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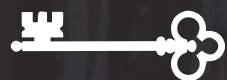
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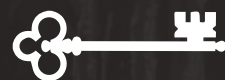




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# FEATURES

## 22 DESTINATION: MILWAUKEE

URBAN RENEWAL HAS LED TO A GROWING INTEREST IN MILWAUKEE AS A MEETINGS AND EVENTS DESTINATION FOR GROUPS OF ALL SIZES.

By Ronnie Wendt

## 28 MEALS ON WHEELS

FOOD TRUCKS ARE DRIVING UNIQUE FOOD AND BEVERAGE OPTIONS TO TODAY'S MEETINGS AND EVENTS.

By Maura Keller

## 32 CALCULATED RISK

TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE, EVENT PLANNERS MUST CONSIDER UPPING THEIR TECHNOLOGY INVESTMENTS.

By Amy Wunderlin

## 39 PODCASTS FOR PROMOTION

THE HOW'S AND WHY'S OF PROMOTING A MEETING OR EVENT WITH PODCASTS.

By Greg Gerber

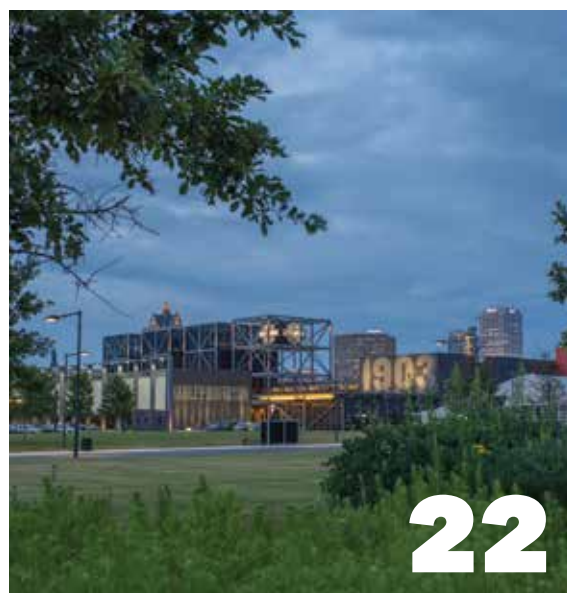
## 45 A TALE OF THREE MEETINGS

HOW TO REINVENT ONE SPACE FOR A VARIETY OF GROUPS AND UNIQUE NEEDS.

By Jen Bradley



# 12



# 22

# DEPARTMENTS

## 8 IN THE NEWS

Briefs on the latest happenings in the meetings and convention industry

## 12 VENUE SPOTLIGHT

Wild Rice Retreat helps corporate teams nurture the mind, body and spirit  
By Ronnie Wendt

## 14 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Why Doesn't Anyone Get Me?  
Understanding how others perceive us can help us make a better impression  
By Molly Rose Teuke

## 18 EXPERT ADVICE

5 Tips for a Better Golf Outing

## 50 PLANNER PROFILE

Best of Both Worlds: Andrea Vandeberg and Sarah Sarbacker  
By Shelby Deering



# 39

## 36 DESTINATION SHOWCASE VISIT BROOKFIELD & REAL RACINE

ON THE COVER: FISERV FORUM. PHOTO COURTESY MILWAUKEE BUCKS.



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Milwaukee topped the news when it won the race to host the next Democratic National Convention (DNC). The convention will take place July 13-16, 2020, in the newly built Fiserv Forum, a 17,500-seat arena that the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks call home.

Milwaukee beat out a pair of larger Sunbelt cities on the ticket in its campaign to host the event. Its selection as the DNC host city marks the first major-party convention in the city's history and is a true testament to what Milwaukee has

to offer the meetings and events industry.

Our destination profile on Milwaukee showcases why the Democratic National Committee made Milwaukee its top pick, over Houston and Miami. New venues, mouth-watering cuisine and varied activities have made Milwaukee a hot destination for meetings and events. This city has it going on, with everything from winning sports teams, beautiful and unique meeting and event venues, a food and beverage scene complete with food delights prepared by nine James Beard nominated chefs and hyper-local experiences that are unavailable anywhere else.

However, even the hottest venue in the world won't draw attendees without marketing. Find out how marketers plan to promote the DNC before, during and after through podcasts in "Podcasts for Promotion." Then learn how being the first to implement cutting-edge technology can make your meeting standout in "Calculated Risk."

The state also has officially teed off in the golf industry. Each year, it's drawing more major championships and now has landed, arguably, the biggest—the 2020 Ryder Cup. What this means for meeting planners is opportunity—the opportunity to give your guests the experience of playing a championship course. For more suggestions on how to make your next golf outing a winner, turn to "5 Tips for Better Golf Outings."

Finally, learn how you can work with a venue to create the meeting of your dreams. Check out "A Tale of Three Venues" to see how a planner team used the same venue to meet different meeting objectives. And, gather some practical tips along the way for what makes sense for a tech meeting, employee appreciation gala or a sit-down dinner.

I'm heading out now for some time on the water, another opportunity the state has in abundance.

Enjoy the read!

Ronnie Wendt  
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## IN THE NEWS

### VISIT MILWAUKEE CEO TO STEP DOWN



After leading the organization for more than nine years, Paul Upchurch is resigning as president and CEO of VISIT Milwaukee. During Upchurch's tenure, tourism spending doubled from \$1.6 billion in 2011 to

\$3.2 billion in 2018, and Upchurch recently assisted the DNC Committee in securing the DNC 2020 bid. Upchurch will stay on through December 31 to assist with the expansion of the convention center and transition planning. VISIT Milwaukee began a national search process for a new permanent president and CEO immediately. The search is being spearheaded by board chair Omar Shaikh, co-owner and president of SURG Restaurant Group LLC, who will be forming a local committee.

### MADISON LAUNCHES "ONE CITY. ONE CONTRACT." PROGRAM

Destination Madison and nearly a dozen Madison area hotels have banded together to create a single contract for meeting professionals needing room blocks across more than one brand property. With the "One City. One Contract." program, planners will work with Destination Madison and sign one master contract that seamlessly stitches together multiple hotels across multiple brands. The contract outlines terms like force majeure, indemni-

fication, how cut-off dates are administered and more. The hotels will issue a simple addendum to the contract that secures the client's guest room block, negotiated rates and concessions. Each addendum is the same format and term language.

### RESTAURATEUR JOE BARTOLOTTA DIES AT 60



Joe Bartolotta, co-owner of The Bartolotta Restaurants in Milwaukee, passed away in his sleep on April 23. He was 60 years old. Bartolotta and his family are among the restaurateurs who jump-started Milwaukee's culinary scene. Beginning with Ristorante Bartolotta in 1993, they expanded to several more James Beard-recognized restaurants such as Lake Park Bistro, Harbor House and Bacchus. The group is also responsible for event spaces at Discovery World, the Milwaukee Grain Exchange and the Italian Community Center. In all, the Bartolotta Restaurant Group owns 16 restaurants and catering facilities in the Greater Milwaukee area, employing nearly 1,000 people.

### ERIN HILLS TO HOST 2025 U.S. WOMEN'S OPEN



Erin Hills, in Erin, Wis., has been selected as the host site for the 2025 U.S. Women's Open and 2022 U.S. Mid-Amateur Championships. The U.S. Women's Open, the ultimate test in women's golf, will be contested May 29-June 1. The 2022 U.S. Mid-Amateur will be played Sept. 10-15, with Blue Mound Golf and Country Club, in Wauwatosa, Wis., serving as the stroke-play co-host course. "We are thrilled to return to Erin Hills, and to



bring the U.S. Women's Open and U.S. Mid-Amateur to such a memorable and deserving course," said Mike Davis, CEO of the USGA. "To bring these championships to a public facility all golfers can enjoy is especially exciting for us. The USGA has a great relationship with the facility, and Erin Hills has proven to be one of the premier golf venues in the nation as well as an excellent test."

## WISCONSIN'S TOURISM ECONOMY CONTINUES TO GROW

Visitor spending in Wisconsin increased by nearly 5% in 2018, to \$13.3 billion, according to a report released by the Department of Tourism. The state saw 112 million visitors, which was 2 million more than it had in 2017. Visitor travel has now grown by at least 2% in each of the past five years. Kristina LeVan, a Department of Tourism spokeswoman, said several large events drew visitors to Wisconsin last year, including the Brewers first playoff games in seven years and Harley-Davidson's days-long 115th anniversary celebration in Milwaukee in late August and early September.

## OFFICIALS EYE HOP EXPANSION BEFORE DNC ARRIVES



Milwaukee city officials are hoping to add 2.4 miles to the city's streetcar line before the Democratic National Convention comes to town. The goal is to extend the Hop all the way to the Wisconsin Center District convention center. The city had already planned to expand the line to serve Fiserv Forum when the current loop opened. Before work can start, the Common Council must approve the plans. The Hop system currently includes five streetcars stopping at 18 stations in Milwaukee.





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## HILTON MADISON MONONA TERRACE UNDERGOES RENOVATIONS

Hilton Madison Monona Terrace is undergoing a full renovation. Work is being done on all 240 guestrooms and suites with a new design inspired by the university community. Upon completion, new features and amenities will include brand-new bedding, stone-topped furniture, and 55-inch smart TVs. All double rooms will be converted to two queen beds, and king rooms will be updated with walk-in showers. All rooms will receive new tile surrounds and double-headed showers. The renovations will also include reimaging the hotel's food and beverage options.

## GOVERNOR'S TOURISM AWARDS ANNOUNCED

Five recipients of the Governor's Tourism Award were recognized at the annual Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism in Wisconsin Dells. The awards recognized individuals, organizations and businesses for their excellence, dedication and impact on Wisconsin's travel and hospitality industry. The Rising Star Award went to Cambria Mueller, Door County Visitor Bureau. The Stewardship Award went to Frog Bay Tribal National Park, Bayfield; the first tribal national park in the U.S. The Arts, Culture and Heritage Award went to the Peninsula School of Art in Fish Creek. The Service Excellence Award went to Lars Johnson, Al Johnson's Swedish Restaurant and Butik. The Tourism Legacy Award went to Trisha Pugal, president and CEO of the Wisconsin Hotel and Lodging Association.

## A-MAZING EVENTS OFFERS NEW SERVICES

A-mazing Events, an event and meeting planning company based in Appleton, now offers venue management services for venue property owners. The company's venue management services include venue-specific phone lines for inquiries; tours; bookings and contracts; event design and planning; and on-site event staffing. The company also offers graphic design and marketing initiatives and consults on space renovations.

## CORRECTION FOR WISCONSIN MEETINGS SPRING ISSUE



In the Spring Issue of Wisconsin Meetings, an incorrect photo was used of the Radisson Hotel and Conference Center on page 30. The photo used is actually of the Thelma Sadoff Center for the Arts

not the new conference center (pictured here), which offers 13,315 square feet of meeting space and 133 fully remodeled guest rooms. Wisconsin Meetings apologizes for the error. [WM](#)



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## VENUE SPOTLIGHT

# COMPANY CONNECTIONS

WILD RICE RETREAT HELPS CORPORATE TEAMS NURTURE THE MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT.

BY RONNIE WENDT

The Travel Wisconsin website describes Bayfield as “the gateway to the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore with lighthouses, sea caves and some of the best kayaking in the world.” The description embodies the charm of the northern Wisconsin town but fails to mention that it’s also a destination where visitors can explore individual creativity and human development. Wild Rice Retreat, a new Bayfield business, offers a space where executives and corporate teams can nurture the mind, body and spirit through integrative artistic and holistic experiences.

Wild Rice Retreat is the brainchild of Heidi Zimmer and her husband, Martin Ebelhardt. The couple took over the former Wild Rice Restaurant space in 2018 to build a year-round calendar of opportunities focused on the arts and personal well-being. The business brings in noted professionals from across the globe to conduct workshops for visitors and corporate teams alike.

“Our programming falls under three general pillars: Expression, which we deem as the writing, painting, drawing, photography, music and jewelry-making pillar; Movement, which encompasses yoga, tai chi, Qigong, meditation, dance and healing movement practices; and Nourishment, which focuses on nourishing the mind, body and spirit through sharing and creating food, aromatherapy, nutritional

coaching, and herbalism with a focus on using locally-sourced ingredients whenever possible,” says Jennifer Albrecht, director for Wild Rice Retreat.

These practices cultivate the mind and provide an excellent team-building opportunity for groups of up to 50 people. “We believe strongly in pulling teams out of their everyday environment and diving deep into strategic planning or whatever topic the corporation needs to tackle in a quiet and peaceful setting,” she says. “This is the perfect place to do this.”

Every Wild Rice corporate retreat begins with a fact-finding mission, where Albrecht asks a host of questions pertaining to what they are looking for, the comfort levels of the team and how much the leadership wants to push those comfort levels. “We ask a lot of questions to learn what would make the retreat a success for the leadership and the team itself,” she says.

The Wild Rice team also assists in planning for off-campus activities, such as water adventures, recreational outings, healing, wellness and other seasonal activities, to help organizations craft retreats that meet specific goals. “We can help groups plan activities on-site, but we will also work with them to get people out of their seats. We can build team-building exercises into outdoor activities or we can plan social times designed to encourage people to interact and share ideas,” she says.

Chef Lars Dukowitz, who served as the Chef De Cuisine in the former Wild Rice Restaurant, prepares the meals on-site. Dukowitz, who was part of the team recognized with a nomination for a James Beard award, is developing gardens on-site and partnering with local food co-ops and farmers to inject local flavor into the cuisine.

Currently teams involved in Wild Rice corporate retreats must stay in town, but that will change when Wild Rice Retreat completes on-site, Scandinavian-inspired cabins in 2020. Besides new classroom spaces as well as a village of 15 camper cabins and one-bedroom cabins, construction crews are also building five quad-style, two-story buildings, each offering four bedrooms and four bathrooms in a shared living space. “For a corporate retreat, this would allow participants to each have their own bedroom and bathroom but share a common living space,” she says. “We are happy to help arrange lodging with our partners or direct you to the plethora of options in the area.”

In a world where business owners and key staff are so busy putting one foot in front of the other in the day-to-day management of a business, it’s important to get back to basics and remind teams why they do what they do. Learn more about how Wild Rice Retreat can help corporate teams accomplish this by visiting: [wildriceretreat.com](http://wildriceretreat.com). **WM**



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## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

# WHY DOESN'T ANYONE GET ME?

UNDERSTANDING HOW OTHERS PERCEIVE US CAN HELP US MAKE A BETTER IMPRESSION.

BY MOLLY ROSE TEUKE

*It's pretty simple, pretty obvious: that people's first impressions of people are really a big mistake.*

—Vincent D'Onofrio, American Actor

In his book, "A User's Guide to the Brain," Dr. John Ratey writes, "There are more possible ways to connect the brain's neurons than there are atoms in the universe."

Which means that no two brains are alike.

Given the vastly different ways our brains process input, it's not surprising that no two people will see us in quite the same way. Yet, we think others see us as we see ourselves.

At a conference a few years ago, the woman I had invited to be the keynote speaker greeted me with the usual "How are you?"

"Great," I replied, "I'm so happy this is finally happening."

"Really?" she asked, obviously skeptical.

"Yes, of course!"

"Well," she said, "your face hasn't caught up to how you're feeling."

Psychologists call this the transparency illusion. We believe others are reading us accurately, and they seldom are. Why not, and what can we do about it? It isn't just whether we're presenting an appropriate facial expression. It has far more to do with the other person than it does with us.

## QUICK VERSUS THOUGHTFUL IMPRESSIONS

Our brains are what neuroscientists call cognitive misers. They process input in the quickest and simplest way possible rather than spend valuable cognitive resources on more sophisticated processing. That leads to what Daniel Kahneman, a psychologist and Nobel Prize winner for his work in behavioral economics, describes as two systems of thinking.

When a driver cuts me off in traffic, my System 1 thinking labels him a jerk. If I can engage my System 2 thinking, I might conclude he's on his way to a hospital or is distracted because he just got laid off—or any number of scenarios that might explain his rude driving.

System 2 thinking takes effort. We have to stop and think instead of cruising on mental autopilot. System 2 thinking might lead you to conclude, "I would have done the same thing under the circumstances," or "Anyone would react that way." Yet, it takes effort to get there, and so we continue being misunderstood and misunderstanding others.

## DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

People seldom misunderstand us intentionally. They're simply using the shortcuts the cognitive miser between their ears requires. When we meet someone for the first time, we'd be astonished by the assumptions that person is making about us. And yet, we do it, too. We all evaluate one another automatically, drawing on assumptions that have to do with stereotypes or other categories we put people in based on often-irrelevant details like dress, job title, age, height or weight, posture, how they walk, the way they smile—even how white their teeth are. There is no detail too small for your brain to make a judgment around. Every brain does it, and yours is no exception.

## BIAS

In his book "Thinking, Fast and Slow," Kahneman explores countless ways our quick thinking is flawed, primarily because of systematic errors we make in judgment—errors he calls biases. Heidi Grant, author of "No One Understands You and What to Do About It," says, "If you have a brain, you're biased." Let's look at some of the more common biases we use in evaluating one another.

**Confirmation bias.** People see in you what they expect to see. If they expect you to be dull-witted, or



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*"Highlighting shared goals and how you can help achieve them can make people notice you."*

—Heidi Grant, author

smart, or funny, or rude, or kind, that's what they'll see, whether there's evidence for it or not. And they won't have a clue that they're doing it. (Nor will you, even though you'll be doing it, too.) Confirmation bias comes from stereotypes, cultural experiences, how closely you resemble someone else they know and their past experience with you. You will have to work very hard to overcome someone's confirmation bias.

**Correspondence bias.** We attribute behaviors to the person acting, not to circumstances that might have led anyone (even us) to that behavior. To get past this bias, we have to hope people get past their System 1 thinking.

**Halo effect.** We assume that people who have one good quality (attractiveness, intelligence, kindness, etc.) will have many good qualities. We give them the benefit of the doubt. By the same token, people

who have one negative characteristic probably have many. This bias makes it worth adhering to the old adage, "Put your best foot forward."

## LENSES


Grant suggests there are three key lenses through which we see one another. First is the trust lens. Are you friend or foe? Do you convey warmth as a human being? Will you care about me and look out for me? Bottom line: Can I trust you? There are some obvious ways to convey that someone can trust you. Make and maintain eye contact. Smile. Stay focused on the conversation and nod to indicate understanding. Checking your texts during a conversation puts a pretty big crack in the trust lens. Paying attention with care will make you seem trustworthy to the other person.

Research at the University of Pennsylvania suggests that simply appearing happy

versus unhappy, easy-going versus finicky, authentic versus superficial, helpful versus critical, can strengthen someone's impression of you as trustworthy.

Second is the power lens. This one feels a bit cynical, but Grant says that people who have more power than you do see you primarily through the lens of "Can you be instrumental to me and my goals?" Don't tell a powerful person how much you admire him or her. Instead, consider how you might be of service and do your best to convey that. Otherwise he or she might not give you a second thought. Highlighting shared goals and how you can help achieve them can make people notice you. Think about the other person's agenda and convey that this is your agenda, too. It will make you memorable instead of inconsequential. This can be especially helpful when you're asking someone to do something for you (like hire you). The key is to do it with sincerity or you won't pass the trust test.

Third is the ego lens. We all want to know that we're higher in the pecking order than others. You can manage that lens by being modest and by emphasizing that you're on the same side. In other words, your successes can be shared by the person who can bask in reflected glory instead of being made to feel inadequate. Anything you can do to be seen as a support rather than a threat to someone's status will help you get past the ego lens.

Being aware of the biases and lenses through which others perceive you can give you a fighting chance of making a good impression. And it just might help you perceive those you encounter as they really are, not just the way your cognitive miser judges them. It seems only fair. 

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Molly Rose Teuke has an enduring curiosity about what makes our brains tick. She delivers a program for Nicolet College called Get Your Brain on Your Side and delivers brain-based leadership training for the NeuroLeadership Institute, a global leader in the performance arena. She also hosts a weekly classical music program on WXPB-FM. You can reach her at mollyrose@mollyrosecoaching.com.





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## EXPERT ADVICE

# 5 TIPS FOR A BETTER GOLF OUTING

CREATIVE THINKING AND PROPER PLANNING DRIVE GOLF OUTINGS TO SUCCESS.

A recent Golf Digest article suggests there are three types of circle-the-date holidays for golfers: Watching major tournaments; receiving golf-related gifts at Christmas and on birthdays; and playing in club championships, golf trips or golf outings. But, while attendees view the third category, particularly the golf outing, as a respite from work, planners see them as a production where lack of planning can quite conceivably cause an event to fail. Here are five tips designed to drive planners to a better golf outing.

**1). Know your goals.** The first step to take, long before event numbers are turned in, is to define the purpose of that specific golf event. Is it fundraising? Is it networking? Is it a reward? "That alone will determine much of what goes on the day of the event," states Jim Buyze, PGA professional at Wild Ridge and Mill Run golf courses in Eau Claire. "Depending on the group, their time on the course may be directly about the golf experience, but conversely, the day could be focused on just being outside together and having a party."

Jennifer Dalsbo, golf sales manager at Grand Geneva Resort & Spa in Lake Geneva, reports knowing the answer to a handful of key questions can drive the planning process to a better outcome. Among the

questions are: Is this a company retreat? Are you raising money for charity? How large do you want this to grow? What are your key goals? "Planners need to be thinking years ahead, treating the golf outing as they would a business; planning each year with strategy and forecasted growth, while being open to change," she says.

**2). Plan for networking.** Whatever the defined goal, most corporate golf outings put a single purpose first—networking. This is where things can get tricky if the event only centers around golf. Dalsbo states, "Guests expect to network at larger tournaments and will not return next year if they don't make solid connections. You need to think about whom you would want to network with and approach your sponsor list so that it's beneficial to your attendees."

From there, Dalsbo recommends positioning representatives at sponsor holes. "Staking a sign in the ground is not enough," she says. "Encourage your sponsors to hand out food or beverage samples, along with their golf-themed items."

**3). Make it fun for all skill levels.** There are ways to tweak golf outings to make them appealing for all abilities. Dalsbo suggests opening the day with a ball toss, where the winner takes home a pot of cash; using a scramble format; incorporating a golf clinic for beginners; and chipping contests as ways to make a large outing memorable for everyone.

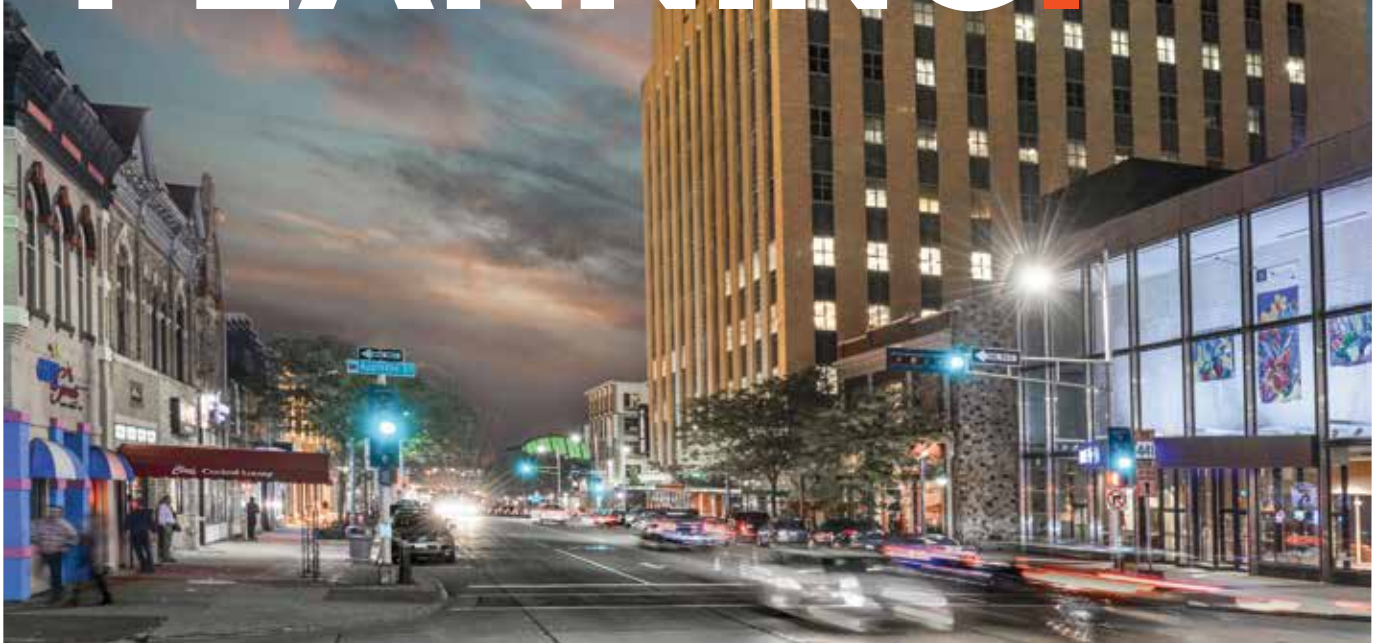
Meanwhile, Buyze recommends playing nine holes instead of the full 18 when there are many inexperienced golfers. He also advises hiring a golf professional to go along with each group. These professionals can help golfers and non-golfers improve their swing. "Courses are building more tee boxes, so we can adjust to experience and ability levels, and can put better players out there with beginners," he adds. "It's not always about the golf, but who you're golfing with."

**4). Consider extra touches.** Everyone loves free stuff and the chance to win a prize. Grand Geneva, for instance, offers a hole-in-one contest for a \$6 upcharge. The payout is \$10,000 and the course sees at least one winner every year. Other details are also offered by the resort for a small fee. However, planners also can strike out on their own to mix in a few extras. "One well received idea is putting welcome gifts in the golf carts, such as golf apparel, a sleeve of golf balls and a cooler stocked with beverages prior to tee off," Dalsbo says.

Guests welcome gifts of appreciation, which can be ordered through the course itself, reports Buyze. "It can be easier for planners to order these things through the course rather than going out and shopping around," he says. "We can have things shipped right here and companies often are



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surprised at the pricing they can get through a golf shop."

**5). Plan for the unexpected.** While die-hard golfers may stick it out in the rain, nothing puts a damper on a golf outing like a torrential downpour. Planners can—and should—prepare for the possibility of rain when organizing a golf outing. Providing golfers with custom rain gear, covered in sponsor logos, is one way to hedge your bets against Mother Nature. In addition, Dalsbo says to "inquire about renting indoor golf simulators (every course has them). They can be placed in the banquet room and don't require much space."

She also recommends making the most of a facility's other amenities. Grand Geneva, for example, has a fitness center, a full-service spa, a banquet space to move the meal indoors, and indoor games like Giant Jenga; all of which can be used to pass the time as golfers wait out the rain.

Organizing a winning golf outing is no easy task, but creative thinking and proper planning can help make every golf outing a hole in one. **WM**



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— DESTINATION —

# Milwaukee

URBAN RENEWAL HAS LED TO A  
GROWING INTEREST IN MILWAUKEE AS  
A MEETINGS AND EVENTS DESTINATION  
FOR GROUPS OF ALL SIZES.

By Ronnie Wendt

PHOTOS COURTESY VISIT MILWAUKEE



PHOTO COURTESY DAVID USELMANN TRAVEL WISCONSIN

*“We have everything  
a top-tier city has to  
offer, but on top of  
that we have Midwest  
hospitality, affordability,  
accessibility and  
experientiality.”*

—Laura Lutter Cole, Convention Sales  
Manager, VISIT Milwaukee

Milwaukee has a long and storied history as a powerhouse for manufacturing and machining. Today, the Cream City, home to seven Fortune 500 manufacturers and second in the nation for the highest percentage of workers in manufacturing, still proudly waves its manufacturing flag.

But just as there is more to the state of Wisconsin than brats, beer and cheese, there is more to Milwaukee than iron, aluminum and steel. In recent years, Milwaukee began a downtown renaissance that continues to this day. No part of the downtown remains untouched. Areas like the Historic Third Ward, Menomonee Valley, the Deer District, the Brewery District, the Wisconsin Center District and Walker’s Point are seeing both new construction and revamps of existing buildings come to life.

This urban renewal has led to a growing interest in Milwaukee as a premier meetings and events destination for groups of all sizes. The crown jewel in the Brew City’s downtown revitalization is its selection as host city for the next Democratic National Convention (DNC) at Fiserv Forum, the 17,500-seat arena that the NBA’s Milwaukee Bucks call home.





Milwaukee campaigned against larger Sunbelt cities to win its bid for the July 13-16, 2020, event. Its selection as the DNC host city marks the first major-party convention in the city's history and is a true testament to what Milwaukee offers the meetings and events industry.

This city has it going on, with everything from winning sports teams; beautiful and unique venues; a food and beverage scene complete with culinary delights prepared by 10 James Beard nominated chefs; a natural setting for outdoors enthusiasts; and a large selection of hyper-local experiences.

"We've had over \$5 billion in development in recent years; Fiserv Forum alone was a

\$524 million development. We added the city's streetcar, The Hop, and we've seen a 30% growth in hotel rooms in the downtown alone," says Laura Lutter Cole, convention sales manager for VISIT Milwaukee.

Lutter Cole reports she previously worked in the hotel industry, and once said, "I can't sell my hotel, unless I can sell my city." Milwaukee sells itself; she says. "We have everything a top-tier city has to offer, but on top of that, we have Midwest hospitality, affordability, accessibility and experientiality," she says.

Though VISIT Milwaukee, Fiserv Forum and other organizations that helped bring the convention to Milwaukee are exceptionally

proud of their efforts, Lutter Cole says the DNC, which will bring more than 50,000 people to the city, is really an extension of what Milwaukee's meeting and events industry has done all along, just on a larger scale. "This is a regional, once-in-a-lifetime event," she says, "and one that speaks very well to the collaborative, welcoming and enthusiastic efforts we make for every organization that chooses Milwaukee for its meeting, convention or event."

## VARIETY OF VENUES

Fiserv Forum opened in 2018, as the Bucks basketball team skyrocketed to national attention. The NBA team made it to the playoffs this year, narrowly missing a chance at the finals.

The new sports and entertainment arena hosts up to 200 sporting and entertainment events a year, but its 730,000 square feet also houses a plethora of unique and dedicated meeting spaces, something many people are unaware of.

"The building was created to be as flexible as we could make it," reports Jonathan Zuckerbrod, director of business strategy and platform development for Milwaukee Bucks. "While it has an open design concept, there are rooms and pockets we can scale down for a smaller meeting or event."

Mallory Brigman, manager of private event sales for Milwaukee Bucks, agrees, highlighting a handful of the meeting spaces available. The arena floor, the building's "most flexible meeting space," she says, can accommodate up to 2,000 people, reception style, or be transformed for a 1,000-person seated dinner. The Panorama Club sits at the top of the arena and offers extraordinary views into the bowl, while an expansive outdoor patio provides a panoramic glimpse of the city. Brigman says this space works well for a business meeting of 60-70 people, but also can accommodate up to 450 guests for a reception. The facility's atrium doubles as meeting space for approximately 280 guests while outdoors, an open-air plaza is available and connects to the entertainment block, which features fare from tenants that include Good City Brewing, the Mecca Sports Bar and Grill, Punch Bowl Social and Drink Wisconsinly.

While Fiserv Forum is certainly the

## PLANNER'S PERSPECTIVE

Kathryn Gleesing, president and CEO of DM-Connection & Events, hosts corporate meetings and university banquets within Milwaukee's city limits for three reasons, which she refers to as the 3 As.

**Affordability:** The room rates and food and beverage options are very affordable, she says.

**Activities:** There are plenty of activities for attendees to choose from, whether it's nightlife or fine dining, outdoor activities or shopping.

**Accessibility:** Milwaukee's General Mitchell International Airport is just minutes away from downtown and the city is also within driving distance (within a six- to eight-hour drive) of one-third of the nation's population. "It's easy to fly in or drive to Milwaukee, and it is easy to maneuver in once you get to the heart of the city," she adds.

*"The corporate groups I work with like being downtown because there are so many options for evening events and they are within walking distance to restaurants," Gleesing says. "They also like the suburban hotels for the banquet options, which give my clients a good price point for food and beverage."*



newest venue, Milwaukee has a veritable treasure trove of meeting spaces. The Potawatomi Hotel & Casino, which is putting the final touches on an \$80 million construction project and is the largest entertainment destination in the Midwest, offers comfortable and flexible meeting spaces that can accommodate events up to 3,000 people.

"Potawatomi has really great meeting rooms," reports Lindsey McKee, communications manager for VISIT Milwaukee. "The rooms make up an entire floor. There are also smaller rooms available for break-out sessions. There is ample parking and it is connected by skywalk to the building."

The Wisconsin Center, part of the Wisconsin Center District, which operates the center as well as the UW-Milwaukee Panther Arena and Miller High Life Theater, offers 188,694 square feet of exhibit space, but also has smaller ballrooms and meeting rooms to accommodate groups of all sizes.

"The Wisconsin Center is one of the few convention center you see that has tons of natural light, along with art and poetry on the walls outside the meeting spaces, a palm garden and more," Lutter Cole says. "And, more than 1,300 hotel rooms are connected to it by a skywalk." SpringHill Suites, Hilton Milwaukee City Center and the Hyatt Regency Milwaukee all offer meeting space as well.

The UW-Panther Arena and Miller High Life Theater provide beautiful spaces for a meeting, adds Lutter Cole. "The Miller

High Life Theater offers gorgeous architecture and murals," she says. "I've taken groups there as an option for an off-site dinner or meeting and they are just blown away by the artwork. The facility can be used for everything from a day-long corporate meeting to a beautiful reception or dinner."

Harley-Davidson Motor Company also dishes up some unique meeting and event venues on its 20-acre museum campus. The Harley-Davidson Museum offers indoor and outdoor spaces that can accommodate meetings and events of 10 people up to 10,000. It offers customizable banquet options as well. Available spaces vary in size from the Bolt, which accommodates up to 30 guests, to the Garage, which holds up to 1,000 people (600 guests seated). Planners can even arrange to have motorcycles brought into the space and tours of the museum as part of the event. Guests can also purchase Harley-Davidson memorabilia at the large gift shop.

The Pfister Hotel has a reputation for offering some of the best meeting space in Wisconsin. The luxury hotel has 15 meeting rooms on the seventh floor that can accommodate groups from 15 to 1,500. The Rouge on the Pfister's lobby level provides a distinctive atmosphere styled with European flavor, appointed with crystal chandeliers and marble accents. For a unique meeting space, the Executive Meeting Room offers a private oasis on the 23rd floor with breathtaking views of Milwaukee's cityscape.



It's impossible to list every available space; there are just so many, laments Lutter Cole. For the unique and unusual, she suggests the Pabst Mansion, which can be rented out for events from up to 30 guests to 300; Turner Hall, which can hold up to 500 guests; or the recently renovated Italian Community Center, which makes its grand ballroom, private conference rooms and an open-air courtyard available for events.

"The Historic Pritzlaff Building is also a great space. It is an old warehouse that has been transformed into a premier event venue," reports McKee. "They have an old safe in the building that gets used a lot for tastings and other really unique spaces."

## HAPPENING HOTELS

As the Democratic National Committee found, there is no shortage of hotel rooms within the city limits. In fact, the greater Milwaukee area offers 17,791 rooms, with 5,503 in the downtown alone. "This is what we have to date, but it's going to increase as the new hotels open," Lutter Cole says. "People are really seeing the value in investing in the Milwaukee hospitality industry."

Among the notable openings expected this summer are the Potawatomi Hotel & Casino's second tower with additional hotel rooms, meeting space and a spa; the Cambria Hotel & Suites in the Third Ward; and Drury Plaza Hotel, a historic renovation of the 15-story First Financial Centre.

Saint Kate Arts Hotel, formerly Milwaukee's Intercontinental Hotel, led the summer openings in early June. It is the city's first independent arts hotel focused on celebrating the arts and the creative process. This hotel offers 219 art-inspired guest rooms, a champagne bar and black box theater.

The hotel, owned by Marcus Hotels & Resorts, offers three permanent spaces for art: An area featuring works from the Museum of Wisconsin Art, another showcasing the Marcus family's art collection and a small space called The Closet, which offers patrons immersive art experi-



ences. The hotel also maintains a staff of artists in residence, including dancers, acrobats and musicians, who entertain guests throughout the hotel.

The one-of-a kind destination also offers 11,597 square feet of meeting space and five culinary experiences including the Aria Café & Bar, which specializes in simple, classic American cuisine; Proof Pizza, offering Neapolitan-style pizzas; The Bar, which is the main gathering area of the hotel; and the Giggly Champagne & Wine Bar.

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# Milwaukee By the Numbers

**\$5 BILLION**  
New development

**150** Locally  
owned restaurants  
in downtown area

**1/3** of the U.S.  
population within  
a day's drive of  
Milwaukee

**17,791** Hotel rooms

**13** Miles of bike trails

**17** Museums

**6** Professional  
sports teams



The Drury Plaza Hotel is a revamp of a 154,000-square-foot building built in the Art Deco style in 1928. Once open, the new hotel will have 200 upscale rooms, a business center, a limited-service restaurant and over 5,000 square feet of meeting space on the second floor. The lower level of the building will feature a fitness center, pool and more meeting rooms.

Cambria Hotel is a new construction that will bring 132 rooms spread across four floors to the city. The project includes a first-floor pool and fitness center as well as a coffee house and meeting room.

Potawatomi Hotel & Casino's 19-story addition adds a second tower housing 119 rooms to the 381-room hotel and increases its footprint by 180,000 square feet. Owned and operated by the Forest County Potawatomi Community, the tower also includes additional meeting space.

The Iron Horse Hotel is also a wonderful lodging option, adds Lutter Cole. The century-old repurposed warehouse is redoing its lobby area and restaurant, and creating a covered outdoor patio, which when complete will be a great outdoor meeting space. This posh boutique hotel can accommodate events of a variety of sizes, from 10 to 200 guests.

The charming Kimpton Journeyman Hotel is also an ideal stopping spot. The hotel features a sumptuous lobby lounge, conversation pieces made by local artists in every room and Tre Rivali, an acclaimed rooftop restaurant and bar. Here, there are also several types of meeting spaces to choose from—a ballroom, flexible meeting rooms and the rooftop itself.

Planner Kathryn Gleesing, MBA, CMP, president and CEO of DM-Connection & Events, organizes meetings from 100-400 people and banquets from 75-150 people every year. She reports the hotel scene is one of the reasons she chooses Milwaukee year after year.

"Most of the hotels have undergone renovations or are in the process of completing projects to keep the inventory fresh," she says. "And, I love the convenience of the skywalks connected to the convention center and throughout downtown. With new inventory [3,000 new rooms] coming online by 2020, Milwaukee will continue to be an attractive meeting spot."

## LOTS TO DO AFTER-HOURS

"Milwaukee offers so much for attendees outside of their meeting schedule," states Gleesing. "From the arts, museums, food tours of Milwaukee, and lakefront activi-

ties such as biking, kayaking and boating, there is so much to pick from at a reasonable price," she says. "Milwaukee is also a very walkable and family-friendly city."

A lot of recent development has been tied to the city's brewing history with many old brewery buildings being restored. "Development has exploded around the former Pabst brewing complex," says Kristina LeVan, senior communications specialist at the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. "It's no longer just a place where beer is brewed; it's become a community gathering space."

For a unique downtown food destination, visitors can trek to the Milwaukee Public Market. The destination bursts with high quality selections of artisan products and freshly prepared foods. There is also an upstairs area available for smaller meetings, reports Lutter Cole.

"We arranged for one group to get \$25 gift cards for their attendees at the public market," she says. "They went to the market to use their gift cards and reserved the upstairs for a meeting. It was fun seeing everyone compare their goodies and taste all the local flavors."

The Bartolotta Restaurant Group kickstarted the city's restaurant scene, when



brothers Paul and Joe Bartolotta opened their first restaurant in 1993. Downtown Milwaukee now boasts 150 locally owned restaurants. The Bartolotta Restaurant Group still ranks toward the top of the fine dining scene, with Bacchus, Lake Park Bistro and Ristorante Bartolotta landing on dining critic Carol Deptolla's Top 30 list every year. Other can't miss places include Bavette La Boucherie, Ardent Restaurant and DanDan, reports Lutter Cole.

If you want to stay in, Lutter Cole recommends the restaurants at local hotels. "The Iron Horse Hotel's restaurant is fantastic, as are the Pfister Hotel's Mason Street Grill, the Milwaukee ChopHouse in the Hilton, Stella Van Buren in the Westin and The Fitz in the Ambassador Hotel," she says. "You don't have to leave your hotel for fine dining."

She adds, "There are so many choices, it

can be hard to narrow it down. We help groups by asking questions like: How much time do you have? What kind of group is it? What do you want to show attendees?"

After hours there is a plentiful selection of urban outdoor activities, including a three-mile riverwalk and 130 miles of bike trails. "There is a state park in the heart of Milwaukee, where you can get on the trails. It's along the lakeshore so it's beautiful scenery," states LeVan. "Bike paths can take you around the city and even beyond the city limits. Kayaking on the Milwaukee River is also very popular."

Because the downtown is situated at the confluence of three rivers and Lake Michigan, Lutter Cole says, "You can take guests on a boat dinner cruise on the lake or brewery tours along the river." There are even pedal and paddle taverns that allow visitors to enjoy a beer or a Bloody

Mary while pedaling on the pavement or paddling on the water throughout the city.

Taking in a game is also a possibility; six professional sports teams call Milwaukee home. There's Brewers baseball, Bucks basketball, Admirals hockey, Wave soccer, Aces women's basketball and the Brew City Bruisers women's roller derby.



The museum scene overflows with 17 museums located throughout the city. The Harley-Davidson Museum tops Lutter Cole's list as a must see. However, there is also the new National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum, the Milwaukee Art Museum, Discovery World and the Pabst Mansion available to give visitors a peek at Milwaukee's rich history.

If shopping is more your thing, the city offers plenty of that too. Access Boutique sells jewelry, handbags and other accessories; while Alive and Fine features vintage selections; ModGen puts a modern twist on a general store stocking stylish homeware and houseplants; The Brass Rooster is a modern-day hattery; and Stephanie Horne is a boutique featuring women's clothing. For traditional name brands, there is always Bayshore Town Center, Mayfair Mall and the Mayfair Collection, just a short drive away.

A mix of new and old development has made Wisconsin's largest city bountiful in its offerings for the meetings and events industry. From the sparkling water of Lake Michigan to the rich heritage of its historic neighborhoods, planning a one-of-a kind meeting or event filled with food, music and fun is made easy in the Cream City. [www.wisconsinmeetings.com](http://www.wisconsinmeetings.com)





# MEALS ON WHEELS

## Food trucks are driving unique food and beverage options to today's meetings and events.

BY MAURA KELLER

As meeting and event patrons become food savvy, crave variety and demand a wider range of flavors, unique food and beverage options are now viewed as an easy avenue to please attendees and keep clients coming back for more. And, food trucks are proving to be a perfect way to do just that—by offering unique dining options that make lasting impressions.

Gone are the days of rusty food trucks dotting the landscape of county fairs. Today's food trucks are often distinctively designed gems that provide eclectic gourmet eats at reasonable prices at a variety of venues. In fact, food trucks are a great way to enhance an event theme or showcase the local foods and flavors of a destination. If meeting attendees are traveling to an event in Wisconsin, where brats, beer, cheese and German fare reign supreme, food trucks might showcase local German flavors, award-winning craft

beers or unique ice cream flavors from local dairies.

It is this inherent uniqueness that is making food trucks a bigger draw at today's meetings and events. They are becoming so popular that meeting and event venues, such as the Grand Geneva Resort & Spa, are getting in on the action. The resort now offers the Grand Grille to enhance culinary offerings at group events. The Grand Grille's offerings, for example, can be customized to include things such as taco night, a burger bar, barbecue or dessert options. Personalized themes with custom options also can be arranged.

Fiorella Neira, event planner at Neira Event Group, says food trucks have been popular for a while because of the variety they create by being so different and even visually appealing.

"Food trucks are being used in creative

ways," she adds. For example, if a conference doesn't include meals for attendees, planners can bring in food trucks to create a cafeteria—offering a variety of foods, beverages and desserts—in the parking lot or among the exhibits. If a meeting runs late into the evening, food trucks can be used to deliver late night snacks or fresh gelato for dessert.

"Food trucks really are a novelty for attendees," Neira says.

The need for novelty in food and beverage offerings is increasing. The Rodeo Wagon is a rodeo-themed catering company based in Madison. Locally owned by Kay-Tee Olds, the Rodeo Wagon offers fare inspired by Oklahoma and Texas. As someone who has coordinated conferences and meeting events, aside from owning a catering business that started as a food cart, Olds states she has seen event coordinators increasingly working toward





PHOTO COURTESY GRAND GENEVA RESORT & SPA

## *“Food trucks really are a novelty for attendees.”*

*—Fiorella Neira,  
Event Planner,  
Neira Event Group*

creating a unique and valuable food and beverage experience.

“A common complaint of attendees is the ‘chicken and mystery sauce’ that is often the lunch at a full-day conference. Considering that food is a factor that can greatly sway someone’s perception of the event experience, it is not surprising that coordinators are looking for alternative options,” she says.

Olds has provided catering for conferences in Chicago, Madison and Milwaukee that have created interactive dining options for their guests by working with food trucks. She has also noticed a growing trend to bring in food trucks during internal training days or corporate events.

Most often, Olds reports, she sees conference organizers hosting the meal served by a food truck, but she’s also aware of conferences that guarantee a minimum sale to the

vendor and allow attendees to purchase their own meals. “We have provided both hosted and vendor services,” she says.

In either case, it’s essential to budget appropriately to ensure enough food and beverage choices are available to attendees. “When budgeting and planning how many food trucks should be available to guests, consider that if a food truck is making less than \$250 per service hour, they are likely operating at a loss. Some may have additional minimums that must be met before they will block off a day to provide private service. Many food trucks that provide private catering or vending services will ask for a deposit or minimum guarantee if the meal is not hosted.”

Alfonzo Jones, owner of Whimsy Dish Catering in Wisconsin Dells, says the great part about food trucks is that event attendees can walk around to socialize while listening to music and enjoying the outdoors. The food cart that Jones uses at events allows him to physically serve 200 people a day depending on the audience and what he is preparing.

“To make the food truck experience work well, the meeting planner needs to know the number of people being served at the

event and the logistics of where the event will be located in reference to where the food truck is coming from,” Jones says.

### **IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS**

To make food trucks an effective and efficient means of providing food for meeting or event attendees, meeting planners need to make sure the food truck company is set to cater to large numbers. Not all food trucks know what it takes to serve large crowds at once, so checking their experience is key.

In addition, meeting planners need to follow the regulations of the venue, city, county and state. A common place to start, if you are unsure of regulations, is the city or county clerk’s office. As a rule of thumb, hosted events are usually considered catering while vending or public events have additional local regulations.

Olds recommends communicating clearly with the food truck or caterer and remembering that it is a win/win for everyone if all details are defined prior to the event. It’s also important to ensure there are enough food trucks to feed the audience efficiently. The food may need to be pre-made in some cases, which is not always how food truck vendors are accustomed to preparing their offerings. So, it takes some extra conversations with the different vendors to ensure that food can be prepared quickly enough to fit in the allotted time for the meal.

“An experienced food truck or similar foodservice provider will have a process in place for working with organized events and be able to provide menu and logistics guidance,” Olds says. “Budget \$10-\$40 per person for a conference luncheon to achieve a memorable experience for the guests.”

Electrical and footprint needs are other important considerations. Most event food trucks need to bring their own generators because electrical boxes are not always available. And considering the size of the footprint of the actual vehicle is important so planners can strategically place them without imposing upon other vendors or event activities.

Many food trucks are self-sufficient by using gas or generators, while others may require access to electricity and still others may want to setup grills or additional equipment to cook on-site and dazzle the audience.



"If you are running an event where the trucks must be present for long periods of time you need to consider an additional fridge for storage," Neira says. "This will give the food trucks the ability to store their food and prepare more as needed."

Weather can be unpredictable so it's important to have a backup plan, as weddings do, for inclement weather. Some food trucks or caterers have additional awnings or tents while others may be able to move their operation indoors.

Make sure food truck operators have a place to arrive and exit without being blocked in. "Figuring out the arrival and departure should be added to your event flow," Neira says. "Do not put vendor or activities too close, they will need space for people to line up and stand around and they will also need space for their

generator, electrical box or electric running to a building."

## MEETING UNIQUE DIETARY NEEDS

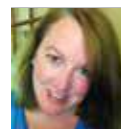
In today's world of various dietary restrictions, food truck operators are usually well versed with unique dietary needs because they serve so many people at various locales.

However, it is common for a food truck to share a commercial kitchen with other businesses, so they may not be able to guarantee that products did not get contaminated by peanuts or other allergens either in their kitchen or throughout the supply chain. Olds says planners need to ask guests about food allergies and other dietary requirements and share these needs with food truck operators in advance.

"Providing vegetarian, gluten-free and

vegan options is a common request and one that can usually be accommodated during the planning process," Olds says. It also is helpful to have attendees select a dish or list dietary preferences during an event's RSVP process, so the foodservice provider can best accommodate specialized dietary requirements.

"The unique consideration for meetings and events as it relates to food trucks is what type of audience will be at this event or meeting," Jones says. "Knowing your audience and the food vendors' capabilities is the most important part to making an event successful." WM



Maura Keller is a Minneapolis-based writer and editor who frequently writes about meeting and event topics.

## 7 Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Food Truck

**1) What experience do you have catering a large meeting or event?**

**2) Can you provide references?**

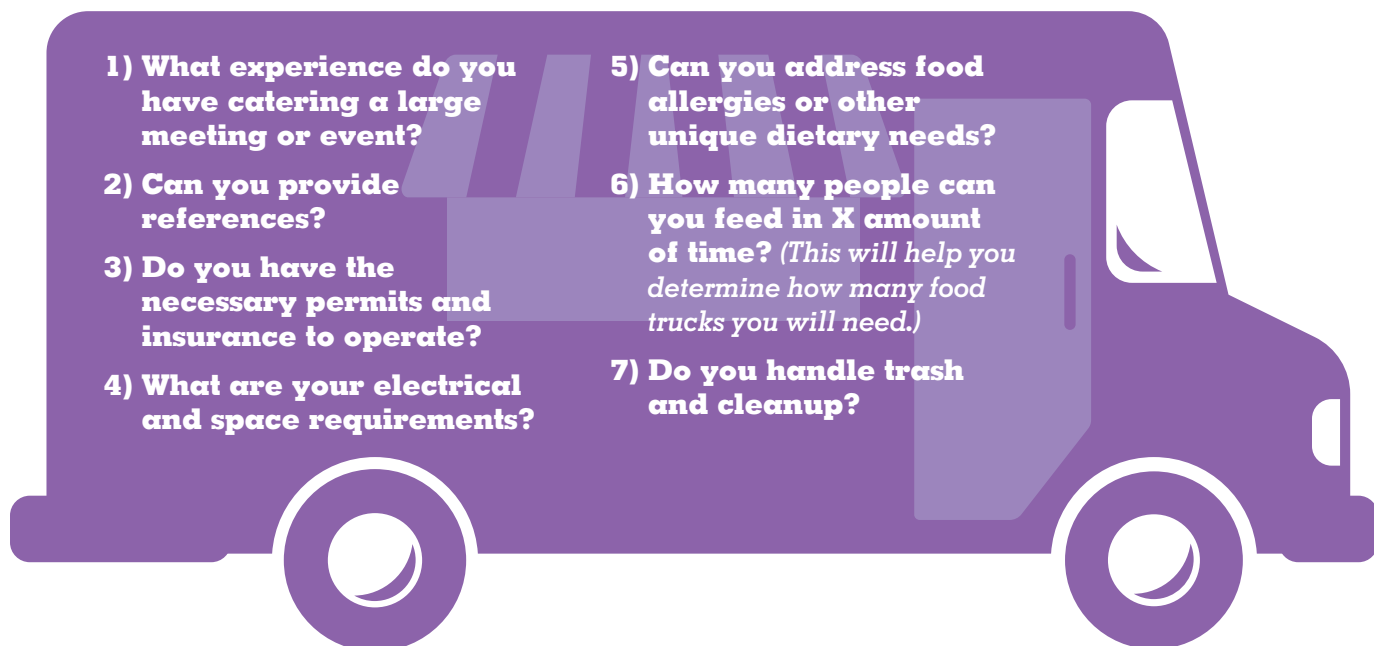
**3) Do you have the necessary permits and insurance to operate?**

**4) What are your electrical and space requirements?**

**5) Can you address food allergies or other unique dietary needs?**

**6) How many people can you feed in X amount of time?** (This will help you determine how many food trucks you will need.)

**7) Do you handle trash and cleanup?**







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By Amy Wunderlin

There's an old saying in the events business that in your first year you will lose money, in year two you might break even and by year three, you should be making a profit. The same is true for adopting technology. While no one wants to be first, those who take the leap now will reap benefits in the long term.



"All decisions in business are based on risk," says Jamie Turner, an internationally recognized author, speaker and CEO of 60 Second Marketer. In adopting technology, "I may not see my return on investment for five years, so the question becomes, 'Am I willing to take that risk?'"

"Yeah, you can overspend and invest in things and it may not turn out the way you want, but you're never going to be the next big event if you keep trying to find ways to cut costs," he adds.

And over the next few years, the competition in the space will only grow more intense. According to CWT's 2019 Meetings & Events Trend Report, demand for meetings will grow 5% to 10% in 2019, and group sizes are predicted to increase by 14%.

In order to stand apart from this growing pack, the implementation of new technology initiatives will be crucial. Technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are creating new ways to engage attendees and deepen their relationship with your event.

"The No. 1 goal for any event is to get people deeply engaged in that event," Turner says. "If you have a competitor down the street running the same event, everything being equal, the organization that deepens the relationship with the attendees and gives them something more experiential is going to be the organization that sells more tickets next year."

Corbin Ball of Corbin Ball Co., a speaking, consulting and writing firm focusing exclusively on technology for events, exhibitions and meeting venues, agreed wholeheartedly with Turner's sentiments as he spoke to a group of planners attending a recent MPI Wisconsin Chapter educational event. He predicts, "AI, VR and AR will have a significant impact on the events industry in the next year or so. There are major changes coming in this area."

Now let's look at how some of the most attention-grabbing technologies are making that more enriched experience possible.

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

According to Turner, AI has become a broad umbrella term for a computer or a computer-controlled robot that can perform tasks usually done by human beings. Several technologies fall under this umbrella, including machine learning,



*"The organization that adopts this [technology] early and can do it without the expectation of an immediate return, will be the organization two or three or four years from now that is well ahead of its competitors."*

—Jamie Turner, CEO, 60 Second Marketer

natural language processing, chat bots and robotics.

When most people think of AI, they commonly are referring to machine learning, Turner says, which he defines as an algorithm on a computer or series of steps that continuously improve as the computer learns more and more about the outcomes.

For example, when you search for images on Google, the search engine is using machine learning to deduct what images best fit into the intended search term. When the very first person did a search for puppy dogs, a picture of a wolf and a line drawing of a puppy may have popped up. But because that person did not click on those images, Google's machine learning assumed that those images must not be correct, and it removed and replaced them with new ones.

That same idea can be applied to the way in which an event or meeting planner targets people they want to invite to an event.

"When you use any digital technology like Facebook or YouTube or even email marketing, the software program behind the scenes uses artificial intelligence to help you do a better job targeting those people who might be candidates to come to your event," Turner explains.

As far as using AI at an event, Turner says the future is with robots that can perform customer service-oriented tasks, such as helping people find trade show booths or acting as security.

"Eventually they will program it so people can go up to it and ask, 'Can you take me to the Microsoft booth?' and it will be say, 'Sure, follow me,' and take you to the correct booth," Turner predicts.

While technology comes with a cost, it also has a return, adds Ball. "Technology can reduce the number of people you need to put on an event," he says.

## AUGMENTED REALITY

While the days of service robots are still a few years away, the use of AR to navigate the show floor is available today.

AR is used to enhance what one sees in their real-world environment. So instead of asking the robot for directions to the Microsoft booth, Turner says attendees this year will use AR via their smartphones to navigate the show floor. AR can map out the show floor with arrows and visual cues that attendees can follow on their phones.

Another example of AR use at events is for a scavenger hunt, which Turner says planners may use to get people to visit the different trade show booths. Participants simply download an app on their smartphones, which provides clues and directions through the trade show.

## VIRTUAL REALITY

VR and AR are often mistaken for each other. While they both provide an enhanced user experience, VR uses goggles to insert users into a virtual world.

Of the three technologies mentioned, Turner says VR will see much growth this year as it has become more cost effective.

Today, most event planners are using VR to get people to stay at and engage in an event—whether that's through a game or some other type of activity.

"Your goal at any event is to get people engaged on a deep level so that they want to come back next year," Turner notes. "That's how events grow; the deeper the feeling with that event, the more it grows."

For example, VR could be used at a travel trade show to immerse attendees into the destination the organization is representing. Instead of an attendee simply grabbing a brochure and walking away, they can put on a pair of goggles and take a virtual journey to Italy.

"They just went from having a short experience of grabbing your brochure and walking away, which takes 10 seconds, to a five-minute experience where they're engaged and immersed with Italy. Studies show that the conversion rate goes way up when you get people engaged in something like that," Turner adds.

VR is also quickly becoming a part of event and meeting locations. In 2017, Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Wisconsin Dells installed a virtual reality experience to raise the bar for guest experiences. Called "The Arena," the space is a free-roam, warehouse-scale, multiplayer, virtual reality gaming experience that allows up to six people to simultaneously explore, conquer and challenge one another for high scores and skill evaluations, all tracking in real time.

According to Tifani Jones, corporate director of sales for Kalahari Resorts & Conventions, planners hosting events at the convention center currently use The



*"AI, VR and AR will have a significant impact on the events industry in the next year or so. There are major changes coming in this area."*

—Corbin Ball, Technology Consultant for Events, Exhibitions and Meeting Venues

Arena for experiential team building activities and after-hours fun.

"The multi-player adventure allows teams to work together and challenge one another for a group experience," she explains.

An early adopter, Kalahari is already showing concrete results in their investment. According to Jones, this experience and other attractions at the resort have proven to increase attendance at events and meetings.

"Kalahari Resorts combines the best in family-friendly resort amenities with massive, state-of-the-art convention space leading to an average 20% increase in meeting attendance. And overall, our groups consume 108% of the number of

group rooms they contract," Jones notes.


As VR, AR and mixed reality applications continue to grow in the event space, Jones further adds that The Arena is providing initial exposure for event planners and attendees, which "helps them see how the technology could work to meet their specific event goals."

Ball predicts VR could significantly impact meeting planning as well. Today planners visit sites during the venue selection and planning phases, but in the future, they might tackle this virtually. "It's the next best thing to being there," he says. "They can see the venue and hotel rooms. They can see their event space come to life and visualize their preparations in advance," he says.

For planners trying to land a big event client, VR, he says, could help them "sell the dream. They can use VR to sell the event that hasn't happened yet."

So, whether you are still exploring and learning about technologies from early adopters such as Kalahari, or ready to move ahead with investment, Turner emphasizes the importance of patience.

"All events are struggling to out-do each other. The organization that adopts this early and can do it without the expectation of an immediate return, will be the organization two or three or four years from now that is well ahead of its competitors," he concludes. **WM**



## THREE TIPS FOR EARLY ADOPTERS

- 1). *Do your homework and learn about the technology.*
- 2). *Take a calculated risk. In the early stage of adoption, there will not be a lot of data that shows results.*
- 3). *Track the investment and be patient. Don't expect to have a positive ROI in year one.*



Amy Wunderlin is a Fort Atkinson, Wis.-based journalist who specializes in the subject areas of supply chain, logistics and technology. She has written for several weekly and daily newspapers, in addition to trade publications such as *Supply & Demand Chain Executive* and *Food Logistics*.



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Largest Room Block: 250  
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Population: 130,000  
Number of hotel rooms: 1,300  
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# PODCASTS FOR PROMOTION

**The how's and why's of promoting a meeting or event with podcasts.**

By Greg Gerber



Allison Phillips is the CEO of Edge Marketing, a Milwaukee-based firm that helps companies produce podcasts. Recently, she scored the opportunity of a lifetime when Edge was awarded a contract to podcast the Democrat National Convention (DNC) in 2020 when it takes place in Milwaukee.

She's planning to interview people before the event to build excitement around the convention.

"A lot of podcasts can be done by using Skype," she says. "You can have people sitting half a world apart but record it so they sound like they're in the same room."

Then, her team will capture as much content as it can during the convention and distribute it far and wide.

"This way others can listen to what's happening in Milwaukee and feel like they are part of the meeting, even though they are thousands of miles away," she explains.

Though the DNC is a larger-scale event than what most planners work with, meeting planners are discovering podcasts are an exceptional tool for promoting events, and when they are used in this way, it doesn't cost a lot of money to reach a lot of people.

They are not alone in their discovery. Podcasting is growing in popularity. What started as a fad back in the 1980s has become a full-blown medium for communication.

According to Podcast Insights, there are now 700,000 unique podcasts—up from 550,000 the year before. In fact, 51% of Americans have listened to at least one podcast episode, and nearly one-third of all adults have listened to a podcast in the past 30 days.

There is so much interest in podcasting today that YouTube recently announced it too was launching a separate podcasting channel.

## WHAT IS A PODCAST?

The advent of broadband Internet combined with portable listening devices, like iPods and later smartphones, ushered in the ability for people to basically produce their own talk show and broadcast it to the world.

A podcast can range from a few minutes to an hour long. Typically, they are about 25 minutes, or long enough to be enjoyed during a one-way commute. Some feature a host delivering a monologue, while others feature interviews or multiple people sharing information.

They are either scheduled to be released at regular intervals, or they are set up in batches, like 20 episodes, to explore a specific topic.

The best part about podcasting is that it allows a company to disseminate a message in its own words.

Richie Burke is the founder and president of GoGeddit Marketing and Media (GGMM), a Milwaukee-based company that helps strategize, produce and market podcasts for brands including Trek Bicycle Corporation, Colliers International and Marquette University. He considers podcasting to be one of the best types of social media promotion available.

"Podcasts allow you to create content around content," he explains. "They are an excellent branding strategy and a very affordable way of advertising."

For example, a company can spend \$200 to air a 30-second radio commercial—and up to \$350 to air it during morning drive time, says Phillips. However, once the commercial airs, the message is lost unless a firm wants to pay to broadcast it again. The cost for television ads rises exponentially, but the result is the same.

But, for the same amount of money—or less—a 30-minute podcast can be prepared and released on a much larger scale and made available for people to listen to when it is convenient for them.

Another advantage to podcasting is that it is passive media, which doesn't require a listener's full attention. "Video requires someone to watch a screen and so does the written word," Burke explains.

Yet, when people listen to one podcast, and like it, they have the option of going



back to Episode 1 and listening to everything else the organization has to offer.

"I have clients who were spending \$20,000 for television and radio ads to promote an event. After starting a podcast, they discovered they can reach a larger audience for less money and have far more accurate statistics regarding who heard the message," says Phillips.

In fact, she notes, that with podcasts, meeting planners know how many people in Milwaukee heard the message versus people in Madison or Green Bay. "With other forms of advertising, you really don't know how many people you're actually reaching, let alone how many people actually heard the message," she adds.

## A GREATER REACH

When it comes to statistics, it is easy to get caught up in the numbers without realizing the true impact behind them. For example, if a podcast had 300 downloads, some people might see that as a small audience compared to the vast Internet.

However, when they close their eyes and imagine that message being presented before a room of 300 people, the audience takes on a whole different dimension. The

*"Including a 10- or 15-second sponsor message at the start, middle and end of a podcast is an excellent way to help exhibitors draw attention to their displays before the show, and to promote their products long afterward."*

—Allison Phillips, CEO, Edge Marketing

people who downloaded the message, did so with intention and purpose, just like those who attend a meeting or event.

Because they are relatively easy to produce and can zero in on a topic of interest to a specific audience, more marketers are embracing podcasting. Phillips underscores this simplicity by noting that one of her clients is PeyPey the Podcaster, a 10-year-old girl who provides entertainment reviews and averages 2,000 downloads an episode. "If a 10-year-old girl can have a successful podcast, we can help others create a successful podcast too," says Phillips.

## MULTIPLE PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Planners are discovering that podcasts can be used to promote an event before, during and after it ends, adds Burke, who notes it's becoming an increasingly important way to disseminate meeting information.

Promoting with keynote speakers and session leaders before an event, gives organizers flexibility to release hot sound bites on social media or the event's website to build more interest in a conference. Speakers can even distribute the content on their own channels, which expands the



reach to include their own followers. Phillips, for instance, was hired to record a women's conference this spring. She released some podcast episodes in advance of the event to help people know what to expect during it.

"Podcasting is way cheaper than spending money on advertising," she explains. "Organizers who embrace podcasting can decrease their advertising budgets."

Some meetings have multiple sessions running concurrently, which requires participants to choose from several options. That means presenters may be speaking to just a fraction of the overall audience, Burke explains. Here, it makes sense to record the presentation for distribution later.

"If the message is recorded and distributed as a podcast after the event, and hundreds of people can listen to it over the next year, now you've made the speaker look like a hero," he says. "Plus, if you give the recording to the speaker as well, it becomes free content for their blog or website which, in turn, builds awareness of future conferences."

He reports recording on-site is easy. Most meetings, especially big conferences, already use a sound system to control microphone volume. Adding a recorder to the sound board is often as simple as plugging in a cable. That allows everything said on the stage to be recorded, and then chopped into smaller segments to be consumed over time, Burke explains.

Once recorded, Phillips adds, "The content can be shared over and over so more people can be reached using larger, more relevant messages for less money."

Likewise, podcasting is a nice way to reward speakers, too, says Burke.

"It takes a lot of time to put together a quality presentation, and a lot of money and time to travel to the event," he says. "By sharing the presentation with others after the meeting, you provide a great perk by helping expand the audience for the speaker. It also gives people who didn't attend this year's conference a reason to make participating in the next event a priority."

## CONTENT LIVES ON

One of the biggest advantages to podcasting is that it allows the content of a meeting to live on long after attendees have departed.

"Companies bring in speakers who deliver excellent information, but only to the people in the room," says Burke. "While there might be a few dozen or few hundred people at the event itself, the presentation can be turned into a podcast and made available to thousands of others."

GGMM is planning to record a tremendous amount of material during a festival this summer, including panel discussions, and then release the information as a 10-episode Netflix-style podcast.

"Meetings are no longer just a one- or two-day event," he explains. "With

podcasting, they offer infinite possibilities.

"Good marketing requires event planners to invest time and money reaching people wherever they may be," he continues. "Podcasting adds value to the promotional process by allowing the message to stand out in a very cluttered marketplace."

Noting that there are 500 million blogs, and just 700,000 podcasts, Burke says it's much easier to get a message heard when people can consume it passively on their way to work, while doing chores or exercising, or sitting in an airplane.





*"Podcasts allow you to create content around content. They are an excellent branding strategy and a very affordable way of advertising."*

—Richie Burke, Founder and President, GoGeddit Marketing and Media (GGMM)

## WHAT DOES PODCASTING REQUIRE?

To do it right, a podcaster would need a good broadcast-quality microphone—or more if people will be interviewed live—plus a sound mixer, headphones, a digital recorder and some software to edit the recording. A professional set up would cost about \$1,600 to \$2,500.

Or, people can hire a company like Edge or GGMM to do the work for them. The firms can bring their podcast equipment to an office and hammer out six episodes in a few hours, edit the content and release the recordings over the next month and a half.

"Where else can you get six weeks of quality social media content for four hours of work?" Phillips asks. "Podcasting is absolutely the wave of the future."

## ELIMINATING ALL COST

What many meeting planners are discovering is that they can sell advertising on podcast episodes to cover the costs of producing them.

"Look at the amount of money companies pay for an ad in a show directory that can be seen only when they arrive on site, and is often discarded when the event is over," says Phillips.

"Including a 10- or 15-second sponsor message at the start, middle and end of a podcast is an excellent way to help exhibitors draw attention to their displays before



the show, and to promote their products long afterward as the podcasts continue to live on," she adds.

Burke says that companies enjoy a huge advantage over new podcasters because they already have established audiences.

"When I started a podcast, my audience consisted of me, my mom and a few friends," says Burke. "Corporations have a customer base and associations have members—and both likely have large email lists that create an established foundation for episode No. 1. The brand can only grow from there."

When people consume podcasts, Burke says most listeners take in 85% of the audio content, compared to just 4% for similar video.

"There's a very good chance that content released as a podcast will be consumed in its entirety because people can listen even when they are on the run, literally," he adds.

## ADDING LONG-TERM VALUE

The bottom line is that podcasting adds value to meeting attendees who might not be able to attend every session, to exhibitors who are trying to entice people to their displays and to sponsors who would appreciate more recognition, Burke explains.

"Nothing beats face-to-face contact and the networking that conferences provide," says Burke. "In person events are great, but they aren't scalable, and the content doesn't live on when the meeting ends."

Hosting rich content like podcast episodes on an association or company website offers the unique, current content that search engines crave. That alone raises the stature of the meeting and its participants.

Phillips agrees, "Conventions are for networking, while learning is for later," she adds.

Her team recorded a beer convention six months ago. Many people who couldn't attend wound up listening to sessions afterward and have already signed up to attend the event next year, she explains. [WM](#)

## Podcasting Resources

For more information about Edge Marketing, visit [edgemke.com](http://edgemke.com). Or for information specifically about podcasting, checkout [edgepodcastnetwork.com](http://edgepodcastnetwork.com). For information about GoGeddit Marketing and Media, visit [ggmm.io](http://ggmm.io).



Greg Gerber is the owner of RV Daily Report and a freelance journalist based in Phoenix, Ariz.



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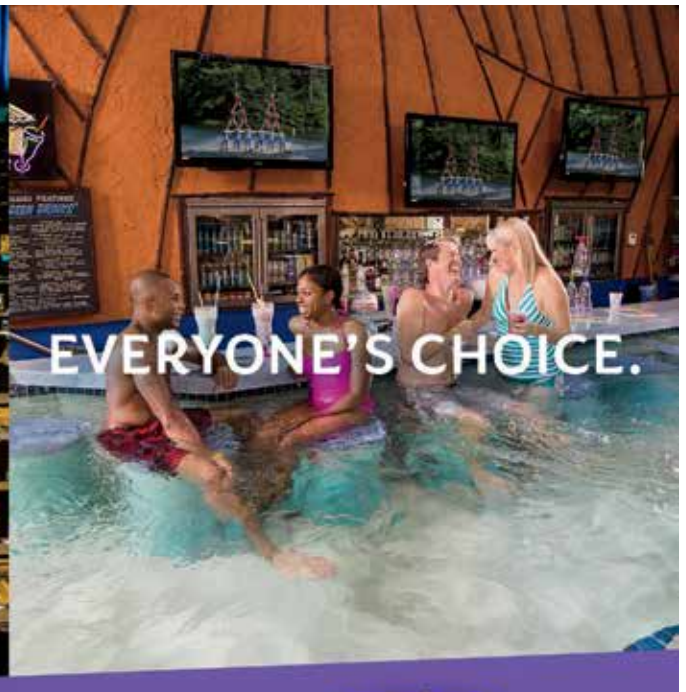
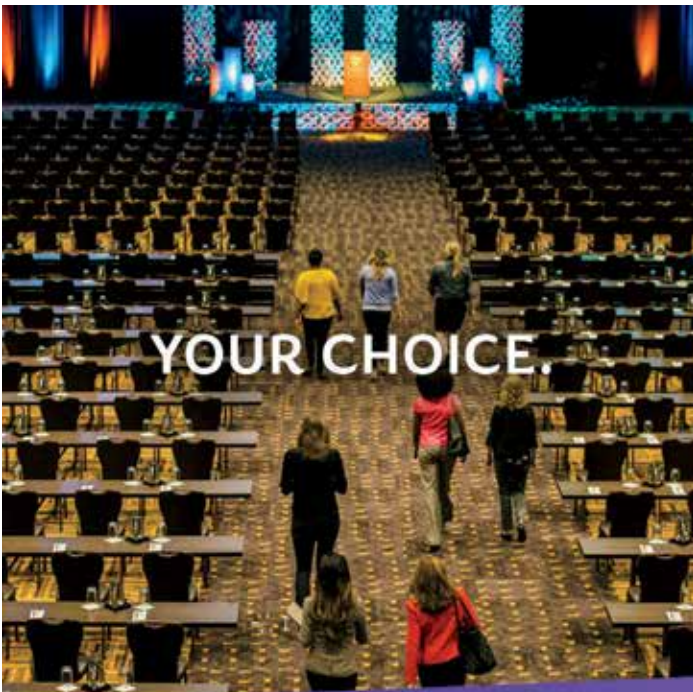
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Photo courtesy A&J Photography

In this photo, one can see how the hanging decor from the ceiling of the huge exhibition hall space makes the room seem more intimate. This was a 1,000-person employee appreciation event.



Here a ballroom space was set for a charity event with silent auction.



This is a conference held in the same event space. See how the mood has changed from the employee appreciation event to the conference.

# A TALE OF THREE MEETINGS

**How to reinvent one space for a variety of groups and unique needs.**

**By Jen Bradley**

One meeting planner. One venue. Three meetings. It's the exciting world of event planning, and the career can take you from a client looking for a techy board meeting to another needing a large sit-down affair. What are the tips and tricks to making it all seamless and can you use the same space to satisfy every client's desires?

## SET THE SCENE

At Monona Terrace in Madison, its Frank Lloyd Wright design automatically provides each event a plethora of architectural features which are appealing to guests and meetings planners alike, says Laura MacIsaac, director of sales for the venue.

"Our facility is inspiring, but we want to always be welcoming to people, proactive and detail-oriented," she explains.

However, MacIsaac adds room rental is room rental, and events all start with the same basics: tables, chairs and perhaps food service. "Where you start to see distinction is when the client starts to say: 'These are the experiences we want translated through this facility.'"

Libby Gerds and Molly Walsh are co-founders of Madison-based Groundwork Events, an event planning company the duo began six years ago. They have worked hand-in-hand with the Monona Terrace staff during that time, planning the gamut of events—smaller corporate meetings to 300-person gala events, and larger—held in the same rooms of Monona Terrace but for very different audiences.

## ONE-DAY CONFERENCE

During a one-day professional conference, Gerds says the main goals were to provide takeaways in professional development,

## KNOW YOUR GOALS

The goals shift as the type of meeting and the crowd changes. Here are suggestions on how you might customize things to a specific type of event or demographic.



### TECH CROWD

If the meeting is technical in nature, consider the following ideas:

**Power to the Tables:** Technology professionals typically bring their laptops and personal devices to the meeting. Make it easy for them to keep their electronics charged.

**Reliable AV:** Speakers at these events will likely have PowerPoint presentations and other audio visual needs. Make sure to plan for them.

**Music with a Vibe:** Match background music to the crowd. For these professionals, pick cool, trendy music that charges things up.

**Breakout the Food:** Provide food, coffee and snacks at regular networking breakouts giving attendees time to mingle and network.

**Dump the Décor:** When your budget is limited, put your money into the things that matter to this demographic: AV and technology.

## EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION EVENT

If the goal is to show your employees some love, consider the following:

**Make a Little Music:** Upbeat music played softly in the background lets people mingle and talk, while enjoying the sound. Later, a DJ or band can play so the crowd can dance.

**Focus on F&B:** Always make the food and drinks easily accessible.

**Do Decorate:** Show your appreciation through lavish décor and matching linens.

**Light the Way:** Light up the place to set the mood. Make the walls a splashy color and even highlight the walls with the company's logo in lights.

**Pump up the Perks:** Paying for parking, giving tickets for a free cocktail or two or a small gift at the table makes employees feel special.



### SIT-DOWN DINNER

When the goal is to provide a seated dinner for a large crowd, consider the following:

**Consider the Cocktails:** Move the cocktail hour to a separate and more intimate area before the dinner to allow guests to mingle.

**Double the Décor:** Make the decorations larger than life and elaborate. This can make a large space appear cozy and intimate.

**Light Things Up:** Consider string lights to set the mood.

**Give Gifts:** Giveaways or a small raffle can bring life to the party.

**Watch the Time:** Time management is critical to ensure smooth sailing when it comes to dinner, drinks and entertainment.

but also business networking connections. This group is heavily rooted in the technical field and to them, technology is very important, she explains.

"Once we define the goals, our next step is to be sure the space is structured in a way to achieve them," Gerds adds. "The room is set in such a way that people can have their laptops in front of them, and power is run to all of those tables, to make sure they can plug in throughout the day."

Her partner, Walsh, adds that the team also makes sure the power is run to the first three or four rows first to manipulate the environment and participation for the event, encouraging people to sit closer. The speakers are experts in their field, so a reliable AV system is important, while backdrops and big decor aren't as much.

Music, though, is. "We try to match the background music to the audience and for this, want people to walk in and think this is going to be a cool event," Gerds adds.

She says for these types of tech meetings they try to direct a nice portion of the client's budget toward the networking breaks—food, coffee, snacks—making sure people have time to eat and mingle at the same time, always a networking time during a professional conference.

## EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION GALA

In the same space, Walsh adds, an employee appreciation gala works perfectly, but with very different goals. "Those are always fun to plan, because people are in a really good mood and the audience is the employees, who are made to feel appreciated," she says.

She explains that the room is set up and looks much different. The music is more upbeat and fun, a little softer so people can mingle—and drinks/food are always set up to be easily accessible. The lighting in the room is also important, and she says at Monona Terrace, this change is simple: upright the walls with any color and project the company's logo on the wall, ceiling or floor. The linens are matched to the décor, and the same space which held a tech-based meeting is transformed into a party that provides a carefree night of dancing, food and fun.

### SIT-DOWN DINNER

Monona Terrace can accommodate up to 1,000 for a sit-down dinner. It can be hard





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to make an event of that size feel intimate and welcoming without spending hundreds of thousands of dollars, says Gerds.

She says that to accomplish this for a business dinner, they may need to use extra spaces in the Terrace to host cocktail hour separately, or for a large employee appreciation event, a child care area was set up for employees' children.

"It's always nice to have a big reveal for an event of this size," Walsh adds. For one large event, the exhibition hall was split in two, where one-third was a space for cocktails and then an open-curtain reveal led guests to the elaborately decorated dining area. The entire ambiance was enhanced and made cozier by hanging decorations from the tall ceilings closer to the tables.

This kind of event requires more timing management, with multiple food times, tables, linens, decorations and establishing the flow of people around the facility. Walsh says they've worked together with Monona Terrace staff to come up with some great reveals and other ideas, even bringing cars onto the floor for a giveaway at a very large employee appreciation event.

"They're excited about doing new and interesting things, even with the AV team," Gerds adds. "We actually strung string lights across the ceiling, and no one had ever done that before."

## LESSONS LEARNED

When asked about lessons learned, this duo says good communication can't be understated.

"We have lots of meetings," Walsh adds. "We know questions to ask, especially things our clients might not be thinking about. For example: When you walk in, where do you put your coat? How do you get a drink? We care about that kind of thing, rather than hope the client or the attendee figures it out."

Gerds says the team encourages clients to spend their budget dollars toward their event goal. By that, she says, if the goal is to make employees feel appreciated, proud and honored to work for the company, "there are certain perks you should not keep from them. They should not have to pay for parking, or little things throughout the night. Buy fewer drinks and less formal

food if need be, but enough that they leave feeling full and satisfied."

She adds that other clients with corporate events may need to invest in the actual speakers and high-quality AV systems. "It typically all evens out; it's just a matter of spending on meeting your goals," Gerds notes.

They also say that anything is possible, and that instead of telling a client they have a crazy idea, the team listens and works with them to see how it can happen, if even on a smaller scale.

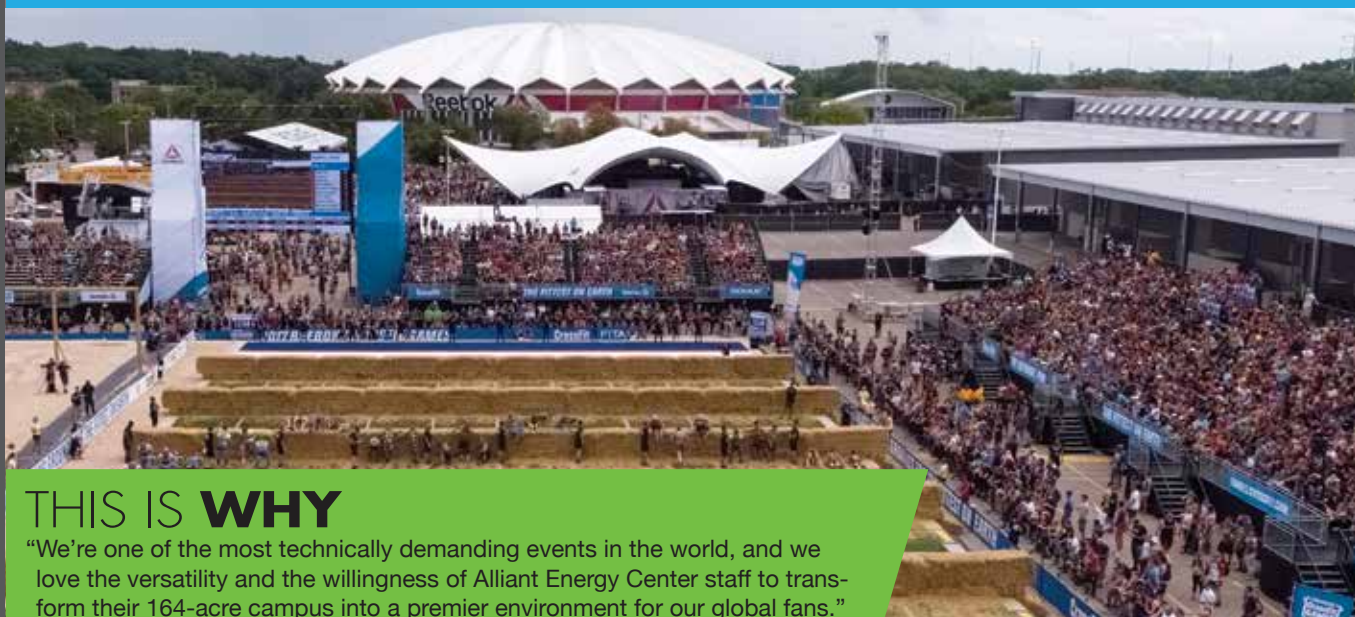
"Try to get the client to articulate their big goal before making any decisions," Gerds advises. "We've often found that if they aren't clear about 'why' they want to do this, the 'how' is much harder."

MacIsaac agrees. She says asking the right questions up front, as well as making sure clients can meet their individual goals are important keys to a successful event. **WM**



Jennifer Bradley is a freelance journalist based in New Holstein, Wis.

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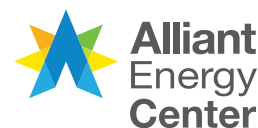


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## PLANNER PROFILE

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# BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

EVENT DESIGNERS ANDREA VANDEBERG AND SARAH SARBACKER SHARE VALUABLE TIPS THAT ELEVATE THE LOOK OF EVERY EVENT.

BY SHELBY DEERING

The room was filled with tiny, shimmering stars, lit-up paper umbrellas and a throng of happy revelers basking in the sparkle and style of the space. But this wasn't some magical wedding fairyland—it was one of the areas that event designers Andrea VandeBerg and Sarah Sarbacker of Madison's Cherry Blossom Events created for the city's toast-of-the-town annual soirée: Frostiball at the Overture Center for the Arts.

As the co-owners of an award-winning event planning company, VandeBerg and Sarbacker specialize in "producing weddings and events that reflect the unique style and personalities of our clients," the two share. Since the duo often plans weddings alongside non-wedding events, they've gained quite a bit of wisdom on planning a wide variety of events since they started in 2009.

One of their favorite events to plan is Frostiball. "We love designing this event as every year we work with a different theme based on a show coming to Overture," Sarbacker says. "We are always challenging ourselves to create a full guest experience for this event."

The two have taken away plenty of insights from planning these types of events. The focal points they center on for all of their events include guest experience, décor, theme and entertainment.

When crafting a fine-tuned guest experience for any event, Sarbacker recommends creating interactive food stations and a map of the event where guests can check off items during the cocktail-hour period. "Creating these talking points can make any event fun and different," she says.

The décor doesn't necessarily need to be flamboyant or over-the-top, the two note. VandeBerg adds that you can anchor the décor with "a few high-impact pieces," and says, "We always try to design with simplicity still in mind. We love having intricate details and layers worked into the overall design, but we always keep in mind that a few high-impact features are all you need to make a big statement."



As for theming your meeting, conference or corporate event, Sarbacker shares, "Sometimes, there doesn't need to be a theme," something that will no doubt make the planning process easier. Instead of wracking your brain to come up with a theme, she says, "It can be more of an overall aesthetic and vibe that you bring to the space."

VandeBerg and Sarbacker consistently strive to include at least one piece of live entertainment in each of their events. VandeBerg says, "If it's not a musical element, it can be a strolling magician during cocktail hour, or a champagne dress. These again can add to the guest experience and interactive approach."

Whether you are planning a large-scale convention, small conference or executive retreat, Sarbacker says the priority is always the same: the guest. "No matter what event you are planning, it's always a great reminder to keep your client and guests at the forefront of the planning; what would be of interest to them and makes sense. Designing with a purpose but still allowing for surprises is a great combination for a winning event." **WM**



Shelby Deering is a Madison, Wis.-based lifestyle writer contributing to national and regional publications such as *Country Living*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Experience Wisconsin*.





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