



MS Gulf Coast CVB's Stephen Richer accepts position at National Tour Association  
page 22

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# MeetingNews

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## Joining Forces

### Two travel industry groups meld their lobbying efforts

By Rayna Katz

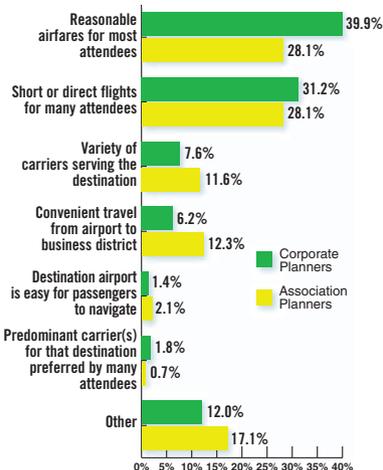
Washington, DC—Bolstering their ability to wage battles on the industry's behalf, the Travel Industry Association and the Travel Business Roundtable have announced that they will become a single organization in 2009.

Meanwhile, the two also will, in effect, take over the Discover America Partnership, which will fold this month. Next year, as TIA works to merge with TBR into one—as yet unnamed—entity, it will absorb much of the DAP staff.

Bringing the two large travel industry  
continued on page 26

#### MeetingNews Exclusive Research

When considering destinations for events, which of the following related to air service are most important to you?



Source: MeetingNews survey of 422 meeting planners

### Short and Sweet

By Nancy Lazarus

Web Extra

When it comes to flights for attendees, planners keep it cheap and direct. see page 16

## MPI Raising Bar on PEC

'Meet Different' interactive theme underscores big changes to event

By Robert Carey

Dallas—Meeting Professionals International, is making bold, and perhaps risky, moves in the planning of its next major educational conference.

Its Professional Education Conference, to be held Feb. 2-5 in Houston, has been branded "Meet Different"; the event's website is named MPImeetdifferent.com. And "different" is indeed the operative word; not only will the majority of educational sessions be new topics, but they will be far more interactive before, during, and after the live event. Also, the traditional grid configuration of the exhibition floor has been scrapped in favor of an open-floor, lounge-heavy layout; one MPI  
continued on page 26

### Hotels/Resorts

#### PLAZA HOTEL BEGINS NEW FRONTIER ON STRIP

Vegas' Frontier Hotel & Casino is demolished to make way for first brand extension of NYC's famous Plaza Hotel. see page 7

#### FOXWOODS ANNOUNCES ANOTHER NEW COMPLEX

Connecticut casino resort, with big MGM Grand project in the offing, plans retail and F&B extension. see page 7

#### ROYAL SPACE TO GRACE COLORADO SKI VILLAGE

Viceroy, a 236-room condo property, will also bring meeting space, a spa, and shops to Snowmass village. see page 7

### CVBs

#### ANAHEIM TALKS UP CENTER WALK PROJECT

Developing hub around convention center will be one-stop shop with hotels, entertainment, and dining. see page 8

#### LAUDERDALE LOOKS TO BUILD ON HILTON BUZZ

Offers promotion with free space rentals, attrition waiver to groups at convention center, which is getting just-announced Hilton HQ hotel. see page 8

#### HAWAII'S MARKETING HAS VIRAL IMPULSES

CVB establishes YouTube promo video site and an interactive blog. see page 8

### Convention Centers

#### HOUSTON, MAJOR CITIES THE TARGET OF UNIONS

Service Employees Int'l Union and Unite Here will rally convention center workers for wages, guaranteed health care. see page 10

#### BIGGER GROUPS WILL FIND WAY TO SAN JOSE

Officials unveil McEnery expansion plan that will raise total capacity to 880,000 sf, triple ballroom space, and double meeting space. see page 10

### International

#### CORNELL STUDY: U.S. IS MISSING OUT ON CUBA

Cuba's tourism/hospitality industry is thriving, but U.S. embargo is keeping suppliers out. see page 14

#### MARRIOTT SIGNS PACT FOR NORDIC PROPERTIES

New contract calls for 15 hotels in Norway, Sweden, and Finland over next six years. see page 14

### Destination Insider

#### NEW ORLEANS

Marriott, Hilton both have large-scale makeovers. see page 18

#### FRANCE

Paris' Cnit Convention Center debuts update and expansion. see page 20

#### LANCASTER COMMISH CRIES FOUL OVER BOND

County commissioners seeking legal recourse to absolve themselves of a \$40-million construction bond. see page 10

# MN Exclusive Research

## For air travel, planners prefer short hauls, hub cities

By Nancy Lazarus

Less is clearly more when meetings involve air travel, as planners prioritized short, nonstop flights and low airfares for their attendees, according to a recent survey of 422 meeting professionals conducted by *MeetingNews*.

Corporate planners often need to streamline air travel. Libby Ricks, marketing and public relations director for Coalition America, in Atlanta, noted, "Many of our attendees don't have the time or patience to fly multiple stops, so it is important to have our meetings in larger cities with lots of flights." Added Julie Hovis, planner for Investment Planners Inc., in Decatur, IL. "Our reps are interested in short or direct flights. They like to stick with the carrier of choice. Many attendees also request a big-city venue within 45 minutes from major airports."

Associations share these air travel challenges. Benny Ellerbe, executive director of Optimist International, in St. Louis, reported, "For our board and smaller meetings, we tend to select hub cities with lower-cost options and fewer connections."

Planners typically prefer major crossroads cities such as Chicago and Atlanta. In recent years, however, other destinations have improved their air access to enable them to compete for meetings business. An example is Long Beach, CA, which is served by three airports, including Long Beach, Los Angeles International, and Orange County. "The

arrival of JetBlue at the Long Beach airport caused the rates of other airlines serving all three airports to drop," said Megan Rodriguez, spokeswoman for the Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. Hilton Head, SC, has improved its air access. In 2007, Delta began offering service directly into the island's airport. In addition, "the Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport just completed a major expansion that increases capacity, which means fewer delays and more flights," said Charlie Clark, spokeswoman for the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce.

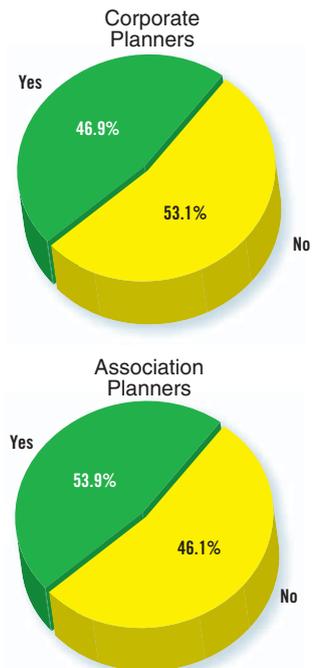
Another issue for planners is air delays. Sixty percent confirmed that their attendees have had more flight delays in 2007 compared to prior years. Weather is probably the most common cause for delays, and it triggers a domino effect; for instance, the Northeast snowstorms in February brought air traffic across the country to a standstill.

The domino effect doesn't stop there. Ellerbe noted substantial problems with hotel bookings due to late arrivals, while Hovis described a program that she had to rearrange altogether when a key speaker was held up. "We had to make changes to the speakers and presentations [and then] fit everything back together."

Smarter scheduling alleviates air travel problems, as Ricks explained: "When creating an agenda, I always make the first night a casual night with registration, so if someone has delays they won't miss

## Fly Versus Drive

In 2007 and 2008, are you trying to hold more meetings in destinations where many attendees can drive to?



Source: *MeetingNews* survey of 422 meeting planners

anything important." Other planners suggested holding meetings concurrently with major industry events to minimize the amount of travel necessary in a calendar year. Alternatively, planners are increasingly taking up videoconferencing and webcasting as backup scenarios for key speakers—or even as replacements for face-to-face meetings.

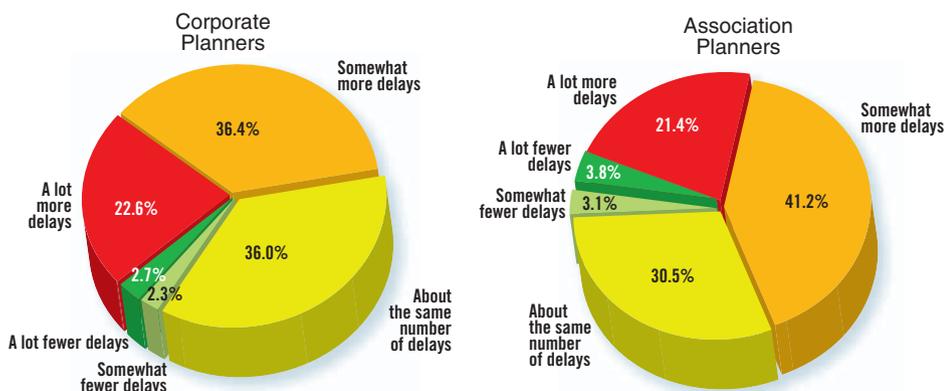
Those surveyed were evenly divided over efforts to hold more drive-to meetings. However, the planners interviewed here were not ready to forego air travel, despite its inconveniences. Said Marion Hendricks, director of marketing for Herbeau Creations, "We are a national plumbing company based in Naples, FL, with showrooms and sales reps all across the country. Air travel is a necessary part of the way we do business."

But there are classic benefits, as Hovis noted: "Most attendees enjoy the change of scenery. Many like to bring spouses to a location away from the ordinary." ○

Contact Nancy Lazarus at [nancy.lazarus@nielsen.com](mailto:nancy.lazarus@nielsen.com)

## Air Travel Delays Worsen

To what extent have your attendees experienced air-travel-related delays or hassles getting to your meetings in 2007 versus recent years?



Source: *MeetingNews* survey of 422 meeting planners