

## A Room-Within-a-Room

By: Mel Lambert

Interior of the Pacific Ballroom during opening-night celebrations on November 20, 2013, showing lighting and loudspeaker cabinets on the tension grid and drapes in various positions.

### Long Beach Arena's Pacific Ballroom is a creative experiment in creating a multifunction space

Multifunction performance venues, including large-format arenas with fixed seating, offer reduced flexibility for today's cost-conscious corporate events, touring concerts, and other gatherings that need to be up and running in just a few hours with a perma-

nent sound and lighting rig. Which was the conclusion reached by owners and operators of the landmark Long Beach Arena, located 30 miles south of Los Angeles. Built in the early '60s adjacent to the Long Beach Convention Center and originally designed as a

sports venue for hockey and basketball, for many years Long Beach Arena attracted touring acts and large events that could fill the 13,500 perimeter seating areas and 46,000 sq. ft. of floor space with its 80' ceiling. Now, however, the trend is toward versatility and the ability to tailor a venue to fulfill each client's unique needs.

Facilities management company SMG oversaw the venue transformation, with general manager Charlie Beirne heading up the team; The Long

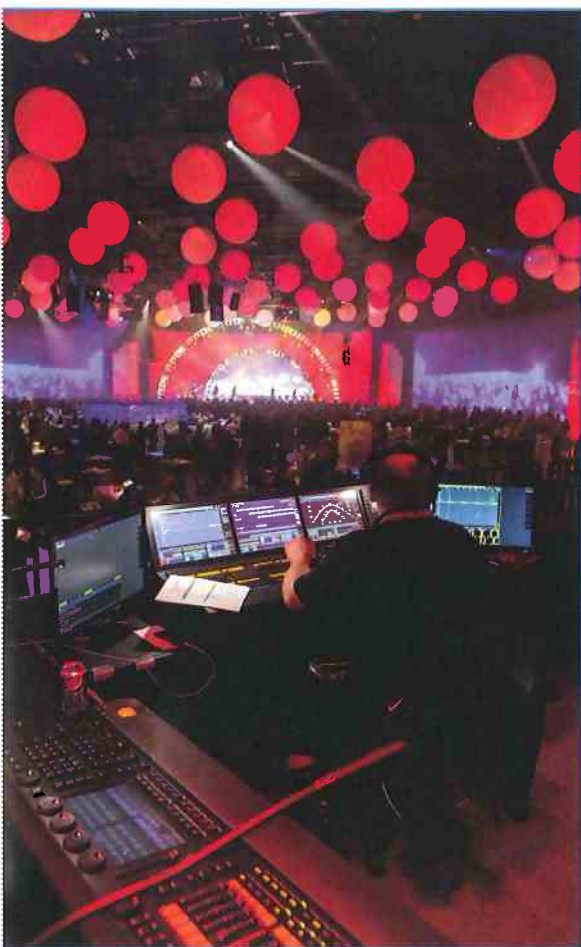


Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, working closely with facility management, also supported the project. The new, fully customizable venue—in reality, a multifunction ballroom within a traditional arena—incorporates the world's largest flying tension-grid system, with a flexible line-array sound system from Renkus-Heinz and a Martin Professional/ETC lighting rig that is said to integrate \$1.6 million in moving and fixed LED instruments. Designed by architects John Sergio Fisher & Associates/JSFA, with Jerry Sherman as associate architect and Theatre Projects Consultants serving as the theatre-design consultant, the nine-section tension grid can be lowered from the high steel to any desired operating height—normally 30' for smaller events and up to 65' for sports plus larger events—and is augmented



Renkus-Heinz IC<sup>2</sup> cabinets require no articulation between enclosures since steering/aiming is accomplished via computer-controlled DSP.

**“We needed to reinforce the building to accommodate the full weight of the grid and equipment by adding a total of twenty 150'-long beams on 18' centers, as a new frame to support the additional hardware. It was very challenging to add weight to an older Californian building, particularly one in a known earthquake area.”** — Clark



Pacific Ballroom's FOH and lighting position during the opening event.

by a system of movable drapes hung from a surrounding truss that screen off the permanent, arena-style seating sections. JSFA was also theatre consultant and acoustician on the project, with John A. Martin & Associates as structural engineer of record and Clark/Reder as engineer for the tension grid plus drapery trusses.

Now known as The Pacific Ballroom at Long Beach Arena, the new venue is described as a separate, intimate space capable of seating up to 5,000 guests for concerts, receptions, fashion shows, sporting events, and other events. The ballroom can be customized into any required seating configuration, with flexible, fully integrated audio and lighting systems. The Pacific Ballroom opened officially in November 2013; the reported total budget for the revitalization project

was \$10 million.

“What makes The Pacific Ballroom unique is not just the ability to offer different configurations,” says Michael Ferguson, of Theatre Projects Consultants, “but also that it can be also used for boxing, fashion, banquets, or TED Conferences, thanks to its ability to accommodate all of those types of events and turn over between them very quickly. [The organizers] can have a church service, a concert, and then a graduation on three consecutive nights. If you need a 40,000-sq.-ft. space for a sit-down dinner, you can do it; Disney on Ice or Cirque du Soleil—they could handle that as well.” In essence, The Pacific Ballroom was designed as a turnkey operation to allow its organizers to adjust the size and shape of the room, lighting, and audio configurations with a minimum



The nine-section elliptical tension grid can be lowered from the high steel to any desired operating height.



The tension grid is augmented by a system of movable drapes hung from a surrounding truss that screen off the permanent, arena-style seating sections.

of time and effort.

"Previously, you would need to hire a crew of workers to hang trusses, lights, and speakers and, of course, the time to set them up," continues Ferguson, who served as TPC's project director. "Now, within 10 minutes and 10 keystrokes, you can lower the ceiling, lower the draperies, and create completely immersive lighting through-

out the ballroom." By allowing the arena to rearrange the ballroom for each event, the venue can turn over an unprecedented number of clients—and, in doing so, increase their revenue. "The cost [of hosting an event] can be cut in half, or even 80%," says Daniel Clancy, VP of sales and event services with Vision Global Event Strategies, a San Diego-based company that uses the venue on a regular basis.

### Design of removable, multi-segment tension grid

"Our brief was to redesign the arena with a permanent sound and lighting system that could be used during a number of diverse productions," says Fisher. "The Pacific Ballroom was intended to be a room-within-a-room, to create a fully programmable environment," Sherman adds. "A conventional truss system would not have offered the flexibility the ballroom needs; we specified a tension grid that would cover the entire floor."

"The elliptical tension grid measures 250' on its long axis, and 165' on the east/west axis to cover the 45,000-sq.-ft. floor area," Fisher continues. "It

was fabricated in nine discrete sections by J. R. Clancy, based in Syracuse, New York, and then shipped to Long Beach. The modular construction—basically three sections at each end and three in the center—offers enhanced flexibility, because the whole grid can be lowered and any section removed independently; in one configuration, the three sections from one end were lowered, rotated 180°, and then suspended below the other end segments for storage." J. R. Clancy also designed the trusses and staggered curtain systems around the ballroom's perimeter. The tension grid comprises three groups that can be operated separately, while the drapery trusses are separated into discrete segments that operate independently from one another.

"Our biggest challenge was to use the arena's existing steel trusses and their inherent weight capacity," Fisher adds. "We hired Clark/Reder Engineering to determine the loading capabilities [working with John A. Martin as structural engineer of record] and what additional steel might be needed. We were aiming for an all-in weight for the tension grid plus the sound and lighting equipment to be 500,000lb, which we determined was our loading limit."

According to Daniel Clark, of Clark/Reder Engineering, which specializes in structural engineering, "We needed to reinforce the building to accommodate the full weight of the grid and equipment by adding a total of twenty 150'-long beams on 18' centers, as a new frame to support the additional hardware. It was very challenging to add weight to an older Californian building, particularly one in a known earthquake area."

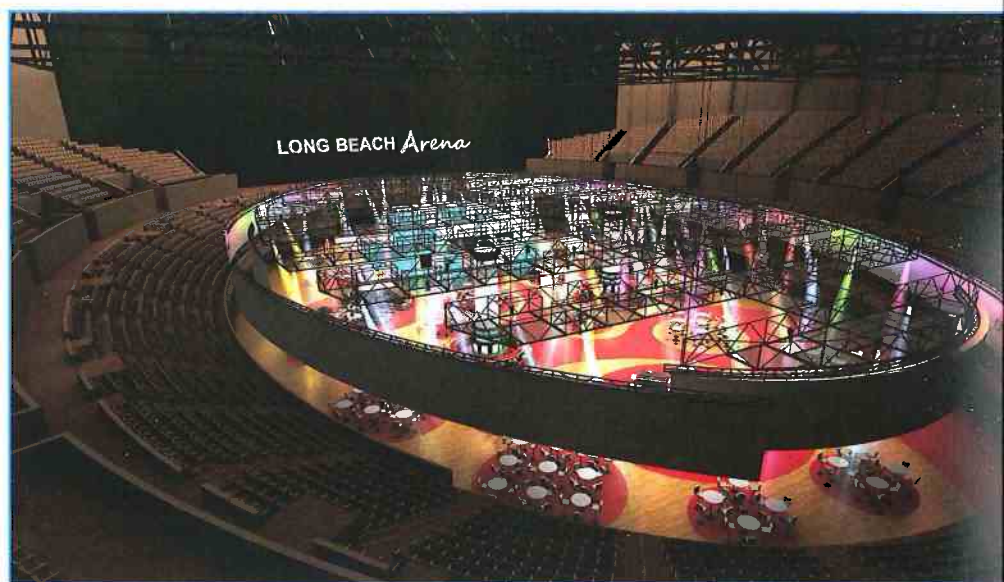
Brett Cooper, who served as principal project manager for J. R. Clancy, recalls that designs for the tension grid changed as details of the sound and lighting equipment were finalized, all of which fell under his firm's scope of work. "The project started back in 2011, when we began to discuss the



revised use that was planned for the Long Beach Arena," he says. "The grid is made up of similar 8'-x-8' wire-mesh panels mounted on tube beams, with walkways that join together the grid sections, allowing as many as 15 people to be down on the center. The resultant design weighs approximately 175,000lb, with weight being saved by omitting mesh panels where they weren't essential. Instead of line shafts, we specified 18 drum winches to raise all or part of the grid using [3/8" Dyform] cables from a storage height of 68' to an operational height of 30', and to the floor for system maintenance and/or removal. We also provided a two-person SkyClimber lift in the center of the grid for access. [SkyClimber is an international supplier of rigging solutions; its US office is based in Delaware, Ohio.] Power to the loudspeakers and lighting is handled via a series of distribution boxes in the ceiling plus cable reels.

"The curtain trusses, supplied by Tomcat USA, were designed to match the curvature of the walls in the arena. We specified a line shaft hoist on the top of the trusses that supports the frame and its curtain from the up to down positions." Eight perimeter curtains form a complete oval around the floor space. The hardware contains self-climbing hoists to allow operators to raise and lower the trusses, along with a horizontal cable clew assembly with special loft blocks attached to the trusses in order to raise the curtains. A programmable wireless pendant control initiates movement of the curtain trusses and the tension grid from anywhere in the ballroom.

"The wireless automation design incorporates a true emergency-stop system," states Tom Zorn, J. R. Clancy's control-hardware developer. "It's built on the Siemens functional safety platform, a higher level of hardware and software that is robust enough to reject interference from other signals in the room." The operator can be located as required to maintain a line of sight with all parts of



This computer graphic shows the tension grid and curtains in place for a special event.

the system during moves.

"What [JSFA] created is essentially a technical ceiling," Ferguson considers. "With a full truss system and curtains, you have the ability to configure a full house, a half house, or a two-thirds house," says general manager Beirne. "We can handle receptions, pop concerts, and auto shows with individual lights on the autos."

### Sound systems

Working with the architects and tension grid designers, Electrosonic developed a flexible audio playback system that is intended to fulfill the ballroom's myriad requirements. A number of Renkus-Heinz self-powered enclosures can be under-slung to the movable tension grid using straps in a number of configurations. A total of 20 Renkus-Heinz IC<sup>2</sup> digitally steerable loudspeakers—normally arrayed in two 10-cabinet hangs—are augmented with eight flown or floor-stacked Renkus-Heinz IC118-S subwoofers. A series of network connection points allow the speaker arrays to be moved around the grid as necessary. Alternatively, the IC<sup>2</sup> arrays can be removed from the grid and ground-stacked. Once in place, the IC<sup>2</sup> array's digitally steered beam technology

enables them to be configured to cover only the areas needed, aiming sound away from the hall's acoustically reflective outer walls and ceiling. The grid can also be lowered and removed for events like a Cirque du Soleil show, providing full access to the 75' ceiling.

"The IC<sup>2</sup> delivers such even sound pressure level from the front to back [of the ballroom]," states Electrosonic design consultant Andy Batwinas. "When we did the demo, [the array] was set up at the far end of the arena and shot down the long axis. You could walk the whole space, cover the floor, and keep it a solid 98dB SPL from one side to the other." Ralph Heinz, senior VP at Renkus-Heinz, was also instrumental in setting up demonstrations of IC<sup>2</sup> in the Pacific Ballroom, which "ensured that the original concept of a flexible and easily reconfigurable sound system could be realized," Batwinas recalls.

Sound components supplied and installed by Pro Sound & Video, a Burbank, California-based AV integrator, include a 16-fader Soundcraft Si16 front-of-house console and a number of QSC Q-Sys networking modules that carry audio signals from the front-of-house area to the loudspeakers.

Various connection points enable the speaker arrays to be moved around the tension grid, depending upon the desired configuration; digitally steered-beam technology enables coverage to only the targeted ballroom areas, with sound being directed away from the arena's reflective areas. Using Renkus-Heinz's RHAON signal distribution and control, the ballroom's technical crew can implement preset coverage configurations for different events.

Renkus-Heinz IC<sup>2</sup> loudspeaker modules are said to combine the advantages of point-source design with the control and flexibility of digitally steered array technology. Output beams can be steered either up or down, while the stack or array remains vertical; four 8" low-frequency trans-

noticeably on the spoken word. The 'direct sound' feel of the voice was as though the presenter was speaking directly to you without the room's midrange reverberation muddling things, and the presenter appeared more comfortable speaking as they heard less of themselves coming back from the room.

"Given the [Pacific Ballroom's] wide variety of uses and planned configurations for the space, IC<sup>2</sup> seems to be an ideal choice. Not only are the cabinets extremely configurable and modular in terms of how many can be flown, but the aiming and steering is handed from a computer on the ground that controls DSP functions, rather than having to physically re-tweak hanging positions and angles. Especially when

**"During a shootout between our IC<sup>2</sup> cabinets and a [major vendor] line array, the benefits of steerability and creating tight beams were obvious. We listened to a variety of program sources and it was clear that the IC<sup>2</sup> delivered considerably more intelligibility, most noticeably on the spoken word. The 'direct sound' feel of the voice was as though the presenter was speaking directly to you without the room's midrange reverberation muddling things, and the presenter appeared more comfortable speaking as they heard less of themselves coming back from the room."** — Kirby

ducers and four 1" throat high-frequency drivers powered by Class D amplifiers are said to be capable of delivering high sound pressure levels.

"During a shootout between our IC<sup>2</sup> cabinets and a [major vendor] line array," says Rik Kirby, Renkus-Heinz's vice-president of sales and marketing, "the benefits of steerability and creating tight beams were obvious. We listened to a variety of program sources and it was clear that the IC<sup>2</sup> delivered considerably more intelligibility, most

working in reverberant spaces, a tweak of a couple of degrees up or down can make quite dramatic differences in intelligibility; being able to do this electronically allows for much more precise fine tuning than a mechanical solution could provide."

"From the movable FOH console we use a fiber network to carry audio and control signals to the grid-mounted loudspeakers," says head systems technician Paul Fabre, who has been with the arena for 32 years.

"Suspended from the grid at a height of 30', the hang of 10 IC<sup>2</sup> cabinets ends some 16' off the floor.

"The QSC Q-Sys 8x8 signal-transport modules connect digital outputs from the FOH console to switches in the tension grid that break out the individual signals to each loudspeaker cabinet. The four Q-Sys output modules, connected via the Q-LAN network, comprise a pair of 12-output and a pair of four-output units that deliver analog signals to the Renkus-Heinz line arrays and subwoofers. The same one-gigabit Q-LAN fiber-optic network also carries the RHAON control signals that re-configure each loudspeaker according to where we want to put to sound across the ballroom floor. Each array behaves as a single flown box, capable of generating up to eight individual beams in the vertical plane. It's a very versatile system, and just what we need for the varied type of events being held here at the Pacific Ballroom."

"The Q-Sys Core 500i features a variable number of I/O options, with an internal routing matrix," adds Shawn Risberg, project manager and programmer, of Pro Sound & Video. Modules were installed at two ballroom locations "for input connection to the FOH mixer," he says. "The eight local outputs connect to monitor speakers for the mix engineer."

The ballroom's lobby area and concourse are covered by 18 Renkus-Heinz VARIA modular point-source arrays, 12 Renkus-Heinz VA15S subwoofers, and 16 Renkus-Heinz CFX81 compact two-way loudspeakers.

## Lighting systems

The lighting system within the Pacific Ballroom comprises a number of fixed and moving instruments specified by theatrical lighting consultant The Ruzika Company and supplied by Sacramento Theatrical Lighting: 24 Martin Professional MAC Viper Profiles; 180 Martin Rush MH1 Profiles; 74 ETC Selador Desire D-60 Vivid wash units; 102 ETC Selador



Vivid-R strip lights; and 96 inflatable globes fitted with Blizzard Lighting's The Puck RGBWA units. JSFA designed the lighting distribution system, assisted by Theatre Projects Consultants.

"Our initial goal, specified by Steve Goodling [Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau president and CEO] was to produce the look of a grand ballroom in a high-end hotel; we decided to provide a versatile and highly flexible lighting array that could put light anywhere on the ballroom floor," says company president Tom Ruzika. "The initial lighting plot for the ballroom included a recommended equipment list for a combination of arc-source and LED-source, moving and fixed-focus lights, incorporating over 260 spotlights in a fully digital system—[rather than] conventional dimmer racks and halogen sources.

"Steve Odehnal, at Sacramento Theatrical Lighting, refined the lighting fixture specifications during the extended construction period, to assure that the equipment—especially the arc- and LED-source automated lights—incorporated the most current technology. We feel that the rig can accommodate touring concerts, as well as the Long Beach Symphony," which performs at the venue on a regular basis. The Ruzika Company designed the theatrical lighting plot, circuitry distribution, and lighting data distribution systems for the arena lobby plus exterior entry area.

"The entire ballroom system is controlled from an ETC Eos Ti 12K console with DMX control data transmitted over a fiber network to a total of 27 ETC Net3 two-port nodes and nine ETC SmartSwitch relay panels," explains Jeff Bettis, the facility's head of lighting and its chief lighting director. The dedicated infrastructure originates at a series of Cat 5 network access points around the perimeter of the arena, to allow the cart-mounted ETC lighting desk to be located where necessary. "From there, we use fiber-optic connections to a network switch

mounted on the catwalks, through cable reels down to the tension grid," Bettis continues, "where we convert to DMX commands for the individual lighting instruments," which are permanently hung from the grid using The Light Source Mega Claws and half-cheeseborough pipe clamps.

"Because all the fixtures have been pre-hung from the tension grid, I can be up and running very quickly," the lighting director continues. "The 24 Martin Vipers and close to 200 Rush moving lights are spread out pretty evenly around the edges of the tension grid, with the Selador strip lights hung from the top of the curtain trusses around the perimeter of the arena, and the globes from the grid. Aside from the Martin Vipers, all instruments feature LED elements that will give us a far better lamp life.

"The ETC Eos Ti lighting desk is extremely comprehensive and handles everything we have asked of it; with the permanently rigged [lighting array], I can get everything aimed and focused within maybe four hours of receiving the final arena layout for a planned event. The Selador Vivid strip lights are amazing—I love the seven-color wash capabilities, and their phenomenal output that yields a true 16-million color palette, including a great selection of amber tones. The Selador D-60 washes on the grid feature the same seven-color engine for added compatibility, and work well with the Martin MH1 moving lights to offer a number of great-looking washes across the arena floor. The inflatable globes, with their built-in RGB lights, are very flexible, and add an 'extra' aspect to a production—that's our 'wow' factor! We can also deflate the globes by turning off the internal fans, and have an operator quickly bag them within 10 – 15 minutes after the grid is lowered to the floor."

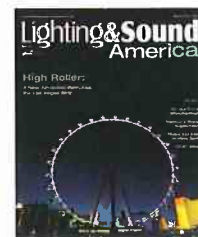
The Pacific Gallery, or arena lobby, which leads directly into the new ballroom incorporates a permanent installation of lighting fixtures, controlled from an Alcorn McBride LightCue Pro

chassis, triggered from either an Alcorn McBride V4Pro controller or, for temporary looks, from an Avolites Diamond 4 PC laptop-based console. Lighting power for the 19,000-sq.-ft. area "is provided through an ETC SmartSwitch relay panel controlled by the LightCue Pro chassis," Bettis explains. "On the ceiling and walls we have 90 Vello Stage Blaster LED wash units, 16 Martin Mac 350 Entours, nine ETC Selador Desire D-60 Vivid wash units, three 26" ETC Source Four LEDs, seven Airstar Crystal RGB LED inflatable globes, 15 Philips Color Kinetics 1' ColorFuse Powercore lights for the crystal sconces and 24 Color Kinetics 1' iColor Cove Powercore lights for the murals, and nine Coloronix 6" recessed RGBW downlights for the main arena entrance lighting.

"All in all, we have a very flexible yet powerful system," Bettis concludes, "and one that has fulfilled our every requirement during the past year."

"We had some visitors from a Las Vegas showroom come to see The Pacific Ballroom," says president/CEO Goodling. "They were blown away by our new facility; another visitor from a leading cosmetics firm said, 'Forget looking to the future—I'm now standing in it.' We couldn't expect better feedback from prospective clients." ☺

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### WHAT DO MEETINGS LACK? PASSION FOR DETAIL

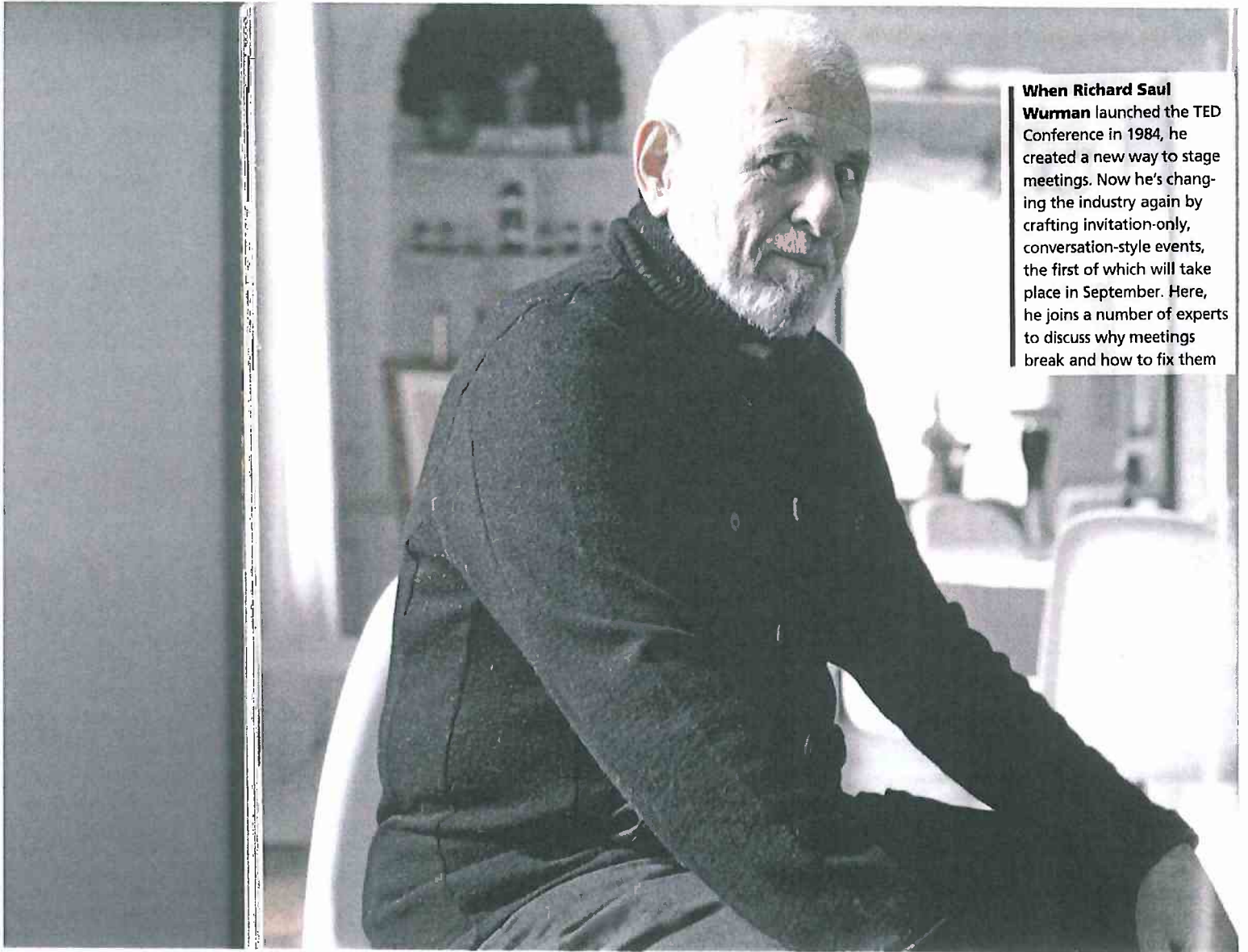
— Richard Saul Wurman  
creator of the TED  
Conference

**3** Reasons  
to meet at  
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**When Richard Saul Wurman** launched the TED Conference in 1984, he created a new way to stage meetings. Now he's changing the industry again by crafting invitation-only, conversation-style events, the first of which will take place in September. Here, he joins a number of experts to discuss why meetings break and how to fix them



## Cover Story



# 5 Fixes for Mediocre Meetings

**T**he state of professional meetings and how they are planned could use a lot of improvement, according to Richard Saul Wurman, creator of the famed TED Conference.

"There are only a few good meetings out there," he says, "but that's true of just about anything. Name any field, and there are only a few practitioners that you could point out as worthwhile. It's just the nature of the world." While some might judge Wurman's view as a bit harsh, it's undeniable that the art and science of gathering people together for business purposes is a process that can always be refined and improved.

Indeed, when it comes to planning, certain basic pitfalls threaten to undermine the project, both before and during the event. This special report offers five important ways in which any gathering can better meet its objectives, from conception to execution.

### **1** Improve Your Internal Collaboration

One of the biggest problems of putting together

an effective program rears its head right in the meeting owner's backyard—before the event takes place. It's bad internal partnering: a lack of collaboration between event stakeholders and the finance department.

"In today's business world, the biggest challenge is communication," says Vlad Haltigin, a certified incentive travel executive formerly with Xerox Canada and now an independent consultant for reward and recognition programs based in Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

Most companies don't have a system in place to facilitate interdepartmental partnering, partly because in the past, meeting planning was managed largely by marketing departments and operated in a silo. "Planning departments have been fairly autonomous for many years," Haltigin explains.

But today, as companies grapple with the aftermath of the recession and the heightened emphasis on transparency, organizational activities and spending are more highly scrutinized, and "the planner [who] has been able to work

Susan Radojevic draws parallels between the way financial advisors help clients work toward monetary goals, and the way planners help organizations work toward corporate and association goals. Both require a portfolio-based approach.



**"When you go to a financial advisor, you bring your portfolio and look at the return you're getting." Meetings should be looked at in the same way.**

Susan Radojevic, President,  
The Peregrine Agency

independently for many years all of a sudden has a financial person over her shoulder asking, "Why are you spending this?" Haltigin says. "The planner now operates in a different situation where it's essential to partner and collaborate with others in the organization."

This "new normal" can actually lead to better, more valuable meetings—but only if the events and finance departments establish a solid working relationship and effective lines of communication. There are a few key ways to do this, Haltigin says. First and foremost, it's crucial for the planner to think of the finance group as a partner. "Don't treat them as enemies, treat them as allies," he says. "You

each have goals that you have to meet in your departments and overall in the organization. Everybody has a role."

Educate the finance department on meeting planning. "As the head of my division, from time to time I took key people in finance to lunch to explain how meeting planning works," says Fred Diniz, managing director for Nanuet, NY-based Global Events Consultants. "I turned our lunch sessions into meeting-planning training seminars. It helps them, and it helps my team work with them."

That kind of additional effort is critical to taking an event to the next level, says TED's Wurman. "You have to be a little obsessive

to care about everything," he says. "In the end it comes down to passion. Most meetings are not done by people who are passionate enough to take the time to dig into every detail of an event."

Haltigin adds that the historically siloed nature of event planning has meant that most people outside of the industry do not know what the day-to-day pressures and expectations are, and sharing this information can lead to much clearer communication and a more fulfilling partnership.

Begin collaborating early on. It's critical to bring the finance department in during the initial planning stages, both to show the department that you understand its value and to keep colleagues abreast of the requirements and demands from each key stakeholder. By doing this, they will understand exactly where funds are going and why.

During this stage it's also essential to create a contingency fund comprising 10 to 20 percent of the budget—and explain the reason why to finance counterparts. "Senior managers typically ask for more than you're able to deliver," Haltigin notes. If you have some backup money in the bank, you'll be able to work with both senior managers and the finance department.

Once rapport has been established, manage the relationship by keeping your counterparts consistently informed, Diniz says. "Keep them close and apprised of all the steps and changes in the planning of the budgets. Manage the relationship and the expectations—don't blind-side your finance people with surprises. Keep them informed and they will work with you," he advises.

—Agatha Gilmore

## **2 Refine Your Strategy**

The simplest way to avoid an unfocused—and thus unproductive—meeting is to align your meeting strategy with broader corporate goals. To do this, you need to put in quite a bit of work upfront.





## Wurman On: Lighting

"If a speaker is not showing slides or a presentation, the house lights should be on so the speaker can see the audience. If a speaker can see the audience, he can see how the audience is reacting and adjust his presentation accordingly. A speaker can't really do that from a stage if a dramatic spotlight is on him—it blinds him."



## Wurman On: Networking

"The most important times during a conference are the breaks and meal functions between the speeches. I'm not diminishing the quality of the speakers—that's what everything is based on. But it's those conversations that reflect on what you just heard in the auditorium where ideas are formed. They have to be protected, they have to be long, and they have to be in a wonderful place."



## Wurman On: Staging

"Look at everything you do and instead of adding things, you should subtract them. My first TED conference in 1984 was an exercise in subtraction. At the time, every conference had panels of four to five people saying a couple words and not really talking to each other. Everybody had a lectern and gave long introductions. I took away introductions, panels, and lecterns and achieved a clearer focus on communication, understanding, and passing on ideas."

"If you don't want to have bad meetings, you have to figure out what the purpose of a meeting is—why it's being held—not to mention when and how it's being held," says Susan Radojevic, president of The Peregrine Agency, a Toronto-based global event portfolio alignment consultancy. "You have to look at your meeting from a strategic, 35,000-foot level."

Don't look at each event in a vacuum. Radojevic suggests that planners think about the events they manage as a portfolio, in much the same way financial advisors do. "When you go to a financial advisor, you bring your portfolio of investments and take a look at the return you're getting from a goals perspective. If you want to retire at 65, how much money do

event. "We've run into situations where we're a new partner and the corporation is approaching initial meeting planning as they've always done. We like to start a new discussion, consider what's been done in the past through the lens of what will satisfy the C-level stakeholders, and then think about what will impact attendees," says Rich.

Next, craft an outcome-focused agenda. Lynn Davidson, founder and president of Los Angeles-based management consulting firm Direction Focus and the former head of strategic planning process development at Getty Oil Company, puts critical emphasis on outcomes when setting meeting agendas. "The first place people fail is in neglecting to put down on paper the goals they want to achieve as a result

**"The first place people fail is in neglecting to put down on paper the goal they want to achieve as a result of the meeting."**

Lynn Davidson, Founder and President,  
Direction Focus

you need? That's the way we need to start looking at meetings—what's the purpose of these meetings? Why did we choose these options to deliver? What is the current reality that we're living in, and do these meetings fit in with that reality?"

"A failed meeting doesn't deliver on measurable objectives," says David Rich, founder and leader of George P. Johnson's global strategy practice and a member of the board of directors for the International Center for Exhibitor and Event Marketing. "When meetings fail to define their objectives in a way that is actionable, they go wrong." It's important to review your organization's meeting practices to see what will and won't work for a particular

of the meeting," he says. "You need to think of the goals as the design specifications for the meeting."

The most common problem with a bad agenda is that you can simply run out of time to tackle all the items, says David Sibbet, president and founder of The Grove Consultants International, a San Francisco-based firm that works with organizations to improve planning and organizational change. For critical meetings have a design team work on the agenda with key stakeholders. Look at it as a living document rather than a time-blocked logistics schedule.

Sibbet, who is also the author of *Visual Meetings: How Graphics, Sticky Notes*

and *Idea Mapping Can Transform Group Productivity*, adds that there is a school of thought that an agenda should never include time limits, but only show the flow of topics.

"Try to imagine each stage of the agenda and what it needs to achieve," says Davidson, from *Direction Focus*. "Meetings all have the same fundamental structure in that you start with a question, then you throw out ideas about how to tackle it, then you filter that feedback down into a solution."

And consider mimicking entertainment formats, suggests Wurman, beginning with a warm-up of sorts. After all, learning is a form of entertainment. "You shouldn't be dour about it," he says. "You should feel entertained. That's the way you remember things—because they're interesting. Learning is remembering what you're interested in."

—Kate Mulcrone

### 3 Enhance Your Meeting Environment //

Your group is gathered in a nondescript meeting room bathed in flickering fluorescent light, sitting in rigid chairs arranged in tight rows. Onstage, a speaker drones on from behind a lectern off stage right.

By the time your attendees get back to the office, most of what they heard at the meeting will have been long forgotten. How do you solve this? By creating an environment that supports collaboration, connection, and community—all critical to effective meetings—with proper lighting, an appropriate temperature, regulated air quality, and ergonomic seating.

The environment should provide context. There was a time when windows were considered a distraction. Not anymore. Studies show that natural light in a meeting room is an ad-



David Rich, from George P. Johnson, puts emphasis on measurable meeting objectives and actionable goals

vantage. "Our brains are designed to respond to everything around us through our senses," notes Andrea Sullivan, an organizational psychologist and CEO of Brain Strength Systems. "Some environments are nourishing and supportive, while others are toxic and draining. Ambient noise can interfere with attention and learning. Music can elicit emotional states and also [works with] our physiological rhythms, with rapid tempos speeding us up and slower ones bringing us to a relaxed state. Even furniture affects the neurotransmitters in our brains in a variety of ways: we are more alert when sitting in straight-backed chairs and more at peace when relaxing on a sofa." Different color schemes produce different effects, adds Sullivan, with warm colors creating a state of stimulation, and cool colors encouraging greater creativity.

Don't rely on the hotel for your meeting design. Because of the importance of the meeting environment, "you should design the

meeting and not leave it up to the hotel to do it," says Wurman. "Much thought must be given to every element of the meeting. For instance, if you put the lectern to one side of the stage in a symmetrical auditorium, you can be subconsciously telling the audience that one side [of the room] is more important than the other."

His advice is to get rid of lecterns all together. "They make it too easy for a speaker to read from a script and that removes vulnerability," he says. "When speakers are vulnerable, you are most likely to get at the truth of a topic."

—Andrea Doyle

### 4 Find and Coach Effective Speakers

You can tell with a glance that the speaker you hired wasn't very engaging if people are hunched over their BlackBerry devices and iPhones during the presentation. So why aren't they listening to the expert you brought in to enlighten and excite them?

One fairly common answer is that once you hired the speaker, you didn't bother to spend any time telling him about your company, your attendees, and what challenges they are facing, says Michael Frick, president of Palm Springs, CA-based Speakers Platform, a speakers bureau.

"Speakers should have at least one in-depth discussion, via conference call, about the event goals with the event planning staff," Frick suggests. "It is also helpful to have the planning staff thoroughly fill out the pre-program questionnaire that speakers bureaus dispense, since it will provide the background information speakers need to customize their programs."

Of course, for that to be of any use, the person briefing the speaker must actually know the event's goals, says Peter Sheahan, a popular speaker and founder of ChangeLabs, a



global consulting firm focusing on behavioral change. "It usually takes between an hour and an hour and a half, live on the phone, to get the answers you need. The things that I want to know, in that process, are what is the current state and what is the desired future state—where are we trying to get with this group?" he says. "I have had problems with clients who are involved in the briefing process not necessarily knowing the answers to those questions. I've had more than one occasion where I've had to go back and brief a second time with an executive, because the meeting planner, or whoever was involved with the client, didn't really know the answers."

One event production company that takes this process to heart is Consero, a Bethesda,

MD-based firm that produces small events for high-level executives in the legal and information technology fields.

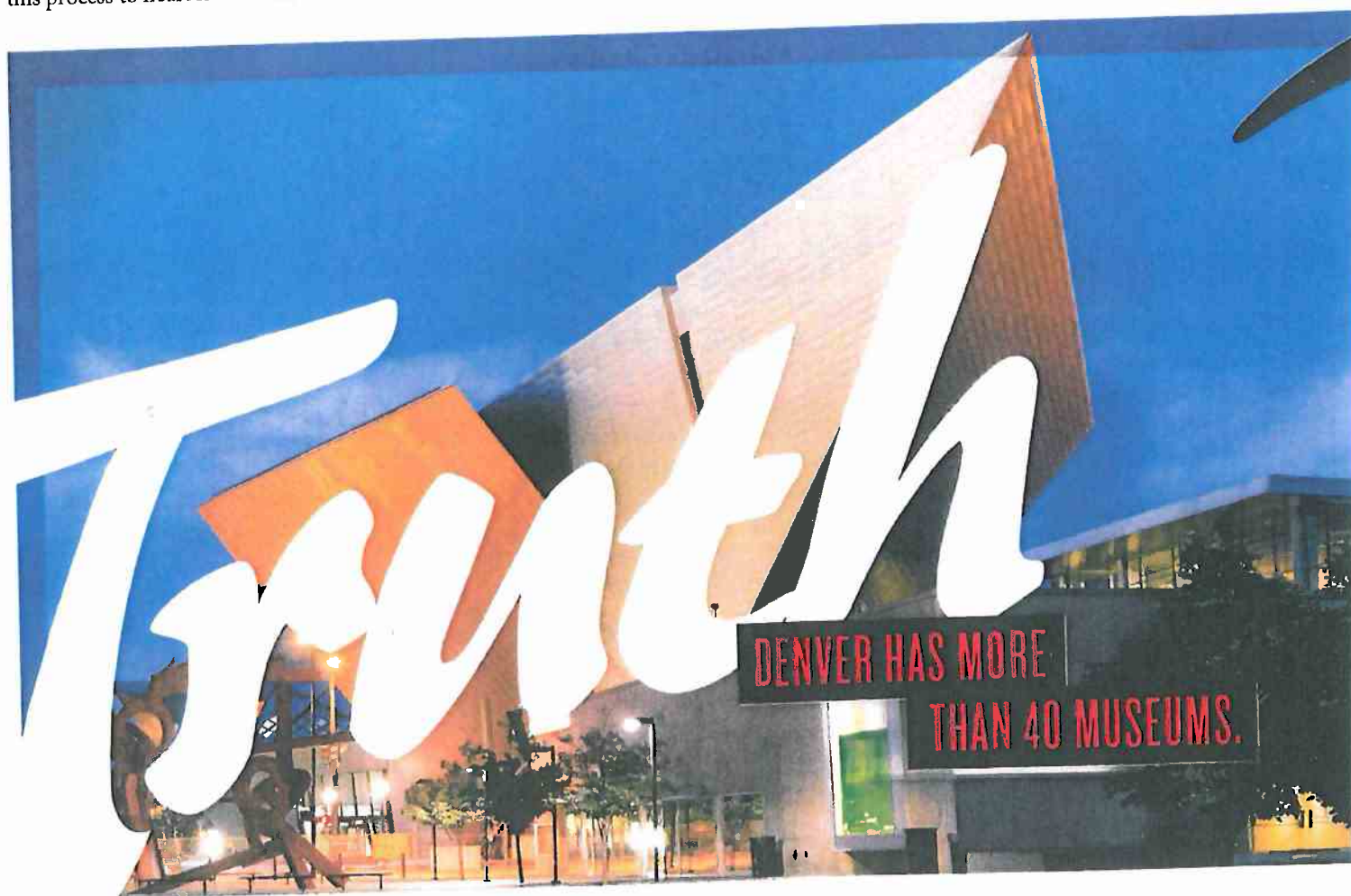
"I was a practicing lawyer for a number of years and had attended events, and then I started a legal support company and sponsored a number of events," says Paul Mandell, Consero's founder and CEO. "I was never really particularly pleased with the experience."

So Mandell teamed up with a law school classmate and two planners to form a company that would spend as much time and effort on the educational content as it did on the logistics of its events. That means "focusing a little more aggressively than is the norm in the industry on the subject matter that's being presented," he explains.

"We have two separate teams for each event," Mandell says. "One that focuses aggressively on subject matter and one [made up of] meeting professionals who manage putting together a great event in all other respects."

Once speakers are chosen, "we'll have at least one call and email correspondence to make sure we're tailoring the session to what people were interested in in the first place," Mandell adds. "We'll review and provide feedback on any PowerPoint or accompanying information. It's a very interactive process, and that helps us ensure we're delivering what our participants want ... [and] that the presentation is consistent with the goals we had anticipated."

—Leo Jakobson



## 5 Pep Up Your Presentations

Ever wonder why Steve Jobs was able to change the world? Part of the reason is that Jobs was a naturally talented showman who captivated audiences with memorable presentations that were emotionally charged and in sync with the way we absorb information.

"In other words, a presentation needs a good, clear story, and the speaker needs some passion while delivering it," says acclaimed TED speaker Nancy Duarte, whose presentation design and training firm, Duarte Design Inc., in Mountain View, CA, has aided numerous Fortune 500 firms. "I analyzed Steve Jobs' 2007 iPhone launch," says Duarte. "I calculated the number of times he marveled at his own product, saying things like, 'Isn't

this product great? Isn't it wonderful?' He did it an amazing 209 times in 30 minutes."

Today everyone is pressed for time, but it takes time—and skill—to craft a clever

who counts Apple, Cisco, Facebook, Google, HP, and GE as clients.

"If you're delivering a presentation, your goal is to be more interesting than an audience

**"If you're delivering a presentation, your goal is to be more interesting than an audience member's inbox."**

Nancy Duarte, Author,

*Slideology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations*

presentation, and that's generally not part of corporate culture, says Duarte, who has authored best-sellers such as *Slideology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations* and

member's inbox," she says.

Presentations should promise and deliver value. Many presenters go about their business without delivering the true meaning of



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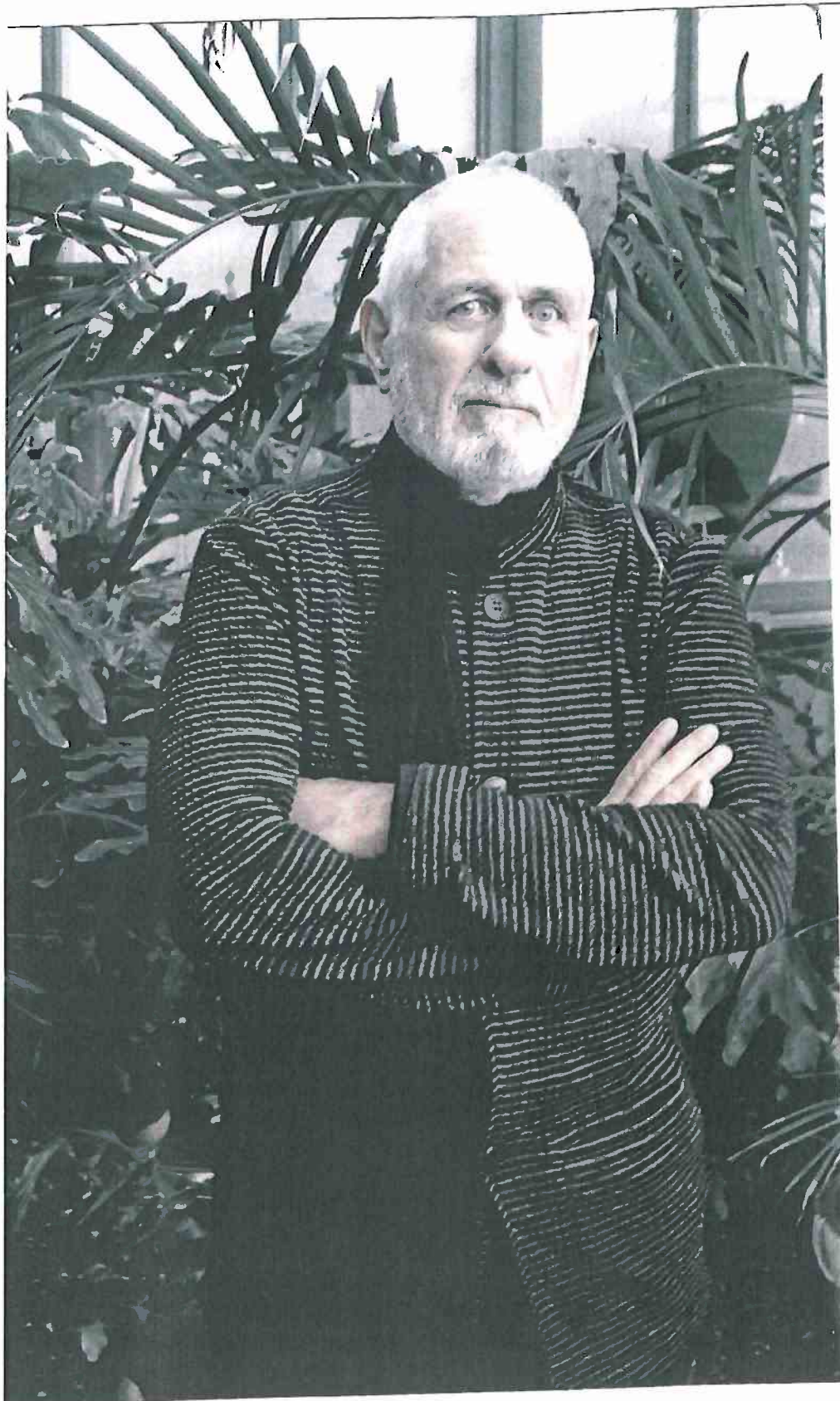
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The Colorado Convention Center's 40-foot-tall Blue Bear, *I See What You Mean*, designed by Denver artist Lawrence Argent, has become a Mile High City icon.

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In an effort to reinvigorate the attendee experience, Wurman mixed traditional presentations and panels altogether at his events

their presentations and without letting the audience know what they will get out of them, says Mark Pearson, a professional speaker and television and radio host. The first fatal mistake, he notes, is inundating the audience with text on-screen.

"You've already lost your audience at that point," he says, explaining that the brain is wired to pay attention to patterns. "As soon as a PowerPoint slide appears, the brain reacts: 'Have I seen this before? Yes, I've seen many boring PowerPoint presentations.' The brain automatically expects this to be boring and checks out."

"The slides should be the backdrop and not the focal point," Duarte points out, while advocating the use of notes on handouts instead to deliver important bullet points. "People turn their backs on dense visuals. There's too much information."

Humans have a habit of establishing standards and then mindlessly following convention, so much so that a slow, agonizing death by PowerPoint has become the norm rather than taboo. So how do you avoid a snooze fest? Both Duarte and Pearson urge greater use of picture slides, and Duarte goes as far as recommending a professional sketch artist to translate your spoken words into images on the fly. "It's riveting, actually," she says, since the audience will anticipate what's coming next from the artist.

But for corporate communicators who want to fly solo, Duarte's firm trains clients how to break the ugly cycle of reusing stale PowerPoint templates, teaching them how to deconstruct and declutter typical slides into pictures (read: not charts or graphs) that better deliver the message.

Keep attendees on track and wanting more. Part of delivering a compelling story is having a framework and structure that audience members can wrap their heads around.

"Give people a roadmap along the presen-

tation, give them an idea of where they're going," says Pearson. "If there are three parts, let them know, 'Here's part one, and now here's part three,' so they can keep track."

Duarte advocates having an actual beginning, middle, and end to your presentation with clear turning points, as well as contrast, which means making clear that, for example, a current business situation does not compare to the one you envisioned. She advises using a similar brand of conflict-and-resolution found in a good drama: "Creating tension and release is a great device. Make where you're going sound amazing."

Start with the big picture. "Another effective

strategy is to reveal the meaning before the presentation delivers the details," says Pearson. "When people do not grasp the meaning of something, it's hard for them to pay attention to the details."

Brief is best. There is also the "10-minute rule," because the brain starts to weaken in digesting information at that marker, so attention dwindles. Not that this means you have to work in breaks every 10 minutes in your presentation. Rather, when you feel the audience is fading, it's time to tell an emotional personal anecdote to regain their attention.

"Great communicators do this," says Duarte. Pearson leans toward survival stories because "the brain pays attention to threats."

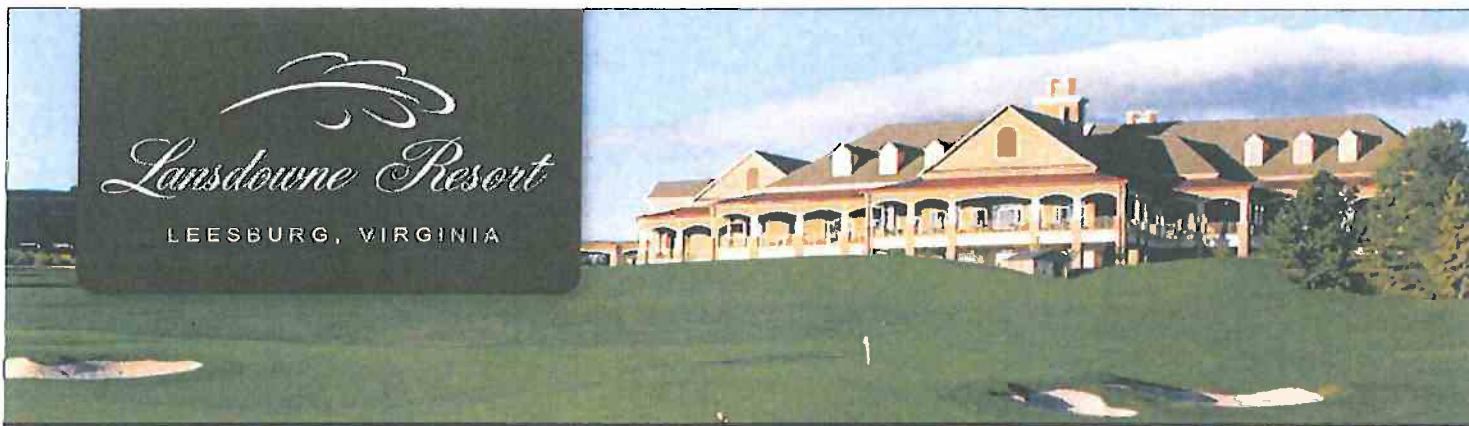
So what is Duarte's mark of a pitch-perfect presentation? When even Twitter stops chirping.

"Great presentations grab the audience to the point where there's no tweeting, since they're so riveted," she says. "Sometimes we forget there are human beings in the room, and there's really no better venue to make the human connection than with a live presentation."

—William Ng SM



To learn about Richard Saul Wurman's next innovative meeting, visit [bit.ly/smWurman](http://bit.ly/smWurman)



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By Agatha Gilmore

# FOUR TOP MEETING TRENDS FOR 2014



Access Destination Services held an event at Chateau Julien Wine Estate in Carmel, CA



Unique meeting venues help planners craft one-of-a-kind experiences for attendees

As we collectively embark on this exciting New Year, with fresh resolutions and fresh hope, we find ourselves looking ahead and eagerly anticipating what the future holds. While there's no crystal ball for meetings in 2014, there are certainly some emerging trends that will continue to shape the industry. Here's a look at four of these developments, and advice for planners on how they can not only meet, but beat expectations in the year ahead.

### 1 Meetings Are Experiences

If there's one thing that all the experts agree on, it's that meetings today aren't just face-to-face gatherings for the sole purpose of exchanging business information. Rather, they're enriching, one-of-a-kind experiences that attendees will treasure forever.

"It's less about, 'I'm going to a conference,' and more about, 'I'm going to have an experience,'" says Carol McGury, senior vice president of event and education services for SmithBucklin in Chicago.

"There's a lot of 'been there, done that,'" adds Chris Lee, president and CEO of

Access Destination Services, a Chicago-based destination management company. "What could [attendees] not do on their own?"

Planners are increasingly creating these distinctive experiences in a variety of ways, oftentimes simply by choosing unique or unexpected venues that offer "bragging rights," according to Emma de Vadder, regional director of North America for VisitEngland. In fact, in a report titled "Trends and Developments: VisitEngland Reveals What Will Shape Our Meetings and Incentives Industry in 2014," the tourism board discloses that unusual venues in England have seen increased use for corporate events, including religious buildings such as St. Mary's Church in Nottingham or medieval-era Sheffield Cathedral, and historic houses such as Carlton Towers in Yorkshire or Leeds Castle in Kent.

Another way planners are creating distinctive experiences for attendees is by incorporating outdoor elements into the meeting, whether it's "teambuilding outside, venues that offer access, or just building into programs time outside, being in nature," de Vadder

## READER ROI

- Meetings offer special, memorable experiences
- Social media plays an ever-greater role in events



says. The VisitEngland report asserts that in 2013, corporate groups could be found “brainstorming alongside a troop of baboons at the Monkey Playhouse in Yorkshire Wildlife Park, [in] tipis on Brighton Beach, and [outside in] Bear Grylls’ new survival academy.”

Lee says another way to create memorable experiences is by engaging all five senses in what he calls “multi-sensory events.” For example, for past programs, Access Destination Services has temporarily implemented scented wallpaper, linens, and tablecloths that reflect the theme of the meeting or booth — such as “tropical” or “rustic, Old World leather,” according to Lee — as well as a matching temperature adjustment (i.e., warmer for the tropical scent, cooler for the cozy leather).

Meals are also part of the attendee experience, and in the year ahead, food and beverage offerings will be increasingly tailored either to reflect the event theme or to serve as special events in and of themselves. Andrea E. Sullivan, founder and president of learning and performance organizations BrainStrength Systems and LeaderStrength Systems, Inc., says there’s “much more thought” being put into meals today “to create an experience or create a memory. Meals are special events and provide particular experiences. I think we’re seeing the quality now is really overriding quantity.”

Even the sponsorship of an event will tie in to the overall attendee experience in 2014, notes Brian Langerman, executive director of InSight, the largest independent user community of McKesson healthcare technology, and director of SmithBucklin’s Technology Industry Practice.

“In the past it was: How many banners



**“At an event, we’re offering attendees 10 to 25 craft beers on tap that people can’t get back home.”**

— Chris Lee, Access Destination Services

could you hang up, how many signs could you put up to slap a company logo on?” Langerman says. “Now the exhibitors and partners are getting much more savvy, and we work with them on an integrated strategy. It’s about linking the user experience to them year-round.”

Ultimately, says Meg Proskey, Maritz Travel’s division vice president of air, registration, and technology, planners want to “deliver an experience that is not only there [at the event], but also makes attendees want to attend it again in the future.”

### ② Attendees Want a Sense of Place

Another shift is the growing popularity of incorporating local elements into the meeting or event — giving attendees a taste of the locale they’re in. Gone are the days of business professionals being holed up in a large convention hall in a nameless, faceless city. Attendees today want and expect to experience the culture of their meeting destination.

One easy way to bring the locale to them is by offering attendees samples of the regional cuisine — and they’re hungry to try it, according to a recent survey by VisitEngland, which found that 76 percent of respondents want to dine at restaurants serving local dishes.

“People are asking for local produce, for farm to table,” Lee says.

Sullivan points out that regional cuisines are often not hard to incorporate into events because most chefs and catering companies today are looking to buy local ingredients anyway. And when it comes to beverages, there are new local craft breweries and wineries popping up all over the world that attend-

ees will no doubt want to try.

“In San Diego, where I live, there are literally dozens of craft beers coming out,” Lee says. “So at an event, we’re offering to attendees 10 to 25 craft beers on tap that people can’t get back home.”

According to IMEX, another popular way for attendees to experience a destination is to engage in local volunteerism, which can be included as part of the meetings program and also plays in to the growing interest in and importance of sustainability. “Where once the international nature of the meetings industry meant thousands of opportunities to ‘do good and give back’ in far flung corners of the world, the trend now is to reach out to help those right on your doorstep,” notes a statement by IMEX.

### ③ It’s a Seller’s Market

According to Martiz, “while clients still expect hotels and venues to hold space for a long time without a firm commitment, ... the reality is they are facing a lack of availability and price pressures.”

McGury explains the shift by pointing to the trend of higher hotel occupancy. “Hotels will be in a stronger position to negotiate,” she says. “Planners will have to start thinking differently in terms of location, price. [And] because there’s higher occupancy, there’s a need to move faster in terms of contracting. It trickles down to whoever the decision makers are. People need to be more nimble and move faster to get these contracts in place.”

Proskey adds that if clients do commit to booking further in advance, hotels are more likely to negotiate with them regarding deposits and cancellation penalties.

### ④ Mobile Technology is Here to Stay

Having an event website, app, and social media presence used to be nice-to-haves. Today, they’re table stakes.

“Now it’s: How are you engaging the attendee before, during, and after the event?” McGury says.

## MEETING TRENDS

Mobile technology allows event organizers not only to push information out to attendees, but also to listen to attendees to help them craft their programs on the front end, as well as make adjustments during the event to provide more value.

"It's one of those things you can really engage your attendees on," Proskey says, adding that the digital strategy should be conceived well in advance of the roll out. "It's not just something you can throw in at the last minute. It really does have to have a clear, concise plan leading up to the event," she says.

Some event organizers may take this data to the next level, adding special geo-locating features to their apps to really tailor the experience to the individual, according to Maritz Travel. Attendees can use the technology as a sort of virtual guide through the event. It highlights booths and information that the attendee might find interesting, based on previous behavior, while locating other nearby attendees for networking opportunities, and wayfinding throughout the venue, according to Maritz Travel.



Carol McGury,  
SmithBucklin

Further, social media has officially arrived as an events component. According to IMEX, in 2014, "social media starts to receive its own budget, and begins to play a meaningful and measurable part in marketing and communications strategies across the meetings and events industry."

Further, access to reliable, universal Wi-Fi will be increasingly expected going forward.

"Wi-Fi is no longer an option, but a business necessity," says Nick Balletta, CEO of TalkPoint, a New York City-based webcasting company. "More cities will be offering free public Wi-Fi to compete with those already doing so." **SM Questions or comments? Email [agilmore@ntmlc.com](mailto:agilmore@ntmlc.com)**

## MORE ONLINE

There's more! Go online to learn about these two additional major meeting trends for 2014 at [bit.ly/sm2014Trends](http://bit.ly/sm2014Trends):

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Moderator: Leo Jakobson

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## ◀ How to Negotiate in a Seller's Market

March 20, 2014

2:00PM Eastern

Moderator: Andrea Doyle

Very little new hotel inventory is scheduled to come on the market and many organizations are holding more meetings. These trends tend to make suppliers unwilling or unable to negotiate. This webcast will feature legal, sales, and meetings experts offering best practices for negotiating in this difficult environment. **CMP Credit:** 1 hour, B. Project Management

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TUESDAY, JULY 3, 2012

## A Sociable Conference

The New Hotel Meeting Room Is a Place to Lounge



MARILYNN K. YEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Grand Hyatt New York's Gallery on Lex offers a setting to foster interaction between executives.

By JULIE WEED

As the line between office and social life continues to fade, with more people checking e-mail after dinner or texting friends between business meetings, hotels are taking the cue in redesigning their meeting rooms.

Multiple chains are transforming some of their traditional and somewhat antiseptic meeting rooms into more comfortable lounges aimed at encouraging people to mingle and ideas to flow.

Not long ago, conferences were used to communicate important information that could not be easily acquired otherwise. "Now, attendees can get most of the meeting's content via Web site, simulcast or videos posted online," said Stephani Robson, a senior lecturer at the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration. "So the face-to-face networking that happens on-site can be the most important aspect of the gathering."

As a result, hotels are remaking their meeting rooms into more social spaces and places for impromptu connections and small gatherings, said Dr. Robson, who studies how hotel design influences guests' perceptions and behaviors.

At Fairmont Hotels and Resorts, hotels "have been moving away from standard, dull meeting rooms," said Mark Sergot, vice president of global sales at Fairmont, and making them "comfortably loungelike so attendees can relax, get work done, or both."

Newly renovated meeting rooms at the Westin New York at Times Square include shelves of books and decorative objects, and the common area is set up with conversational seating areas and a permanent central bar and food service area, rather than space for temporary food stations. "The total effect is more residential and relaxed," said the general manager, Terry Lewis. He contrasted it with "the typical meeting area layout of a long hallway, with very little décor and no seating."

At the recently renovated Grand Hyatt New York, a new meeting room called Gallery on Lex offers wood and stone floors, leather furniture, richly colored striped carpets, a long high-top communal table and stone counters so attendees can "socialize and interact with the hotel's culinary team."

A \$40 million renovation at the Hilton McLean Tysons Corner in Virginia aims for "a mix of formal and casual multipurpose spaces that transcend the traditional meeting or conference rooms" said Andrew Flack, vice president, global

brand marketing, Hilton Hotels and Resorts, so meeting attendees can gather and casually exchange ideas. The JW Marriott Grand Rapids in Michigan offers traditional meeting spaces, but demand has been rising for its small Mixology lounge off the lobby, said Jennifer Shaler, director of sales for the hotel.

John Zagula, managing director for Ignition Capital Partners in Seattle, said he traveled every month, mostly around the United States and Asia, and had noticed the new meeting room designs. He said it reflected his own work environment. "We don't have the same formal-looking offices with the desk and chair and filing cabinet like we used to," he said. "My office now is a more casual space with an armchair, where I can read or people can stop to chat or brainstorm."

Participants at conferences expect to be comfortable, even if they are in for-

### Business meetings are becoming more focused on building social ties.

mal meetings listening to speakers, Dr. Robson said. At a recent Hospitality Design Expo in Las Vegas, she said, she saw new chair designs that included storage under the seat for laptops and briefcases, as well as chairs that were padded and could swivel or tip back, to replace stackable plastic ones.

Dr. Robson noted that hotels were quickly adopting the new design elements. With so much more information available on the Internet, she said, from hotels sharing their plans to customers posting pictures and reviews, "It is easy to see what the competition is doing and adopt their best ideas."

Convention centers are rethinking their spaces as well. Megan Rodriguez, a spokeswoman for the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau in California, said part of its recent \$35 million upgrade was inspired by the TED ideas conferences. The new design offers meeting attendees the opportunity, she said, "to collaborate and foster a deeper connection with their community," she said, "via pod seating areas and mini meeting spots." Rather than an efficient-feeling space to get things done and go home, she said, the convention center

aimed for a "warm, stylish and welcoming guest social experience."

The new spaces often come equipped with new technical capabilities. Dr. Robson said the increase in simulcasting and filming sessions for the Web required better acoustics, better lighting and quieter cooling and heating systems to improve the quality of the presentation for remote viewers. She also said a roomful of conference-goers — all potentially using laptops and smartphones — required a robust Wi-Fi system.

The recently opened meeting spaces at the Grand Hyatt San Francisco include LCD televisions that retract from the ceiling and state-of-the-art audiovisual technology to accommodate remote participants. Touch-screen LCD reader boards in the hallways show guests where their meetings are and how to get there. The property aims to be "the most versatile, tech-forward choice for meetings and events in San Francisco," said David Nadelman, general manager.

Meeting spaces are also being designed to be more flexible so they can quickly transform from board meeting to festive event. The new conference center at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, scheduled to open in October, will offer spaces with walls that open up to the outdoors for a "refreshing open-air meeting or evening banquet, making the venue feel more like a lounge than a traditional meeting space," Mr. Sergot said.

Dr. Robson said the more flexible spaces allowed hotels to respond more quickly to customer requests, increase revenue per square foot and reduce construction costs. "Building one multifunctional room is better than two specialized ones," she said.

The reimagined meeting rooms are also showing up overseas. The FG Royal hotel in Riga, Latvia, advertises its Library room with leather sofas, wood paneling, bookshelves and a fireplace for corporate meetings. The Web site for the W Hotel in Barcelona, Spain, encourages guests to "leave mild-mannered meetings behind" and offers a "sensory set-up" with music and special scents as well as "state-of-the-art bells and whistles to create audiovisual spectacles."

Of course, it should be noted that the reason the traditional boardroom design has been around so long is that it works. "Mostly, you still need your standard long table to sit around," Mr. Zagula said. "It's too hard to have a teleconference or take notes when people are scattered about in stuffed armchairs."







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