

**Exclusive: 19th Annual 50 Top Event Companies  
Insider Tips: How to Enter the Gala Awards and Win**

# SPECIAL EVENTS

FALL 2020

## *Event* INNOVATION

**HOTELS FIND NEW SPACES,  
NEW STRATEGIES TO STAGE  
SPECIAL EVENTS**

**MAKING  
VIRTUAL  
FUNDRAISERS  
PAY  
P. 27**

**DELICIOUS  
WHILE  
DISTANCING:  
APPETIZERS  
TODAY  
P. 32**

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Contributing editor **Kelly Rehan** takes a bite out of appetizer menus today.



Our art director, **Cheryl Prats**, splits her time between *Special Events* and a range of design projects, both print and online.

### On With The Show:

**The Special Event + Catersource 2021** runs July 19-22 in Miami Beach. We want you to join in!

We're looking for speakers, exhibitors, sponsors and more. Please visit **[www.thespecialeventshow.com](http://www.thespecialeventshow.com)**. See you in Florida!

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# SPECIAL EVENTS

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## EDITOR'S PAGE

# LOOKING BACK, **LOOKING AHEAD**

**I always knew** that event professionals were ingenious, but the COVID crisis has been the acid test.

This issue is full of examples of how event pros—from caterers to hoteliers to event producers—have faced the crippling blow the pandemic brought our way. We present scores of real-life stories on how they have found ways to cope, to change, and to triumph. I know you will find some valuable strategies to make your own.

That's my look ahead; here is my look back.

My longtime business motto has been: "Don't look back—and don't look down!" But after 21 wonderful years with *Special Events Magazine* and The Special Event, I am stepping back. Our company, Informa, has been gracious enough to offer a departure package to people like me who been around for a ridiculous amount of time, and I am taking it.

From Australia to Austin, the Bahamas to Boston, Dubai to Denver, my tenure at *Special Events* has allowed me to travel to amazing places. I am so grateful for this.

I am even more grateful for the experiences I have had with you all.

I remember our guests walking into the stunning Wedding Luncheon at The Special Event 2004 in Las Vegas and bursting into tears because it was so beautiful. (Thank you, Cheryl Fish.)

And always, always, I am so proud of the *Special Events* Gala Awards. It has been a privilege to watch event professionals take the stage to enjoy the recognition they richly deserve. These moments are engraved on my heart.

I am also grateful for the business owners who shared their stories—good and bad—for our articles and our endless lists: the rental industry, corporate forecast, big DMCs, and so on. When I started at *Special Events*, some big-time business reporters called me out for being unable to quantify the size and scope of our industry. We've made it our goal to remedy that—an initiative that is even more important as our industry fights to prove it deserves COVID relief.

The *Special Events* brand will be in good hands with my colleague Kathleen Stoehr of *Catersource* taking the reins. And you had better promise me you will be at The Special Event + *Catersource* 2021 in Miami Beach in July.

Thank you for opening my eyes to how beautiful, exciting and powerful special events can be.

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# CONFETTI



**Lighting up the night:** Fireworks light up the sky (top, photo by Ihsan Salhia/TG Media Productions); the main dinner show, an Arabic dancer; and a photo op at the entrance (lower row, left to right; photos by Elmer Amurao Magallanes / EAM Production Photo and Video Services).



## Big Drama in Dubai

**The team from EventWorks overcomes a wide range of challenges to produce a stunning incentive.**

**Big-time incentive** events require top-end production values, stunning settings, and exciting entertainment as givens. But what happens when the event must also not only meld clashing cultures, but reconfigure every event element thanks to weather weirdness? The team from EventWorks met this challenge and won.

The massive event, held over eight days in January, brought more than 10,000 guests from Amway China to Dubai for another of the company’s landmark incentive events. These guests are VIPs: “China is the largest market for Amway,” explains EventWorks CEO Ted Bowers. “Their annual sales

top \$2 billion, and the company has over 1.5 million distributors throughout the country. It is considered a top honor to be invited to the annual reward event.”

The 2020 program was a series of identical events for more than 10,000 guests in eight waves. The climax: the final night gala themed to “Arabian Nights.” ▶





**Event innovation:** PyroDrones spell out client name 'Amway' next to the iconic Burj al Arab. Photo by Elmer Amurao Magallanes / EAM Production Photo and Video Service.

As guests arrived at the outdoor event, they were treated to *ayallah* dancers and photo ops, including a “flying carpet,” henna tattoo stations, and levitating performers. The main stage and four satellite stages allowed for nonstop entertainment during dinner, followed by a 45-minute show featuring a performer singing a Lady Gaga song in both English and Mandarin, so that the guests could sing along. After performances by LED belly dancers and fire dancers, the evening concluded with fireworks and PyroDrones spelling out “Amway” beside Dubai’s iconic Burj al Arab.

But .... The “outdoor event” quickly pivoted to “indoor event” for nights three through six, when epic rains forced the team to move the production to the nearby Madinat Arena. “Since everything moved indoors, we created a new blueprint,” Bowers says. “We had to combine all entertainment into one space. All media had to be reprogrammed. All the show elements had to be adapted for a smaller stage. Thankfully, our local producer and crew were nothing short of amazing. We all worked around the clock to get this done in time.”

And the challenges just kept on coming. Once the skies cleared, the client asked for the show to move *back* outdoors. The EventWorks team complied—including repairing the huge dinner tent damaged by the storm—to stage the final two nights outdoors in the original setup.

Dramatic Dubai—with its stunning architecture, huge shopping malls, and beautiful beaches—made for a striking setting for the 25th anniversary of Amway China. But the EventWorks team had to navigate some complex cultural clashes.

For example, “Chinese audiences love magic, but this posed another challenge, as magic is considered evil in Arabic culture,” Bowers explains. “Thankfully, through [the TV program] ‘Arabs Got Talent,’ we found a champion magician who delivered the main stage show.” The singer who performed in both English and Mandarin was from India, passing as Middle Eastern. EventWorks provided a vocal coach, who spent three months teaching her songs in Mandarin. EventWorks co-founder Janet Elkins says. “It was also terrific working in a country comprised mostly of immigrants: Brits, South Africans, Indians, Pakistanis, Ethiopians and a few local Emiratis as well,” she adds. “How wonderful it was to experience how everyone respects each other.”

**PLANNING PERFECTION** A full year’s worth of work went into the planning the event, with the L.A.-based EventWorks team bouncing between China and Dubai to nail down details and monitor progress.

The rapport between client and event team is a solid one. “Our 12-year-long friendship is based on mutual trust,” Bowers says. “The repeated collaborations allowed us to develop a strong relationship, based on the fact that we deliver on our promises. We always invest in a lot of research to develop new concepts that address the taste of Chinese guests, the client’s purpose, and the iconic value of the location.”

“We are incredibly proud of our teams in Los Angeles and in Dubai, who overcame cultural and linguistic differences, time zones, and fatigue for months,” he adds. “Everyone brought 100 percent of their energy, skill and enthusiasm to this assignment. No one ever said ‘no’ to any of the last-minute changes. Everyone met the challenges.” ●

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**EventWorks** 340 W. 131st St., Los Angeles CA 90061; 323/321-1793; [info@eventworks.com](mailto:info@eventworks.com); [eventworks.com](http://eventworks.com)



**Big thanks:** Debbie Meyers-Shock, CSEP, tries to curb her enthusiasm after winning a Gala Award at The Special Event 2020 as Patrick Peel looks on. Photo courtesy WASIO.

# 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 Special Events Staff***

**Now in its 36th year,** the 2021 *Special Events* Gala Awards competition honors the finest work in special events worldwide.

And in more good news: This year, you can enter the Catersource 2021 Ace Awards in the same online portal as the Gala Awards. Catersource and The Special Event will co-locate in 2021, running July 19-22 in Miami Beach at the Miami Beach Convention Center. Both the Gala and ACE Awards will be presented on July 22.

**WHAT WINS?** In the words of one judge for the Gala Awards, “Galas are the time to raise the bar.” So, what qualities elevate an entry to award-winning status? Veteran judges of the annual Gala Awards competition—

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 states, “I believe it is critical to follow the instructions as the bottom line for an entry—that way, everyone starts out on an even 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 a long way in furthering 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, not precise enough to sell the event.”

“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.”

You can make only one first impression. 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 that are 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 the description.

### 4 LET TRUTH BE TOLD.

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

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 has to be able to be duplicated exactly with the budget that's given,” according to 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 strictly 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.” After seeing the same entry in more than one category, judges begin to skim the now-familiar material, and consequently lose the full impact of the event. Therefore, they might deduct points if the submission does not address the specific category in which the event is competing. To impress the Gala judges, take the time to tailor your entry to its individual category.

### 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.

Find all the details about categories, how to enter, and deadlines on our website: [www.specialevents.com/gala-awards](http://www.specialevents.com/gala-awards) ●

19<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL

SPECIAL EVENTS

# 50 TOP EVENT COMPANIES

Though the COVID crisis has packed a punch, these big companies have been nimble, finding solutions to deliver events with impact.

Edited by Lisa Hurley

Once again, *Special Events Magazine* profiles the biggest players in event development and production. The challenge this year: how to forecast the future when no one could have predicted we would be where we are right now. But these companies could not have grown to the stature they have without meeting challenges—read about their smart strategies here:

## AgencyEA

Chicago

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Gabrielle Martinez, Fergus Rooney

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 40

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$25 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** “The year 2020 has seen an evolution of service offerings to include more opportunities to provide virtual and hybrid events and experiences for our clients,” management says. “In tandem with this shift, Agency EA is launching two new service offerings in early fall 2020. The first will focus on a high demand from clients for content development by offering studio-broadcast production complete with a full-service green-screen studio and webinar production services. The second will be

brand consultancy focused on strategy, design and message development for new and existing clients.” The team has stayed busy with the Target national stores meeting, Salesforce Cloud 100, Samsung NEXT, and the Obama Foundation Summit.

**TOP TRENDS** “The global pandemic has accelerated the shift to virtual,” management says. “Post-pandemic, this shift will remain a part of the experiential and live event landscape, with all future events including a virtual component. In this new ‘hybrid future,’ brand reach and audience size will become much broader. Marketers will create experiences that target more people than ever; capturing and holding attendee attention will be the new metric for success. Brands and their agency partners will innovate constantly and evolve experiential in this new direction at a rapid pace.”

## Allied Experiential

New York

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Matthew Glass

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 500

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$26 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The Allied Experiential team has continued to build its partnerships with multiple divisions of Amazon; producing a large-scale event for P&G during the Super Bowl; a launch event for Lady Gaga's beauty brand, Haus; an immersive tea party to promote Focus Features' "Downton Abbey" film; and an Amazon Alexa Smart House pop-up in New York. The team also activated events for Hulu, Audible, WeTV, Circle K, Two Lane Beer (with singer Luke Bryan), and HBO. On top of all that, the team increased its staff by 30 percent and moved into a new office and warehouse space in Los Angeles to accommodate growing client programs.

**TOP TRENDS** "While 2020 has been challenging for the industry, Allied Experiential has successfully transitioned from in-person events to live, online events, re-imagining existing tours and events, and translating them to virtual experiences like live streams, micro-sites, and other online programs," management says.

## Ashfield Meetings and Events/ Spark Thinking

Fort Washington, Pa.

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

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Gavin Houston

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 500 to 700

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$120 million to \$150 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** "This extraordinary year has tested our clients, suppliers and teams like no other," management says. "While an unprecedented number of meetings, live events and congresses were postponed or cancelled, many clients took the decision to pivot to virtual or hybrid meetings, and our teams responded exceptionally. Impactful and effective virtual meetings have been the outcome for many clients, and we've inevitably seen this area of our business grow exponentially."

**TOP TRENDS** Look ahead to the "blend": "In a post-COVID, pre-vaccine landscape, the future will be about providing attendees with choice: those who want to attend in person, versus those who have got used to virtual alternatives and prefer their convenience," Ashfield says. "We see the industry looking to a blended approach—a combination of virtual experiences that complement or supplement live, face-to-face events." Because safety and health will be essential concerns, "Ongoing training alongside well-being support and initiatives will be paramount to success."

## Balich Worldwide Shows

Milan

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Stefano Core

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 8 to 10

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$60 million to \$70 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The global pandemic

prompted Balich to reconfigure itself into four entertainment business units: institutional ceremonies, events, immersive shows, and special projects, which include interactive icons such as the "Tree of Life"—the icon of Expo Milan.

**TOP TRENDS** The Balich team believes the COVID crisis has underscored a trend already on the way: the need to amplify live events with digitization. "Now we have realized that events must be natively designed for greater digital diffusion," management says. "For this reason, we are evaluating acquisitions and partnerships with companies in this sector."

## Bellwether Corp.

Tempe, Ariz.

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Jeffrey Dixon, Alan Edwards

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 7 to 9

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$8 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** During the first week of March, Bellwether worked to pivot the 2020 Workday sales kickoff to a virtual event in only four days' time. "The event had originally planned to bring together 3,000-plus attendees in Orlando, Fla.," management says. "Instead, a webcast was produced from the client's headquarters in California, with large success."

**TOP TRENDS** "With the shift to virtual, presentations are getting shorter, videos are becoming more engaging, and we are seeing an inclusion of videos and interstitials used for sponsorship opportunities in place of expo booths and signage," they say. "It demands a strategic mix of live-streamed presentations and prerecorded videos being pushed out to the live audience."

## Blue Danube Productions

Seattle

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Niki McKay

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 100

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$1.5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** How things change: From 2019, when the team created a "tasteful adult fetish" party for a corporate client, 2020 has seen Blue Danube switch to virtual platforms. "We launched our own streaming platform to allow our clients an elevated, secure option for their creativity," they say. "The virtual shift has allowed for so many different concepts to be discovered and explored."

**TOP TRENDS** "2020 has forced us to redefine what an event looks like," leader Niki McKay says. "Moving to the virtual world has opened doors to new ideas, thoughts and innovation that, in my opinion, wouldn't have happened otherwise. While we are still at the beginning of this journey, it's exciting to be pioneers in forging ahead."

## Broadstreet

New York

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Mark Baltazar

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 510

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$12.7 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** "Broadstreet became the go-to company for virtual meetings for a dozen companies across five industries," management says

with pride. “While supporting flawless execution and best practices from a production standpoint, clients turned to us for our insights on creating engagement with audiences and our approach to communications in a world that changed daily.”

**TOP TRENDS** “We won’t be the only ones to say it, but we are working hard to discover or create ways for people to come together without the distraction, fear and concern for their well-being while celebrating and communicating with friends, colleagues and customers,” company head Mark Baltazar says. “The second biggest trend in these times is survival. I say to people that if your business ends the year at zero, you’re ahead of the game.”

## **Bucom International**

**Chicago**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Darlene Krammer

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 25 to 30

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$5 million to \$10 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Celebrating 33 years in business, the team strives to offer new solutions for clients.

**TOP TRENDS** The need to be nimble: “We have worked hard with our clients to renegotiate contracts and reschedule meetings to future dates,” management says, “as well as move face-to-face meetings to virtual and hybrid solutions.”

## **Cerbelli Creative**

**New York**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Michael Cerbelli

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 80 to 100

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$3 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The team points with pride to its “Under the Big Top” event, produced for the last 16 years for legacy client SL Green Realty Corp. “For their 28th annual Green Deal Awards 2019, we transformed Cipriani 42nd Street into a mesmerizing, classic New York City circus experience,” management says. “Everything down to the cart umbrellas was personalized to our client’s colors—blue and yellow.”

**TOP TRENDS** After seeing live events collapse in March, “As of today, the Cerbelli team has created over 60 virtual experiences and is expecting to go to the end of the year and into the spring erasing the word ‘pivoting’ from our vocabulary and changing that to ‘optimism,’” Michael Cerbelli says, “creating new offerings and expecting to do over 200 virtual moments.”

## **Corporate Magic**

**Richardson, Texas**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jim Kirk

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 15 to 20

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$25 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Bridgestone and Firestone have been added to the roster of Corporate Magic clients, while the team continued producing events for Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices, Mazda, and Sherwin-Williams, among others. A highlight of the past year: Corporate Magic’s live broadcast

production of Ellie Goulding’s Thanksgiving halftime-show performance at AT&T Stadium for the Dallas Cowboys on CBS.

**TOP TRENDS** “There is no doubt that the onset of COVID-19 caused a significant disruption in the event industry. However, with every difficulty comes new hope in the form of innovation,” says chief operating officer Jeff Kirk. “We have found opportunities with new clients through our virtual events. While the return of in-person meetings continues to be our desire, virtual solutions will remain a part of our future repertoire.”

## **CWT Meetings and Events**

**Minnetonka, Minn.**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Kurt Ekert

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 685

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$25 million to \$30 million (*Special Events* estimate)

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Highlights of the past year have included managing travel for the 2019 Rugby World Cup. “Even though Typhoon Hagibis struck, we ensured all attendees were safe by working in conjunction with our business travel team and demonstrated the unique value of working with CWT,” management says with pride. Also, the team “planned a unique conference for a client in which we revolutionized their trade show by incorporating environmentally friendly elements, such as 100 percent recycled cardboard and charging furniture. Additionally, we used entertainment to create excitement around their event theme and destination of Nashville [Tenn.]. As one example, the welcome gala included entertainment that slowly grew from a lone fiddler onstage to finally 12 fiddlers, six dancers and a full band.”

**TOP TRENDS** CWT is focusing on four big trends for 2020 and beyond: digitalization; responsible business practices (such as stressing sustainability, diversity and inclusion); meeting the expectations of Gen Z (by focusing on the “participant” versus the “attendee” and using dating-style apps); and travel safety (properly managing programs to stress attendee care and client needs).

## **E=MC<sup>2</sup>**

**Calgary, Alberta**

[www.emc2events.com](http://www.emc2events.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jocelyn Flanagan

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 60

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$8 million to \$10 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This year’s event roster has included LGI Homes Awards, a Bayer incentive trip to Spain, Oxford Properties Global Leadership event, Canadian Screen Awards, marketing campaigns for regional business associations, and nationwide scavenger hunts to promote local economies.

**TOP TRENDS** No secret here: Hybrid and virtual events are the major trend. “We are working on very creative and interactive drive- and walk-through events for graduation and corporate holiday celebrations,” they say.

## **Elite Productions International**

**Laguna Niguel, Calif.**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Lili Shadab

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 10 to 15

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$2 million to \$3 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The team at Elite Productions International designed and produced an intimate birthday celebration for a local billionaire. “From captivating coastal views to a private performance by Kenny Loggins, guests were treated to truly incredible experience,” they say.

**TOP TRENDS** “Keeping guests and client engagement during this time of technology-driven trends is definitely a part of our challenge now,” says CEO Lili Shadab. “We find bringing in entertainment, games and technology-driven activities is the key in keeping guests interested, involved and engaged. There needs to be much more interest incorporated into a program, and we are continuously updating our findings so that we can stay on top of the game.”

## Enterprise Events Group

San Rafael, Calif.

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Richard Calcaterra, Matthew Gillam

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 80 to 100

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$40 million to \$50 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** EEG changed up its plan to produce the Planful Virtual Tour in May. “This was set to be an in-person road show taking place throughout spring 2020,” management explains. “But when the industry was forced to pivot to virtual events in March, EEG quickly launched this virtual tour instead to reach over 600 attendees.”

**TOP TRENDS** “Within the new virtual landscape, EEG is at the forefront of creative innovations to engage a virtual audience,” management says, with “gamification-led ‘swag stores’ with redeemable points for attending sessions or meeting sponsors, and a meeting ‘pulse’ tool to let the audience share in real time how they feel.”

## Entire Productions

San Francisco

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Natasha Miller

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 400

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Highlights over the past year have included “numerous” virtual event and entertainment productions with “the addition of our new marketing division, which provides premium branded items and gifts—a perfect addition for our clients’ needs for special events, both in-person and virtual,” management says. “Since pivoting to virtual events, we’ve been able to work with our core clients but are also being given the opportunity to work with other companies from all over the world.”

**TOP TRENDS** “The current trends in events right now are shorter, faster-paced segments that are packed with good content and no fluff,” Entire management says. “Entertainment segments to break up long virtual summits and conferences have proven to be a lifeline for people’s attention. Our industry has to

work even harder and smarter to gain the respect and focus of attendees at virtual events, which is leading to a wave of creative thinking that is very exciting to be a part of.”

## Event Lab

Minneapolis

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jack Noble

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 100 to 150

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$2 million to \$3 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** During the pre-pandemic days, “Our team was having fun managing several large events for our customers in the medical field at Minneapolis’ largest sports venues, including Target Field and U.S. Bank Stadium,” management says.

**TOP TRENDS** “The trend for 2020 is virtual events and smaller gatherings where attendees can feel safe from the dangers of COVID-19,” management explains. “These can include decorative backdrops and comfortable lounge furniture that is large enough for social distancing.”

## Eventum Premo

Moscow

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Alexey Berlov,

Alexander Shumovich

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 55

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$7 million to \$9 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The Eventum team launched its own platform—Zeen—for digital and online events. “One of the projects took place in 25 countries at once, with simultaneous translation into 10 languages and studio construction for online broadcasting in Toronto, Riga, Kiev and Moscow,” they note. Another project—the X Conference—showcased new products from Xiaomi Russia; here, employees, bloggers and end-users helped showcase the new products, resulting in 2 million views, with more still coming in.

**TOP TRENDS** The Eventum team agrees that “events will no longer be the same as before. And even when the world will recover, there will be a huge demand for hybrid events, with a small ratio of offline, but online mostly.” They add, “The good thing is that people feel the value of events in their lives again. Most of the events that have been postponed before will be even more anticipated now.”

## EventWorks

Los Angeles

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Ted Bowers, Alisa Walsh

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 50

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$7.5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** A highlight of the past year was an incentive staged in Dubai for 10,000 guests in eight waves for Amway China. “In the midst of the series, Dubai was hit by a record-breaking storm,” management says. “EventWorks and its local team managed to change locations and reset the entire gala twice within hours. This feat required redesigning the blueprint and reprogramming all show elements,

moving from outdoors to indoors and back.” See the full story on pages 7-8 in this issue.

**TOP TRENDS** The year 2021 “will be about solutions, ensuring safety and liability issues are solved while creating real human connections,” management says. “EventWorks has adapted all procedures to address the new conditions. Medical experts are now part of the planning and on-site team. Vendor contracts include strict safety protocols for all team members, as well as flexible cancellation and postponement policies. EW has a proven track record of pioneering successful event technology, including 3-D lifelike 360-degree hologram projections and pre-produced immersive virtual experiences.”

## Filmmaster Events

### Milan

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Matteo Coradini, Andrea Francis

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 45

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$44 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The event roster in the last 12 months has included the opening ceremonies of the Conmebol Libertadores football cup in Lima and the Arabian Gulf Cup in Doha, as well as the world premiere of Nikola TRE, the first zero-emission truck by CNH Industrial and Nikola Motor Co. The company notes the “remarkable” special events it has produced in the Middle East, including the Camel Festival and Vietnamese Cultural Week, both in Saudi Arabia, and the Government Games in the UAE.

**TOP TRENDS** “The trend will be getting back to creating unique and spectacular events,” management says. “Partnerships with digital providers are important, but we firmly believe in the power of events and in the human factor. For this reason, we have chosen not to bend our creative intelligence to a single technology and to continue investing in editorial content, innovative formats and, overall, in events designed to cater to emotions and recall memories. We stated this firmly in our 2020 manifesto #webelieveinhumanity.”

## FIRST Global Events Agency

### New York

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Maureen Ryan Fable

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 250 plus

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$20 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The year has brought a mix of live and virtual events from FIRST. Mastercard SMART was a two-day live event in Seattle, featuring a custom in-the-round stage and seating design that connected attendees from all angles of the ballroom. The virtual upfront for Univision was streamed live to 3,200 simultaneous viewers. FIRST worked within local health and safety guidelines to virtually coach speakers, produce segments in broadcast studio environments, and create a powerful, high-production show. The result: Univision doubled past attendance and delivered positive media in Forbes, Variety and Adweek. The team also produced a digital series for Netflix across three days, in three different locations and three different languages.

**TOP TRENDS** FIRST forecasts that hybrid events will include a combination of multi-location live and virtual

audiences for the same experience. “For in-person audiences, creative safe spaces will be re-imagined with spatial design and hyper-focused safety planning,” they say. “To connect all attendees, integrated tech will break down walls and create enhanced experiences with the goal of curating a holistic experience that connects all attendees at every level.”

## George P. Johnson Experience Marketing

### Auburn Hills, Mich.

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Chris Meyer

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 1,500 to 2,500  
(*Special Events* estimate)

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$305 million to \$675 million  
(*Special Events* estimate)

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** “Since March, we’ve been guiding and advising our clients as 100 percent of their events have gone online, sometimes with as little as a few weeks to execute,” management says. “With a tiger team of strategists, experience designers, producers, content creators and live broadcast specialists, we’re helping our clients take advantage of the opportunities they have with all-virtual events until we can meet safely again in person. At the same time, GPJ co-founded a coalition of agency partners to put our fabrication and logistical expertise to work to fight the virus and to put our industry to work for the greater good. The LiveForLife coalition is 200-plus partners strong, with brands that are usually competitors working together to form a network of providers across the country that can build and deploy temporary structures like testing and vaccination sites, as well as provide PPE, signage and logistical structure for employees to return to work.”

**TOP TRENDS** The good: “Brands are recognizing the power of strategic, immersive digital experiences, as well as the broadened audience that can be acquired through sharing live and captured digital content from the event,” they say. The bad: “Many clients are still struggling with captivating digital experiences as well as integrating their event data insights into their other marketing channels.”

## Go West Creative

### Nashville, Tenn.

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** David Fischette

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 70

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$6.5 million to \$8 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Ahead of the curve: “Go West has fortunately been producing virtual meetings for companies since 1999,” management says. “From satellite to webcasts, we have the tools and experience. So in response to CV-19, we immediately pivoted all of our efforts towards the virtual production space, including making substantial investments in additional broadcast studios.”

**TOP TRENDS** The Go West management team is blunt: “Virtual. Really there is nothing else. And when events come back, it will be hybrid. Virtual is here to stay, and it will forever be a part of the event industry. The good news is that we are creative, and creative solutions are necessary now more than ever. Our



clients need our expertise to guide them into a new world of audience engagement and communication.”

## Hargrove

Lanham, Md.

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Tara Higgins

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 350

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$60 million to \$75 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The last 12 months have been busy for this veteran event producer, including a parade in Washington to help the Nationals celebrate their World Series win, the lighting of the National Christmas Tree, events for the premiere of the Netflix show “6 Underground,” and the production of the SAMCOM annual sales and marketing conference for Anheuser-Busch. A highlight: the third consecutive partnership with the Democratic National Committee to produce the hybrid Democratic National Convention in August.

**TOP TRENDS** No surprises here: “Obviously, the most prevalent trend is the move from live events to those that are virtual,” management says. “As the industry works toward the return of face-to-face events, be they hybrid or 100 percent live, what is critical for success is the adherence to new safety standards. Hargrove is actively working with our clients to guarantee that we all #MeetSAFE, making guidelines readily available and working to design and produce events that are safe and engaging.”

## iMARS Communications

Moscow

[www.imars.ru/eng](http://www.imars.ru/eng)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Vladimir Stupnikov

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 40 to 60

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$5 million to \$7 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The iMARS Communications team has been active in international projects in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America for clients in various spheres: oil and gas, atomic energy, transport and logistics, tourism, consumer packaged goods, and jewelry. The highlight: International PR Week 2020, they say.

**TOP TRENDS** “Previously, 80 percent of offline events accounted for only 20 percent online,” management says. But due to the COVID crisis, “Now total online events are 100 percent. In the aftermath of the pandemic, many updated communication methods are expected to be in demand, due to a completely new consumer mind-set after the ‘home’ lifestyle.”

## Index

Bangkok

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Kreirngkarn Kanjanapokin, Kreirngkrai Kanjanapokin

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 30

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$30 million to \$36 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The COVID crisis hit the Thailand market hard in February, leading clients to decrease marketing and promotion budgets, Index management reports. However, a pivot to virtual and

hybrid events is starting to pay off, with the team at work on new projects.

**TOP TRENDS** Event producers will have to adhere to regulations, such as social distancing, to produce in-person events. As a result, virtual and hybrid events are coming to the fore, management says.

## InVision Communications

San Francisco

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Rod Mickels

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 70 plus

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$52 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Get ready to change: Over the past 12 months, the InVision team pivoted from live to digital for the DocuSign Global sales kickoff, ServiceNow Knowledge20, Veritas Sales Leadership Summit 2020, RMS Exceedance 2020, and Atlassian Summit 2020. But live events still have been in the mix: Genentech NFM 2020, Dell FRS 2020, Sherwin Williams National Sales Meeting Midwest 2020, Amway Achievers 2019, Oracle OpenWorld 2019, Gartner Symposium 2019, Arm TechCon 2019, Microsoft Ready 2020, Siemens Converge 2019, Box BoxWorks19, and the Nutanix NEXT Conference Copenhagen 2019.

**TOP TRENDS** “We see innovations beyond the virtual event,” InVision says. “This includes unexpected engagement tactics and additional channels for communications before, during and after the event, which we call ‘campaigns.’ There will also be a complete rethink in the design and purpose of virtual events.” The event industry should also focus on major social trends: “An exciting focus for all brands moving forward is diversity, equity and inclusion. We are helping clients execute on this strategy—from audience acquisition to speaker selection and calls for papers to panelists and even designing breakout sessions—to ensure equity and inclusion for all learning styles.”

## INVNT

New York

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Kristina McCoobery

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 220 plus

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$66 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The event roster over the last year has included the GMC Yukon debut, Cadillac Escalade launch, Samsung Unpacked, SAP Adaptive Strategies in a Changed World Forum, SHRM Tune in Tuesdays, and the Cadillac LYRIQ debut.

**TOP TRENDS** INVNT management points to four big trends at play today: the need to “reassess the story,” as consumers will be looking for different values from brands in the wake of the pandemic; medium specificity (“The content needs to be tightened way, way up, multiple environments rather than one set design are a must, and cut-always to vibrant animations, bold graphics, and prerecorded bursts of content are key for ongoing audience engagement”); interactivity (“We’re all craving face-to-face interactions, and we’re seeing the most successful live virtual experiences are those that enable networking, provide attendees with curated physical kits that enhance their in-home virtual viewing experience, feature elements like live Q&A functionalities, and more”); and the rise of “phygital”—the combination of physical and digital

components. “We anticipate we’ll see smaller satellite events become the norm, and they’ll be complemented by sophisticated tech solutions that allow a large majority of attendees to tune in virtually—a powerful amplification tool.”

**Jack Morton Worldwide**

**Boston**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Josh McCall

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 1,000 to 1,250

(*Special Events* estimate)

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$147 million to \$212 million (*Special Events* estimate)

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Though the COVID crisis has felled some agencies, the Jack Morton team points to plenty of wins over the last year: “In 2019, we closed several global AOR [agency of record] wins, including Jameson and Lenovo. We continued to create more brand experiences for Google than any other agency, and we were selected to create Facebook’s largest public-facing brand activation of the year at Cannes.” Further, “Reebok, Charmin, L.L.Bean, Staples, Netflix, Subway, EY and more all looked to Jack to create major brand experiences for them in the last year.”

**TOP TRENDS** The Jack Morton team takes a nuanced approach to the online event experience. “Virtual experiences might be how we connect today, but it’s short term,” management says. “Brands must be ready to reimagine physical interactions but keep digital rolling. They’ll need to re-architect their experience portfolio to mirror the slow curve back up to social closeness.” Further, “In the post-pandemic world, experiences won’t look the same. And audiences will respond to them differently—prioritizing the ones they love. Those with purpose, that deliver on the promises they promote, will win.”

**JJ | LA**

**Los Angeles**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jeff Consoletti

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 40 to 60

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$5 million to \$7 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This year’s event roster has included OUTLOUD: Raising Voices Series for Facebook; Equality California: Golden State Equality Awards; Point Foundation’s Point U. Campus and Honors Hall; Destination Crenshaw Launch; St. John’s Hospital Foundation event; and Sundance Film Festival activations for Quibi, Hulu and OUTFEST.

**TOP TRENDS** The JJ|LA team is working through the current crisis while planning for better days: “The pandemic has forced us all to look at meaningful ways to produce events digitally and virtually. We have worked with clients to create unique experiences that stand out and are memorable, despite guests engaging with content solely online. In the meantime, we are already working on ensuring events can return safely once the health crisis is under control.”

**LEO Events**

**Memphis, Tenn.**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Cindy Brewer

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 75 to 100

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$17 million to \$19 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The year 2020 kicked off with LEO producing Hilton’s All Suites Leadership Conference and Kowa’s National Sales Meeting. Taking a digital turn with the onset of COVID-19, LEO released its virtual platform with “robust” virtual and hybrid event production capabilities, they say. Additionally, the team built an in-house LEO Studio to streamline digital broadcasting and production efforts. “Since then, the team has successfully executed programs like AutoZone’s Virtual Vendor Summit and Acquia’s ‘Experience Online’ series,” management reports.

**TOP TRENDS** “Purpose, partner and platform are the leading factors influencing the event marketplace in today’s digital landscape,” LEO management says. “Now more than ever, planners are gauging the value of particular events, and then designing event elements so that attendees find the connection they’re seeking. And as always, the best events are products of collaboration between trusted partners—regardless of time, place or space.”

**Linkviva**

**Dubai**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Alexander Bendious

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 50 to 100

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$22 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The team points with pride to its work on the 25th anniversary celebration of the Dubai Shopping Festival. The event was launched by a showstopping grand opening under the iconic Burj Khalifa that featured A-list performances including Algerian-born superstar Khaled and One Direction’s Liam Payne. The event, which attracted some 30,000 guests over two days, featured a interactive stage that wrapped around the entire festival park. Linkviva also delivered the Dubai Fitness Challenge, which drew more than 1.1 million people over a 30-day period.

**Live Marketing**

**Chicago**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Anne Trompeter

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 10 to 15

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$10 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** “With events of all kinds shifting to virtual and hybrid formats, we’re helping clients audit their plans and develop a digital playbook to guide their decision-making process, planning digital engagement and communication strategies and tactics to achieve their goals,” says Anne Trompeter, executive creative strategist. “Our team has created digital event hub microsites, enhanced multi-day webinar experiences, virtual hands-on product training, and more—focusing on fresh strategies to engage, educate and excite audiences wherever they meet to drive results.”

**TOP TRENDS** “One of the biggest challenges remains telling a compelling story so it translates to audiences, no matter where they are or the delivery format,” management says. “Combining the right tech

platforms, audience acquisition and engagement strategies with strategic storytelling makes the message 'sticky' and makes for a memorable experience that lasts long after any virtual, hybrid or face-to-face event is over."

## Next Group

Milan, Rome

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Marco Jannarelli

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 30 to 50

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$15 million to \$20 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Highlights of the past 12 months include Ferrari Universe, the first exhibition dedicated to the world of Ferrari in its historic headquarters, with the chance for clients, dealers and enthusiasts to take guided tours; the digital launch of Milan City Studios, a new area dedicated to events, cinema and digital production (an initiative in which Next Group is a partner); and a digital launch event, broadcast live in 15 languages from Beauvais, France, to present the new Massey Ferguson tractor to international press, dealers and customers.

**TOP TRENDS** "The role of the agency has changed today, and it is about guiding customers towards the use of different languages, taking advantage of all the opportunities offered by digital technologies," management says. "It is indeed the time to design and propose innovative solutions and new hybrid event formats—live and virtual—based on technology and creativity. The objectives remain the same, but the technological evolution changes their execution."

## One Smooth Stone

Chicago

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Mark Ledogar

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 40

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$15 million to \$16 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Highlights of the past year have included the Ace Hardware General Session, held at Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium. "The largest challenge faced by the team was making the 71,000-seat stadium feel 'intimate,' accomplished by designing the environment to seat retailers in the end-zone and framing the stage with three large LED screens, complemented by the venue's massive digital displays," management says. For a global management consulting firm whose in-person event was canceled due to COVID, in only five weeks OSS developed a program that aired live for a global audience of 1,200, spanning time zones in nearly every continent. Live presentations from leadership were presented globally, complemented by regional programming and networking sessions that ranged from coffee with leadership to group Peloton rides to activities for the children of partners. OSS is a division of DMC giant PRA.

**TOP TRENDS** In-person events will never be the same: The future holds "the pivot to digital engagements and the need to approach all future in-person events as multi-model/hybrid experiences," management says.

## On Stage Hong Kong Production and Consultant

Hong Kong

[www.onstage.com.hk](http://www.onstage.com.hk)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Billy Chu

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 50 to 60

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$3.5 million to \$4.5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Highlights of the year have included a dinner in Phnom Penh with Asian superstars, the installation ceremony of Rotary International District 3450 in Hong Kong, as well as plenty of online and virtual events for as many as 20,000 attendees.

**TOP TRENDS** All partners in the industry must commit to hybrid events, management says: "Apart from event agencies, it will be important that hotels, convention centers and all venues around the world have the capabilities to support" hybrid events.

## Opus Agency

Beaverton, Ore.

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Kim Kopetz

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 120

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$60 million to \$75 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This full-service event and experiential collective is "built on the power of connection and a common foundation of integrity," they say. Opus services more than 70 iconic organizations, including Amazon, BMW, Google, Microsoft, SoftBank, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

## Pacific Event Productions/ PEP Creative

San Diego

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** George Duff, Joanne Mera

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 500 to 800 (*Special Events* estimate)

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$6 million to \$10 million (*Special Events* estimate)

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** A highlight for the team was a carnival-theme rehearsal dinner: "Guests were wowed as they experienced hot air balloons, merry-go-rounds and carnival games."

**TOP TRENDS** PEP relies on flexibility to stay afloat. "Navigating the changes that happen daily, weekly and monthly during this pandemic has proven to be the only constant," management says. "PEP's diversity of in-house divisions has given us the ability and adaptability to provide a variety of solutions and new lines for both the virtual event world and as a manufacturer of safety items."

## Party Planners West

Culver City, Calif.

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Patricia K. Ryan

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 25 plus

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$26.5 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.

**Paulette Wolf Events**

**Chicago**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Jodi Wolf

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 35

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$3 million to \$4 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** PWE had been gearing up for a packed calendar with a record-breaking first quarter till the pandemic brought a nearly total shutdown. "In response to the current climate and situation regarding COVID-19, we have designed a phased system for virtual experiences, but this pivot has drastically changed our numbers for 2020," they say.

**TOP TRENDS** Ready, set, change: "We create experiences that engage, excite and enthuse, but we are also nimble and flexible, allowing for last-minute adaptations in response to the current climate and situation regarding COVID-19," management says. Their solution: "We propose celebrations that can be executed in phases as we return to the full potential of our lives, and a remote experience that isn't your typical virtual event."

**Pico Group**

**Hong Kong**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Lawrence Chia

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 152 to 190

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$168 million to \$210 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** A head start: Pico management notes that its early investment in digital capabilities is already paying off. "In just the first half of 2020, Pico's deep expertise in experiential marketing and digital capabilities has been called upon by a number of international brands to deliver online, virtual or hybrid events, including the Fifth Global Virtual Reality Conference for China Mobile's Migu Video Technology; the Ford Ranger launch; the Huawei Developer Conference; the launch of the JD Redmi K30 5G edition smartphone; the 2021 Yonex Newest Technology and Products Trade Show; as well as various online conferences for Alibaba Cloud, Dongfeng Peugeot and Huawei," they say.

**TOP TRENDS** As the event industry begins to show improvement, "Hybrid events will complement virtual ones in meeting the ever-changing demand from -continuously shifting customer behaviors," management predicts.

**Revolution Event Design and Production**

**Baltimore**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Erin Cermak

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 100

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Highlights of the past year have included the "Say Yes to the Prom" tour for TLC; Guinness St. Patrick's Day staged at the Guinness Open Gate Brewery in Baltimore; and the East Coast premiere of the Netflix show "Gentefied."

**TOP TRENDS** "So much about what is in demand now for events has changed, starting with the simple

concept of how to meet safely," management says. "First, it was drive-by events, then it was drive-in events, and now it's virtual or a mix of all of the above. What hasn't changed is our desire and need to be creative. As event professionals, we are now tapping into our creativity more than ever, just in new ways."

**Ruby J Events**

**London, New York**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Joanna Greenfield, Lucie Robins

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 15

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$4 million to \$5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The Ruby J team has been at work on online content such as virtual summits, "whilst continuing to plan for 2021-2022 social events," they say.

**TOP TRENDS** Get creative or get out of the business: "The current climate is pushing the industry to be more creative and innovative with event planning," management says.

**Russell Harris Event Group**

**North Hollywood, Calif.**

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Russell Harris

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 55 to 60

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$6 million to \$8 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** With a client roster that features both domestic and international clients including Disney+, Fox, LinkedIn, Google, Intel, Hyundai, Tinder, auto firms and technology companies, the RHEG team produces both live and virtual meetings, conferences, premieres, internal corporate events, product launches, hospitality events, and incentive programs.

**TOP TRENDS** "Building on our approach from last year in expanding the experiential event, we are taking the idea of the experience itself to a deeper depth to create dynamic virtual experiences that achieve the results that live events were producing," management says. "With the dramatic shift in the industry with the arrival of COVID-19, we've had to be more strategic and creative than ever before. Great virtual entertainment and intriguing content coupled with a myriad of interactive opportunities that enhance the digital experience—the opportunities are boundless. Strategic, well-thought-out approaches that follow through on brand promises and audience expectations are still a must."

**Sequence**

**New York**

[www.sequence-events.com](http://www.sequence-events.com)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Adam Sloyer

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 35 to 45

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$4 million to \$5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** Notable projects over the last year have included BNP Paribas' first-ever Virtual Global Markets Americas Conference—a fully live five-day event—along with signature virtual events for the American Red Cross, Foot Locker Foundation, Licensing International, and Black Women's Health Imperative.

**TOP TRENDS** “Regardless of when in-person events finally return, virtual is here to stay,” management says. “There are inherent benefits for organizations to go virtual or utilize a hybrid model, including reaching a broader audience, limiting costs, and hedging against another pandemic. Hopefully in-person is back soon, but digital has carved out an important niche moving forward.”

## Silhouette Group Los Angeles, New York

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES** Lori Hart, Melissa Spirito  
**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 16 to 26 (*Special Events* estimate)

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$1 million to \$2 million (*Special Events* estimate)

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This Gala Award-winning team produces private and corporate events, galas, brand launches, and “custom elite experiences.”

**TOP TRENDS** The good: Virtual and live-stream will continue to be strong trends in 2020. The bad: “The oversaturation of these virtual solutions without creative and innovative ways to touch the lives of our clients can have a negative impact on our marketplace,” management warns.

## The Firm Los Angeles

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Samantha Sackler  
**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 60

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$13 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The Firm is known for its large-scale special events and red-carpet premieres and galas.

**TOP TRENDS** Management says that sustainability and creativity are keys to success. “As everyone in the event industry knows, you are only as good as your last event or idea. We are constantly pushing ourselves to be more creative, more innovative and more cost effective in our production, for everything from designing red-carpet looks to a social-sharing photo moment on a budget.”

## The Sheppard Los Angeles

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Lauren Stephenson  
**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 10

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$7.7 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** The team has been busy with the Taco Bell Franchisee Forum and FRANMAC Convention, Cabi Virtual Fall Scoop, and Cabi Spring Scoop.

**TOP TRENDS** “This year it was powerful to see everyone adapt to virtual at the drop of a dime,” management says. “With the move to virtual, it was both bad and good for the industry, as there is such a drastic variety on how to deliver a virtual event. We have learned with the right amount of engagement, professional production and a good attitude, you can really make a virtual event just as dynamic as a live event.”

## Vibe Agency Miami

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

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Valerie Bihet

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 20

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$5 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** A strong first quarter saw events including an incentive trip that brought a client to Super Bowl in Miami; a sales convention for Dannon; and VIP events at CES in Las Vegas. The COVID crisis didn’t stop Vibe—the team created virtual team-building events for Estee Lauder and L’Oreal as well as the new virtual event series “Good VIBE USA.”

**TOP TRENDS** Vibe management sees benefits in the wake of the COVID crisis. “As event professionals we are—or should be—always looking for new ways to showcase a client’s values or mission for their event, so this is just a new type of design. We need to redesign our industry and how we approach business, and business events, and be more inventive. There’s a huge door open for how we can execute more meaningful and engaging virtual events. This is our challenge to be creative in a different way.”

## Viola Events

Abu Dhabi

[www.viola.ae](http://www.viola.ae)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Ammar Hani Sharaf

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 20

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$10 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** This year’s event roster has included the Innovator UAE and Abu Dhabi Science Festival 2020 for the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge, Hay Festival Abu Dhabi (its first in the Middle East region), and the My Health Coach exhibition stand at Dubai Trade Center for the Department of Health Abu Dhabi.

**TOP TRENDS** Seeing the good side: “Events will still continue to take place in the near future, as nothing can replace physical interaction,” management notes, “but they will offer the option of both on-site and online, and this will reach more audiences and increase exposure.”

## VOK DAMS Worldwide

Wuppertal, Germany

[www.vokdams.de](http://www.vokdams.de)

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE** Colja Dams

**2020 EVENT COUNT** (estimate) 350 plus

**2020 REVENUE FORECAST** (estimate) \$190 million

**NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** “Besides noteworthy events worldwide for our key accounts such as BMW, L’Oreal, SAP, Porsche and HERE Technologies, we won exciting new clients including ServiceNow, Bugatti, Vodafone and much more,” management says with pride.

**TOP TRENDS** “Hybrid events are the format of the future, but such events should come with a new goal: offering an equally impactful experience for both live and virtual participants,” management cautions. “On that base, data-driven events—live plus marketing automation—are becoming increasingly important.”

**Note:** All information here is supplied by the companies listed and was current at press time. The evolving COVID crisis may well affect data. Should you be on this list next year? Please send us an email: [info@specialevents.com](mailto:info@specialevents.com).





# Events Check Into Hotels

These four hotels find innovative ways to stage events despite the challenges of the COVID crisis. **By Special Events Staff**



**Social and smart:** The Adolphus Hotel has enjoyed a booming wedding business despite the COVID crisis. Photos this page courtesy Adolphus Hotel.

## SAYING 'I DO' AT THE ADOLPHUS

Love never stopped blooming at Dallas's iconic Adolphus Hotel. Although corporate events have not returned, "We've been hosting weddings every weekend since the end of June," reports director of catering and conference services Paula Fenner, CPCE. The state permits venues to host 50 percent of a room's capacity, so Fenner can stage weddings with up to 200 attendees.

To keep safe distancing at the bigger events, Fenner's team sets up four bars and four hors d'oeuvre stations for cocktail hour in the French Room restaurant—which is currently closed to the public—then moves guests to the ballroom for dining.

Service strategies include coasters and caps on passed wineglasses and on preset wine and water glasses, staffed hors d'oeuvre stations, and a faux wedding cake—"with the exception of the piece that the bride and groom cut," she explains.

Fenner's clients don't balk at the hotel's COVID rules. "I have been very transparent with them, and fortunately we work with amazing wedding planners," she says. "I think everyone is comfortable with the new expectations." [adolphus.com](http://adolphus.com)





**The great outdoors:** The Broadmoor offers a stunning array of outdoor options for events. Photos courtesy The Broadmoor.



### TAKE IT OUTSIDE

The Broadmoor resort in Colorado Springs, Colo., is making the most of its great, big space—some 5,000 acres—in order to stage a wide range of small-scale events, both corporate and social. Regulations allow director of sales Pepper Dombroski to allow 175 attendees indoors and 250 outdoors, and the prop-

erty’s outstanding outdoor spaces make the task easy.

Physical distancing is a snap at the Broadmoor. “We are using lawns, patios, balconies. Our indoor spaces allow meetings to be spread out for social distancing, creating a safe and productive meeting environment,” Dombroski says. “Also, keep in mind that our ‘hallways’ are outdoors, and guests enjoy the beautiful Colorado weather as they move throughout the grounds of the resort.”

Another hit with guests: the Broadmoor’s bento box lunch, “which clients absolutely love!” Dombroski says. “It allows for a three- or four-course meal to be served in a beautiful bento box that an attendee can carry to an outside patio, their meeting room, or their guest room.”

The resort’s safety protocols have gone over well with clients. “We had a meeting here this week, and the planner said she felt safer here than at home,” Dombroski says.

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







**Playing it safe:** The St. Anthony Hotel stresses safety protocols to keep event guests healthy. Photos by David Sixt Photography.

## PERFECT MATCH

San Antonio's landmark St. Anthony Hotel has been busy with both corporate and private events, with a maximum attendee count of 125. These "micro" events have been a hit: "Our average wedding has dropped from 50 percent to 75 percent in size," notes catering sales manager Wendy Haralson.

The St. Anthony team followed required safety rules to keep risks low but event spirits high. Haralson recalls, "We had an intimate wedding for 90. The tables were 72-inch rounds of eight and six feet apart. Guests had a great time; some even had masks that matched their evening gown. We worked closely with the DJ for the evening to remind people about social distancing. We set hand-sanitizing stations at the entryway, as well as extra masks for their convenience. While celebrating, it is easy for guests to forget, and we wanted everyone to be safe."



Indeed, helping guests remember why today's safety protocols are in place helps ensure successful events. "While the original vision of their event may not be able to be produced, there are many other options to create a beautiful event," Haralson says. "We just need to find them, and the only way to do that is through communication."

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



**Going up:** The Royal Park Hotel turns its balconies into concert seating. Photos courtesy Royal Park Hotel.

## NOW HEAR THIS

The team at the Royal Park Hotel in Rochester, Mich., is busy with both corporate and private social events. The team makes the most of the property's mix of event spaces. A recent highlight: "We are working with a corporate group of 60 people, and created small gatherings in our outdoor cabanas for breakouts," explains director of sale and marketing Sue Keels. "Lunch is served outside on social-distant picnic tables or blankets. We stagger times for meal periods and offer make-and-take pre-packed lunch boxes for participants," she explains. "The 'general session' is held in our outdoor Park Pavilion, where there is assigned seating and nothing on the table. During breakouts, the space is sanitized, and we also use QR codes for their agenda, avoiding as much paper as possible."

The boldest move yet from the Royal Park: its "vertical concerts." Here, guests purchase rooms with balconies or terraces and enjoy live music. "We pair each vertical concert with food and beverage packages, and recently partnered with [famed distiller] Maker's Mark, launching our private label 'Rochester Reserve' bourbon," Keels explains. And the vertical concerts are a hit: "Our socially distant Nashville vertical concert sold out in three days!" she boasts. "People are craving music and good times with coworkers, family and friends."

The buy-in from staff is crucial. "We stand by our team, and if a guest 'tests' us or refuses to follow one of our protocols, we don't look the other way, and are sure we not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk and stand by our team," Keels says. "Trust in the COVID world is critical."

[www.royalparkhotel.net](http://www.royalparkhotel.net) ●





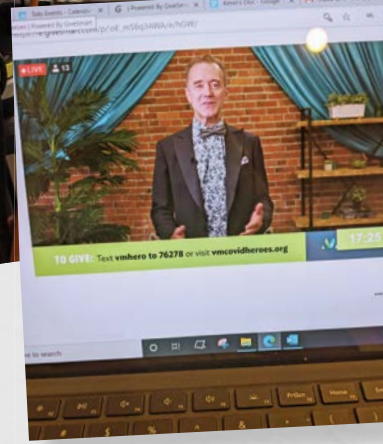
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# The Virtues of Virtual Fundraisers

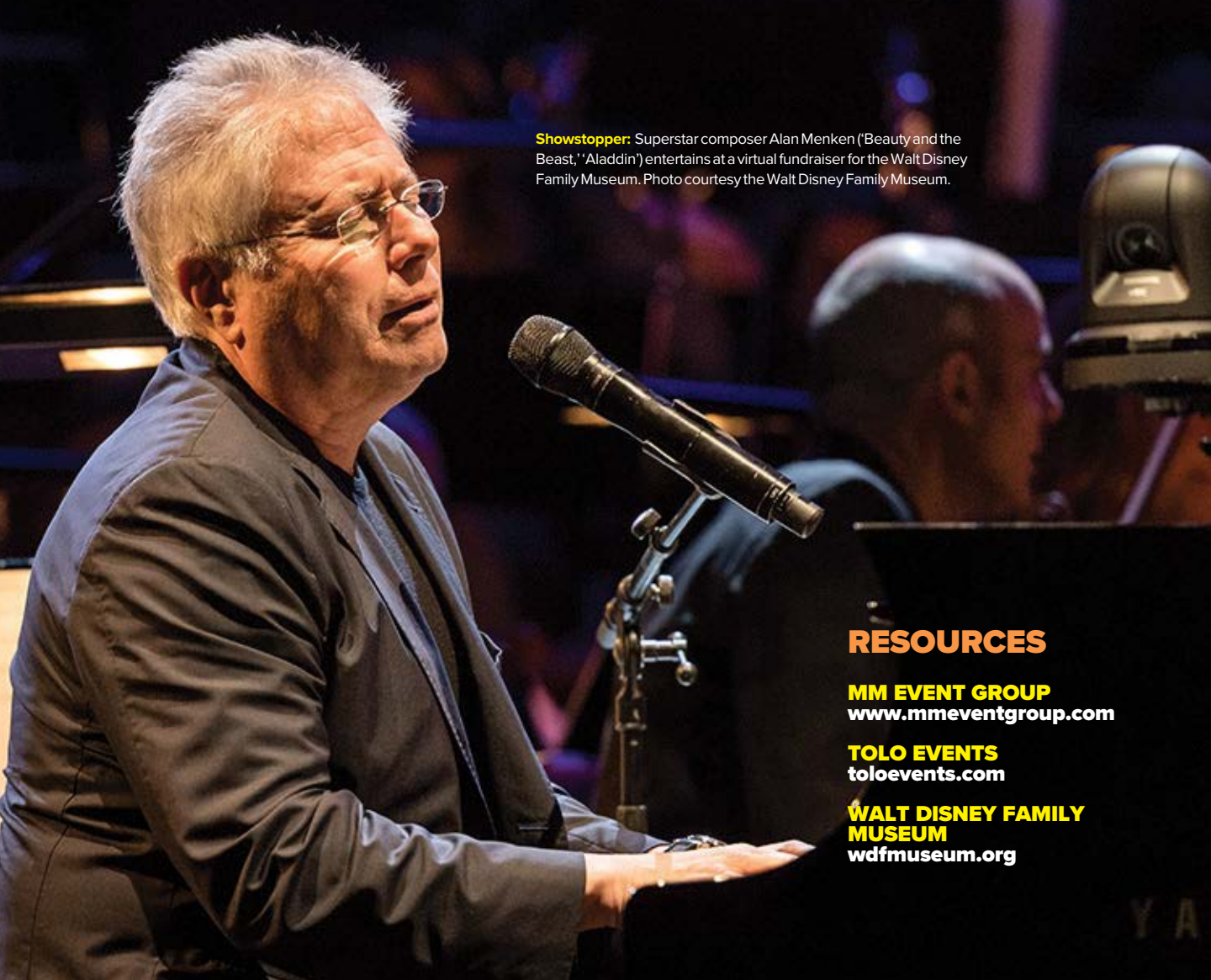
**Three event pros share how they made virtual fundraisers pay off.**  
**By Special Events Staff**

**These special event** professionals believe in the power of live events to raise funds for worthy causes. But when the COVID crisis made them switch their galas to virtual events on the fly, they came through with flying colors. Read on ...

**Perfect prescription:** Tolo Events brings in funding for Virginia Mason Medical Center with an online event that mixed live and prerecorded segments (photos courtesy Tolo Events). The team made the most of 30 watercolors of staff dressed in protective equipment, created by Seattle-based artist Jayashree Krishnan (above). 'We worked with a graphic designer to put the portraits in motion and set them to music; this artwork became the 45-second opening and closing of the live show,' Shelly Tolo explains.

**REBUILDING THE BALL** The what: Seattle's Virginia Mason Medical Center moved its Dreambuilders' Ball, originally slated for March 14, to an online event on July 30. The 45-minute live-streamed show focused on celebrating and supporting health-care workers, explains producer Shelly Tolo of Seattle-based Tolo Events. "We settled on one host who was live throughout to transition through the evening and thank donors,

*Jayashree  
6.20.2020*



**Showstopper:** Superstar composer Alan Menken ("Beauty and the Beast," "Aladdin") entertains at a virtual fundraiser for the Walt Disney Family Museum. Photo courtesy the Walt Disney Family Museum.

## RESOURCES

**MM EVENT GROUP**  
[www.mmeventgroup.com](http://www.mmeventgroup.com)

**TOLO EVENTS**  
[toloevents.com](http://toloevents.com)

**WALT DISNEY FAMILY MUSEUM**  
[wdfmuseum.org](http://wdfmuseum.org)

with all the storytelling and announcements being prerecorded.”

The Tolo team streamed the event on Vimeo and Facebook Live, and also had it embedded in GiveSmart, their donation software program. As a result, viewers needed only one link both to watch the event and to donate to it.

**The results:** In a usual year, some 700 guests attend the gala. But this year, 320 households viewed the virtual event on Vimeo, with 1,200 views on Facebook. At present, some \$930,000 has been donated, “but more continues to come in,” Tolo says. Next year, she is looking at creating a hybrid event “with smaller groups of people together on the same night to support the cause, and then bringing them all together through technology.”

**Words to the wise:** “Marketing for a virtual fundraising event is very different than one in person,” Tolo warns. “Frequency of contact, reminders, social

media, calling people, etc., are all important to be able to get your viewership to the level that you desire.”

**SING OUT The what:** San Francisco’s Walt Disney Family Museum turned California’s COVID shutdown orders to its advantage, launching an array of free, interactive experiences in April linked to Walt Disney’s life and legacy. The virtual events were such a hit that management offered its first, exclusively virtual fundraiser on Aug. 6—“An Evening with Alan Menken,” famed composer of “Aladdin,” “Beauty and the Best,” “Pocahontas” and “The Little Mermaid.” The event took place in two parts: a paid fundraising program followed by a free musical performance.

Tickets started at \$200, with tiered ticket and sponsorship options along with the opportunity to submit questions for Menken and to receive signed Disney artwork. The virtual performance, featuring a special appearance from “Hamilton” composer Lin-Manuel



**The story of this night:** 'Hamilton' superstar composer/performer Lin-Manuel Miranda put in an appearance at the Walt Disney Family Museum virtual fundraiser. Photo by Matthew Murphy.

Miranda, was free to view with donations of any size welcomed; this segment required guests to pre-register.

To allow for a quick and simple optional donation process throughout the virtual fundraiser, the museum decided to use MobileCause as its primary platform for streaming the event. Not only could guests pre-purchase sponsorship packages and/or register for the fundraiser via the MobileCause platform, but they could also easily access details to make donations via text while enjoying Menken's presentation. The free performance was also hosted on Facebook Live, Vimeo and YouTube as alternative streaming options.

**The results:** More than 20,000 people tuned in to the live event, reports Caroline Quinn, Walt Disney Family Museum senior communications coordinator, with viewers watching after the event bringing the total to 75,000 views. All told, more than \$160,000 was raised to help the museum keep its educational efforts alive.

**Words to the wise:** "With any virtual or live-streamed program, there will always be the possibility of technical challenges," Quinn notes. "To address this, the museum's team ensured staff were standing by to assist viewers, via email and phone, who experienced issues with accessing links or loading the event stream. An unexpected number of people simultaneously tuned into the free virtual performance on the MobileCause website. ▶



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**It's all in the mix:** MM Event Group relies on a mix of 75 percent prerecorded, 25 percent live-streamed content for its winning Latino Community Foundation fundraiser (photos above). Photos courtesy MM Event Group.

However, the museum had provided alternative streaming links on popular social media platforms to all registered viewers ahead of time to allow other options for viewing the program.”

### **TELLING THE STORY** The

**what:** The Coming of Age gala for the Latino Community Foundation was held on its original date—May 21—but was transformed from an in-person event to a virtual gala thanks to the team at New York-based MM Event Group. “By watching every live event and webinar, we quickly realized the weak point in virtual events is the Internet connection,” explains MM president Marilyn Moss. “Storytelling is fundamental to virtual events, which makes the ability to successfully hear and see your speaker critical. To be proactive, we decided that our event would be 75 percent prerecorded content and 25 percent live-streamed.”

**The results:** Using the GiveLively platform, the 2020 event brought in about \$800,000—more than last year’s in-person event, Moss says. Some 7,000 people viewed the event live—more than could fit in many venues. “Since then, with our video accessible on the LCF website and YouTube, the event has received over 10,000 views,” Moss notes.

**Words to the wise:** “The attention spans of your attendees are minimal in virtual events—our run of show must be well thought out and take advantage of every minute,” Moss says. “We recommend sticking to 60 to 75 minutes maximum for your show time.” She adds, “During the LCF gala, our guests experienced a variety of forms of entertainment, including musical interludes and spoken-word poetry, celebrity-featured videos, prerecorded LCF storytelling content, and breakaways to the live call-to-action, with donor names in ticker tape along the bottom of the screen.” ●

# LCA LEADING CATERERS OF AMERICA

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### Corporate

LCA specializes in corporate events of all types - marketing, celebratory, client related, employee morale, and others. Whether held in the hosts' facility, or in an off-premise location, LCA members are able to deliver a high value corporate event experience.

Photo Credit: Pure Joy Catering



### Weddings

At its collective portfolio of some of the most desirable wedding venues in North America, the LCA caters many thousands of weddings annually. Most LCA members have dedicated wedding specialists on staff, to ensure that this most important day is executed flawlessly, no matter the level of complexity.

Photo Credit: Red Table



### Social

Bar and bat mitzvahs, first communions, quinceañeras, retirements and graduations, and even funerals are all important life cycle events. Superb food and service are crucial to making these events special and memorable, and the LCA is a perfect resource for those products.

Photo Credit: LUX Catering & Events



### Nonprofits

Galas and fundraisers are key to the success of most charitable ventures - including both financial and membership. The LCA is highly attuned to the needs of most charities, and is a great resource for all the necessary components to make these gala events successful.

Photo Credit: Catering by Michaels

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## FOOD FOR FÊTES

# Delicious While Distancing: Appetizers for the COVID Age

**Caterers are balancing safety and style for starters today (with a little help from the now-chic cloche). By Kelly Rehan**

**Appetizers and hors d'oeuvre** are often “passed” and “shared”—two less-than-ideal options during a pandemic. Fortunately, caterers are finding ways to balance safety, taste and style to keep events special from the very first bite.

**PIVOT TO DELIVERY** Due to state and local guidelines, Bethesda, Md.-based Ridgewells Catering has transitioned its focus to small soirees and virtual galas, says Katie Fleury, director of sales.

“Adding food elements to a virtual gala or meeting elevates the event,” Fleury says. “We are transitioning with our clients to help them reimagine their events



**Virtual vittles:** Ridgewells Catering delivers nice bites for a virtual gala (here, above). Photos courtesy Ridgewells Catering.



**Here's how it's done:** Hamachi crudo comes with instructions from chef Curtis Stone (left); photo courtesy Maude, Los Angeles. A beautiful 'Shindig' box delivered by Schaffer (right); photo by Kathleen Schaffer.

and make them special, despite the circumstances.”

She shares this example: “One of our corporate clients planned a virtual partners’ meeting in May, and wanted to find a way to make it feel festive. We decided to add a happy-hour element to one of the days and delivered beautiful hors d’oeuvre displays and wine to 65 partners. For those out of town, we shipped nonperishable desserts two days in advance, so they could enjoy a treat during happy hour too!”

Abby Borden, owner and principal of Table, Set, Go in Los Angeles, shares that caterers have shown creativity and adaptability by offering appetizers and hors d’oeuvre that can be picked up from the caterer and then reheated or prepared at home under the direction of a chef.

“[Celebrity chef] Curtis Stone, for example, recently participated in a virtual dinner, offering his hamachi crudo as a first course, allowing guests to take on the intricate plating themselves,” she says.

For its virtual fundraising galas, Los Angeles-based Schaffer now offers a “gala box” that is delivered to guests. The box includes a range of foods, including sharable appetizers, depending on the level of donation from the participants, explains Melissa Darpino, director of sales and marketing.

**SAFETY FIRST** In addition to offering amazing food and orchestrating a beautiful event, event professionals now have taken on the responsibility to keep clients and staff safe. It’s a challenge that Ridgewells Catering has tackled head on with a safety team tasked with setting guidelines for on-site staff.

“Our team wears masks at all times, we are working in larger kitchen spaces to help staff spread out, and we’re working with our clients on how to safely entertain,” Fleury says.

Caterers without in-house safety teams can still safely practice their craft by putting commonplace precautions in place.

“We check temperatures, wear masks and gloves, work behind acrylic screens, and do the necessary physical distancing,” says Pauline Parry, founder and CEO of Los-Angeles based Good Gracious! Events.

Alexandra Morris, founder of Tastings NYC, says her team is preparing appetizers and other food in their kitchen and individually packing everything, in order to minimize contact with guests at in-person events. “We feel that right now, this is the safest way to go,” she says.

Darpino says Schaffer keeps a minimal staffing level at in-person events—two or three max. As an additional layer of safety, Schaffer works to determine what kind of atmosphere staff will be entering prior to the event. “We let the staff know in advance what the event parameters are, so they can make decisions based on their comfort level,” she says.

**CLOCHES RULE** Guests at in-person events find tray-passed appetizers and hors d’oeuvre irresistible, forcing caterers to adjust service to preserve social distancing.

“Some producers will try to limit the mingling and keep guests to their assigned table,” Borden says. “Some guidelines have mentioned staggered guest



**Playing it safe:** To avoid contact, Chef's Expressions offers pre-plated hors d'oeuvre (above) while a mobile oyster shucker from Oysters XO stays socially distanced (below). Photo above by Ken Rochon/The Umbrella Syndicate; photo below by Oysters XO.



arrival times. To manage both, appetizers and hors d'oeuvre could be sent directly to guests rather than tray-passing."

Jerry Edwards, CPCE, president and corporate chef of Chef's Expressions of Timonium, Md., is also pre-plating hors d'oeuvre during the pandemic. "Guests are handed a small plate with the hors d'oeuvre on it,

so no one is touching their food," he says.

Borden mentions how Hospitality Collaborative—a Los Angeles-based group of venues and catering services—has presented offerings under one of the top pandemic catering tools: a cloche dome. "This 'protects' the dish from kitchen to table and is a more elegant option than stainless steel plate covers," Borden says.

Morris agrees that the cloche is crucial for caterers who are both safety- and presentation-minded. "We follow all the safety guidelines, but we still want to be appealing and curated in the presentation," she says. "We believe that the self-service buffet will not be a viable option for a while. Passed appetizers are covered with a glass cloche or individually wrapped in paper boxes with a clear top."

Darpino explains how Schaffer has gotten creative with passed appetizer service in a socially distanced world.

"Traditionally passed items may be served to each group or pod from a long board," she says. "The server departs the kitchen and serves only that one group from that one board, and remains distant during the hand-off."

For buffets and stations, Darpino says that her guests do not serve themselves. Instead, one staff member creates a plate for each guest, and guests stand a proper distance away from the buffet.

For plated service, the Schaffer team serves all courses—including appetizers and hors d'oeuvre—topped with, you guessed it, a cloche.



**Now see this:** A covered box protects vegan hearts of palm 'crab cakes' with lemon caper remoulade from Bruce's Catering. Photo courtesy Bruce's Catering/Hospitality Collaborative.

## POPULAR DURING A PANDEMIC

With stay-at-home orders, more people are cooking at home. Borden recommends keeping this in mind for upcoming special events.

"Guests will be looking for those items that are a stretch to do themselves and have been so missed," she says, "such as freshly shucked oysters, crudo and croquettes, rather than comfort foods like sliders or bruschetta."

Both Edwards and Morris suggest caterers opt for room-temperature appetizers and hors d'oeuvre, as individually packed or covered items don't hold up as well when they're steaming hot.

To face a formidable foe like COVID-19, Darpino

## RESOURCES

**CHEF'S EXPRESSIONS**  
[www.chefsexpressions.com](http://www.chefsexpressions.com)

**GOOD GRACIOUS! EVENTS**  
[www.goodgracousevents.com](http://www.goodgracousevents.com)

**RIDGEWELLS CATERING**  
[www.ridgewells.com](http://www.ridgewells.com)

**SCHAFFER**  
[www.schafferla.com](http://www.schafferla.com)

**TABLE, SET, GO!**  
[www.tablesetgo.com](http://www.tablesetgo.com)

**TASTINGS NYC**  
[www.tastingsnyc.com](http://www.tastingsnyc.com)

says Schaffer has launched an entirely separate brand, "Shindig," to help guests entertain during the pandemic. Shindig delivers meals in custom boxes for individuals and small groups. Its "Mingle" box contains sharable appetizers for groups of 10.

"You can order a few different boxes for the perfect cocktail party or pool-side gathering," Darpino says. "It's like receiving an amazing meal, but presented as a gift." ●

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## THE LAST WORD



# By the Numbers

**The career of Heather Rouffe of Atlas Event Rentals adds up to success.**  
**By Lisa Hurley**

● **WHAT'S BETTER, WHAT'S WORSE IN EVENTS**

"Increased competition means there are a lot more price wars in the rental industry today than there have been historically. On a positive note, over the years Florida has become more of a hot spot for events, which means there is a growing wealth of vendors, opportunities and creativity!"

● **THE GOOD, THE NOT-SO GOOD**

"I think the traits that have helped me over the years are my sales skills, my tenacity and my creativity. However, being patient is hard for me, so that is something I wish I were better at."

● **HER BIG INFLUENCER**

"If you know me, you know I am obsessed with 'The Real Housewives' on Bravo. Bethenny Frankel, owner of the Skinnygirl brand and formerly on 'The Real Housewives of New York,' is someone I look up to a lot. She started her business out of her apartment with nothing, and today she is a successful mogul, entrepreneur and mom. I also admire how hard she has been working during the pandemic to give back to our nation's health-care workers. I think we would be great friends if we ever got the chance to meet!"

**Heather Rouffe is a**

"numbers person," she says, and she always thought she'd wind up in accounting. But when she started organizing events for nonprofits, "That's when I fell in love with the events industry," she explains.

She landed at her current company—Atlas Event Rental of Boynton Beach, Fla.—by happenstance. "Seventeen years ago, I met Randee [Wechsler], who is one of my partners today at Atlas. I sold her an ad, and a few days later she offered me a job," Rouffe explains. "I started as inside sales, then moved to outside sales, then finally to director of sales. I am still director of sales today, but have added managing partner to my role at Atlas for the last six years."

Today, Atlas oversees events throughout south Florida, with 120 employees in season. "In our busy season, we could be delivering 200 to 400 orders in a week. This past year for the week of Art Basel in Miami, we had over 400 deliveries in one weekend. It was incredible!" Rouffe says. The company offers everything "from linens and tabletop to tables, chairs, dance floors and a full line of commercial cooking equipment."

Rouffe will serve as an Ambassador for The Special Event + Catersource 2021, taking place July 19-22 at the Miami Beach [Fla.] Convention Center. "It is an honor to have been asked to represent The Special Event + Catersource, and even more of an honor now with all that is happening in the world," she says. "I truly believe

the 2021 show will be a testament to the resilience and strength of our industry. I am so looking forward to connecting with my fellow industry friends and making many new ones."

The biggest challenge for the event industry today is, of course, the COVID crisis. "Every facet of the event world is facing a unique set of challenges, as different cities, counties and states are in different stages of reopening," Rouffe says. "We have been working hard to stay flexible during this time, something that has been greatly appreciated by our vendors and our clients. We are breaking our typical minimums to accommodate many of the smaller events that are happening now as more people are choosing to celebrate at home." She adds, "As far as safety-related changes, we already had extremely high standards at Atlas. In addition to the rigorous sanitation procedures we currently have in place, we have implemented contactless delivery, limited appointments in our showrooms to allow for social distancing, and our staff is following all mandates relating to PPE and workplace safety."

"Although we are facing many challenges right now, we will make it to the other side of this, together," she says. "We have faced challenges before, and we will conquer these challenges as well." ●

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**Atlas Event Rental** 1926 High Ridge Road, Boynton Beach, FL 33426; 561/547-6565; [atlaseventrental.com](http://atlaseventrental.com)

# MEETINGSNET

## The premier resource for meeting professionals

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