

Scratching Backs

al sales offices, SMG is working toward standardized templates for contracts with major clients. 'That is a goal for this year. We're now in the process of working on this with three clients.'

TM: What's next for SMG?

GC: The growth very clearly for us is in the smaller markets, those working to boost their convention base along with their tourism base, places such as Knoxville, Mobile, Savannah.

Ten years ago you wouldn't have

thought about a convention center in some of these markets, but they've become much more attractive as costs rise. You can find a lower hotel rate, a lower cost of doing business, as long as there's some reasonable air service and transportation mechanism.

Adding to that, we're seeing more vertical shows in more in-depth marketplaces. It used to be just the mega shows in the mega markets; now everybody is looking at vertical shows. They're getting into second- and third-tier cities.

TM: What new markets are you looking at?

GC: We are primarily concentrating on markets that have a new venue or expanded venue on their radar screen, espe-

SMG and the Society of Independent Show Organizers (www.siso.org) have launched an affinity program giving SISO members special consideration when booking any of the facilities under SMG management.

SMG's Thom Connors, senior vice president of operations, calls it a "most favored nation" status for SISO members, who will now have access to demographic surveys and other data for many SMG markets, reduced or eliminated advertising commissions for signage in public areas, and a "variety of other incentives." Each facility is developing its own SISO benefits. In return, SISO will give SMG facilities special consideration when choosing a site for its annual meeting, promote the program to members, and provide testimonials for SMG promotions.

dally the Midwest and some of the smaller markets.

If there's no facility to serve a market, maybe we can invest in a facility. That's one direction we've just started to explore. San Francisco is a good example. Moscone is very difficult to get dates in. If we could get a building in the Bay area for the right cost of entry to the marketplace--without interfering with our obligations to Moscone--I think that's a market that could use the extra space quickly.

TM: What are the biggest technology challenges for the convention centers you manage?

GC: Today it's about the fiber. And it's about trying to get a grasp on what the wireless Qeod is going to be. At the end of the day, the toughest technology challenge for a convention center is planning ahead. The time between design and construction is just unbelievable. As we consult from our design division, we literally just tell people to plan for their conduit. We're going to run *something* through it, but what we're going to run may not even be designed yet.

TM: What other tech demands are you hearing?

CG: Twelve months ago we had videoconferencing facilities in two or three facilities; now we're up to 15 and adding a few more. If people are looking for alternative ways of getting people together without high travel costs, we see videoconferencing as a supplement to what big trade shows do.

[Connors adds that convention center clients are looking for more technical knowledge at the management and executive levels. "This was a theme of our recent corporate conference. This management-level education is an important goal for us this year."]

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