

## 10 INDELIBLE CHANGES

Few have a more comprehensive national perspective on events than Brian DiMartino, president of 21st Century Group, a company based on Maui, Hawai'i that provides global site selection assistance for meetings, conventions and group travel incentives. Here's his list of the 10 most significant changes over the last 10 years:

### 1. Smaller, Shorter Meetings

There has been a gradual shift to regional meetings as opposed to national/international meetings.

### 2. Shorter Lead Times

Shorter lead times have become the rule rather than the exception.

### 3. Growth of Second-Tier Cities

Charlotte, N.C., Jacksonville, Fla., and other second-tier destinations are growing in popularity as viable alternatives to first-tier cities. (For more on emerging destinations, see pg. 74.)

### 4. Tougher Contracts

Hotels have toughened up their contracts to the point where lawyers are almost required during every negotiation.

### 5. Underblocking Rooms

Attrition penalties and food and beverage minimums have driven this phenomenon.

### 6. Online Competition

Additional distribution channels such as hotels.com have made it much harder for hotels to control group blocks and for planners to get attendees to use them.

### 7. National Sales

Hotels are now using national reps to offer one-stop shopping to sell their various (and now vast) product lines in addition to having on-property sales reps to handle individual properties.

### 8. Loyalty Programs

Most hotel properties and chains have developed their hotel point programs, which have now spread into the area of meetings.

### 9. Downsizing

Salaried planners are asked to do more with less and have effectively learned to do so.

### 10. Technology Affecting Relationships

Technology has been a great enabler but has contributed to a decline in many of the personal aspects of the industry.

see significant changes in the locations, content, frequency and duration of association board of directors meetings," she says. "[There is a need to] focus precious face-to-face meeting time on issues of strategic importance and engagement of a variety of stakeholders in the dialogue and deliberation."

The unfairly vanquished incentive sector has revived by leaning philanthropic, according to Leslye O'Neal, CMP, director of operations for BCD M&I Chicago. "The days of lavish spending on incentive trips are definitely in the past," she says. "Cause marketing and corporate social responsi-

bility continue to be a focus; many companies are now including an opportunity for attendees to give back or make a difference to the community in their chosen destination."

## Meeting Destinations

As with the top industry sectors, an examination of five top-tier meeting destinations—San Francisco, New York, Hawai'i, Las Vegas and Orlando—reveals a remarkable level of evolution. While the perception has been that meetings are struggling, growth in these destinations proves otherwise.

### San Francisco

San Francisco has lured meetings partly by being a fearless trailblazer in green meetings over the past decade. The destination has also seen a major increase in international attendance, especially in the medical association market. Understandably, airlift in and out of the city has increased, including non-stops from overseas.

According to research by the San Francisco Travel Association, the city's CVB, in 2001 there were 15.73 million visitors with a \$6.51 million spend, compared to 15.92 million visitors and \$8.34 million spend in 2011. Similarly, there were 697 meetings held in 2001 that were booked through San Francisco Travel, versus 1,190 in 2011.

Says Kathryn Horton, senior director, convention events and services at the San Francisco Travel Association: "The biggest change with regard to meetings in San Francisco in the past 10 years is the advancement of technology. Live surgeries are broadcast around the world or imported from around the world onto large general-session screens, Twitter is used to create excitement among attendees and to chat about sessions, and with [modern] kiosk registration, attendees no longer have to go through long lines to pick up their badge."

As for the future, Horton asserts, "Groups are still looking for cost-effective measures, and we see that trend continuing. San Francisco is a leader in being green and is a very walkable city; groups have cut back on the usage of shuttle transportation, not only to be green but to save money, and we predict this will definitely continue."

### New York City

According to Christopher Heywood, vice president, communications at NYC & Company, the city's tourism and marketing arm, in New York, it's all about thinking outside the box—of Manhattan, that is. "The biggest change to hit New York since 2001 is that it's just not just about midtown Manhattan anymore. There are 90,000 additional hotel rooms in the five boroughs now. In addition to more venue choices, New York is more affordable. Depending on the season, the average room rate is close to 25 percent less than it was just five years ago. In addition, under Mayor Bloomberg's leadership, the city is cleaner, greener and safer."

Last year the city attracted 50 million visitors for the first time. Save for a dip in tourism business post-9/11 in 2001 and 2002, New York has experienced an uptick in visitors every year since 2000, when the number was 36.2 million. The city has now set its sights on 55 million visitors by 2015.

When asked to channel the next 10 years, Hey-



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