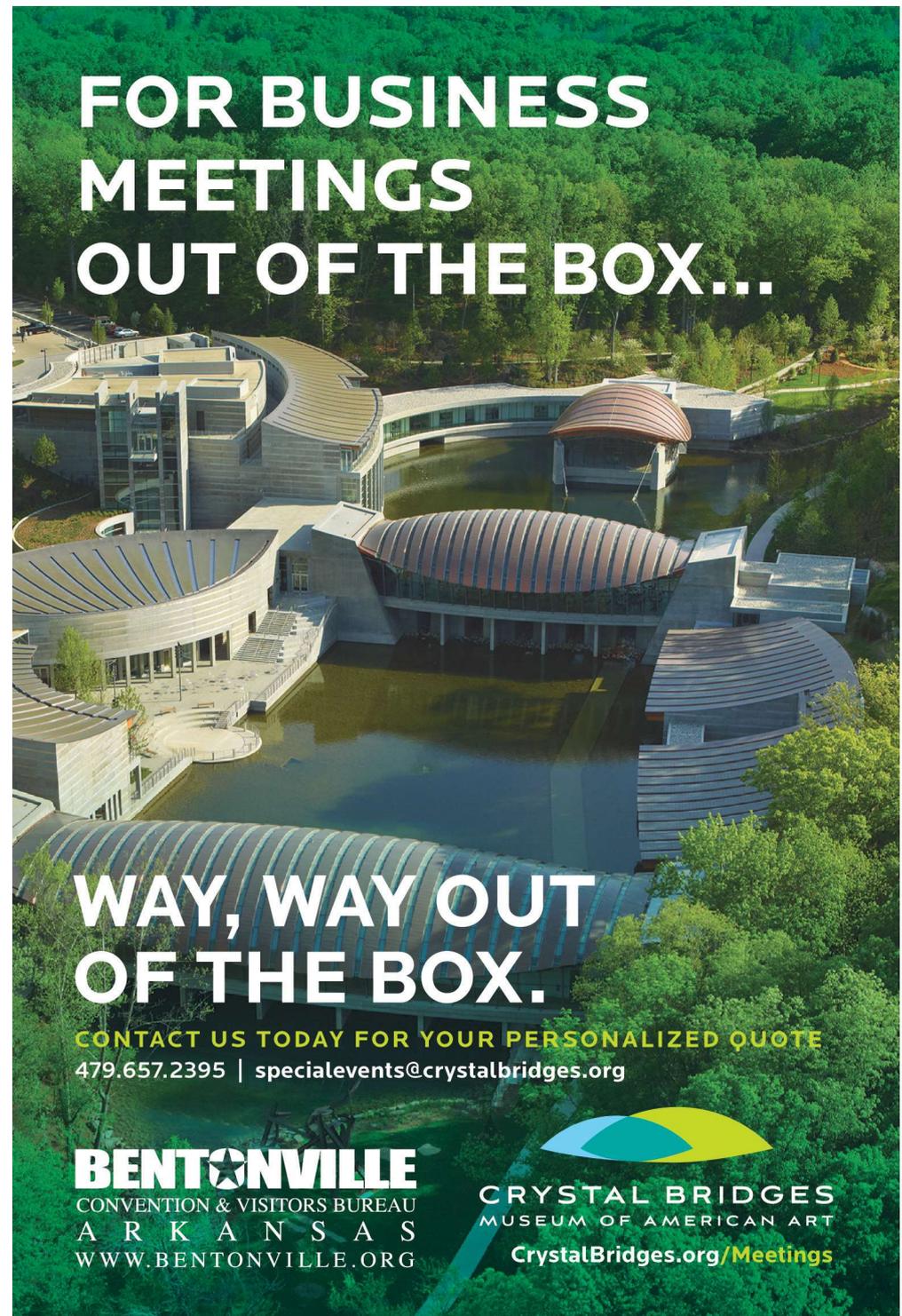
places they go for answers. The daily use of social networking sites via smartphones is also on the rise. Attendees can also network through social media before, during, and after the event, which can be a relationship game-changer. Adding your voice to this conversation creates new opportunities to listen and learn from your attendees.

Learn even more about attendees. Companies with sophisticated event management solutions can now track costs, registrants, attendance trends, subsequent sales and more. Whether an event has 25 or 250 attendees, meeting planners are responsible for registering them. It has become more than taking down names and creating a badge per attendee. Technology enables lead retrieval and integration with various technologies, such as specific sessions each person plans to attend and if or how they are participating. The post-event online survey sent to attendees days or weeks after the event may not be the most cutting edge tool, but the data can be the best intelligence in improving all aspects of future meetings, including the quality of and effectiveness of core messaging.

Hybrid meetings growth explodes. Face-to-face meetings still matter because they are more likely to keep attendees listening, yet they are more effective with hybrid components. A hybrid meeting is one that has a real-time, face-to-face as well as a virtual component and is growing in popularity. Many larger events, for example, are being streamed live with backchannel conversations on platforms such as Twitter. The beauty of a hybrid meeting is that even registrants who can't attend can experience it virtually, which will extend the life of the meeting. It also can preserve the content so that prospects can go online and check in months or even years later.

Follow up with feedback. When reconnecting with attendees, don't be over-promotional about your company and services. Offer content they can use in your blog and post-event communication. Continue and strengthen your relationship with participants. Find a sub-group who enjoyed your event and invite them back to a

virtual meeting. Select the right ones with a post-event survey that asks for their opinion and suggestions. Create a virtual discussion group that will reinforce a peer-to-peer dynamic. This way you can continue to offer value to your prospects long after your event's closing session. ■



FOR BUSINESS MEETINGS OUT OF THE BOX...

WAY, WAY OUT OF THE BOX.

CONTACT US TODAY FOR YOUR PERSONALIZED QUOTE
479.657.2395 | specialevents@crystalbridges.org

BENTONVILLE
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU
ARKANSAS
WWW.BENTONVILLE.ORG

CRYSTAL BRIDGES
MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
CrystalBridges.org/Meetings