



ACOM Conference Attendees Hit the Jackpot

By Jeff Adcox
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The Association for Convention Operations Management (ACOM), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing the practice of convention services management (CSM) in the meetings industry, recently concluded its Annual Conference – The Meeting of the Services' Minds!

The Annual Conference, held at the Westin Casuarina Hotel in Las Vegas from January 6-9, was attended by convention managers, including forward-thinking CSMs from convention centers, CVBs and hotels from across the U.S. and Canada. Attending CSMs also make purchasing decisions and have influence on the purchasing decisions of their meeting planner clients.

The mission of ACOM is to also prepare CSM professionals for a critical role in the growth and success of their organizations.

The event was well attended, with over 180 convention service professionals from CVBs, hotels and convention centers.

"This year's theme was Hitting the Jackpot with Convention Services," said Diane Galante, ACOM's association manager. "The focus of the annual conference was on building the relationships between CVBs, hotels, centers and working with individuals within their communities. Sessions around these topics included educating attractions, partners and the community on the role of the CSMs and learning from past CSM of the Year recipients."

The conference began with a welcome by Marilyn Healey, CMP, ACOM president, and was immediately followed by an opening general session and keynote presentation by Cindy Novotny, managing partner of Master Connection Associates.

The keynote, entitled Turning up the Volume in the World of CS!, was specifically designed to motivate and inspire attendees to re-engage with their customers like never before.

"Cindy reminded the attendees about returning to the basics and more personalized attention, such as sending a hand written note or making a three-minute phone call instead of an email or letter to communicate to their clients," said Galante.

"Cindy set the tone for the rest of the conference," said Madonna Carr, CMP, vice president of destination services for Meet Minneapolis. "She has an excellent reputation in the industry. Cindy provided us great insight on what is happening in the hospitality industry and how we need to approach servicing clients in 2011."

The conference also addressed some of the challenges that are facing the meetings industry.

“The industry is still struggling with downsized staffs, budget constraints and how to provide their clients the most for their budgets,” said Galante. “The conference had several sessions that addressed these challenges, including Exceptional Service with a Down-Sized Staff, Trends in Food & Beverage: Smaller Budgets and Hands-On Experiences and What Meeting Planners Want and Expect from their CSM.”

One of the general sessions, Preparing the Service Element for the 2012 Super Bowl, presented by Susie Townsend, director of convention services for the Indianapolis Convention and Visitors Association, was of particular interest to Carr.

“I enjoyed the presentation by Susie Townsend,” said Carr. “She had a great template on how to work with the hospitality community in planning a major event in your city. She had everything covered.”

The conference also included several breakout sessions designed to deliver information on best practices and trends affecting the industry.

Jeff Hurt, director of education and engagement for Velvet Chainsaw Consulting, delivered a session entitled Social Media: Fad Or Revolution? This session provided members with the tools necessary to enhance their services by utilizing Twitter and other social media.

“Jeff gave a great presentation and overview of all of the social media options available,” said Carr. “It seemed a little overwhelming, but he did a great job of prioritizing what we really need to do as service professionals. I found this very helpful.”

Carr intends to put the information she gained at the conference to good use when she returns to the office.

“I plan to use social media to promote Minneapolis to upcoming groups, with the meeting planners' approval, of course,” said Carr. “We also need to conduct all sales to service transitions with over the phone introductions versus form letters.”

The conference ended with another informative session entitled What Meeting Planners Want and Expect from their CSM.

“The meeting planners were very candid as they shared what their expectations are with convention managers,” said Galante.

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