

A large, ornate, multi-tiered chandelier with numerous glowing spherical and faceted glass ornaments hangs from a ceiling with intricate gold-colored architectural details. The background shows a ballroom with a painted ceiling.

**Exclusive: 18th Annual 50 Top Event Companies**  
**'Summer of One': Microsoft's Super-Size Event Engages Employees**

# SPECIAL EVENTS

**FALL 2019**

## **THE BEAUTY** *of the* **BALLROOM**

**Ballrooms make event magic—  
here are seven superstar spaces.**

**ALL APPETIZERS,  
ALL THE TIME P. 31**

**SCRIMP OR SPLURGE?  
SMART SPENDING  
ON DECOR  
P. 35**



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## EDITOR'S PAGE

### WHAT'S NEXT

**In this issue,** we're proud to bring you the 18th edition of our "50 Top Event Companies." The firms are the biggest in the business, and their work sets the standard.

A key trend these companies point to this year is increased use of technology to shape the event experience. The team from New York-based FIRST sees a rise in the use of biometric data at events. "This can help track the way audiences perceive the event experience in real time," they say. "Facial recognition is being used for check-in at events, which helps avoid lines, ensures security, and provides more opportunities for personalization."

Other trends include an emphasis on sustainability and responding to client demands to keep budgets in line. And even though technology is shaping events, the soul of events is still a compelling story. As the team from Portland, Ore.-based Henry V Events puts it, "We continue to see content creation as the driving trend of the industry. As trust in traditional media and digital influencers declines, our clients are investing focus on impactful storytelling. They are collaborating with us to design moments to help attendees capture the event and share out directly to their social channels." Turn to page 13 for the full story.

The pros we interview don't see a major economic downturn ahead, but many point to a sense of "budget hesitancy" on the part of clients. If your clients are watching the bottom line a bit more, then turn to page 35 for "Divine Decor." Here, our experts share where to scrimp and where to splurge when designing events. They prove that creativity always trumps cash.

Our "Food for Fêtes" feature is thinking small—small plates, that is. The formal meal is falling away, as caterers turn out menus that are essentially a dizzying array of appetizers. "Our clients are requesting more free-flowing events where the dinner is butlered in what we call 'phases,'" says Alison Awerbuch, chef and partner at New York-based Abigail Kirsch. You will find it all starting on page 31.

Our job is to write about great events, but we honor them, too, with our Gala Awards. Presented since 1986, the Gala Awards salute outstanding events from throughout the world. In a first, the Galas will be presented with the Catersource ACE Awards on March 12 in Las Vegas at our co-located shows—The Special Event and Catersource. You will find all the details in our feature on page 10.

I can't wait to see your work.

*Lisa Henley*

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# CONFETTI



**Microsoft comes alive:** 'Summer of One' events include photo ops, Food Fest, Outdoor Movie Night, and Discover Day (clockwise from top). Photos courtesy Microsoft Photo Archive.

## We're All One

### Microsoft builds community with its super-size 'Summer of One' event program

**Looking for a corporation** that believes events mean business? Look no further than Microsoft Corp.

The Redmond, Wash.-based technology company is all in on the transformative power of events, as shown by its "Summer of One" event program. The super-size series of events, which ran from May through August, treated the 55,000

employees at its headquarters to everything from lectures to games to movie nights. Besides offering food, entertainment and good old-fashioned fun, the events are part of Microsoft's commitment to transforming its corporate culture.

The "Summer of One" program came in a response to a challenge, explains John Cirone, director of

global executive and employee communications. Microsoft has staged its "One Week" event program for the past six years, including its marquee event, the Microsoft Global Hackathon—which has grown to be "the largest private hackathon on the planet," he says. But major construction work on the Redmond campus has disrupted many





**Happy hackers:** Hackers at work at the Hackathon (above) with a flash mob having fun at the Picnic on the Promenade. (at left). The Bubble Man enchants kids at Bring Your Kid to Work Day (near right) while chefs show off at Food Fest (far right). Photos courtesy Microsoft Photo Archive.

traditional events. The solution? The event team put its various summer events under one umbrella, branded “Summer of One.”

The word “one” is significant. “Microsoft has been on a journey over the last five years to transform its corporate culture,” Cirone explains. A pillar of the culture change is “One Microsoft”—a challenge for a corporation with more than 130,000 employees globally. But, “We are all part of one Microsoft family,” Cirone explains. “We use our events program to celebrate this.”

“Summer of One” had something for everyone. Athletes competed in the Microsoft 5K Run/Walk, foodies feasted at Food Fest (which showcased the many dining options on campus), employees had the opportunity to network at an all-company Discover Day career fair, and families bonded at Bring Your Kids to Work Day. Besides building morale and camaraderie, the events introduced employees to facets of Microsoft they might not have known before.

A common theme at “Summer of One” events: food. Foodservice contractor Compass group oversaw a stunning array of options, with menus that included everything from pork belly tacos to fried cheese curds to ice cream treats. Entertainment at events ran the

gamut, including bands, a karaoke stage, and life-size lawn games.

To ensure that “Summer of One” was reaching its goals, the event team tracked the program carefully, Cirone says. Several thousand employees received emails each day, measuring awareness of and engagement with the various events. The team also provided plenty of branded photo booths on-site sharing the #MicrosoftLife hashtag, and then tracked employee engagement on social media.

Combining the various Microsoft events under “Summer of One” has paid off in several ways.

For one, the new brand streamlined communications to employees, who could now see the wide array of event options available to them as part of one overarching program. Also, the various event planning teams were able to share investments in infrastructure and planning, Cirone says, which allowed each team to focus more of their budgets on creating a better attendee experience.

Also, taking the bird’s-eye view of Microsoft’s program of summer events showed where there were holes in the event mix, such as employee segments that were underserved. “I’m proud of the partnership that ‘Summer of One’ demonstrates,” Cirone says. “We were able to bring a broad range of events to employees and serve the many communities that make up the Microsoft family. The sum of the collective effort was much greater than any one event.”

“Summer of One” was such a success that the Microsoft team will “definitely” bring it back for 2020, Cirone says. The model will also be available to other Microsoft campuses around the world next year.

With the success of “Summer of One,” Cirone underscores the power of events: “Driving real culture change takes time, and events are a key part of how we accelerate that change.” ●





## BY THE NUMBERS

### Attendance at 2019

### 'Summer of One' events

**Hackathon:** 27,000 worldwide

**Bring Your Kids to Work Day:** 15,000

**Give Fest and Microsoft5K Run/Walk:** 6,500

**Discover Day:** 5,000

**Food Fest:** 3,000

**Recess at Work Day:** 2,500

**Picnic on the Promenade:** 2,500

**Outdoor Movie Night:** 1,000

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# How to Enter the Gala Awards *and Win*

**If a beautiful Gala Award trophy is missing from your life, now is the time to fix that problem. By the Editors**

**Good news:** The 2020 *Special Events* Gala Awards competition is open. Now in its 34th year, the Gala Award honors the finest work in special events from throughout the world.

And in more good news: This year, you can enter the Catersource 2020 ACE Awards in the same online portal as the Gala Awards. Catersource and The Special Event will co-locate in 2020, March 9-12 in Las Vegas. Both the Gala and ACE Awards will be presented on March 12 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center.

In the words of one judge for Galas, “Galas are the time to raise the bar.” So, what qualities elevate an entry to award-winning status? Veteran judges—all members of the *Special Events* Advisory Board—reveal how they settle on scores, and offer tips on submitting a top-notch entry.

## **1. Get it together.**

Across the board, judges are in accord: What you leave out will cost you. “The first thing I do is check to make sure all the components are there,” says one judge. “I know it has nothing to do with how talented these people are, but it’s part of the [entry] directions.” Another judge adds, “I believe it is critical to follow the instructions as the bottom line for an entry—that way, everyone starts out on a level playing field.”

The same judge cautions, “Having even one point deducted because you overlooked a component can have a marked effect on the outcome.” In short, “Incomplete entries will kill you.”

## **2. Write it right.**

While they don’t base their decisions on prose alone, judges say that strong, accurate writing goes far in an entry’s progress in the competition.

One judge says he seeks out “concise and cogent wording that makes me interested in learning more about the event,” while he docks entries that are “too wordy.”

“The judges are human and there are a lot of entries, so you need to keep the judges’ attention,” cautions another judge. She says she is turned off by written responses that are “too vague or too dry.”

For yet another judge, redundancy raises a red flag. Entering a single event in multiple categories without providing different written responses for each category is a no-no, he notes, as is “repeating the same phrases in the answers to different questions.”

Since the written description is the first aspect of your event that the judges see, make it memorable with a neat, spell-checked entry. As one judge puts it, “If you cannot write well, then hire someone who can.”

## **3. Make your photos do the talking.**

Proving the saying “A picture is worth a thousand words,” judges frequently say they wish they could see more photos in entries. Adding extra high-quality photos packs a visual punch, allowing the judges to better appreciate your event. The Gala rules require 10 photos, but you can upload up to 20. Do not include collages.

Don’t just *tell* the judges why you deserve a Gala Award—*show* them why, with pictures of professional quality. Bear in mind that the event description and the photographs should complement each other. The photos should verify—not contradict—the claims in your descriptions.

## **4. Let truth be told.**

All judges agree: When it comes to your entry content, honesty is the best policy.





The team from Emerald City Designs celebrates its Gala Award win. Photo by Special Events.

Many judges point to budget as an area that they watch closely for signs of trouble. In categories that require budget information, entrants “have to remember the event must be able to be duplicated exactly with the budget that’s given,” says one judge. She offers the example of a decor-category entry whose budget omitted lighting—a key ingredient in the production, she says—because lighting was an important element in the photos submitted for the entry. “It was definitely a mistake on the entrant’s part because it was a great entry, but, unfortunately, that hurt them.”

Don’t try to cram a pricey event into a lower budget category. “We just don’t trust those entries because we don’t believe them,” says one judge.

Another judge warns against stealing the spotlight. “If it appears you and your team are taking credit for work performed by someone else, you’ll lose points,” he explains. For example, if your sole contribution to a wedding was the floral, then think about entering one of the decor categories, but do not enter “Best Wedding.”

## 5. Get down to specifics.

It’s fine to enter the same event in multiple categories, but be sure to write an original entry for each category. For example, don’t submit the identical entry you used for “Best Logistics” in your submission for “Best Wedding.” Judges are looking for descriptions that fit the category being entered. Take the time to tailor your entry to its specific category requirements.

## 6. ‘Why does this entry matter?’

A first-rate entry answers the question “So why does this matter?” and convinces the judges that the challenges overcome to accomplish this event were noteworthy, making the finished product worthy of a Gala Award.

As one judge explains, “Installing a tent in a flat field on a calm summer day is not going to get as many points as one that was installed on a cliff at the height of tornado season.”

A word of warning to entrants claiming they’ve overcome “outrageous” challenges in the course of

producing an event: Explain why that aspect of the job was troublesome. It’s not enough to bemoan such common problems as cantankerous clients, tight budgets or rain on the Big Day.

Remember that the judges have produced events, too; they know what qualifies as a difficult challenge versus problems that occur on a regular basis in the industry. Don’t be shy about sharing how you overcame challenges that clients might not understand but fellow event pros will.

## POINTERS FROM THE PROS

Our judges acknowledge that they can be exacting, but they can also be a great source of information and inspiration. They offer these valuable words of wisdom to both novice entrants and Gala Award regulars:

- “Take your time putting your entry together. It involves a lot of work and commitment, but it’s worth it in the end. We can tell when an entrant has put the time into it.”
- “Show us something innovative. Make us say, ‘Now, that’s cool!’”
- “Start planning at least a couple of weeks out, and prepare the entry accordingly.”
- “If you have the opportunity, have a previous Gala Award winner read your entry. [If you don’t have access to] a previous winner, by all means have someone not related to your company—as they can be biased—read your entry with the criteria in mind and give you feedback.”
- “If you can get across in writing and photos how truly spectacular your event was, we will respond to that. We want you to win!” ▶

*Entries for the 2020 Gala Awards are due Oct. 25; our special “late bird” option—for a slightly higher fee—extends the deadline to Nov. 1. Enter the Gala Awards [here](#).*

# FAQS *Gala Entries*

## 1. What events are eligible?

This year's competition is open to events that have taken place between Sept. 1, 2018, and Sept. 30, 2019. Events that place after Sept. 30 may be entered in the 2021 competition.

## 2. When are Gala entries due?

The regular deadline is Oct. 25 by 4 p.m. Pacific Time; the fee is \$99. The special "late bird" deadline is Nov. 1 by 4 p.m. Pacific Time; the fee is \$160. Joint entrants—that is, one entry credited to two companies—are \$200; two trophies will be presented.

## 3. Can an event company from anywhere in the world enter the Gala Awards?

Yes! We are honored to receive entries from Europe, North and South America, the Middle East, etc. You do not need to belong to any association to enter the Gala Awards.

## 4. I am entering the category "Best Achievement in Logistics." Do I need to include a budget?

No, you do not. Only categories with a dollar figure in the title must include a budget. So, if you are entering "Best Achievement in Logistics," "Best Venue," etc., you do not need to include a budget. But if you enter "Best Wedding: Budget Under \$1,000 Per Guest," you do need to include a budget.

If you do need to include a budget, be sure to use the Gala Budget Template so that you include all the line items the judges are looking for. (To get a copy of the template, click [here](#).) The judges realize that



Gala Award winners from Zynger Events (top) and Images by Lighting (bottom).



not all entries will require each line in the template, but try to follow the template as closely as you can.

## 5. How are you accepting entries this year?

All entries are entered online. Your descriptions, photos and payment are all uploaded [here](#).

## 6. As a Gala Award entrant, should I make sure to keep my company's name out of the descriptions in the entry?

Yes! To ensure fairness, Gala Awards are anonymous. Be sure to double-check your documents, photos and video links—they should not include your company name. But it's fine if your name is on the Referral Letter—the judges do not see this.

## 7. But what about my client's name—is it OK to have that name

in the entry? (My client's name appears in decor, on signage, on the invitation, etc.)

Yes, it is OK if your client's name appears in the entry.

## 8. But I am an in-house event professional—I created the event for my own company. Is it OK that my company's name appears in the entry?

Yes, that's fine—the purpose of many special events is to emphasize a brand. And the judges don't know if the in-house event professional or an outsider creates the event. Just remember to avoid referring to yourself as an employee of the "client" company.

## 9. There is no way my client will give me a referral letter. Does this mean I cannot enter?

No, you still can! The entry portal has places for you to list your client's name and contact information. As long as this is completely filled out, you do not need a Referral Letter too.

## 10. How do I pay for my Gala entries?

All payments—credit card only—are made online [here](#).

## 11. When do I find out if I am nominated?

The nominees in each category will be notified by Dec. 20, 2019.

## 12. When are the Gala Awards presented?

The awards will be presented on March 12, 2020, at The Special Event show in Las Vegas. Winners need not be present.

## 13. Help, I still have questions! Whom can I contact for help?

You are welcome to email questions [here](#). ●



# EVENTS

## 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

Immersive events, data-driven decisions, and a focus on sustainability—  
all top trends at play for the biggest event companies in the business.

Edited by Lisa Hurley

### AGENCYEA

#### CHICAGO

[www.agencyea.com](http://www.agencyea.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Gabrielle Martinez, Fergus Rooney

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 90

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)** \$70 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The team has been busy with Hilton's General Manager Leadership Summit; GitHub Universe; Samsung Developer Conference; Obama Foundation Fellowship Retreat and Summit; and Samsung Galaxy Unpacked—the launch of the Galaxy Fold phone, produced in collaboration with Cheil Worldwide. Additionally, EA continued its partnerships with Intuit, Google and MillerCoors on their respective events—Intuit Quickbooks Connect, the Google Cloud Onboard event series, and MillerCoors' Distributor Conference brand reception.

**TOP TRENDS** "Brands are increasingly using livestream to engage and unite a global audience," management says. "To speak to these broader, virtual audiences, companies are finding a space and designing a stage that wows attendees both in person and via livestream. This ensures the online audience has a cutting-edge, elevated experience that mimics being there in person and differentiates the brand in their minds."



**allied experiential**  
a division of allied global marketing

### ALLIED EXPERIENTIAL NEW YORK

[www.alliedexperiential.com](http://www.alliedexperiential.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Matthew Glass

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 500

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)** \$16 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** In its "biggest year yet," the Allied team has worked extensively with client Amazon and the "Amazon Treasure Truck" to produce events for brands including Panasonic, Pampers, Disney, Canon and Nintendo. The agency has won "multiple" awards for its production of the annual Crazy Glue stunts, including an appearance this year by world champion weightlifter and "Game of Thrones" star Hafthor Julius "The Mountain" Bjornsson; a comedy tour for Hulu in support of its new show "Ramy"; an influencer tour for Sephora; pop-up stores for Pottery Barn, Kind Bar and HBO; and press events for Capitol One, Keurig and Car2Go.

**TOP TRENDS** The Allied team predicts that "Lots more immersive, scripted, character-driven activations will be produced," while the strength of social media means that influencer and social media-driven installations "continue to be essential." And it's time to refine: "As many of the big tent-pole conventions, conferences and festivals reach brand saturation, newer targeted audience events

present exciting opportunities to really stand out," they say.

### ASHFIELD MEETINGS AND EVENTS/SPARK THINKING IVYLAND, PA.

[www.ashfieldmeetings.com](http://www.ashfieldmeetings.com),

[www.spark-thinking.com](http://www.spark-thinking.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Gavin Houston

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 960 to 1,150  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)** \$125 million to \$160 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The company's growing Spark Thinking arm allows the company to deliver meetings and live event experiences to clients outside of its traditional health-care market. The University of Pennsylvania turned to the team to provide a local presence to support day-to-day planning while also offering access to a global network for a campaign that covered 12 different cities in the United States as well as London and Hong Kong.

**TOP TRENDS** "One of the biggest trends influencing the events industry is the well-being and work-life balance of our staff," management says. "We recently launched an optional paid volunteering day for all staff, as volunteering and helping others have shown to have positive effects on mood. Alongside this, we introduced a flexible working policy to enhance the way we work and provide employees with the power to control when and where they work."



# 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

## BALICH WORLDWIDE SHOWS

MILAN, ITALY

[www.balichws.com](http://www.balichws.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Gianmaria Serra

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 13

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$100 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Highlights of the year have included "AQUA: Leonardo da Vinci's Water Vision," the official installation of Salone del Mobile Milano, celebrating Da Vinci at the 500th anniversary of his death. Also on the event roster: ceremonies of Napoli 2019: 30th Summer Universiade, Italy's biggest event of 2019, and the torch relay of the Lima 2019 Pan and Para Pan American Games.

**TOP TRENDS** "Our plan includes new projects of different sizes and in different geographical areas that bring forward the trend of entertainment based on content related to art," management says. "We are working on theatrical performances in a new, revolutionary format that will be launched soon."

## BROADSTREET

NEW YORK

[www.broadstreet.com](http://www.broadstreet.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Mark Baltazar

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 32

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$16.5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** It's been a year since Broadstreet debuted its new tagline: "Provoke. Collaborate. Lead," and 2019 has seen the team "capitalize on what clients have told them sets Broadstreet apart," management says. "It's our unique ability to help brands tell compelling and memorable stories that move people both intellectually and emotionally."

**TOP TRENDS** Broadstreet is focusing on creating "craft experiences"—intimate, personalized, custom experiences that allow audiences and attendees the opportunity to "self-discover" the experience on their own terms. "The challenge for creatives and producers is to create an environment for this to happen while knowing all the time where, when and what your audience will experience," they say. "It's a bit like magic; we call it experiential sleight of hand."

## BUCOM INTERNATIONAL CHICAGO

[www.bucom.com](http://www.bucom.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Darlene Krammer

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 25 to 30

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$10 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Celebrating 32 years in business, the team strives to offer new solutions for clients.

**TOP TRENDS** "We continue to see short lead demand from our clients, with a shift towards some of the more popular second-tier cities in the U.S. and E.U.," management says. "The trends for creative, healthy and innovative culinary programs continue, as does the desire to consistently deliver an experiential experience to all attendees."

## CERBELLI CREATIVE

NEW YORK

[www.cerbellcreative.com](http://www.cerbellcreative.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Michael Cerbelli

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 100

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$6.8 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The Cerbelli team spent almost three weeks at sea aboard two ocean liners bought out by the client for only 1,700 attendees for each cruise. The team created custom experiences for each day, from opening nights to award galas to dinner entertainment to late-night laughs and interactive experiences, culminating in "unforgettable" closing celebrations.

**TOP TRENDS** Reality TV shows are changing the event industry: "Our clients are loving these fast moving, hit-em-and-run opening and closing acts," management says. "The experience of all the attendees meeting and greeting them is even a bigger experience, as name talent usually won't meet 300 attendees. These performers have become affordable well-known acts, but need to be produced properly, as the corporate and social worlds are new to them."

## CMS COMMUNICATIONS LOS ANGELES

[www.cmsbiz.com](http://www.cmsbiz.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Diana Zimmerman

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 8 to 12

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)** \$6 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** While CMS has been busy with events for clients including Firestone, Varian Medical Systems and Shaklee, "We are doing far more consulting," management says, "especially in the area of social marketing and brand strategy."

**TOP TRENDS** "Companies remain cost-conscious and not wanting to look as though they are producing extravagant events," management says. "Budgets overall seem to be stabilizing, but not growing."

## CORPORATE MAGIC

### CORPORATE MAGIC

RICHARDSON, TEXAS

[www.corporatemagicinc.com](http://www.corporatemagicinc.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jim Kirk

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 15 to 20

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$30 million to \$35 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Corporate Magic continued its longstanding relationship with Berkshire-Hathaway HomeServices, held at the Colosseum at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, more than tripling the attendance of its annual sales convention in 2019 and resulting in massive global growth to the BHHS network, the company says.

**TOP TRENDS** "While clients still care deeply about the quality of the production in their events, they are pressured to find solutions which continue the event message throughout the entire year," says COO Jeff Kirk. "Crafting the right message and utilizing the correct mediums to bring it forward is something that differentiates top-tier event companies from the masses. The event industry is very mature and highly competitive. Reaching clients at a deeper level is setting us apart from the competition."

## CWT MEETINGS AND EVENTS

MINNETONKA, MINN.

[cwt-meetings-events.com](http://cwt-meetings-events.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Kurt Ekert

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 1,300

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$65 million to \$80 million (*Special Events estimate*)

## 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** A highlight of the year was a two-country, six-city tour that took the Minnesota Orchestra, patrons and stakeholders to London and five cities in South Africa on the centennial birthday of South African politician Nelson Mandela, all with an eye to inspire current patrons and future donors. Another standout: A Fortune 100 company's luxury incentive trip to the Amalfi Coast.

**TOP TRENDS** CWT points to four big trends driving special events today: festivalization, which treats attendees to immersive experiences, which can differ among guests; real-time feedback to drive engagement (e.g., facial recognition), which can ensure safety, expedite check-in, and improve social media reach by photo-tagging; speaker optimization, using techniques from TED Talks and new technologies such as Datakalab to make presentations more interactive and compelling; and capitalizing on social media. "As social media is a fact of life for most people, integrating it within events can add to the experience, as well as provide sharing and networking," management says. "Bringing the event experience closer to the way people behave outside of work,

in terms of messaging and chat, is set to become simpler with the launch of WhatsApp Business for Android phones."

### **E=MC<sup>2</sup> EVENTS** **CALGARY, ALBERTA** **www.emc2events.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jocelyn Flanagan  
**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 100  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)** \$14 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This year's event roster has included the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts Juno Awards Gala, Canadian Screen Awards, SingularityU Canada Summit, Canada's Walk of Fame Hometown Star, ThoughtWorks ParadigmShift in New Orleans, and the SOCAN Awards.

**TOP TRENDS** The team is going for the green: "We've replaced individual water bottles with water stations, eliminated plastic straws from our events, and suggest decor and gifting options that are reusable and sustainable," they say. "We are optimistic and hope that this is not just a trend, but a permanent shift in the way events are organized!"

### **ELITE PRODUCTIONS INTERNATIONAL**

**LAGUNA NIGUEL, CALIF.**

**www.eliteproductionsintl.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Lili Shadab

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 30 to 35

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$6.2 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The

Elite team points with pride to its transformation of a public parking lot into a private event space for an all-white themed birthday celebration and surprise vow renewal. With less than three hours to set up, the Elite team transformed the Museum of Modern Art in New York into an event and concert space for more than 800 guests, including decor, florals, and food and beverage.

**TOP TRENDS** The Elite team points to four big trends for successful events today: infusing events with hands-on experiences; sustainability as part of the event; influencers playing a larger role in events; and "each event needs to be better than the others."



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# 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

## ENTERPRISE EVENTS GROUP

**SAN RAFAEL, CALIF.**

[www.eeginc.com](http://www.eeginc.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Richard Calcaterra, Matthew Gillam

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 124

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$51.04 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** EEG recently managed The Table Group's "Unconference," its top-tier customer event featuring business guru Patrick Lencioni. Attendees comprised 850 businesspeople, 45 percent of whom were CEOs. "The event was so popular that EEG maintained a waitlist of 350 people for the conference," management says. Better yet: "The day after the conference, hundreds of people had already signed up for 2020."

**TOP TRENDS** Management points to three big trends: an emphasis on Apple-style "Genius Bar"-style interactions and networking opportunities; a trend away from mobile apps "as many attendees are reluctant to download another app and create login details for a three-day program"; and the increased need to livestream events to reach a wider audience.

## ENTIRE PRODUCTIONS

**SAN FRANCISCO**

[entireproductions.com](http://entireproductions.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Natasha Miller

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 600

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)** \$5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Highlights of the past year have included an event for Google Hardware for more than 5,000 people; five events in one day for a tech IPO in San Francisco with a scant three weeks' notice; production and programming of the Jazz at Filoli concert series for the second year; and "a very successful experiential marketing event for our company—a Mardi Gras masquerade that was attended by 800 people from the event planning industry."

**TOP TRENDS** "Corporate clients are still requesting incredible immersive experiences where their guests can not only enjoy well-designed decor and a great menu and wine selection but also very vivid entertainment with an emphasis on interactive activities," management says. "Understanding the psychology of extroverts and introverts and what will give them joy

at events is also being considered, so that everyone is able to enjoy the special event they've been invited to."

## EVENT LAB

**MINNEAPOLIS**

[eventlab.net](http://eventlab.net)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jack Noble

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 250

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$5.1 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The team has been busy this year with Final Four events including work for Capital One, CBS and ESPN. Other large events include projects for Stryker and Essentia Health, both in the medical field.

**TOP TRENDS** The team points to trends including interactive events focused on moving people around with large games; "lighter, brighter" events (with interesting tables with features such as mirror tops, unique legs, eclectic chairs—and fewer wooden tables—modern sofas and chairs in unique fabrics and colors taking over from lounge furniture); and "zero waste" events.

## EVENTMAKERS

**TOLUCA LAKE, CALIF.**

[www.eventmakers.com](http://www.eventmakers.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Guy Genis, Mark Genis

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 50 to 75

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)** \$17 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS**

Eventmakers has been making lots of events, including the Sports Humanitarian awards, telecast during ESPN's ESPY Awards; meetings throughout the U.S. for McDonalds Corp.; a destination experience for 2,000 in Dublin that included a general session, a sit-down dinner at Guinness Storehouse and other interactive experiences; and a camping-themed employee appreciation event for Sony PlayStation, featuring 26-foot-tall tents and outdoor props including canoes and a grizzly bear. Another event saw teams of employees building and racing their own pinewood derby cars.

**TOP TRENDS** Technology continues to lead trends in the event and exhibit industries, management says, "mainly LED technologies, as the cost continues to come down and more clients are now able to

afford larger LED walls. These LED walls are replacing convention video projection." Video mapping still continues to advance and bring excitement to event and exhibit installations, they add.

## EVENTUM PREMO

**MOSCOW**

[eventum-premo.ru](http://eventum-premo.ru)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Alexey Berlov, Alexander Shumovich

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 73

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$15.5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Guests at the company's Range Rover Evoque launch event in Moscow were treated to an interactive film where they could influence the plot evolving onscreen, followed by test-drives on a special track. The SAP "Big Data Media Sculpture" was presented at SAP Forum 2019; it featured graphics displayed in real time on a cubic sculpture—the graphics transmitted the results of data analysis illustrating the consumer experience over several centuries. Other projects have included more than 10 integrations at summer festivals created for brands such as S7 Airlines, Qiwi, Tinkoff Bank and MegaFon.

**TOP TRENDS** "Brands need new formats; they are no longer interested in doing the usual events—they need to create new experiences," management says. "In retail, pop-up projects are gaining great popularity." And successful events will aim higher: "Any marketing event requires the involvement of opinion leaders and the creation of a digital special project for this project to really reach the masses," they say.

## EVENTWORKS

**LOS ANGELES**

[www.eventworks.com](http://www.eventworks.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Ted Bowers, Janet Elkins

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 130

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$8.5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** L.A.-based EventWorks has taken its multilingual team south of the border repeatedly over the past year, creating branded events in exotic locations in Mexico. The team has stressed sustainability, including creating a sand lounge for a pool party, afterward "returning

## 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

every grain of sand to the beach,” they say. Closer to home in California, the EventWorks team took large, highly branded, customized multi-day events “to the next level ... creating iconic experiences and enhancing existing luxurious environments,” they say.

**TOP TRENDS** Activations have it all, management says: “They can deliver a fun activity for attendees or a wellness respite from the hustle and bustle of the event, employ the latest in augmented VR technology, immerse attendees in a different world, and provide a great opportunity to include a higher purpose in an event. Activations allow producers to deploy the full tool chest of creativity and skills to create an unforgettable experience that tells the client’s authentic story.”

### FILMMASTER EVENTS MILAN, ITALY

[www.filmmasterevents.com](http://www.filmmasterevents.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Andrea Varnier

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 60

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**  
\$80 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The event roster this year has included E-Prix in Rome, MSC Bellissima ship-naming ceremony, Spring Festival Dammam, the closing ceremony for the Camel Festival Saudi, the Euroleague Final 4 Ceremonies, Campari Red Diaries 2019 International Launch, Iveco international launch, and Waterfront Costa Smeralda events.

**TOP TRENDS** “Digital convergence, extensive use of new technologies, and fragmentation of the mass market into many different targets have turned every event into a true user-centered communication project,” management says. “You need to know how to make stories happen with an expert direction coordinating contents, emotions, interactions and ‘gamification’ to engage individuals and create lasting relationships.”

### FIRST GLOBAL EVENTS AGENCY

NEW YORK

[www.firstagency.com](http://www.firstagency.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Maureen Ryan Fable

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 250 plus  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**  
\$45 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This year’s event roster has included the Univision upfront, Verizon Media NewFront, Montblanc StarWalker launch, Mercedes Benz CLA Coupé launch, and the New York Times New Rules and New Work Summits. “This past year, we were awarded a three-year contract with SWIFT to produce Sibos, the world’s premier financial services event,” management says. “FIRST officially named Dublin a FIRST hub, expanded our global reach in EMEA, and added a handful of new C-level roles and leadership in the Americas, EMEA, and APAC, increasing our overall number of employees.”

**TOP TRENDS** The FIRST team points to three major trends: spatial computing, “which blends technology into the real world using augmented, mixed and virtual reality”; sustainability, “whether it’s biodegradable or recycled materials like name tags or swag, sustainable efforts are huge; it can take the form of anything from choosing a venue that takes their environmental responsibilities seriously, to things like donating leftover food, sourcing locally, and utilizing solar power”; and biometric data, which works with a person’s fingerprint, iris print, handprint, heart rate, face, voice or walk. “By analyzing information, companies can learn more about the users and how they interact. This can help track the way audiences perceive the event experience in real time,” they say. “Facial recognition is being used for check-in at events, which helps avoid lines, ensure security, and provide more opportunities for personalization.” Also, artificial intelligence is being used “to make the attendee journey smoother and more personalized.”

### FREEMAN DALLAS

[www.freeman.com](http://www.freeman.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Bob Priest-Heck

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 4,500 to 5,000

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**  
\$437 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Freeman has integrated its agency services throughout its global business, and as a result has transitioned its FreemanXP brand to Freeman. The company “has been rapidly evolving over the last few years, adding new products, services and solutions across the company to meet the changing demands of the industry,”

management says, and has “lots of exciting projects in the works!”

**TOP TRENDS** Saying that the industry can create its own future, Freeman management notes big trends ahead include the importance of serving as a “content factory”—creating stories versus simply telling stories, and making sure that play is incorporated into events, because it engages attendees and stimulates creativity. Multisensory experiences are vital because they “unlock authentic emotional responses,” they say. Also important: creating “mindful moments,” which encourage meaningful exchanges and disrupt the “always-on routine.” “Whether it is an oxygen bar, wellness spa, or revitalizing cafe, these moments give visitors the chance to reflect and recharge for the day ahead.”

### GEORGE P. JOHNSON EXPERIENCE MARKETING AUBURN HILLS, MICH.

[www.gpj.com](http://www.gpj.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Chris Meyer

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 2,500  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**  
\$700 million to \$770 million (*Special Events* estimate)

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Longtime specialists in experiential marketing, the GPJ team continues to invest in digital tools, data analytics, and creative and live production talent, management says. “In client work, GPJ continues to expand its role in Google’s experiential marketing portfolio, is still expanding its automotive practice, and continues to grow and expand into new verticals. With the acquisition of boutique experiential agency Kenwood Experiences, we gained innovative and creative talent, as well as a significant gaming and e-sports clientele such as Capcom and Square Enix.” Additional new clients include Macy’s, Facebook, Amazon Web Services, Harman Industries and Ellie Mae, “while we continue to provide creative and strategic work for longstanding clients like IBM, Salesforce, FCA, Honda/Acura, Nissan/Infiniti and many others.”

**TOP TRENDS** The good: “Brands are recognizing the power of digital integration and live production theatrics, both to the immediate attendee group as well as to the broadened audience that can be acquired through sharing live and captured digital content from the event,” they say. The bad: Many



## 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

clients still struggle with integrating their event data insights into their other marketing channels, management says.

### GO WEST CREATIVE

NASHVILLE, TENN.

[gowestcreativegroup.com](http://gowestcreativegroup.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** David Fischette

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 100

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$9.5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Go West continues to expand its lines of services, now offering “strategic ‘agency of record’ work in the areas of digital, social and experiential,” management says. “Also our new 3-D dining experience—‘The Banquet of Hoshena’—makes its U.S. debut, featuring a gourmet five-course meal.”

**TOP TRENDS** “New technology is on the rise, making events and activations more memorable and social media-worthy,” the Go West team says. “Event companies are growing their capabilities and offerings rapidly, making the market more and more competitive. We are constantly striving to find the next big thing that will set us apart and give us the ‘uniqueness’ edge.”

### HARGROVE

LANHAM, MD.

[www.hargroveinc.com](http://www.hargroveinc.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Tim McGill

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 600

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$80 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** For two weeks in January, Hargrove teams traversed the U.S., producing nearly 20 gubernatorial inaugural events in six states—including swearing-in ceremonies, galas, a concert, a parade, and other celebratory events. “Large annual conferences and galas such as those hosted by AIPAC, CHCI, HRC, IMF, NEA, WBENC, and The World Bank continued to benefit from ongoing creative collaboration,” management says. “Hargrove’s in-house creative strategy team has enabled these and several new clients to evolve and elevate their events.” They add, “This year has seen a greater upswing in brand activations, with corporate events becoming more experiential in their approach.”

**TOP TRENDS** “As experiential

activations are increasingly integrating with the design of special events, we are seeing the industry develop and formalize tools and techniques in response,” says Naomi Clare, Hargrove’s director of creative strategy. “Approaches such as experience mapping, touchpoint journeys, and empathy-driven persona profiles are being defined as methods that redefine how planners conceptualize and craft the strategic event experience. These design-thinking tools are being applied across the process of event creation, helping to introduce collaborative workflows and spur innovation.”

### HENRY V

PORTLAND, ORE.

[www.henry-v.com](http://www.henry-v.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Katja Asaro

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 150

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$22 million to \$24 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This veteran Pacific Northwest event marketing agency launched a rebrand this summer, along with introducing an optimized service that includes expanded strategy and creative teams, enhanced technology solutions, and organizational investments strengthening project management, production and planning services. Event highlights include Adidas Legacy’s New York brand induction, a grassroots basketball initiative that expanded programs to eight high schools there; KinderCare Education’s Center Director Summit, a multi-day event that hosted more than 2,000 guests in Orlando, Fla.; and Daimler Trucks North America’s eM2 product delivery—the first handover of electric trucks to DTNA’s top customer, Penske.

**TOP TRENDS** “We continue to see content creation as the driving trend of the industry,” management says. “As trust in traditional media and digital influencers declines, our clients are investing focus on impactful storytelling. They are collaborating with us to design moments to help attendees capture the event and share out directly to their social channels.” But in cautionary news, “Our clients are building budget hesitation as a result of our weakening economy. Conversations around expanding event budgets are happening at a slower pace.”



### INDEX

BANGKOK

[www.indexcreativevillage.com](http://www.indexcreativevillage.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Kreirngkarn

Kanjanapokin, Kreingkrain

Kanjanapokin

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 65

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$62 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS**

“Sustainability” is an ongoing theme for the team, management says. Projects over this year have included the Wat Rong Khun Light Fest event, the KILO Run project, and the anniversary of Thai Life Insurance.

**TOP TRENDS** “The most important factor that supports us to be the leading Asian events company is ‘creative value,’” management says. “We are building connections with customers through new hybrid and participatory online/off-line experiences that evoke emotional responses in every element of our event design and development process.”

### INVISION

COMMUNICATIONS

SAN FRANCISCO

[www.iv.com](http://www.iv.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Rod Mickels

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 175 to 190

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$78 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The past 12 months of events have included Genentech NFM 2019, Dell Technologies World 2019, Dell Technologies Global Partner Summit, Alienware E-Sports Arena, ServiceNow Knowledge19, Oracle OpenWorld 2018, Gartner Symposium 2018, Oracle HCM World 2018, Mahindra National Dealer Meeting 2018, ARM TechCon 2018, Amway Achievers 2018, Dendreon NSM 2019, Genentech

## 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

Full Spectrum, DocuSign Global Kickoff 2019, DocuSign Momentum, Atlassian Summit 2019, Nutanix NEXT Conference, Square Enix FFXIV Press Event and Akamai Edge 2019.

**TOP TRENDS** The InVision team points to three big trends shaping the event marketplace: diversity/inclusion in event design, sustainability, and hyper-personalization. Diversity/inclusion “is an opportunity for the audience to see themselves represented onstage, in the content and with their constituents in the audience,” management says. “The goal is to work toward an environment that feels less like it’s created by a chosen few, toward a level playing field of voices and participants who each play a role in calling the plays.” In regard to sustainability, “More brands are finding ways to make their events more sustainable; i.e., digital and smart app technology in lieu of registration/badges,” they note. As for hyper-personalization, real-time data and artificial intelligence are leveraged to create “more relevant content, product and service information to each user,” they explain.

### JACK MORTON WORLDWIDE

#### BOSTON

[www.jackmorton.com](http://www.jackmorton.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Josh McCall  
**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 2,250 (*Special Events* estimate)

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)** \$300 million to \$350 million (*Special Events* estimate)

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Pointing to its 80 years creating “extraordinary” event experiences, the Jack Morton team notes it “worked with seven out of 10 on Forbes’ list of the world’s most powerful brands, and as of this year, six out of 10 of our clients are on the Fortune 100 list,” they say. “We added over 120 new clients to our roster including Waze, Uber and NFL Films. We secured several AOR [agency of record] relationships with brands including MillerCoors, LYCRA, Honeywell and VMware.” They add, “Our work with brands such as Google and Facebook went up 174 percent, and we produced more events for Google than any other agency in the world.”

**TOP TRENDS** “Since there is always a new piece of tech or other trend on the horizon, we’re big believers you shouldn’t design an experience around a shiny new object,” management says. “While the tech will continue to change, experiential tech is here to stay—things like mixed reality that helps us create experiences that take people to a whole new level, one they haven’t ever been to before. More connected, immersive and responsive—driven by technology and data. Eventually, this will manifest in physical and virtual environments becoming one, so the use of more hyper-reality to create an increased sense of presence, which is critical to creating believable experiences. We’ll also see more advanced and real-time measurement of emotions and reactions at live events. This will allow brands to shift their creative on the fly to fit the consumer’s mood, too. This data will help them be much more effective marketers.”

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check the box for 752



## 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES



### JJLA

LOS ANGELES

[www.jj-la.com](http://www.jj-la.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jeff Consoletti

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 65 to 85

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$6.5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The team's busy event roster this year has included L.A. Times Food Bowl Night Market, Yahoo at Night Before, Swisse Wellness at Expo West, Equality California 2019 Gala Series, MAC Cosmetics at ULTA GMC, Mind Body Green Mother's Day Event Series, L.A. Pride Festival, Pride Island Concert at New York City World Pride, Jasmin.Com Mobile Tour, and Children's Hospital L.A. Walk and Play L.A.

**TOP TRENDS** Large-scale experiential activations are back, bigger and grander than ever, management says. "Clients are looking for impactful solutions that drive brand awareness while creating immersive, photo-worthy environments," they note. "While the 'Instagrammable moment' might be an overused phrase, the importance of creating valuable consumer experiences will only continue to be of growing importance."



### LEO EVENTS

MEMPHIS, TENN.

[www.leoevents.com](http://www.leoevents.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Cindy Brewer

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 150

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$28 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The year 2019 has seen LEO producing multiple shows worldwide for Walmart, AutoZone, ExxonMobil, the National Civil Rights Museum, and midsize enterprises including Kowa Pharmaceuticals, Acquia and Mid-America Apartment Communities, management says. Also, the team oversaw the debut of two new products of the KAABOO festival brand—one in the Cayman Islands and another at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. In addition, LEO renovated a 17,000-square-foot building in downtown Memphis, Tenn., and moved its corporate headquarters in January to the trendy Edge District.

**TOP TRENDS** The LEO team is incorporating the "sober curious" movement as it relates to nonalcoholic offerings at events, management says, tapping into an emerging—and profitable—trend that allows attendees to have "greater focus and limitless presence." Another strategy on LEO's radar is stronger concentration on Gen Z versus millennials, as this generation is stepping into the workforce "and so far, they've proven to be very different in their goals, desires, and processes," they say.

### LINKVIVA

DUBAI

[www.linkviva.com](http://www.linkviva.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Alexander Bendious

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL**

**EVENTS PER YEAR** 50 to 100

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL**  
**EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$22 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The team's program of work this past year has included events ranging from festivals to experiential activations. Highlights have included Market Outside the Box—an initiative of Dubai Tourism to provide a platform for emerging local, regional and international artisans, designers and F&B concepts to showcase their products to a large customer base on the grounds of Burj Park over 10 days. The team also organized and managed the Special Olympics World Games, hosting more than 4,000 special needs athletes from across the world to discover Dubai and Emirati hospitality, customs and traditions, and the Expo 2020 Volunteers Ceremony, Expo 2020 Labor Day Celebration, and Zayed Sports Tournament opening launch.

**TOP TRENDS** The good: The UAE is host to the World Expo in 2020, which has brought unprecedented opportunity to Dubai, the team says. "With less than a year to go, there is a plethora of events and experiential opportunities—pavilions are being built, brands are investing inside these spaces to display their goods and services, and experiential activations for each pavilion/exhibitor/concept will boost the ecosystem in the region." The bad: "The industry is moving to an extremely competitive procurement and RFP/tender bidding mechanism," they say. "This means that collectively the industry spends excessive resources [on] pitch time, and the end result is a lot of wasted effort for the industry as whole. This needs to change, and key agencies need to be appointed on a framework agreement/retained basis to ensure quality resources are invested per account and client—whether private or government sector."

## NOTE

Unless otherwise noted, all information is supplied by the companies listed. Companies listed oversee production of special events, hiring specialists as needed. *Special Events* estimates are based on interviews by staff, industry experts and other research. While every effort is made to ensure accuracy, errors and omissions sometimes occur. It is the policy of *Special Events* to address such errors promptly. All figures are in U.S. dollars. **Should you be on this list? Tell us at [info@specialevents.com](mailto:info@specialevents.com).**

# 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

## LIVE MARKETING

### CHICAGO

[www.livemarketing.com](http://www.livemarketing.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Anne Trompeter

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 25 to 50  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$10 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** “One of the many live-plus-digital experiences planned, produced and executed this year for Live Marketing’s clients include a one-to-many immersive HoloLens experience that drove exhibit dwell times of 14-plus minutes,” management says. The team also produced multiple AR and VR booth experiences as well as national sales meetings, trainings and kickoff events using “unique content delivery formats, cutting-edge staging, on-theme on-site activations, and powerful storytelling.”

**TOP TRENDS** “The most significant trend in our industry is about using technology to make the face-to-face connection more powerful and authentic,” management says. “Successful event and tech activations create moments that capture attention, communicate information, and excite and inspire audiences to talk about their experience.”

## MGM RESORTS EVENT PRODUCTIONS

### LAS VEGAS

[www.mgmresortsevents.com](http://www.mgmresortsevents.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jim Murren

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 2,100  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$15 million to \$20 million (*Special Events* estimate)

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** “In 2019, we experienced an increased number of both corporate and social clients, producing more than 700 events, each one uniquely designed to meet very specific needs,” the MGM team says. “Internally, we had the opportunity to produce simultaneous large-scale, luxury New Year’s Eve parties across the MGM Resorts portfolio for the company’s top guests—each with immersive experiences and activations that evoked all senses.”

**TOP TRENDS** “Las Vegas continues to be a very strong event destination with planners seeking a one-stop-shop approach that simplifies the experience and maximizes often limited human and financial

resources,” management says. “As Las Vegas continues to unveil new event locations and venues, planners know MGM Resorts Events can always deliver extraordinary experiential programs that drive ROI and exceed intended goals.”

## NEXT GROUP

### MILAN, ROME

[www.nextgroup.eu](http://www.nextgroup.eu)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Marco Jannarelli

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 80 to 90  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$32 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Highlights of the past 12 months include the three main annual corporate events of Generali insurance group for a total of 1,000 attendees; the 35th edition of Linkontro Nielsen, which brings together executives of leading consumer-goods corporations (more than 500 managers participate, representing more than 200 companies); the Coca-Cola HBC Italia Sales Convention 2019 for 1,200 people at Cinecittà World; and the annual convention of JTI Italia.

## OPUS AGENCY

### BEAVERTON, ORE.

[www.opusagency.com](http://www.opusagency.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Monte Wood

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 800  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$140.6 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** In the last year, Opus welcomed a new president, Jeff Stelmach, and chief creative officer, John Trinanes. Stelmach will provide agency-wide operational support and direction across all teams at Opus, Level 2, and MAS Event + Design; Trinanes will lead and build Opus Creative Studios to serve creative needs of the agency’s clients, as well as lead the effort to establish an Opus office in Boston, the company reports.

**TOP TRENDS** “Event teams must pivot into being creatively led,” management says, which is “more than just hiring a fleet of designers to your team; it’s a culture and a mindset. Our teams are tasked to favor innovation and creative solutions and to weave creativity into every aspect of each program we manage. Event professionals must solve problems, big and small, with a creative thought process that stretches their clients to challenge their own thinking and

embrace solutions that might be out of their comfort zone.”



## PACIFIC EVENT PRODUCTIONS/PEP CREATIVE

### SAN DIEGO

[www.pacificevents.com](http://www.pacificevents.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Joanne Mera

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 900  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)** \$11 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** For a company that wanted to blend the best of California and Hawaii into one event for their top executives, the team created a rich coastal look with deep undertones of dark koa wood mixed with turquoise and teal. “We custom-blended entertainment for them on all levels—through food, song, dance and their core company values,” management says. “By working closely with their executive team, we wove into the event all of their essential goal elements for their milestone meeting.”

**TOP TRENDS** The big trend: “thoroughly modern mash-ups!” they say. “Clean lines, sleek shapes and pops of bright colors combine to bring unique atmospheres for our clients. PEP Creative has been manufacturing new tables and seating options, mixing welded metals and mirror to add a fresh allure to our events.”

## PARTY PLANNERS WEST

### CULVER CITY, CALIF.

[www.ppwinc.com](http://www.ppwinc.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Patricia K. Ryan

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 25 plus  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$28 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The veteran events company specializes in large-scale hospitality and logistics for the sports and entertainment industries. Clients include the NFL, MLB and Indian Wells [Calif.] Tennis Center.



## 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

### PAULETTE WOLF EVENTS CHICAGO

**www.paulettewolfevents.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jodi Wolf

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 75 to 100  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$10 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** PWE has had a full slate of events this year including meetings, incentive trips and events for Mercer, Samsung, Google, the Chicago Cubs, NetApp and CDW, multiple product-launch events for HMSHost, grand opening events for Rivers Casino and various mall developers, private anniversary events featuring former U.S. President Bill Clinton, Sting, Diana Ross and Imagine Dragons, as well as charity galas, including a nontraditional gala for the Nature Conservancy.

**TOP TRENDS** Make time for brain breaks, management advises. "Events are full of content and activity, and attendees want to maximize their investment of time and money. But, packing several sessions to attend, booths to visit, notes to take, and people to meet into two or three days can be quite demanding for conference attendees. Adding areas or just time where attendees can unplug from the event and allow them to process what is happening and reconnect allows them to come back energized and engaged. We recommend fitness classes, meditation and fun activities in between sessions to help unwind and give the brain a break."

### PICO GROUP HONG KONG

**www.pico.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Lawrence Chia

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 380  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$420 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** An "excellent" year for Pico, with mega-events including the Mother of the Nation Festival in Abu Dhabi and the seventh edition of i Light Singapore. "At the same time, we laid the foundations for two high-profile events in 2020 by winning major contracts at Expo 2020 Dubai and the Tokyo 2020 Olympics," management says. Pico's Art-Zoo Inflatable Park has been on tour in Asia and the Middle East; "We also

delivered unique event activations including roadshows and launch events for numerous car brands around the world, including BMW, Jaguar Land Rover, Mercedes-Benz and many more."

**TOP TRENDS** "We believe that technology is the key to sustained success," management says. "In the events industry, companies that invest in technology will consistently lead the pack and stay ahead of the game. In particular, tech that uses the power of data intelligence and analytics can help companies enhance both their external offerings and their internal operations to create efficiencies, increase ROI, and deliver superior experiences to clients and participants. Most of all, by embracing technology, companies will stay on top of the digital wave that is sweeping across the planet."

### PODEGIKI MOSCOW

**www.podegiki.ru**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Sergey Gorbachev

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 157  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$14.8 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The year's event roster has included big events for Janssen, Johnson & Johnson, Raiffeisen Bank, S7 Airlines, Avon, E&Y, Beiersdorf, PepsiCo, CROC, Perfetti Van Melle, X5 Retail Group, Cisco and Tochka Bank, management says.

**TOP TRENDS** Management points to two big trends: connecting events to digital and media channels to increase efficiency, and providing individualized experiences to attendees, enabling them to be "fully emotionally" immersed in the essence of the event and to be "a participant in the action."

### REDDAY MOSCOW

**redday.ec/itsallaboutpeople**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Boris Alhimovich  
**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 32  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$10 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Big events this year have included SAP Now for 6,000 attendees on-site and more than 200,000 online, along with KFC Top League, which brought

some 1,700 representatives of the restaurant company from Russia and eastern and central Europe to Moscow.

**TOP TRENDS** The major trends in events, according to company management: the importance of the sustainability, cost efficiency, the power of social media on messaging, drawing inspiration from design and art trends, and the value of integrity.

### RUBY J EVENTS LONDON, NEW YORK

**www.rubyjevents.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Joanna Greenfield, Lucie Robins

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 5 to 10  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$8 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Both the London and New York teams are busy prepping for the Summer Olympics in Tokyo for 2020, while still working closely on their existing social clientele for weddings and bar/bat mitzvahs, management says.

**TOP TRENDS** Going green: Management notes that both clients and vendors are stressing environmentally friendly practices, such as using sustainable materials in floral and catering.

### RUSSELL HARRIS EVENT GROUP

**NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.**  
**rheventgroup.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Russell Harris

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 50 to 55  
**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$4 million to \$6 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** With a client roster including Disney, Fox, Causeway Financial, LinkedIn, Google, Johnson & Johnson, auto firms and technology companies, the team produces meetings, conferences, premieres, internal corporate events, product launches, hospitality events, and incentives.

**TOP TRENDS** "We are taking the idea of experiential stories deeper to create even more immersive live experiences that resound with audiences and produce immediate results, whether in ROI, media exposure or other metrics," management says. "With the live action of social media, the opportunities are boundless. The drawback to this is that negative

# 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

response can also spread like wildfire. Strategic, well thought out approaches that follow through on brand promises and audience expectations are a must.”

## SEQUENCE

### NEW YORK

**www.sequence-events.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Adam Sloyer

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 50 to 60

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$5.5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Notable projects this year include Spotify Inclusion Summit, bicoastal U.S. launch of Klarna’s “Smooth Sessions,” BNP Paribas’ Global Markets America Conference, and multiple galas for the American Red Cross.

**TOP TRENDS** “Reusable decor is growing increasingly popular, which we love because of the eco-friendly impact,” management says. “On the design side, monochromatic spaces are very in right now, with variation, texture and scale being used to create dynamic environments.”

## SEQUOIA PRODUCTIONS

### LOS ANGELES

**www.sequoiaprod.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Cheryl Cecchetto

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 30 to 45

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$12 million to \$20 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This year’s event roster has included the Academy Awards Governors Ball, Primetime Emmys Governors Ball, G’Day USA Gala, AMPAS Governors Awards, and events for the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Goldman Sachs.

**TOP TRENDS** “Clients are wanting bigger and better while budgets are shrinking,” management says. “Social media and marketing of events are becoming more important to the success of public-facing events.” The big challenge: coming up with more creative ways to engage and immerse the guests and audience, they say.

## TAMAR PRODUCTIONS

### CHICAGO

**www.tamarproductionsinc.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Mary Ann Rose

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 150 to 200

## ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)

\$15 million

### NOTEWORTHY EVENTS

The Tamar team has been busy with the Magnificent Mile Lights Festival, Eversight gala, Siemen’s annual meeting, the Illinois Governor’s Conference, the American Airlines New Zealand travel kickoff, Medical Library Association event, and “Paint the Mile Magnificent” gala for the Magnificent Mile Association.

**TOP TRENDS** Tamar’s take on trends: reduced budgets, a return to hard props and scenery, and concentration on new and innovative lighting.

## THE SPECIAL EVENT COMPANY

### RALEIGH, N.C.

**www.specialeventco.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Sally Webb

Berry, CSEP

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 70

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$7.8 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The event roster this year has included multi-day leadership conferences across the U.S., the 150th anniversary of the City of Durham [N.C.], World Scout Jamboree events, annual meeting for Pepsi Bottling Ventures, campaign kickoff for Elon University, opening for Credit Suisse headquarters, an incentive trip to Montreal, management of the Event Professional Conference in San Diego, and full creative and delivery of an urban development project for the City of Raleigh [N.C.].

**TOP TRENDS** The trend to watch: smart wearable event technology, such as the KLIK system, which enables exchange of contact information, registration, scheduling of events, etc., and can be integrated with other apps and solutions, management says.

## VIBE AGENCY

### MIAMI

**www.thevibeagency.com**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Valerie Bihet

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 90

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$7 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The team has been busy with events for Estee Lauder, Coty, Dior cosmetics and Le Groupe La Poste.

**TOP TRENDS** In a good development, the growth of digital teams in corporations means new audiences for events, beyond the customary sales and marketing meetings, management says. But the rise of online platforms for venue and vendor sourcing is concerning, they add, as these platforms can easily cut out the role of the planner.

## VIOLA EVENTS

### ABU DHABI

**www.viola.ae**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Ammar Hani Sharaf

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 65

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$16 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This year’s event roster has included the Morocco in Abu Dhabi festival; Innovator UAE and Abu Dhabi Science Festival 2019; ADSSSA Pavilion in GITEX Technology Week; National Archives Pavilion at the Sheikh Zayed Heritage Festival; and FAB Integration Celebration.

**TOP TRENDS** Market conditions in place last year are still in force, management says; “However, there is a much larger focus on digital and digital support, and businesses are investing more in dynamic events.”

## VOK DAMS WORLDWIDE

### WUPPERTAL, GERMANY

**www.vokdams.de**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Colja Dams

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPECIAL EVENTS PER YEAR** 450 plus

**ANNUAL REVENUE FROM SPECIAL EVENTS (2019 FORECAST)**

\$255 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Beside a wide range of events worldwide for the team’s key accounts, which include marquee brands such as BMW, IBM, Adidas, L’Oréal, SAP, Porsche and HERE Technologies, “We won new exciting clients including Zalando, TikTok and PepsiCo,” management says.

**TOP TRENDS** “In the background of digital developments in events and live marketing, ‘live-plus’ marketing automation” is the future, management predicts. Live-plus is “the integration of the live channel into the marketing automation process to develop personalized, customized and automatized live marketing, event and follow-up campaigns as part of a holistic customer journey.” ●



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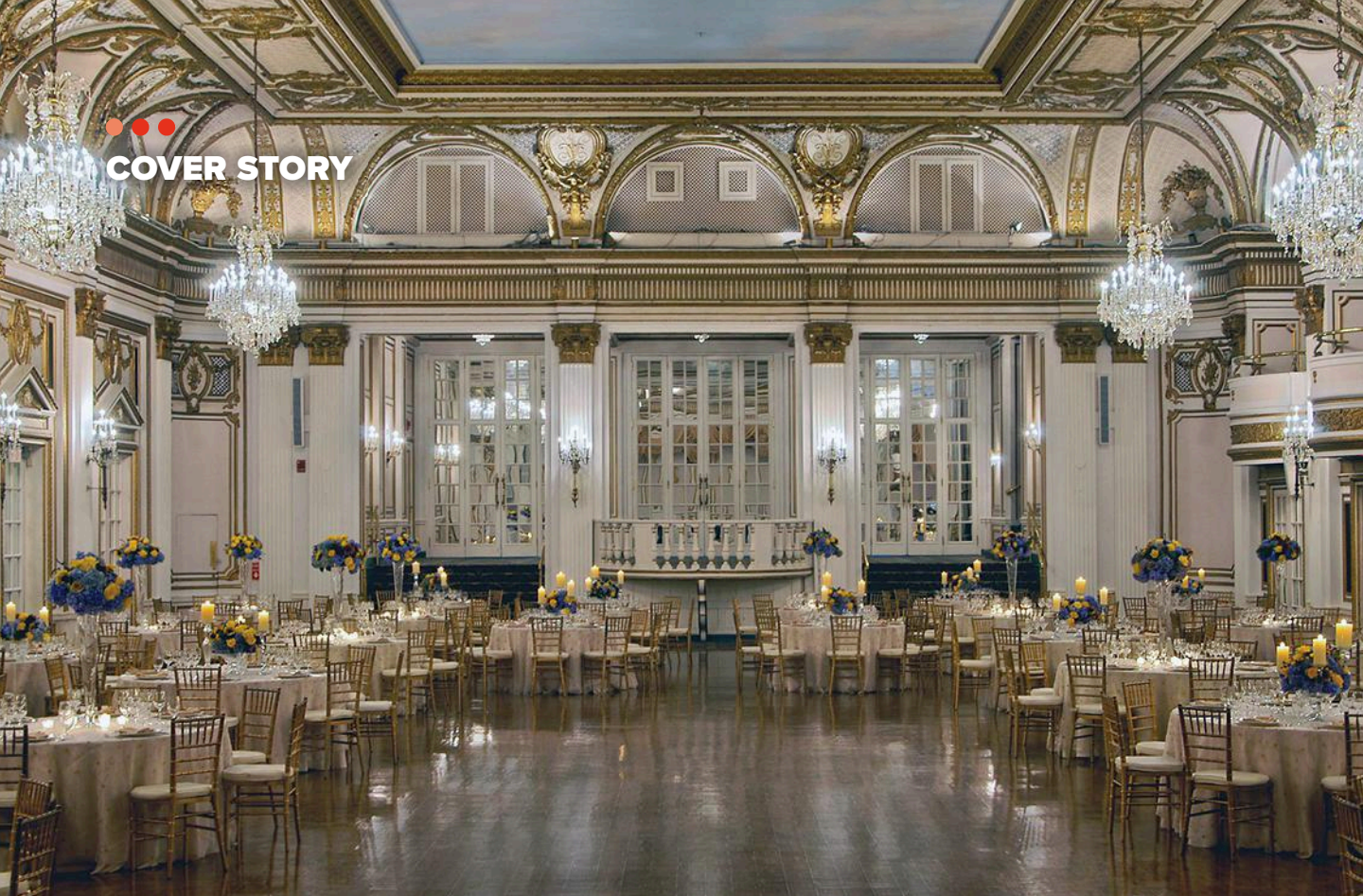
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# The Beauty of Ballrooms

**The backbone of special events, ballrooms can make magic. Here are seven superstar spaces. By the Editors**

## ROYAL WEDDING FAIRMONT COPLEY PLAZA, BOSTON

**Great ballroom:** At the grande dame of Boston hotels, the Grand Ballroom offers more than 6,000 square feet of column-free space and 28-foot ceilings. Its crystal chandeliers, balconies, mirrors and gilded pilasters provide an elegant backdrop for receptions for 1,100 guests and banquets for 580. The ballroom offers a dance floor and built-in stage; a back-of-the-house alley connected to the ballroom leads right to the loading dock.

**Great event:** Because the hotel is the “premier wedding venue in Boston,” management says, the team dreamed up a “royal wedding viewing party” to watch Prince Harry and Meghan Markle tie the knot last year. The sold-out event saw nearly 300 guests decked out in fascinators and gala wedding wear gather in the Grand Ballroom to enjoy scones, tea and champagne—and generated more than 162 million media and social impressions.

—[www.fairmont.com](http://www.fairmont.com)

Photo at top courtesy Fairmont Copley Plaza, at right by Binita Patel Photography







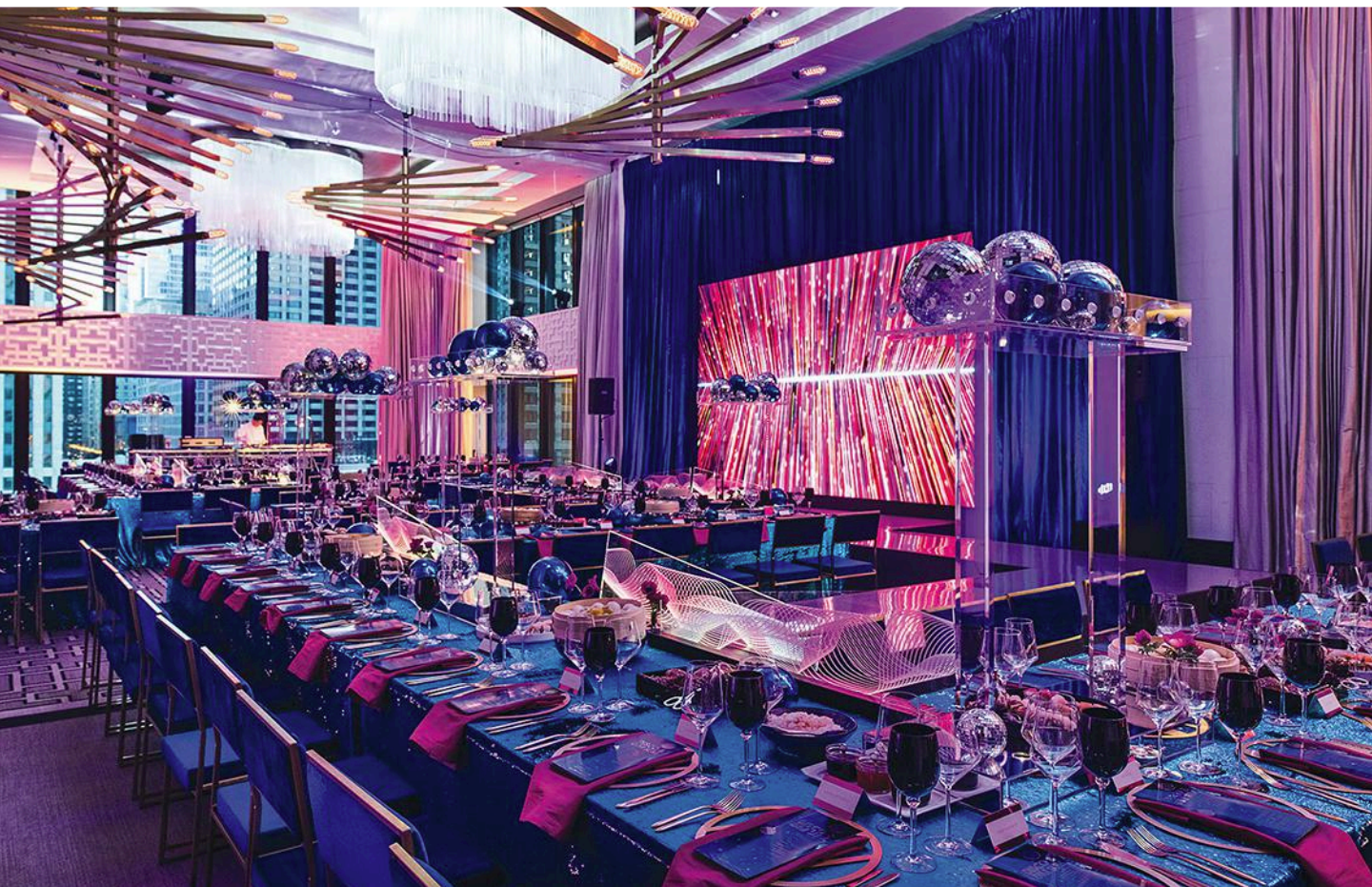
## MY KIND OF BALLROOM THE LANGHAM CHICAGO

**Great ballroom:** Located on the third floor of an iconic Mies van der Rohe skyscraper, the Devonshire Ballroom offers 4,880 square feet of column-free space and sweeping views of the Chicago River and skyline. The space, which can host 250 for dinner and dancing, can be reconfigured into four separate event spaces.

**Great event:** In July, the Langham invited elite wedding planners to a “Disco and Dim Sum” party in the ballroom, featuring performers “Cher” and “Donna Summer.” The planners also visited other event spaces at the property and enjoyed treats such as a hip-hop ballerina performance and a bomboloni bar from hotel pastry chef Danielle Marelli, with Italian doughnuts and a nitro ice cream station.

— [www.langhamhotels.com](http://www.langhamhotels.com)

*Photos courtesy The Langham Chicago*







## WINNING HAND RIO ALL-SUITE HOTEL AND CASINO, LAS VEGAS

**Great ballroom:** The really big Pavilion Ballroom offers 55,000 square feet of space that can be divided into 11 sections. Unique features include a modular grid panel truss comprising 20 individual sections, each capable of being lowered individually or as one unit, as low as five feet off the floor. The ground-level “elephant” doors on each end of the ballroom are a whopping 12 by 16 feet.

**Great event:** During the World Series of Poker, the Pavilion Ballroom is set with 238 poker tables, each requiring a surveillance camera and special lighting. By lowering the grid to the 5-foot working height, cameras, lighting, TV monitors, signage and sound can all be attached, then the entire grid raised to show height. The massive load-in doors allow forklifts, pallet jacks and equipment haulers to pass in and out with ease, saving both labor and time. The Pavilion can accommodate 2,618 poker players and dealers at one time; during a typical WSOP, players in the Pavilion and



other ballrooms within the Rio Convention Center will consume more than \$1 million in food and beverage, scarfing down 16,000 hot dogs, 89,000 cups of coffee, 65,000 cans of energy drinks, 289,000 bottles of water, 5,000 burritos and 24,000 pieces of sushi.

— [www.caesars.com/rio-las-vegas](http://www.caesars.com/rio-las-vegas)

*Photos courtesy Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino*



## TIME TO CELEBRATE THE MACARTHUR, LOS ANGELES

**Great ballroom:** As downtown L.A. continues its hot streak, the stately MacArthur—built in 1925 to honor those lost in World War I—has become a go-to event venue and filming location. Its Grand Ballroom offers 6,468 square feet of space that can seat 250 for dinner and dancing, along with features such as a built-in stage, a built-in bar, windows overlooking MacArthur Park, and easy load-in access.

**Great event:** A recent milestone birthday featured a mix of different size tables and custom linens. The venue created a five-course meal served butler-style, while guests enjoyed performances on the ballroom stage before heading downstairs for drinks and dancing. —*the macarthur.com*

*Photos here and top right courtesy  
The MacArthur*







## SHORE THING SHORE LODGE, MCCALL, IDAHO

**Great ballroom:** Get away from it all—but with glamour—at the Shore Lodge in the Rockies. The resort's two Pavilion ballrooms—upper and lower—feature dramatic timbered ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Payette Lake. The upper ballroom seats 200 for banquets, the lower ballroom 160.

**Great event:** A recent event put a '60s spin on the traditional country fair with a lakefront cocktail party where '60s-style water-skiers showed their talents, followed by dinner in the upper Pavilion and a 1967 dance party in the lower Pavilion, with go-go dancers, hula hoops and groovy beats.  
—shorelodge.com

*Photo courtesy Shore Lodge*





## GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS VENETIAN RESORT, LAS VEGAS

**Great ballroom:** The showcase Venetian Ballroom features 85,000 square feet of column-free space, which can be subdivided into 12 individual spaces. It offers an adjacent catering kitchen as well as an expo space next door.

**Great event:** Last year the Venetian Ballroom played host to 3,500 guests at a reception for Cvent Connect, where the “five brand pillars” of the resort—business-orientation, integration, convenience, innovation and sustainability—were showcased. Guests were treated to the culinary, beverage, production and innovative services offered at the resort. — [venetian.com](http://venetian.com)

*Photos courtesy Venetian Resort*



## NICE BITES MOHEGAN SUN CASINO AND RESORT, UNCASVILLE, CONN.

**Great ballroom:** The new 20,000-square-foot Earth Ballroom can host seated events for 1,000 and receptions for 1,750. The column-free space, which can be divided in two, features an advancing lighting system. The ballroom offers an outdoor terrace perched on the Thames River.

**Great event:** The Earth Ballroom hosted the kickoff night for the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Sun Wine and Food Festival with a showcase of Boston’s foods and sports superstars. Around the perimeter of the ballroom, chef stations provided cooking demos while the sports legends chatted with the more than 500 attendees. — [mohegansun.com](http://mohegansun.com)  
*Photo courtesy Mohegan Sun*



## FOOD FOR FÊTES

**Appetizers from abroad:** From Entertaining Company, an Indian-inspired plantain chip with tandoori chicken, mung bean salad and a jalapeno crisp (here) and steamer baskets of Peking duck bundles with a hoisin sauce drizzle (below). Photo here by Chris Cassidy Photography, below courtesy Entertaining Company.

# All In for Appetizers

**If we're honest, most of us would not mind a dinner menu made up of nothing but appetizers. A feast exclusively of beguiling bites and sumptuous small plates—essentially a meal made of snacks? Yes, please!**  
**By Susan Cuadrado**

**APPS ALL NIGHT** “Our clients are requesting more free-flowing events where the dinner is butlered in what we call ‘phases,’” says Alison Awerbuch, chef and partner at New York-based Abigail Kirsch. “Guests start with hors d’oeuvre, then transition into heartier passed fare. From there they move to butlered small plates, which often require a small utensil and vessel, but can still be passed and enjoyed standing. And of course, we finish with creative butlered sweets that typically include something warm, something frozen and something spiked.”

These types of events, especially social events, are often complemented with kiosks and carts in lieu of traditional stations. “It’s the perfect alternative to the traditional seated dinner, station or buffet party,” Awerbuch says.

Eric Barnachea, CEO of Palo Alto, Calif.-based Catered Too, agrees. “It’s still going strong and is a predominate piece of our business,” he says. “We always suggest a mix of action stations, self-serve stations, and passed appetizers.”



“We had a recent wedding where we served 12 different tray passed hors d’oeuvre in addition to station-set appetizers,” says Colin John, executive chef at Troy, Mich.-based Forte Belanger. “Our clients prefer a traditional item with a high-end touch, such as our curried egg salad with pumpernickel croutons served in a clear





**Warming trend:** From A Joy Wallace Catering, pani puri filled with warm goat cheese, spicy mango chutney and lentils. Photo courtesy A Joy Wallace.

push pop, or our ‘steak and eggs’—a sous vide quail egg with beef tenderloin drizzled with tarragon red pepper chimichurri.”

For Eric Michael, president/founder of Washington-based Occasions Caterers, traditional cocktail buffets have given way to chef-driven, small-plate tasting events. “We have developed a series of stations to provide guests with a chef-designed small plate with two or three components,” he says. Examples are a soft polenta station with guest choice of braised pork ragoût or slow-roasted eggplant, a burrata station with a variety of toppings, and a made-to-order hummus station.

**TRAY CHIC** Indeed, we eat first with our eyes, so hors d’œuvre must be as prettily presented as they are palatable.

“We focus on the little details, from the type of plate or spoon that is used to the angle in which the food is placed,” says David Turk, owner/founder of New York-based Indiana Market and Catering. He cites Chinese porcelain spoons, edible spoons and crispy *frico* baskets as popular one-bite vessels. A recent event featured woven cucumber strips as the plating for a lobster appetizer, while crispy mini carnitas tacos sat on a bed of dried peppers.

At Los Angeles-based Wolfgang Puck Catering, ingredients also often double as serving vessels, such as puffed rice or tapioca baskets, or lime-compressed



**Good things in small packages:** From Forte Belanger, sweet pea dumplings in tiny vessels (top) and watermelon-radish tacos held in place with tiny clothespins (above). Photos courtesy Forte Belanger.

jicama for sashimi or salad bites. “This adds a great textural component to the dish,” says senior sales manager Pamela Pimiento.

**A CALL TO ACTION** In the iconic words of rock star Jimi Hendrix: “Are you experienced?” The answer should be “yes”—when it comes creating high-impact presentations and action stations.

“We have been developing a series of ‘experiential’ hors d’œuvre stations,” Michael says. “We are creating experiences that are really out of the box and popular on social media.” Two of the company’s most successful concepts are its “Wall of Levitation,” which uses electromagnetic force so that hors d’œuvre hover in space, and its “Wall of Offering,” a custom-built wall featuring golden ceramic hands holding plated hors d’œuvre.



**Think small:** From Catered Too, truffle mac and cheese with toasted garlic panko served on spoons; Southern barbecue shrimp served over aged white cheddar grits; and street tacos with chipotle beef, caramelized onions, pico de gallo, mango salsa and guacamole (from left). Photos courtesy Catered Too.

“More often than not, guests want something unique or out of this world, so the team will get together to collaborate and create a completely custom experience,” John adds. “We’ve spelled out phrases or words with light-up popcorn walls, served up fresh grapefruit and basil ‘boozy’ snow cones, and spun-fresh honey-lavender cotton candy.”

He also favors small-plate action stations, where guests can view their appetizers being made. “One of our favorites is the ‘Watermelon Radish Ravioli Terrarium,’ in which we incorporate baby vegetables from local farms, fresh pressed olive oil, and Michigan goat cheese. It looks like a miniature garden and tastes like summertime.”

Salad is shaken, not stirred, at Catered Too’s “Shake It Up” ramen salad station, which features servers sealing cups of layered ramen noodles, fresh veggies, savory sauce and a choice of protein or a vegetarian option. “Guests can

watch the machine seal the cups, then give their meal a shake before they enjoy it. It is a huge hit,” Barnachea says.

### CRAVING RICH ASIAN

Asian flavors and dishes—specifically Korean, Hawaiian, Chinese and Indian—continue to inspire chefs and please palates. “Korean influences are definitely trending,” says Awerbuch, citing *gochujang* barbecue duck, smoked scallop satay, and Korean-spiced short rib bites as example.

At Chicago-based Entertaining Company, founder/creative director Wendy Pashman adds Korean chicken wings with scallions, fried shallots, garlic and chive flowers to the mix. “We are also loving Roy’s [restaurant]-inspired *Lakanilau* rolls of wagyu beef, tempura asparagus, avocado, sesame miso and truffled greens, as well as the forever-popular coconut-lime shrimp skewers,” she says. “*Huli-huli* boneless chicken wings with soy, pineapple and ginger are a nod to ’50s

tiki pool parties and are delighting a whole new generation.”

Indiana Market and Catering serves its Asian mushroom bites with Sriracha and grilled pineapple on Chinese spoons, while Chinese chicken *shu mai* dumplings are accompanied with green chile-soy sauce. “We are receiving a lot of requests for Indian cuisine, so we are trying to put a spin on some of those flavors,” John adds. “We make a *moong dal* arancini with goat cheese and mango cilantro gremolata. There is certainly some fusion, but the focus is the Indian herbs and spices, which provide heat and a ton of flavor.”

**VEGGING OUT** “Plant-based menus have been in high demand, which challenges our chefs to get creative,” Pimiento says. “We do a vegetable ceviche bar with three types of composed ceviches that taste better than if they had fish in them.”

Indeed, fruits and vegetables make perfect sub-ins for fish when





**Special spin:** Occasions Caterers puts a spin on dishes, including its vegan sushi (top) and plantain chips with curried goat (above). Photo at top by Eric Kelley; photo above by Pablo Sarto Photography.

it comes to creating sushi-like appetizers. “We’ve done a beautiful apple summer roll with shiso mint, Thai basil, fennel, cucumber, lemon, and sweet chile dipping sauce,” she notes. “The apple was put through a machine that created long strips that we used for the ‘roll.’ It was a total crowd-pleaser.” Likewise, an increase in demand for plant-based menus has prompted Occasions Caterers to create a full line of vegan hors d’oeuvre, including assorted sushi and crispy-crunchy baby carrots. “Our vegan options are all complex and very flavorful,” Michael says.

Another star on the vegan (and gluten-free) table is, not surprisingly, cauliflower. “Cauliflower is the new kale and brussels sprout, particularly since it can be subbed into several dishes in order to make them gluten-free,” says Awerbuch. The vegetable appears in the caterer’s many vegan and gluten-free incarnations such as cauliflower pizzetta, General Tso’s crispy cauliflower, and truffled cauliflower “risotto.” Other plant-based delicacies include crispy fried squash blossoms served with pipettes of balsamic pesto, and vegetable and melon poke on a homemade quinoa and brown-rice cracker.

## RESOURCES

**A JOY WALLACE CATERING AND DESIGN**

[ajoywallace.com](http://ajoywallace.com)

**ABIGAIL KIRSCH**

[abigailkirsch.com](http://abigailkirsch.com)

**CATERED TOO**

[cateredtoo.com](http://cateredtoo.com)

**ENTERTAINING COMPANY**

[entertainingcompany.com](http://entertainingcompany.com)

**FORTE BELANGER**

[fortebelanger.com](http://fortebelanger.com)

**INDIANA MARKET AND CATERING**

[indiananyc.com](http://indiananyc.com)

**OCCASIONS CATERERS**

[www.occasionscaterers.com](http://www.occasionscaterers.com)

**WOLFGANG PUCK CATERING**

[wolfgangpuck.com](http://wolfgangpuck.com)

**CHEESY GOODNESS** Apologies to all vegans, but an appetizer without cheese is like ... well... an appetizer without cheese. Cheese presents heavily on action stations such as Wolfgang Puck’s hand-pulled mozzarella station, where a cheese maker pulls fresh mozzarella in front of the guests while discussing the process. “Guests love the fresh flavors and local produce and herbs paired with such a simple ingredient,” Pimiento says. Similarly, Abigail Kirsch’s “create your own burrata” appetizer is served on hawkers trays where guests can mix and match toppings. At Miami-based A Joy Wallace Catering and Design’s “Rac and Roll” raclette station, Gruyere cheese is transformed into liquid gold and poured over a small plate of roasted apple, dates and walnuts or sourdough croutons, grilled cauliflower and carrot wheels.

“Our clients are still loving grilled cheese in all its variations,” Pimiento says. Fillings such as Indian mango chutney and Brie with raspberry preserves on baguettes are popular. “Another fun trend is taking items that are traditionally served as desserts and giving them a savory, hearty twist,” Awerbuch adds. These cheesy bites include apple cheddar tarts and truffled Brie profiteroles. “Guests sometimes wonder why we are serving dessert during the cocktail reception,” she says, “until they take their first bite.” ●

## DIVINE DECOR



**Go big:** BeEvents makes big statements in its decor for fundraisers. Photo at top by Laurie B. Studio, below by Anna Grinets Photography.

# Spending Smart on Design for Fundraisers

**Where to splurge efficiently? How to scrimp effectively? When every dollar counts, strategy is key.** By Susan Cuadrado

**Devynn Smith, co-owner** of Los Angeles-based Edge Design and Decor, sums up the fundraising design process simply: “Sometimes we have a great budget to do whatever our hearts desire, and other times—not so much.”

**MAKING AN ENTRANCE** First up, the entrance. “The entrance is key in making that first impression and building excitement for the event and what is to come,” says William Fogler, principal/founder at Atlanta-based WM Events. “It sets the tone as soon as guests arrive.”

Haleema Linares, partner at Las Vegas-based Sktch Events, suggests a dramatic entrance treatment with interactive themed greeters to set the tone. “Glow elements seem to be catching everybody’s eye in the event world,” she says, citing large LED letters as an example.

“You have to set your scene,” adds Ryan Hanson, CSEP, of Minneapolis-based BeEvents. “This is the



‘wow moment’ of walk-in, the canvas upon which the rest of the elements rest.” To that end, Hanson favors large installations—such as balloons, paper cut-outs, glass balls. “Things installed en masse can make a





**Made you look:** Two from To Be Designed: A 'beach boho' tabletop (above) created with AZA Events (photo courtesy To Be Designed); (at left) a hand-painted butterfly photo op (photo by Your Face is Rad).



ing in pipe and drape to hide the whole room.”

**THAT’S SO LIT!** Skimp somewhere else, but never on lighting. “Lighting is a driving force in the overall design of a space,” says Kellie Hanley, partner at Sktch Events. “It’s a great way to stretch a budget and make an overall statement.” Rheana Coon, director of events at San Diego-based To Be Designed, agrees. “I think people are finally starting to understand how much design can be done with lighting—and what a major impact it makes in a space,” she says. “I’ve had less requests for stage decor and more demand for unique projections and LED walls.”

“Generally, lighting has a great return on the investment,” Hanson adds. “And with all the dramatic increases in the capabilities of LEDs and video-mapping technologies, this is fast improving. Innovations in chandeliers, integration of neon or tube lighting, and variations on ‘café lighting’ are a designer’s best friend when decorating a space.”

If the budget is tight, Hanley relies heavily on ambient lighting—specifically blue or amber uplights around the perimeter to establish a mood—enhanced with a wash of multicolor pulsing or moving lights to generate energy. “I always say spend on lighting because it creates the atmosphere and mood at a level

you cannot get from flowers and linens,” Folger notes. “Uplighting is vital, but textural lighting, such as gobos projected around the room, is also important. Imagery on screens or abstract video imagery can play into the theme and is very big right now.”

**FINE-TUNED TABLES** Guests spend a lot of time at their gala tables, so thoughtful design is key. “Splurge on specialty dining tables, especially if they are being sold in different size packages,” Smith suggests. As for linens, think texture.

“Linen is one of the easiest ways to make a ball-room pop and keep it from looking like a monochromatic sea of tables,” Fogler adds. “Incorporating texture into linens for a tactile experience adds interest and keeps the table from being flat.” The budget-conscious can achieve this look by mixing less expensive linens with designer items, or using material covers—such as cork or butcher paper—he explains. Coon notes, “Rich textures in linens are always popular, as well as popping in funky patterns here and there.”

Hanley also suggests elevating simple components—the place card, table number, napkin treatment, chargers—into statement-making design elements. For Hanson, less is more. “A clean-lined table—well draped linen, a simple napkin, and a lush yet compact centerpiece in a modern container can be just as impactful. And, of course, a comfortable chair.”

**FLOWER POWER** “I tend to spend on floral because it offers a memorable effect,” Fogler says. “If there is nothing on the table, you do miss it.” Some trends he’s seeing now include the Bohemian look, with natural textures such as pampas grass and other dried stems, monochromatic floral installations, and painted, metallic and hanging florals. Hanley adds,



**Boosting the brand:** From Sktch Events, a twist on a Las Vegas photo op with authentic sagebrush and desert fauna as well as integration of the client's product for an interactive element (top), and a luxurious wall made of live greenery showcasing the client's brand (above). Photos courtesy Sktch Events.

"Dig into current trends with the use of metallics or mercury glass, and, when budget allows, add peonies or orchids." Coons recommends multi-element centerpieces with plenty of candlelight. "I always create different price-range centerpieces so that all the tables aren't super costly," she says.

And don't forget about sightlines, Folger cautions. "Sightlines and table space are important at nonprofit events, so these need to be kept in mind when designing centerpieces," he says, adding "Incorporating an organization's messaging or even instructions for the evening's crowdfunding efforts can help a centerpiece do double duty."

Off the table, Linares suggests adding affordable live plants to the decor mix. "Plants can be a useful tool visually and are aesthetically pleasing. Live plant walls or backdrops help create a mood while promoting sustainability."

**PHOTO BOMB** Not surprisingly in the day of social media, an essential design element is the photo op—whether for quick selfies or professional shots. ▶

# WORKING THE ROOM

**Does your event use the same venue year after year? Design tips on keeping a fundraiser fresh:**

"I always make sure the color palette is different, and ask if we can change the flow of the event or the seating style. It helps the guests stay excited about attending, knowing they aren't going to that 'same party' every year."

—Rheana Coon, **To Be Designed**

"We change the theme each year, so there is always something new to explore and enjoy. With a new theme, centerpieces and colors can be updated, while still keeping familiar elements to stay on brand with the event. What often isn't possible is changing the floor plan. However, we can change the format of the evening, altering the guest flow and the run of show to keep the event fresh year after year."

—William Fogler, **WM Events**

"Change up the layout of the space, perhaps use a combination of table styles—some rectangle tables, some rounds. If budget allows, use elevation to transform the space by adding risers for some of the guest tables."

—Kellie Hanley, **Sktch Events**

"Be willing to look at your space and see new ways to do an old thing. For example, in one venue, there is a bank of windows that we regularly needed to cover with pipe and drape. Then one year, the client wanted to add its new brand visuals to the event space. Instead of covering the windows, we collaged an integration of their new graphics with event graphics and sponsor recognition, and transformed the experience of the space while still accomplishing a necessary logistical task. The next year, we built on that idea, and our event theme developed around a coloring book concept. We turned it into an interactive wall of line art graphics, which guests colored in."

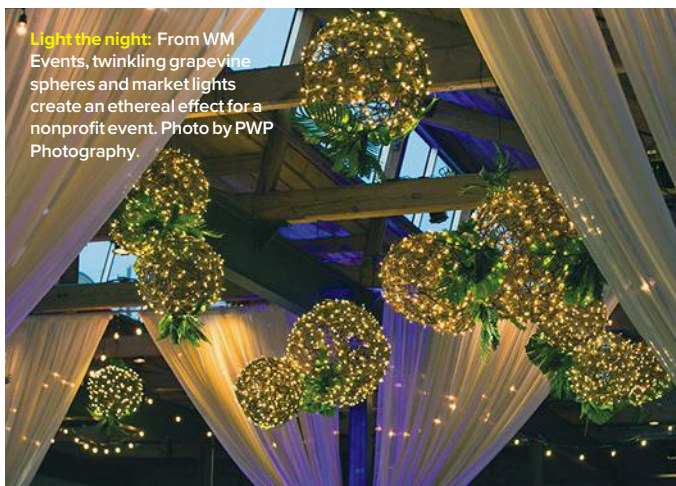
—Ryan Hanson, **BeEvents**

"I cannot stress enough how much a change in color palette can really express the room in different ways. Also, change the linen textures and/or include a pattern, get creative with the table layout, and make cocktail hour a different experience than the dinner."

—Devynn Smith, **Edge Design and Decor**



**Light the night:** From WM Events, twinkling grapevine spheres and market lights create an ethereal effect for a nonprofit event. Photo by PWP Photography.



“Photo opportunity installations are huge right now,” Coon says. “Everyone wants that one fabulous Instagram photo.” Hanging floral installations are especially popular, she notes. For Hanley, rentable, easily adorned boxwood walls are an affordable option that can be customized with everything from balloons to stuffed animals to pool floats. “The only limit is your imagination,” she says.

When the budget does allow, Hanley goes big. “Creating enclosed photo environments allows for an immersive, themed space that surrounds the guests,” she explains. “Upside-down installations, where it looks like the guests are on the ceiling or floating in the space, are very popular. Or an interactive element like a swing or seesaw—even a bathtub.” ●

## Under the Influence

Designers share their design inspiration

“I attend the furniture markets twice a year to check out incoming trends. Just last week I was walking through my neighborhood and saw some incredible tables that would be cool for an event, so we built some and added them to our inventory.”  
—Rheana Coon, To Be Designed

“We have seen a lot of iridescent and crystal themes, which are coming from fashion and the popularity of unicorns—yes, unicorns—which bring rainbows and iridescent colors. We’re using actual crystals, as well as polygonal shapes that mimic the outlines of crystals. This same trend has also morphed into an oil-slick look. When it comes to pop culture, the Kardashians have had an effect on the event world. Thanks to their baby showers, balloon installations have become huge—balloon-filled rooms are trending everywhere.”

—William Fogler, WM Events

“Millennials have had a huge impact on my design lately. Not only are they a powerful audience, but they value experiences over things, which is what events are leaning towards—creating an experience. They are influencing me to create more interactive, fun, live experiences for everyone to enjoy.”  
—Haleema Linares, Sktch Events

“Interior design elements are having a moment in event design. Wallpaper has become a huge trend, and we have incorporated it into several elements—on walls and panels for the stage or on a bar front. It can be an inexpensive way to give a custom element in the overall design scheme.”  
—Devynn Smith, Edge Design and Decor

## RESOURCES

**BE EVENTS**  
beeeventsdesign.com

**EDGE DESIGN AND DECOR**  
edgedesigndecor.com

**SKTCH EVENTS**  
sktchevents.com

**TO BE DESIGNED**  
tbdsandiego.com

**WM EVENTS**  
wmevents.com


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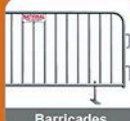
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## THE LAST WORD



# She's Got Game

**The gaming business brought Pam Howatt into events, and now she has a winning hand.**

### I WISH I'D LEARNED

**SOONER:** "I have learned to say 'no' when a project is not right for us financially or to protect our brand."

### WHY I LOVE SPECIAL

**EVENTS:** "I love working with our client as a partner to make each event easier for them, make their event special, and make our corporate clients heroes in their company and with their end clients."

### WHO MATTERS:

"My entrepreneurial career has been full of wonderful people that have inspired me. [Catersource founder] Mike Roman was the first in my catering career. I follow many others in the industry that inspire me to be more creative and deliver amazing customer service."

### THE GOOD, THE BAD:

"As founder and owner, my best skill is my passion for creating amazing events and building client relationships. I need to be better at social media marketing and keeping up to date on that technology."

**Pam Howatt found** her heart when she found the world of events.

After earning her degree in business administration, she worked for an international manufacturer of gaming equipment. Her role as director of marketing saw her planning the firm's trade shows and client events all over the world. "This is where my love of events began," she says.

In 2005, she took the plunge, purchasing a catering and events firm. Today, she oversees three operations: Divine Events, Divine Cafe at the Springs Preserve cultural site, and Proprietor's Reserve, her new 4,000-square-foot private event space. Together, the three operations—all in Las Vegas—produce more than 1,500 events a year.

Howatt is excited about Proprietor's Reserve, which opened in July. The venue offers an "elevated meeting experience," providing business services but in an upscale setting. "We are developing fabulous menus and different levels of service to meet that experience," she says.

Indeed, offering fabulous food is becoming increasingly important in the event world, she notes. "The early years were all about theming an event and the entertainment," she says. But today, "We see so much more emphasis on the experience surrounding food and beverages now, personalizing with interactive stations and craft bars."

The trend toward increased personalization is also affecting who is invited to attend special events. "In my early career, it was all about

entertaining the masses—companies were out to splash their name to a large group of people, always trying to top the last event," Howatt recalls. But today, "We see the dollars being spent on specific clients, personalizing the experience and focusing on the experience for the target audience."

And today, those budget dollars are under client scrutiny. "Budgets per person were much higher when we started," she says. "Now, even the largest clients are budget-focused."

Another challenge facing the event business today, Howatt says, is attracting young people to lead the industry forward. "We need to develop careers for our young teams and create paths for them to see progression," she explains. "We were named to Leading Caterers of America a couple of years ago, which is helping us develop career paths for our team."

Another way that Howatt is helping to support her industry is by serving as an Ambassador for The Special Event 2020. In a first, The Special Event will co-locate with powerhouse conference Catersource, with both shows running March 9-12 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas.

"I am really excited to be part of the combination of the two shows," Howatt says. "They have both inspired me and educated me over the years, so I am glad to have an opportunity to give back." ●

**Divine Events** 6380 S. Valley View Blvd., Suite 316, Las Vegas, NV 89118; [divineeventslv.com](http://divineeventslv.com)



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