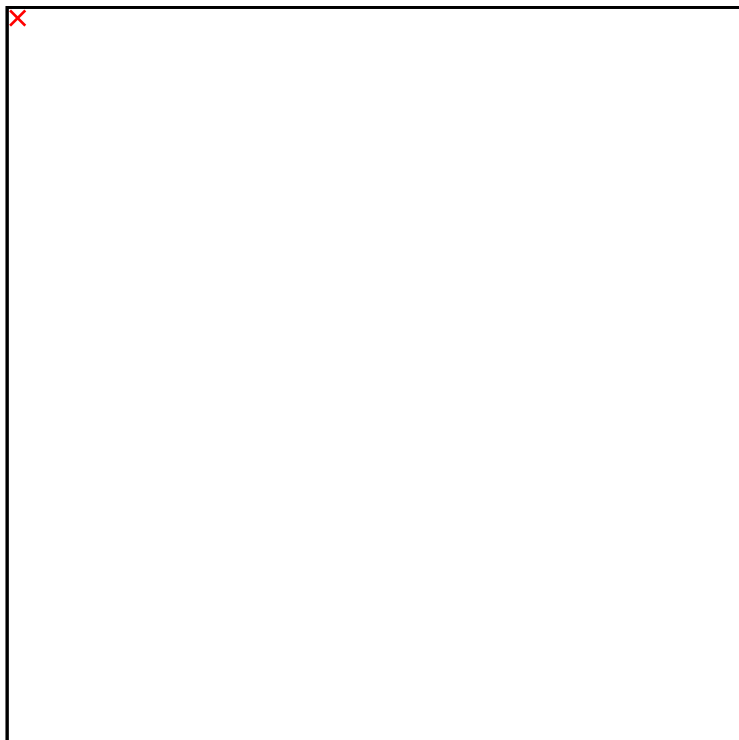


BENCHMARK's New "Meeting the Moment" Initiative Offers A Vision for Meetings in 2021

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The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, March 2021 ... As the meetings industry continues to confront the profound changes and challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, [BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company](#), is launching a visionary new educational initiative to help meeting planning professionals. "Meeting the Moment" is a strategic initiative designed to address today's issues while laying the foundation for safer, healthier and more productive meetings in 2021. The program provides customized information and solutions to help planners deal with the complexities of creating and preparing in-person meetings in 2021 and going forward. Meeting the Moment channels the expertise of Benchmark's leaders in technology, food and beverage, teambuilding and meeting design. **Working as an empowered team, this panel of experts will meet virtually with individual planners-- whether or not they have an immediate need to schedule a meeting or event --as Meeting the Moment is designed to be a helpful, educational and consultative resource to the industry** —a personal and individualized think tank for planning professionals.

Last May, Benchmark created the Meetings Accelerator program aimed at mitigating the immediate effects of the crisis with zero risk clauses and safety initiatives, according to Benchmark's Chief Sales Officer Eric Gavin. "These many months later, we have a much better idea of what works, what is needed, and what we must do to help create a very different kind of safe and productive meeting experience for the long-term."

"Though devastated by the pandemic, the meetings industry and its hospitality partners have shown incredible courage, creativity and resilience," Mr. Gavin notes. "And while many see a bright light at the end of the tunnel, more challenges and questions lie ahead. The Meeting the Moment initiative addresses many of those questions and seeks to create long-term solutions that will permanently impact how meetings are conducted safely, constructively and with successful results."

The Meeting the Moment panel consists of experts in the key aspects of conference planning, including :

- Patrick Berwald, Benchmark's vice president food and beverage
- Brian Wells, Benchmark's general manager at The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center
- Kama Carter, director of conference services, Deloitte University
- Janene Varden, director of sales & marketing, Willows Lodge

Whether or not they have an immediate need to schedule a meeting or event, planners can access the exceptional Meeting the Moment resources, view video presentations by Benchmark's team members and schedule personalized sessions by visiting https://www.benchmarkresortsandhotels.com/meeting_the_moment/. Planners can also schedule to meet personally via remote access with the Meeting the Moment experts by contacting Paul Bashaw, Benchmark's corporate director of global sales, at pbashaw@benchmarkglobal.com / 602-796-5949.

What Kind Of Advice Can Meeting Planners Expect with the Meeting the Moment Program?

The Meeting the Moment team can address planners' specific goals, budgets, safety concerns and the physical and psychological needs of attendees following a year of quarantines, isolation and demanding work conditions. Benchmark's new Meeting the Moment initiative offers a deep-dive focus into the following four important components of meetings today.

Group Dining Reimagined

"Food and beverage experiences are an essential aspect of group gatherings," says Patrick Berwald, Benchmark's vice president of food and beverage. "However, getting together for a meal is not as simple as it used to be." Mr. Berwald highlights suggestions for organizers working to reimagine dining plans, while going into depth in each area in panel discussions with planners:

Make it Private. Limit or stagger access to dining areas, to manage traffic while offering unique spaces to congregate and dine. Most Benchmark properties offer three or more dining venues in addition to traditional function rooms that can be booked exclusively for groups.

Focus on Wellness. More than ever, F&B offerings focus on wellness and sustainability. Look for menu items that are indigenously

sourced and clean-label foods that promote natural energy. Support the experience with nutritionists to curate menus tailored to meet any group dietary needs.

Limit Time Spent. To reduce the amount of time guests are seated together, order ahead from customized menus to help minimize exposure and increase efficiency.

Change-up the old-school Buffet. Flip self-serve to full-service food stations that are operated by dedicated service teams. Newly positioned “action pods” are set at appropriate distances to minimize crowding while conducive to traffic flow and social distancing.

Grab-and-Go. Individually portioned snacks and beverages allow for expedient guest flow during breaks while maintaining low-touch protocols.

Boxed Lunch 2.0. No longer a just a sandwich, a cookie and an apple – custom “bento boxes” come complete with three-courses, elevated packaging and the convenience for guests on the go.

Meeting Technology Solutions

“Keeping up with technology has always been an issue for planners and COVID-19 presents new problems that we have not had to address, pre-pandemic,” says Brian Wells, general manager, The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center. “Technology is key to keeping us safe and to designing meetings that are productive and inclusive.” Mr. Wells goes on to discuss:

Hybrid Meetings. When guests are unable to attend a meeting because of health, distance, family or budget concerns, technology enables them to easily participate in all or part of a meeting from home.

Multipod Meetings. This is a different take on hybrid meetings. Host smaller, in-person groups at two or more hotels. Link these groups together with sophisticated technology that allows them to participate in the same meeting but enjoy a different destination experience. Benchmark properties span urban centers, beach locations and mountain highs.

The Air That We Breathe. When the weather outside is challenging, seek out facilities that offer state-of-the-art air control systems that can improve indoor air quality.

Pre-Conference Communication. Benchmark’s sophisticated technology can help planners to communicate with attendees prior to the meeting with information on safety protocols, concierge services and the local destination. Virtual attendees will receive information on connecting to the meeting and participation.

Tech Support. Meeting planners can opt for full-service in-room tech support. For those who prefer to manage their own AV system, Benchmark tech teams will provide a comprehensive orientation.

The Evolution of Teambuilding and Wellness

“Teambuilding and wellness initiatives are a terrific way to help teams re-connect and re-energize after a stressful year of working alone, too many Zoom calls, lack of social contact, and dealing with other challenges brought on by the pandemic,” according to Janene Varden, director of sales & marketing, Willows Lodge. “Benchmark’s teambuilding and wellness programs are customized to meet the needs of attendees with a variety of programs that aid in combating stress and lead to relaxation, rejuvenation, and renewal of team cohesiveness and spirit.”

Take It Outside. Research today confirms nature’s profoundly healing and restorative effect on our minds and bodies. After the trauma and isolation of COVID-19, wide open spaces and outdoor venues beckon. Benchmark’s resort properties offer an abundance of outdoor activities and teambuilding programs that soothe the mind and body.

Get Moving: Re-energize with local outings, and sports such as golf, boating and hiking.

Give Back. Help the local community with a project that brings attendees together and serves the greater good. Assist at a food bank, build bikes for kids in need, or help clean the shoreline for a healthier environment.

Chill Out. Plan activities that slow down the tempo, teach new skills, inspire creativity and promote relaxation and focus. Choose activities such as yoga meditation, breathing sessions, culinary competitions, wine tastings and art classes.

Address Information Overload. Organize a group session with a health coach to help educate and make sense of the array of wellness approaches available. What is real and what is not, what is useful and what is trendy, what steps to follow and how to follow them.

Take to the Spa. Many Benchmark properties include modern spa facilities utilizing appropriate COVID-19 safety protocols while providing exceptional services that focus on relaxation and wellbeing.

Innovative Meeting Design

“Planners today have a dual challenge in designing impactful, successful meetings in a safe, productive, and increasingly today, in an outdoor setting,” according to Kama Carter, director of conference services, Deloitte University. “Now, more than ever, each meeting must excite and inspire attendees, while providing learning and personal connections safely, doing so in an environment where attendees can feel secure so they are free to focus on the meeting’s content, goals and objectives.”

Creative meeting space setups will optimize healthy hygiene practices while providing a setting that stimulates collaboration and innovation, according to Ms. Carter. As part of the Meeting the Moment panel, Carter has these highlighted recommendations for planners.

Keep it Flowing. Consider implementing entry and exit flows to ensure social distancing preempts bottlenecks and unintended face-to-face run-ins. Stagger breaks and event/exit timing.

Make it Clear. Color-coded systems and property signage, including floor decals and free-standing signs, will help alleviate the guess work for attendees. Hotels can provide an event team, trained to help navigate meeting flow and provide guidance to attendees on health and safety protocols.

Keep it Clean. In addition to positioning hygiene and sanitizer stations at all entries and exits, Benchmark works closely with the [Ecolab Science Certified](#) program, a comprehensive, science-based commitment to rigorous criteria that ensures a higher level of cleanliness.

Create a Customized Floor Plan. Collaborate with the hotel conference team to ensure that you have a customized plan that meets your needs and complies with CDC and state and local guidelines.

For more information on Benchmark’s new Meeting the Moment initiative, to meet virtually with the Meeting the Moment panel members, or to book a meeting at a Benchmark resort, hotel or conference center, please contact Paul Bashaw, Benchmark’s corporate director of global sales at pbashaw@benchmarkglobal.com / 602-796-5949, or visit <https://www.benchmarkresortsandhotels.com/meeting-the-moment/>.

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