

HUMAN SCALE

BY TOM GRESHAM

CONVENTION CENTERS FIND THEIR PERSONALITIES WITH EMPHASIS ON BECOMING A PLACE ATTENDEES WANT TO BE

FOR YEARS, THE people who fill convention centers have been changing much more rapidly than the convention centers themselves, said Todd Voth, who leads the convention center practice for architect Populous. Decades ago, a basic formula for convention center design was established, he said, and that formula has been slow to lose its hold on the industry ever since. In recent years, however, Voth and other venue experts have seen more creative thinking in convention center design and operation.

The buildings are becoming more flexible and dynamic, making them better suited for a specialized, more informal clientele that favors

small groups, personal interactions and technology-based solutions. Convention centers also are becoming more attached to their neighborhoods and communities after years of seeming to exist as something apart, residing in their own space somehow separate from their surroundings.

“We’re starting to see different models for convention centers that are more focused on the customers as human beings,” Voth said. “A lot of the trends we’re seeing are in line with that. We’re seeing more natural light, more views, more varieties of spaces. It’s taken a while for people to step onto the diving board and take a little risk, but it’s happening.”

A step up: The Washington State Convention Center's \$1.7 billion expansion will add more than 400,000 square feet of space.





The Las Vegas Convention Center expansion and renovation is one of two major projects in the city.

FLEXIBLE, VARIED SPACES

Tom Hazinski, managing director for convention, sports and entertainment at HVS Design, said the way information is exchanged among meeting attendees in convention centers has changed dramatically, and facility operators are still striving to provide spaces that accommodate that change.

“It used to be (that) a typical setup for a meeting was to have a stage and have a set of presenters who would come out and communicate this information to a larger audience, and it was a kind of one-way street,” Hazinski said. “As most industries have become more specialized, the need for more breakout space has grown. There’s much more of an emphasis on a peer-to-peer exchange of information.”

Voth said designing a mix of meeting spaces in convention centers for visitors with different needs and preferences is a key piece of the design challenge for these venues.

“Our emerging customer is demanding more variety and more informal kinds of meeting opportunities,” Voth said. “We’re always working to create spaces that offer that variety.”

Hazinski said convention centers are opting for highly flexible large multipurpose spaces that can serve as an exhibition space or ballroom or multiple meeting rooms.

“These spaces aren’t always of quite as high a quality as dedicated spaces, but they do provide a tremendous amount of flexibility to a venue,” Hazinski said.

Voth said flexible is sometimes an inadequate description for the design work done

to give users a variety of space options – he prefers transformable. For instance, the Anaheim (Calif.) Convention Center, designed by Populous, has a system of movable walls that allows the venue to reshape itself based on the needs of each client.

Rob Svedberg, principal in the convention center practice at Tvsdesign, said flexibility can be especially critical in smaller convention centers.

“They have to be a jack-of-all trades and host a Rotary lunch or a small, high-end meeting or an exhibition or wrestling or roller derby or whatever comes their way,” Svedberg said. “At that level, it’s just a different type of flexibility, because the range of events that they do is really astounding.”

Hazinski said convention centers also place an emphasis now on spaces that encourage impromptu social gatherings within larger meetings. In fact, Svedberg said, “informal casual spaces have become as important as more formal meeting spaces.”

“Sometimes there are as many people milling about, socializing and networking as there are sitting in classroom sessions, and those people need a place to go and sit where they can be in a group of two or three people rather than sitting with 150 other people,” Svedberg said. “There’s a need for these smaller-scale, more intimate spaces within these big venues.”

Technology is often a critical component in designing flexible spaces. Populous designed a “meeting room of the future” in the San Antonio Convention Center that employs technology, such as touchscreens,

CITY	VENUE	EST. COMPLETION
CALIFORNIA		
SACRAMENTO	Sacramento Convention Center	Late 2020; new ballroom April 2021
SAN FRANCISCO	Moscone North and South expansion	Jan. 3
COLORADO		
DENVER	Colorado Convention Center	End of 2019
FLORIDA		
FORT LAUDERDALE	Broward County Convention Center	Late 2023
ORLANDO	Orange County Convention Center	Five years after county approval
KENTUCKY		
LEXINGTON	Lexington Convention Center	November 2021
NEVADA		
LAS VEGAS	Caesars Forum	2020
LAS VEGAS	Las Vegas Convention Center	2023
NEW YORK		
NEW YORK CITY	Jacob K. Javits Conference Center	2021
NORTH CAROLINA		
CHARLOTTE	Charlotte Convention Center	2020
OKLAHOMA		
OKLAHOMA CITY	Oklahoma City Convention Center	2020
TENNESSEE		
MEMPHIS	Memphis Cook Convention Center	Late 2019
WASHINGTON		
SEATTLE	Washington State Convention Center	2022

TVSDSIGN

BLUEPRINTS: U.S. CONVENTION CENTER CONSTRUCTION

COST	OWNER	ARCHITECT	BUILDER	NOTES
\$240 million	City	Populous	AECOM Hunt	Project will expand exhibit hall, add meeting rooms and entrances, and include a new 40,000-square-foot ballroom, a new kitchen and lobby. A 15,300-square-foot outdoor activities plaza will also be built.
\$550 million	City and county	Skidmore, Owings & Merrill with Mark Cavagnero Associates	Webcor Builders	The North and South buildings facility will offer 505,000 square feet of space, almost double the space now offered in its largest hall; two ballrooms; 82 meeting rooms, 126,000 square feet of prefunction lobbies; and more than 25,000 square feet of outdoor terraces.
\$233 million	City and county	NA	NA	Project includes new flexible meeting and ballroom space and the addition of 100,000 square feet of prefunction and service space that will also include a 50,000-square-foot terrace, which will be on the roof of the convention center.
\$900 million, including hotel	County	NA	NA	The convention center expansion will add 525,000-plus square feet of contemporary-designed indoor and outdoor space and will be accompanied by the construction of an upscale 800-room hotel.
\$605 million	County	NA	NA	Under the proposed expansion plans, the convention center would gain a new multipurpose venue (200,000 square feet for trade shows) and the all-new Convention Way Grand Concourse (80,000 square feet for ballroom space and 60,000 for meeting rooms).
\$241 million	Lexington Center Corp.	NBBJ Architects and EOP Architects	Messer Construction	After the expansion, the convention center will provide more than 100,000 square feet of exposition halls, a 25,000-square-foot ballroom, more than 57,000 square feet of hospitality space and more than 30,000 square feet of flexible meeting space.
\$375 million	Caesars Entertainment	NA	NA	The new conference center will feature 300,000 square feet of meeting space, including pillarless ballrooms measuring 110,000 square feet each; two 40,000-square-foot ballrooms; six boardrooms, more than 100 breakout rooms and a 100,000-square-foot outdoor plaza.
Phase Two expansion \$935 million; Renovation TBD	Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority	Tvsdesign / Design Las Vegas	NA	The project will feature the addition of 1.4 million square feet, including 600,000 square feet of new, leasable exhibit space.
\$1.5 billion	New York Convention Center Development Corp.	Tvsdesign	LendLease and Turner Construction	An addition of 90,000 square feet of exhibition space will create a 500,000-square-foot exhibition hall. Other additions include a 55,000-square-foot ballroom, 45,000 square feet of meeting room space, and a rooftop terrace overlooking the Hudson River.
\$110 million	Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority	Tvsdesign, in partnership with LS3P Associates and Neighboring Concepts	Holder-Edison Foard-Leeper	The expansion will add breakout space and prefunction space, as well as breakout meeting rooms. The project also includes a pedestrian bridge over Stonewall Street linking the convention center with The Westin Charlotte hotel, two new hotels and a light rail station.
\$288 million	City	NA	NA	The new convention center will feature a 200,000-square-foot exhibit hall, a 45,000-square-foot meeting space, and a 30,000-square-foot ballroom. The ballroom is complemented by 10,000 square feet of pre-function space and a 4,000-square-foot panoramic balcony.
\$175 million	Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau	LRK Architects and Tvsdesign	NA	Expansion will allow for additional meeting rooms and expand the footprint of the building with outdoor terraces and glass-enclosed concourses, prefunction and meeting spaces.
\$1.7 billion	Public Facilities District	LMN	NA	A second, stacked convention center one block from existing facility will include 58,000 square-foot ballroom; 248,450 square feet of exhibit space; 102,040 square feet of meeting space; and 159,300 square feet of information, rooftop terrace, and prefunction areas.

to create a highly interactive space. The space also can be divided in a variety of ways. Voth said meeting planners and attendees can prove to be extremely creative when a space allows them to be.

“I’ve seen dramatically different events in that space,” Voth said.

A NEIGHBORHOOD ANCHOR

Michael Winters, principal and director of design and interiors at Fentress Architects, said connecting a convention center to its community as part of its brand “has become a fairly new trend in the industry.”

“Thirty years ago, a convention center was just a simple economic engine for a city,” Winters said. “It was seen as a way to bring clean money to the city, without much emphasis to its place or design. Convention centers became known as ‘boxes with docks,’ and design perspective was not important. Today, both the city and the users expect a significant civic piece of architecture that reflects a true sense of place and relates to the new destination that the visitor encounters as part of their convention experience.”

Public and private entities in most cities are invested in improving their urban centers, and convention centers are a useful asset in that effort. In Denver, for instance, Winters said “the city core expanded toward the convention center with billions of dollars of development” since it opened in 1990.

The convention centers themselves advocate for improvements in their surrounding neighborhoods because it can provide them with a competitive edge. The proximity of shops, restaurants, hotels, parks and other appealing features help fill out the convention experience. Acceptable meeting spaces, sufficient hotel rooms and a decent price are just the “threshold criteria” for meeting planners, Hazinski said.

“With everyone providing that, then the real competition comes with the ability for meeting planners to maximize their attendance at events,” Hazinski said. “And that means bringing people to an environment they want to be in.”

After all, the meetings are important, but “visitors want to get out and explore the city and have that authentic experience that can be a great part of going to a convention,” Voth said.

Populous served as an architect on the International Convention Centre Sydney that opened in 2016. The convention center has the favorable location of a site on the famously picturesque Darling Harbour. The location is a natural draw for visitors, but Voth said designers didn’t take that for granted. They designed the facility with spaces that encouraged visitors from neighborhoods and elsewhere, even including food venues that are open to the public.

Building an appealing connection to a city is not just about location and surrounding features – it’s also about the building itself. While on a convention center’s campus, visitors don’t want to feel like they could be just anywhere, Svedberg said. That means design features that incorporate the local region’s characteristics and personality, as well as local food choices and views that take advantage of the venue’s surroundings.

“They want a unique space ... where the building is telling a story about where you are.” – ROD SVEDBERG



SPOTLIGHT

“They want a unique space and that’s happening at every scale of the building, where the building is telling a story about where you are,” Svedberg said.

DISTINCTIVE EVENT SPACES

As convention centers jockey for customers, Winters said he is seeing the creation of more special event spaces that can help differentiate a center from its competitors.

At the Miami Beach Convention Center, “we have a rooftop VIP ballroom with an outdoor terrace and a new six-acre outdoor park and event space,” Winters said. “In Denver, we are adding a new 50,000-square-foot outdoor events terrace with spectacular Rocky Mountain views. In San Diego, we developed a five-acre oceanfront rooftop terrace.”

Svedberg said distinctive, featured settings within a center often are outdoor breakout spaces. For instance, Tvsdesign has designed a one-acre outdoor farm on the roof of the Javits Center in New York City with an event pavilion and a large terrace for events.

“It’s about catering to the desire to create unique experiences,” Svedberg said.

“Eye-catching features can really help distinguish one convention center from another.”

Svedberg said these spaces often are found at venues that are fully booked. The spaces are built to ensure that events grow and

A \$1.5 billion project at New York City’s Javits Center is scheduled to be complete in 2021.



TECH IS STILL THE TALK

IMPROVING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS is a major issue in convention center design and management today, said Michael Winters, principal and director of design and interiors at Fentress Architects, particularly as meeting attendees become younger and more socially connected.

“With everyone carrying multiple personal devices, bandwidth is the key to satisfying the expectations of the delegates to a convention,” Winters said. “Visitors expect high-speed connectivity so that they can plug in and connect their devices, as well as live-stream seminars and events.”

The Miami Beach Convention Center, which Fentress designed, is providing 10-gigabit-per-second broadband. It’s one of the strategies “to make the project the most technology-advanced convention center in the U.S.,” Winters said.

Technology can also be a tool to better understand visitors. Rob Svedberg, principal for the convention center practice at Tvdsdesign, said event organizers are increasingly turning to data analytics to research visitors’ behavior patterns to shape their event experiences. Similarly, “we’re using data to inform the design of the buildings.”

At the Las Vegas Convention Center, Svedberg said, venue operators will be able to use information gleaned from cell phone signals to track where groups of people are in the building and how they are using the space.

“Say you have a hotspot in the concourse that shows up for certain types of events. That can tell you that that’s a good spot to offer a coffee station or a lunch grab-and-go,” Svedberg said. “So there’s two pieces to it: collecting the data and then interpreting what it means and how to use it.”

Smarter buildings also mean more energy-efficient buildings, said Todd Voth, who leads the convention center practice for Populous.

“There’s such a focus on creating energy efficiency, and these monster buildings can really use a lot of energy if they’re not appropriately monitored,” Voth said. “You’ve got to be able to measure what you’re doing in order to get the best results — the most efficient results — and the building management systems now are a lot more sophisticated than they ever were.”

—Tom Gresham

flourish — and bring meetings back the next year.

“Centers are using the spaces to delight their customers more and to provide additional places for event revenue,” Svedberg said.

FINANCING AND THE RENOVATION BOOM

Winters said that the most common financing method for convention center projects continues to be increasing hotel occupancy taxes, though sales taxes and rental car taxes also are used.

Winters and Voth said they are seeing more P3 projects — public-private partnerships — in which a city and a private development group enter an agreement for the design, construction, financing and management of a facility, often with a hotel attached.

The convention center construction landscape remains heavily dependent on renovations and expansions with few new ground-up construction projects in the works in the United States, but even within those constraints experts see signs of innovation and progress.

“There’s been a real pent-up demand for projects, especially renovation projects that should have occurred 10 years ago that didn’t occur and are way overdue — carpets, painting, repurposing space, new technology — and that left a lot of convention centers well behind the market because the funding and political will weren’t there,” Svedberg said. “Those deferred projects are getting done now, and that’s helping the market catch up.”

THAT WAS THEN, AND THIS IS NOW: INTIX AT 40

**MAUREEN ANDERSEN,
PRESIDENT, INTIX**

1979 WAS THE YEAR! Milwaukee was the place and Patricia G. Spira, then box office manager at the performing arts center, was miffed. And so was Richard Carter over at the Minnesota Orchestra Hall. Both had asked their general managers for funding to attend a weeklong course on box office management at Banff and both had been unceremoniously turned down. The rest is history. I know these two people and I know that getting their dander up was just the right catalyst and right moment for change and creation!

They took matters into their hands and the bull by the horns and in the ensuing weeks Box Office Management International was born, funding secured, location booked, program created, invitations sent and folks from around the world were saying "Yes, hold a space, our box office manager will be there." In Mrs. Spira's words from the INTIX 20th anniversary history book, "They were coming to Milwaukee for a 3-day conference during the coldest month of the year because they wanted to share experiences, they wanted to see what others were doing, they wanted to talk ticketing ... this was for box office people ... it was their meeting. It was to give them a professional presence, to them the opportunity to talk to each other as peers about the subjects that concerned them on a day-to-day basis, to talk about what they knew best ... better than anyone else in the world ... ticketing." When you have a great plan, a strong message and an enduring mission they will stand the test of time. The name was changed in 1997 to the International Ticketing Association, but the core values remain.

Fast forward to January 2019 and INTIX will celebrate its 40th anniversary with a Texas-sized celebration and conference Jan. 29-31 at the Gaylord Texas Resort & Conference Center. Entertainment ticketing professionals will once again gather for their annual tribal festival that celebrates the mission of Igniting Success for those who are ticketing professionals, for those that serve the entertainment industry and for those that have made this a lifelong career path. The INTIX "tribe," as the members identify themselves, is a community that continues to meet to exchange ideas, to discuss trends, to teach each other, to learn from one another and to act as the standard bearer for the industry. The members represent not just ticket offices of all sizes and types of venues but the leaders of technology and services. These individuals and businesses all agree that exemplary service, ethics, integrity and professionalism are paramount for the trust of our customers, fans and patrons and for an enduring, profitable, and safe industry.

Attendees came from around the world for that first educational and networking conference and they still are coming to the INTIX Conference and Exhibition. At that first conference reps from around the world were talking about the brand-new customized computerized ticketing system of the Milwaukee Brewers; customer service; customer communication; the newly installed computer system at the Shubert Organization; and how to get the "maximum amount of information to the teams' management."

Some things don't change, especially when the fundamentals of service, technology, information and data are concerned. At INTIX 2019 the workshops and breakouts will see familiar yet modern versions of technology, service, data, venue experience, and information. Topics will range from technology workshops on bots; legal battles; credit card fraud; blockchain; text messages to drive acquisition and loyalty; culture change and moving icebergs; customer data; revenue reinvention; digital marketing; venue safety and security; and innovative omni-channel distribution strategies, among others.

Top-shelf vendors and providers will fill the exhibition hall and kiosk pavilions and offer thought leadership on the trends and challenges we collectively are seeing on the horizon. Cynthia Marshall, CEO of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, will open the 40th conference with a keynote address to the attendees. This Texas celebration is not one to be missed. Come celebrate our history, our present and our future Jan. 29-31.

There are many voices but if you want the definitive voice on ticketing today and for the future you come to INTIX. After all, as Pat said then and it's still true today, to talk about what we know best and "better than anyone else in the world ... ticketing."

Early bird rates of \$842 (member rates may apply) are available until Oct. 31st at www.intix.org. I will see y'all there! 🍷

quantified the value and are confident it's paid for and more than returned our investment."

Philly Pops' director of sales and customer relations, Danny Palmieri, lauds Digonex's ability to "work with us through set-up to create a custom sales algorithm to make sure the pricing is best for our current inventory. And that remains true even as we grow and expand our offerings."

Another Digonex client, Aubrey Stork, is the digital, CRM and loyalty manager at Mirvish Productions, a Toronto-based company that controls five theaters and specializes in Broadway road shows.

"We've found that with the assistance of the solution, pricing recommendations are being made based on demand factors we never would have considered before," said Stork. "We're now able to anticipate scarcity (or lack of demand) and adjust rather than react to it when the real opportunity has already passed."

Digonex takes into consideration historical data, weather forecasts, macroeconomic conditions such as the price of gas or unemployment rates in ticket pricing, which "all can all be drivers for demand," Loewen said.

Digonex refers to its product as "a software-embedded service," powered by a team of PhD economists, "experts in pricing science," who construct a set of customized solutions for each client based on their research.

"Ultimately, the implementation of true

dynamic pricing has been an eye-opening experience," says Mirvish's Stork. "It's shone a light on opportunities we never saw before."

The question becomes what's preventing dynamic ticket pricing from becoming the norm in today's touring business. It continues to flirt with the secondary market, sometimes with damaging effects. See the recent CBC report about Ticketmaster marketing software directly to brokers as one example of a public relations nightmare.

With the secondary market remaining a murky place — witness the 2017 lawsuit leveled against the Los Angeles Dodgers by several ticket brokers when the team attempted to consolidate leftover inventory in a deal worth more than \$100 million with Houston-based Eventellect — it remains to be seen if dynamic pricing can fully take hold.

The ability to work with different promoters in different cities remains a hindrance to consolidating the effort for companies such as Digonex, which have mostly abandoned that market for smaller regional clients such as performing arts centers.

Loewen points to two specific factors at work in the concert space that need to be addressed.

"One is an analytical, mathematical challenge when you're dealing with all these different marketplaces," he says. "And, on the business side, it's a matter of getting all the

individuals who have a say in ticket pricing to agree and be on the same page."

Still, the idea of dynamic ticketing has its allure, especially in a world where blockchain could soon be the order of the day, even as Qcue's Khan insists it "doesn't particularly solve the problem." Blockchain technology offers a detailed record of all the transactions on a single ticket, enabling every party to earn a percentage along the way.

"The real value of dynamic pricing is found in between the starting ticket prices we set," Stork said. "We're better able to find the actual market value for each seat in the house. If we're doing this effectively, we achieve another extremely important goal — making the resale market less lucrative."

Stork says when the average price of a ticket goes down, sometimes the revenue generated has increased because customers buy better seats than they would have.

In the end, Loewen believes it's inevitable that dynamic ticket pricing is here to stay.

"It's almost unimaginable if you're running a tour or a venue, you wouldn't use this approach," he said. "Everybody along the value chain is looking at dynamic pricing more seriously. How it can help optimize results, from maximizing revenue to lowering prices to fill seats. If you've done it correctly, hopefully you're not left with inventory you need to dump at the eleventh hour." ▣

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