



Small Market Meetings
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CORPORATE AND CONVENTION BUSINESS REBOUNDED

The annual industry forecast released by Carlson Wanlit Travel seems to support the belief that corporate business, particularly when it involves convention centers, is on the rebound across the United States. While some companies may still be searching for ways to cut costs and improve efficiency, North America is considered a seller's market, and the number of meetings and the number of attendees per meeting are increasing, according to the travel company.

Comcast Spectacor and its Spectra brand are taking advantage of a stronger economy and the willingness of companies to stage meetings of all types and sizes. Spectra provides venue management, food and hospitality services, and ticketing and fan engagement to 300-plus clients globally at more than 400 properties that host millions of visitors annually.

"We were definitely affected during the downturn in the economy in 2007-2009," said Shura Garnett, a Spectra division vice president operating out of the St. Charles, Missouri, market. "Now, we have seen a full rebound in business."

Being near the metro St. Louis area, St. Charles handles a lot of corporate business. Garnett has spotted a trend: Planners who used to book meetings and events a year or more out are now doing so only about three to six months ahead of time. Tighter budgets and less desire to lock in commitments too far in advance are possible reasons. However, Spectra staff say they are flexible and can work with any budget and situation.

Being a large, multifaceted company, Spectra has the resources to help corporations and organizations get the most for their bucks. Information sharing is the main reason.

"Since so many of our venues at Spectra host meetings that tend to rotate from the East Coast to the Midwest and then to the West Coast, we share recommendations with our clients that highlight other Spectra venues they could use," said Karen Totaro, general manager of the Atlantic City Convention Center. "It is a win-win situation because the client has a smooth transition and knows the quality they can expect in a comparable Spectra venue. Spectra ensures that there will be another great piece of business for one of the Spectra venue clients. This doesn't happen in a stand-alone venue."

Another example of Spectra corporate business increasing is the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines. The bundled Spectra services approach is credited with helping to increase business activity. Convention revenue, the number of events, food and beverage revenue, and total number of event tickets sold have increased dramatically.

The timing of the downfall and resurrection of corporate business was a little different in Oklahoma compared to other regions of the country. "Our downturn was a little later than most others because we're a very big oil state," said Kevin Boryczki, general manager of the Central National Bank Center in Enid, Oklahoma. "When the price of oil dropped, it affected our corporate business and hurt. But we did see an uptick with other clients we serviced."

The old convention center building in Enid was rebuilt, and a second new building was constructed and attached next door. All together, it's called Central National Bank Center. "It has been an exciting seven years here in the city of Enid," said Boryczki.