

The 25 Most Influential People in the Meetings Industry

The Editors of *MeetingNews* Magazine

One of the remarkable aspects of selecting the 25 Most Influential People in the Meetings Industry, which the editors of *MeetingNews* have done for the 11th consecutive year, is how naturally the list turns over from year to year. It's not that prior honorees are no longer influential, but rather that there are so many dedicated, talented, strong-willed individuals who deserve recognition. The 25 profiles below paint a vivid picture of the commitment and resolve displayed throughout our industry. Please join us in congratulating this outstanding group of leaders.

Chris Brown
Senior Vice President, Conventions & Expositions
National Association of Broadcasters
Washington, D.C.

Chris Brown's annual NAB Convergence Marketplace show in Las Vegas is not only huge, this year attracting 104,000 electronic media professionals from 130 countries, and 1,400 exhibiting companies. The show's also inventive and hip, in both electronic media gear and meetings prowess, and serves as a model for other trade shows.

Now, Brown is taking that prowess on the road. As this year's chairman of the International Association for Exhibition Management, he will oversee a top-to-bottom reorganization of IAEM that includes changing from individual to corporate membership, a board expansion with additional industry players (including CVBs and convention centers), and a newly energized lobbying orientation on behalf of the expo industry.

He also will help direct IAEM's new initiative to certify independent trade show auditors, a critical step toward verifying expo attendance numbers and demographics. And he's not giving up on furthering industry consolidation, despite IAEM's failed merger talks this year with the Society of Independent Show Organizers.

John Chang
CEO
OnVantage
Santa Clara, Calif.

John Chang developed a knack for looking to the horizon and figuring out the path to a successful business model at a time when other Internet companies were dying off in droves.

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When his company, seeUthere, was launched in 1998, it focused on web-enabled, event-registration software aimed primarily at planners of social gatherings. Two years later, the company switched its focus to professional planners by creating a much more robust attendee-management application.

SeeUthere once again was ahead of the curve when the trend toward procurement best practices for meetings swept through a significant portion of Corporate America. The company targeted corporate finance types with an application that enables meetings-spend consolidation and automates enforcement of meeting policies and expenditure controls.

Last August, Chang was at the center of the largest merger of meetings technology companies, seeUthere and PlanSoft. OnVantage now combines seeUthere's buyer-side procurement services with the supplier-side marketing services pioneered by PlanSoft through its searchable database of more than 70,000 meetings venues and suppliers.

Chang has built a valuable asset that, if it retains his foresight, will lead the industry for years to come.

Roger Dow
President/CEO
Travel Industry Association of America
Washington, D.C.

Last year, Roger Dow was named to this list not only due to his position as senior vice president of global and field sales for Marriott International but also because of his customer-focused philosophy.

This year Dow occupies a new position, after moving over to TIA in January. The same philosophy holds, however, with the meetings industry itself as a key customer.

With his hotel sales background, Dow recognizes the significant role meetings play in the overall travel industry. As a result, he is invoking meetings in his efforts to recast the travel industry's image from leisure-focused (read: frivolous) to a critical element of American commerce.

Under Dow at TIA, look for meetings organizations to assume a higher profile in travel industry policy and lobbying efforts, and ultimately turn that higher profile into more influence with travel-industry peers, the government, and the public at large.

Christine Duffy
President/CEO
Maritz Travel Co.
St. Louis

After being named to lead one of the industry's biggest and most influential companies, someone other than Christine Duffy may have reneged on a commitment to chair the industry's leading professional group.

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But few who know Duffy, who was promoted to Maritz's top slot last October, doubt that she'll be anything less than one of the most active and successful chairs in Meeting Professionals International's history. That one-year term began this month.

Given that she possesses some un-CEO-like traits, like being very approachable and down-to-earth, Duffy's professional accomplishments have been startling.

No one deserves more credit than her for moving the industry into the age of meeting-spend consolidation, during her many years as an executive with McGettigan Partners, later swallowed by Maritz. In large part due to her efforts, McGettigan grew into a major force in meetings management.

Now she's poised to make Maritz, already the industry leader with more than \$500 million in managed meetings spend, an even greater power.

Amid all this, Duffy enjoys a special status as arguably the most accomplished woman in an industry with a very large proportion of women, who need look no further for a role model.

Phil Dunphy
Director/Team Leader, Global Travel
Pfizer Inc.
New York

Several *MeetingNews* editors have had a common experience. It seems that whenever we visit a big-name hotel, the sales and marketing people try to impress us by saying Pfizer recently met there. It's like bragging rights.

Phil Dunphy is the head of a decentralized meetings and travel department at Pfizer. His team guides other teams around the world in cumulating the buying power of the company's thousands of corporate meetings and events.

Pfizer has considerable weight to throw around; its meeting spend, minus airfare, is estimated to be in the \$1 billion-plus category. It's a rare company in this recovering market, in that it can still push through contracts that are Pfizer-driven, not vendor-driven.

But be careful not to give Dunphy too much credit. He's emphatic that because of the decentralized system, the company's many travel and meetings management teams deserve just as much credit for successfully exploiting the status of the Pfizer name.

Joan Eisenstodt
President
Eisenstodt Associates
Washington, D.C.

We've been writing in this space for years about Joan Eisenstodt's incredibly diverse involvement in the meetings industry—her peripatetic speaking schedule, her facilitation expertise, her role as expert

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witness in legal cases, her mentoring—but she continues to find new ways to make a difference.

Most recently, Eisenstodt was instrumental in persuading Meeting Professionals International to look into providing meaningful support for university-level meetings education—something that has been mostly missing in the industry. She chaired MPI's Student-Faculty Task Force, which on July 1 became the Student-Faculty Committee, indicating a higher degree of commitment to training the industry's future professionals.

Eisenstodt also has been leading a grassroots effort to identify the issues affecting women in the industry and give women a forum to influence the educational opportunities afforded by the industry. It's meant as a complement to MPI's Women's Leadership Initiative, but one designed to address the needs of the entire industry, not just MPI members.

John Graham
President/CEO
American Society of Association Executives
Washington, D.C.

John Graham is on a quest to remake ASAE. One of his main tasks is working with the group's association and supplier members alike to inform one another of their needs and come up with better, mutually satisfying programs.

Last summer, he shepherded through a merger with the Greater Washington Society of Association Executives, retaining GWSAE's Center for Association Leadership. Also under Graham's leadership is a new membership growth program aimed at various professional niches within the association business. He wants to better serve association CEOs, of course, but he also aims to create programs serving technical staffers, marketers and meeting planners, among others. Most recently, ASAE announced a new certificate program for senior-level association planners focusing on the business of meetings, as opposed to logistics. Key to all this is ASAE's continuing emphasis on research.

Graham says ASAE wants to know and understand the people it's interacting with, rather than being presumptuous about knowing what's best for them.

Steven Hacker
President
International Association for Exhibition Management
Dallas

Steven Hacker is no stranger to the Most Influential list, having been named to it several times, most recently in 2004 and 2002. But IAEM's president always stands out for new and different reasons, in addition to his customary role of speaking out loudly on the industry's most controversial issues.

This year, Hacker, a longtime proponent of third-party event audits, moved the cause forward as IAEM created the Event and Exhibition Industry Audit Commission. The commission will certify independent trade show auditors, and a separate board composed of show organizers, exhibitors and

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suppliers will formulate audit standards.

The fight for third-party audits has been a long one for Hacker; attempts have been made to establish show audits as standard operating procedure for the industry since the 1980s. But this time it looks like some headway is being made; one big trade show company, Reed Exhibitions, plans to do third-party audits on nearly 80 percent of its events by 2006.

Kevin Iwamoto
Chairman/Past President
National Business Travel Association
Global Airline, Car and Ground Commodity Manager
Hewlett-Packard Company
Palo Alto, Calif.

For years, meeting planners and business travel managers insisted on keeping their worlds at opposite ends of the office. And then something called "procurement" grew to become a consolidating presence in many organizations, and the line between the two departments started to blur and in some cases even disintegrate.

Kevin Iwamoto realized this was a big issue around the time he became NBTA president in 2001, so he spearheaded an effort to educate members about meetings. He formed NBTA's Groups & Meetings Committee of travel managers and meeting planners, which last year released the industry's first white paper on meetings management best practices; he added meeting planning sessions to NBTA's education program; and he forged new partnerships between NBTA and Meeting Professionals International and the Convention Industry Council.

Many planners took notice and now are becoming much more knowledgeable about procurement and travel management and how to work with them, not against. Though his term as NBTA chairman is up next month, Iwamoto hopes to see the two sides work together even more closely in the future, with MPI and NBTA leading sessions at one another's annual meetings and offering special benefits for membership in both associations.

Gary Kelly
CEO
Southwest Airlines
Dallas

Gary Kelly was fortunate to ascend last year to the top of the only profitable large airline. But since then, he's made his mark through aggressive moves that have strengthened the business.

Examples: creating an advance-purchasing plan for fuel that buffered Southwest from the crippling spike in the price of oil, and launching new routes to and from cities that are the lifeblood of troubled major carriers. And he has American Airlines positively apoplectic over the bill he pushed to get onto the floor of Congress calling for repeal of the Wright Amendment, which keeps American's hub at DFW thriving by limiting flights from Dallas Love Field.

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Southwest's success comes from keeping costs low. That's a lesson the major airlines are scrambling like mad to follow. Many have not seen their fortunes turn around even though passenger demand has risen steadily in the past 18 months. So last year, when Delta launched its simplified-fare program, which other major airlines copied, it was clear that all were simply following Southwest's longtime blueprint.

The recent elimination of the meetings reservation desk by Delta also smelled of a copycat move; Southwest decided in November 2003 that its low walk-up fares did not require them to have a meetings desk. And the point-to-point route network Southwest employs has forced the major carriers that use the hub-and-spoke system to change the length of time between connecting flights, in order to minimize costs.

If Kelly's next 12 months as CEO are as active as his first, planners will see quite a few more changes among all the airlines they deal with, and quickly.

Kirk Kerkorian
Co-Chairman/CEO
Tracinda Corp.
Beverly Hills, Calif.

For billionaire business tycoon Kirk Kerkorian, bigger is better.

Back in 1969, when the typical Las Vegas hotel consisted of about 400 rooms, Kerkorian built the 1,512-room International Hotel, now the Las Vegas Hilton. He also built the country's reigning resort giant, the 5,034-room MGM Grand, also in Las Vegas.

Kerkorian then engineered MGM Grand's acquisition of Mirage Resorts, in 2000, and the renamed MGM Mirage's \$7.9 billion acquisition this April of Mandalay Resort Group.

The result: Kerkorian, the largest shareholder in Tracinda Corp., which in turn is the largest shareholder in MGM Mirage, controls nearly half of the 74,000 hotel rooms on the Las Vegas Strip.

MGM Mirage's status as the world's largest gaming company has since been eclipsed by Harrah's Entertainment's acquisition of Caesars Entertainment. But for meeting planners, the new MGM Mirage is a bigger deal.

MGM Mirage has created a group-focused powerhouse in Las Vegas, the nation's top destination for conventions and trade shows. More than half a dozen resorts, most with their own significant meeting space, now feed the Mandalay Bay Convention Center, the fifth-largest convention center in the country.

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Marilyn Carlson Nelson
Chairman/CEO
Carlson Companies
Minneapolis

With key enterprises including a meetings management division, hotels and cruise ships, Carlson Companies pulled in a staggering \$26.1 billion in sales last year, up 25 percent over 2003. Marilyn Carlson Nelson's company is a major force.

It doesn't hurt that Carlson employees are, by most accounts, a happy bunch—in fact, the company regularly appears on "Best Places to Work" lists.

But Carlson Nelson is accustomed to such accolades. For example, every year since 1997 *Travel Agent* magazine has named her "The Most Powerful Woman in Travel."

Carlson Nelson's influence extends way beyond the hospitality industry too, as evidenced by presidential appointments, awards from business associations and more. If you need further proof, last year *Forbes* named Carlson Nelson one of "The World's 100 Most Powerful Women."

You don't get much more influential than that.

Jack Phillips
Chairman
ROI Institute
Birmingham, Ala.

With a big push from Meeting Professionals International, return on investment is capturing the attention of meeting planners as never before, especially real ROI—that is, the kind measured in hard dollars.

And central to MPI's ROI effort is Jack Phillips. MPI introduced the Phillips ROI Methodology to the industry at its annual congress last year in Denver and is now further promoting it through presentations to MPI chapters.

Phillips developed his rigorous quantitative analysis of business processes over more than three decades, backed by an impressive academic background that includes a doctorate, a master's, and three undergraduate degrees. Behind the dispassionate analysis lies a deep desire by Phillips to help people who have languished in organizations without the recognition they deserve—like a lot meeting planners—gain greater stature.

While the Phillips method challenges meeting planners to think more analytically, it also offers them a way to speak the language of senior executives: dollars and cents. Phillips has raised the bar, showing that planners can go beyond post-event evaluations to determining a meeting's monetary worth.

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Rossi Ralenkotter
President/CEO
Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

Rossi Ralenkotter would rate as one of the most influential people in the meetings industry simply because Las Vegas is the country's leading meetings destination. But Ralenkotter has proved he has the chops to keep Las Vegas on top. He possesses a combination of keen business savvy and calculated risk-taking that epitomizes the entrepreneurial spirit of Las Vegas.

That explains why the suggestive consumer ad campaign with the now-famous slogan, "What happens here, stays here," has been so successful.

The campaign, in which Ralenkotter played a key role, revived the "Sin City" image that Las Vegas downplayed in the 1990s, when it was building convention business. However, the new campaign apparently hasn't hurt meetings business and, along with a separate campaign targeting groups, arguably has helped. Meeting attendees occupied 6.6 percent more room nights in Las Vegas last year than the year before.

Ralenkotter plans to boost the percentage of meeting attendees to 15-20 percent of all visitors in 2009 while at the same time attracting six million more visitors than last year's record 37 million.

Here's a tip: Don't bet against him.

Colin Reed
Chairman/President/CEO
Gaylord Entertainment Co.
Nashville

Colin Reed helped grow the meeting-focused Gaylord Hotels brand from a single-engine operation into a four-property powerhouse. Slowly but surely, and not at all by accident, the company has created a network of hotels through which groups can rotate, have different experiences, and never leave the brand.

This year, meanwhile, Reed became a one-man executive suite, adding chairman to his existing president and CEO titles.

Reed's new post is more than an honorary nod. He is very involved in every aspect of the business, from developing marketing strategy to daily operations. That brings Gaylord praise, not to mention business.

The company was first in its brand category, upper-upscale, in *MeetingNews'* 2005 Planners' Hotel Preference Poll (May 9).

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Next for Reed: the progressive move of setting up on-property intranets for groups, something now in its infancy at the Gaylord Palms in Kissimmee, Fla., and expected to become available at the other hotels.

Colleen Rickenbacher
President/Owner
Colleen Rickenbacher Inc.
Dallas

Colleen Rickenbacher has saturated herself in the alphabet soup of meetings-industry associations, and not just as a member. She's been on boards or committees for—get ready for this—ACOM, ASAE, CIC, HSMIA, IAEM, ISES, MPI, NSA and RCMA, and has received more awards from these groups than any mantel could hold.

After working at the Dallas CVB for 15 years, Rickenbacher in 2001 created something of a new career, lecturing and writing books on etiquette. That hasn't been limited to teaching business travelers what spoons to use in China; she's trained whole hotel staffs on how to behave when networking, exhibiting, or just doing their daily work.

But she's still got strong connections to the meetings industry. Last year she served as co-chair of the Convention Industry Council Hall of Leaders Gala, and will serve in the same role next year. She's also co-chair of Meeting Professionals International's 2006 World Education Conference, to be held in Dallas.

Rickenbacher remains very involved at the chapter level for MPI, and each year she has dozens of speaking engagements and writes several articles. We're just wondering: When does this woman sleep?

Colin Rorrie Jr.
President & CEO
Meeting Professionals International
Dallas

After taking over the administrative reins at MPI in September 2003, Colin Rorrie wasted no time in changing the tone and culture of the association of 20,000 meetings professionals, giving it a new sense of openness and willingness to cooperate with the larger industry. It's been a marked difference from previous years that culminated in the departure of Rorrie's predecessor.

The result is more than a new cordiality between staff and board. The new atmosphere also has resulted in better working relations with chapters, a revitalized international membership, and cooperative ventures with other meetings-oriented organizations.

Rorrie believes fervently in what he calls "the power of partnership." There have been recent lobbying efforts in Washington together with the American Society of Association Executives, a joint research initiative on procurement with the National Business Travel Association, and cooperatively issued

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statements on the profession with ASAE and the Professional Convention Management Association. These are the kinds of efforts that stand a chance of resulting in real change for the industry down the road.

Meeting planners take note: As the former staff head of the College of Emergency Room Physicians, Rorrie is credited with helping elevate the stature of ER doctors, previously a poorly organized and little-respected medical niche. That expertise now is informing MPI's Pathways to Excellence, its flagship initiative to create professional growth and recognition for its members.

Jay Roseman
Vice President
Corporate Meeting Solutions, North America
American Express Business Travel
Mt. Laurel, N.J.

Quick, what's the best thing a corporate meeting planner can do to demonstrate his or her value? Say it with us: Save the company money.

Jay Roseman's daily routine involves finding Amex group customers ways to save a few million here, a few more there, through a consolidated approach to meeting purchasing. His division has 200-plus employees, but he's the point person for sitting down with existing customers and prospects to evaluate their meeting buying processes and spot areas for improvement.

Over the past few years, that effort has dramatically improved Amex's standing as a meetings management supplier, which at one time was relatively marginal, especially when compared with the company's mammoth travel management business. With the convergence of travel and meetings management taking place throughout Corporate America, American Express is looking like a sure bet to become an even bigger player in the meetings industry.

Heywood Sanders
Professor of Urban Studies
University of Texas-San Antonio

Who would have thought that the person to ignite possibly the biggest controversy in the meetings industry this year would be a college professor?

Heywood Sanders, long a forceful advocate of the premise that convention center space nationwide is growing faster than growth in demand can accommodate, attracted as much attention for a Brookings Institution white paper he wrote on the subject as he did cumulatively in his career to that point.

The 35-page report, in which he chronicles evidence of oversupply in most of the nation's big convention cities, received play in major media such as *The New York Times* and *Forbes* magazine. Many in the CVB community and the hospitality industry at large responded with anger, accusing Sanders of painting a one-sided, naïve picture. But regardless who is right, the controversy has

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heightened the industry's awareness of convention supply-and-demand issues.

Mickey Schaefer
President
Mickey Schaefer & Associates
Tucson, Ariz.
Chairwoman
Accepted Practices Exchange Commission
McLean, Va.

Without Mickey Schaefer, it's doubtful that the meetings industry would be on the cusp of having a broad set of best practices.

Schaefer has led the Convention Industry Council's APEX initiative since it was launched five years ago. She has overseen the difficult task of forging consensus among industry players with sometimes opposing interests.

The first phase of what Schaefer considers an ongoing process is scheduled to reach its culmination this year, by the end of which CIC is expected to have approved best practices for all seven areas of meeting planning covered under APEX.

Schaefer is optimistic that over time APEX will work its way throughout the industry despite what may seem an uphill battle. She believes passionately that industry-wide implementation of accepted best practices will immeasurably improve meetings logistics and raise the professionalism of meeting planners.

Schaefer clearly is taking the long view. That and her passion and perseverance is turning APEX from an abstraction to an industry reality.

Deborah Sexton
President/CEO
Professional Convention Management Association
Chicago

A powerhouse manager and leader at the Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau for more than 10 years, Deborah Sexton now aims to move PCMA forward in the new job she landed in March.

After arriving in Chicago in 1994 to head up sales, Sexton quickly moved up the ladder and became a champion of innovative new services for customers, eventually ascending to president of the bureau in 2002.

Now, with more than 30 years in the industry, she's ready for the challenge of running a national industry association. Collaboration on programs with other industry organizations is a key objective for Sexton, who already has partnered with Meeting Professionals International on a comprehensive compensation survey and with Roger Dow at the Travel Industry Association on research and

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advocacy programs. Other issues she wants to tackle include border concerns and international participation in shows here and overseas.

Sexton has PCMA-only plans as well: Several new initiatives aimed at providing cutting-edge education are slated to be announced in the fall. Given her track record, don't be surprised if these innovations prove to be models for the industry.

Laurie Sharp
President & CEO
Sharp Events/Sharp Destinations
San Francisco

Successfully prodding others to do things you'd like them to do is, virtually by definition, influential behavior. Laurie Sharp took on two critical meetings issues during the past year and helped define the national agenda on both.

Sharp, whose planning firm/destination management company is five years old, is coming off the presidency of the Northern California Chapter of Meeting Professionals International, one of the association's most active local groups.

Her tenure was quick-started last summer by an insistence that MPI take seriously the thorny issue of consolidated travel spending and procurement. Her August conference on the topic, and its impact on meetings, beat the national association to the punch, and helped force MPI finally to address the challenge with studies and a white paper.

In February, Sharp's nudging again was in full force. With ongoing hotel labor strikes and boycotts hurting San Francisco perhaps more than any other city, she and her chapter pressured MPI to issue a national statement critical of union tactics seen as disruptive to meetings business. By the end of her term, in June, Sharp and the incoming chapter president were meeting with San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom to help resolve the city's hospitality labor woes.

There is a great deal at stake in the areas of both procurement practices and hotel labor relations, and look for Sharp to continue playing roles in them.

Richard Lee Snow
Chairman
National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners
Silver Spring, Md.

Richard Lee Snow may be the most influential person on this list many in the industry haven't heard of—yet. But as the new chairman of the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners, he's poised to bring African-Americans into the mainstream of the meetings industry as never before.

African-American groups are estimated to spend \$30 billion annually on meetings—a fact that hasn't been lost on cities from Atlanta to Sacramento, or on MPI, PCMA and ASAE, all of which are trying

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hard to boost their minority representation. (Snow's own group—he's executive director of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, an upscale fraternal service organization whose members have included everyone from former L.A. Mayor Tom Bradley to late tennis great Arthur Ashe—spends \$7 million at its biennial get-together.)

Over the past year, Snow has met frequently with MPI and PCMA for discussions on how the industry can improve its relationships with planners of color. This January, those dialogues will come to fruition when Snow speaks on the topic at PCMA's annual convention in Philadelphia.

Jonathan Tisch
Chairman/CEO, Loews Hotels
Chairman, Travel Business Roundtable
Chairman, NYC & Company
New York

Since Jonathan Tisch last appeared on this list in 2002, he's done everything but slip quietly into the shadows. And we mean everything.

He wrote a book. He's been on TV, including morning talk shows and an installment of a reality series. And through his work with New York's CVB and the Travel Business Roundtable he's been a driving force behind the planned Javits Center expansion, talked to elected leaders about legislation that is onerous to tourism, and broken bread with captains of industry to talk about the hospitality business.

Yet Tisch understands the power of exerting force cautiously. As the leader of Loews Hotels, he's stewarded the company through slow growth, picking up properties only when it's the right time and place, sometimes with long intervals.

Then again, Loews' latest announcement is a new resort in Lake Las Vegas. Nothing quiet about that.

John Wilhelm
President, Hospitality Industry
Unite Here
New York

Agree with their tactics or not, planners cannot deny that John Wilhelm and Unite Here, the large hospitality-workers union he heads, brought greater awareness in the past year to the industry about the impact strikes can have on meetings, planners and their attendees.

When contracts expired in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington, negotiations stalled and demonstrations, strikes and lockouts ensued. So Wilhelm decided to reach owners through meeting planners. Unite Here launched a newsletter and a website for planners, but most notably began calling those with meetings on the books at affected hotels.

Some appreciated those efforts; others did not. MPI, PCMA, ASAE and CIC issued a joint statement

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that said they didn't support the union's decision to call planners directly, noting that some felt threatened by the calls, which strongly urged them to move their meetings.

This was just a prelude to the big battle looming for 2006, when hotel labor contracts are slated to expire in New York, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, Honolulu, Monterey, and again in Los Angeles.

Wilhelm plans to take advantage of the largest collective bargaining opportunity to come the union's way in years. He strongly believes that by pooling purchasing power, employees can receive improved benefits, hotels can save money on better deals for health care coverage and other services, and that this will help keep costs down for planners as well.

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