



The Best of 2004-2005

The Meeting Professional celebrates MPI's many success stories in this special section, showcasing winners of The Meeting Professional Awards, the Global Paragon Awards and MPI chapter honorees.

Stories by Funmi Okunbolade
Photos by James Tkatch Photographer
www.tkatchphoto.com

The Meeting Professional Awards Sponsored by the Hilton Family of Hotels

Page 74 Planner of the Year
Glenn Reighart, CAE,
CMM, CMP



Page 78 Supplier of the Year
Coleman, CMM



Page 82 Marion N. Kershner
Memorial Chapter Leader
Chad Chappell, CMP



Page 84 Tomorrow's Leader
Shannon Derrick



Page 86 Tomorrow's Leader
Ruth Fitzgerald



Page 88 Global Paragon Awards
Sponsored by Omni Hotels

Page 94 MPI Chapter Awards

Excellence in Events

The 2005 Global Paragon Awards demonstrate how strategic planning from start to finish leads to outstanding events that meet or exceed objectives.

S

strategy. Return on investment (ROI). Post-event documentation.

In recent years, these buzzwords have come to redefine the meetings industry. Planners find themselves under increased pressure to demonstrate the strategic value of meetings and enhance their ability to define corporate culture, communicate brand value and positively impact organizations' bottom lines.

Recognizing this new focus, MPI's Global Paragon Awards, sponsored by Omni Hotels, have set the industry benchmark for exceptional events that deliver measurable successes to the organizations they serve. Whether large in scale with grand budgets or more modest in size and scope, the events selected as Global Paragon honorees illustrate how innovation and creativity can elevate the role of meetings in business, thus communicating their importance to senior-decision makers—a core value of MPI's strategic plan, *Pathways to Excellence*.

CATEGORY I WINNER
(meetings with budgets up to
US\$1,000 per attendee):
**Sea to Sky Meeting
Management Inc.**

Vancouver, British Columbia-based Sea to Sky Meeting Management Inc. received the Global Paragon Award for its execution of the 23rd International Conference on Offshore Mechanics and Arctic Engineering (OMAE 2004). This full-service conference management company specializing in association meetings was selected by the conference's local planning committee to produce the five-day event for an estimated 500 attendees June 20-25, 2004, in Vancouver.

OMAE 2004 represented the first time event organizers had sought the assistance of a professional conference management firm in executing the event, which is typically produced by volunteers from participating industry organizations. That move proved worthwhile because Sea to Sky was able to provide a comprehensive final report summarizing the entire meeting strategy and the actionable steps taken in each key area during the process. That document now serves as the basis for future planning of the event.

"We recognized early on the opportunity to work with [the organizers] in establishing goals and objectives and developing a plan to meet those goals and objectives," said Sarah Lewis, CMP, CMM, president of Sea to Sky Meeting Management Inc. "And because we were able to illustrate our

process at every step along the way, ultimately it was easy to demonstrate the ROI."

In its initial meetings with the client, it became apparent that Sea to Sky's mission would be threefold: to increase attendance levels, produce a financially successful event and integrate local Canadian flavor into all aspects of the meeting—all while maintaining the conference's primary objective of being an industry forum for information sharing and best practices.

Sea to Sky's strategic plan, which became the roadmap to the event's success, was developed during the OMAE 2003 in Cancun, Mexico, which Lewis and her team attended. By witnessing the event firsthand and seeing the challenges faced by the organizing committee, Sea to Sky was able to sidestep some key tactical pitfalls.

"We were dealing with so many stakeholders—many of whom weren't in the same city and were volunteers—so communication was a big challenge," Lewis said. "To address that, we established a conference call schedule with the stakeholders. With each call we had a focused agenda, and within the first six months of planning we were all on the same page and everyone was on board."

Another pitfall gleaned from the Mexico conference was the currency in which the meeting should operate. In Mexico, OMAE organizers had chosen to use U.S. dollars, which had serious financial implications, Lewis says. This



COVER STORY

time around, it was decided that Canadian currency would be used.

By the end of the 2003 conference, Sea to Sky was able to present the client with an initial business plan that outlined the objectives of OMAE 2004 and to receive approval from key decision-makers. In addition to workable solutions for the aforementioned issues, the document included a rigorous marketing plan and outlined a realistic budget.

By following the steps outlined in the strategic plan on the agreed-upon timeline, Lowis and her team were able to demonstrate in the final report measurable results on all three of their initial goals. The marketing plan—which targeted past attendees and potential attendees from participating organizations and the industry's fringe organizations—featured a user-friendly registration brochure, a comprehensive Web presence and consistent, ongoing communication with attendees. The result was a record 543 paying attendees—20 percent more than the projected goal.

Sea to Sky also was able to incorporate the client's desire for local themes into many aspects of the event—from the marketing materials to the food and beverage—ensuring that the destination remained top-of-mind for attendees. Among its most successful ventures was the opening plenary session, which included a welcome ceremony featuring the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a video presentation showcasing Canada and a ceremony performed by a local First Nations group.

Financially, the conference exceeded the client's expectations. Despite a climate of uncertainty within the local

offshore drilling industry, by keeping a close eye on expenses, Sea to Sky was

able to secure a budget surplus of more than CDN\$150,000—which eclipsed

WE'VE GOT THE RECIPE FOR YOUR PERFECT NYC MEETING

Introducing our new Executive Chef, **Sam DeMarco**, who brings with him innovative culinary concepts

MILLENNIUM BROADWAY HOTEL
NEW YORK

charting new directions for our conference center, making every meeting with us another one to savor.

NEWLY RENOVATED GUEST ROOMS • 110,000 SQUARE FEET OF CONFERENCE AND EVENT SPACE • 11,000 SQUARE FEET OF EXHIBITION SPACE • IACC APPROVED • HOME TO THE NEWLY RESTORED LANDMARK HUDSON THEATRE

MILLENNIUM BROADWAY HOTEL, 145 WEST 44TH STREET NEW YORK, NY 10036
MILLENNIUMBROADWAY.COM • 212.789.7546

© 2005 MILLENNIUM HOTELS AND RESORTS.

the initial goal by 16 percent.

Reflecting on the results, Lewis says

the biggest success to come out the

conference—for both the client and

Sea to Sky—was the final report.

"For the first time in the history of the conference, there was a document that the client could not only pass on to the next local chair; [the client] also had the opportunity to see on paper what was achieved in every area of the conference. From Sea to Sky's point of view, we now have in a comprehensive document evidence of what we did, which will help in generating new business moving forward."

CATEGORY II WINNER

(meetings with budgets exceeding
US\$1,000 per attendee):

Washington Mutual, CRG Events and Opts Ideas

Demonstrating a meeting's ROI isn't necessarily all about dollars and cents. When Washington Mutual wanted to communicate its core values and brand performance to senior managers companywide, it contracted Seattle-based CRG Events and Opts Ideas—a Sausalito, Calif.-based marketing and events firm—to produce State of the Group 2005: The WaMu Challenge (SOG).

This annual event, held in January at the Washington State Convention & Trade Center in Seattle, attracted more than 3,000 senior-level regional managers from Washington Mutual's business units to review the previous year's performance, set expectations for the upcoming year and generate excitement for—and bring employees in line with—the company's corporate culture. The meeting's strategic objectives were conveyed through themes, creative messaging and entertainment.

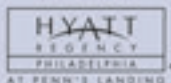
"As part of the planning process, we do a lot of focus groups to understand what it is [attendees] come to



THE ONLY HOTEL IN PHILADELPHIA WITH RUNNING WATER.

The elegant Hyatt Regency at Penn's Landing is the only hotel in Philadelphia located on the historic waterfront. Today our magnificent 22-story hotel lets you enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the river and the city skyline.

Every possible amenity is offered including Internet access, indoor pool, and our outstanding restaurant, Keating's River Grill. We are conveniently located near all the cultural, historic, entertainment and dining attractions of our dynamic city. For information call 215 928 1234 or visit pennslanding.hyatt.com.





COVER STORY

look for, what inspires them and what motivates them to take the message out into the field," said Corby Casler, vice president, corporate communications for Washington Mutual.

Opts Ideas worked with Washington Mutual's corporate communications team to develop the meeting's theme and content. In addition, Washington Mutual produced a "Manager's Action Kit" with simulated mini-modules to assist attendees in relaying the information to their colleagues. To measure SOG's overall effectiveness, a post-event survey of attendees found that 96.7 percent of respondents were able to correctly identify the company's core values as outlined in SOG; upon returning to their business units, 91 percent held a meeting with their teams to discuss the key messages presented during event.

The fact that both CRG Events—which handled the event logistics and overall meeting management—and Opts Ideas had produced the event in past years was a benefit and a challenge to overcome. Experience bred familiarity with the logistical execution of the event and fostered a solid understanding of client expectations. The challenge came in producing content that was entertaining while still conveying the organization's business objectives in a way that would resonate with employees. Much of the initial planning process was spent trying to understand and define SOG's core audience.

"We monitor what's going on in the company on a continual basis—by looking at internal communications as well as external media," Michael Christman, CEO of Opts Ideas, said of the process of developing the meet-

ing's strategic content. "We track issues that are relevant across all lines of business and within each business unit. From the perspective of national management, we look at product development and management, marketing and communications objectives to see what those things point us toward. We then formulate the theme and develop methodologies that will help support and communicate that."

Their ideas were then submitted to Washington Mutual's executive board for approval. The resulting theme—The WaMu Challenge—built upon previous years' messaging and acknowledged the difficult business climate the company had faced. The theme was also intended to illustrate the need to embrace challenge as part of the corporate culture and equip attendees with actionable items to implement in the field. The process ensured that SOG's content aligned with all aspects of Washington Mutual's internal and external business objectives.

To deliver The WaMu Challenge in a manner that was inspiring, informative and entertaining, the planning team—led by Casler, Christman and Leasa Mayer, CMP, president of CRG Events—tapped its collective creativity to determine the most effective means of conveying top-line messages. A key understanding of the audience was crucial in selecting presenters whose style and delivery would resonate with attendees in compelling, not frivolous, formats.

Among SOG's most successful program segments was a mock talk show hosted by comedian Ellen DeGeneres that centered on the concept of "Everyday People," Washington Mutual's

customer base.

Keeping the theme and program content top-of-mind, the planning team was able to use the company's intranet as a marketing vehicle to promote the event to the more than 55,000 employees. For those who did not attend, the methodology was an effective means of fostering an atmosphere of inclusion, which was among the meeting's core objectives.

While the meeting's primary function was that of a communications vehicle, producing an event of its scope under budget was also an obvious consideration. The planning team was able to offer cost savings by negotiating better rates with existing suppliers, making the bidding process more competitive and using smaller, independent contractors who could deliver high value for a fraction of the cost.

Upon final examination, Washington Mutual, CRG Events and Opts Ideas were able to deliver results on the meeting's core objectives by developing a well-executed strategy based on an in-depth analysis of the meeting's target audience and key stakeholders. While post-conference employee surveys can attest to the meetings success with internal stakeholders, VOCAL—a customer experience survey and reporting system recently implemented by Washington Mutual—will be used to determine if SOG's content can be translated into bottom-line fiscal results. The results of VOCAL will be used in planning future SOG events.

FUNMI OKUNBOLADE is a freelance writer based in Dallas.