

One on One:

# Facilities Central

By Susan Hatch

**S**MG, the fast-growing facilities management firm out of Philadelphia, is as much about sales and marketing these days as it is about management. Since January 2000, the company has increased its portfolio of convention centers 25 percent and, in response, is developing a national sales office support structure not unlike those of the major hotel chains. (Perhaps this is no surprise, since Hyatt has a 50 percent stake in the company.) We sat down with Gregg Caren, executive director of operations, in July at the Computer Event Marketing Association Annual Summit, where the company, for the first time, sent representatives from nine of the 35 centers it manages, including the Denver Convention Complex, Moscone Convention Center, and Hawaii Convention Center.



Gregg Caren, executive director of operations, SMG

They need short-term lead response time, so what I've set up is the ability for a client to shop 35 convention centers with one phone call or one e-mail. I can put it out electronically, get the availability of dates back, and try to help find consistencies of service and the ways we contract with them.

**TM:** In essence, a national sales office?

**GC:** Yes and no. When a client wants to leverage [a multi-city buy] from a

negotiating standpoint, I have to remind them that we are a private company, but we work in each market for a publicly owned facility. The city of San Francisco owns the Moscone Center, the state of New Jersey owns the Atlantic City Convention Center, and so on. We can't just cut a deal. We can, however, do a lot of value-added things. We'll help you make the move quicker; we'll share our event resumes, BEOs, all the things that get an event off the ground more quickly and smoothly. At Microsoft's Global Summit in Miami this week [in July at

**Technology Meetings:** SMG seems to be in the spotlight now more than ever.

**Gregg Caren:** It's a couple of things. For a very long time we were kind of like the Oz behind the curtain. We've been managing public facilities for about 25 years, yet the buildings always maintain their own identity. The last 18 months have been interesting. As of January 2000, we ran 65 total facilities [convention centers, arenas, stadiums, theaters]. Today we've more than doubled the size of the company. We now manage 135 facilities; 35 of those are convention centers [up from 28 in January 2000].

Two main things have happened in the past 18 months. We acquired two competitors [Leisure Management International and Ogden Entertainment], and because of this growth, we have grown our corporate support structure in Philadelphia.

**TM:** What does this mean to event planners?

**GC:** The private shows, and especially this audience—the Microsofts and the Oracles and the SAPs that are doing 20 to 700 events per year—need to move quickly.

“SMG now manages 135 facilities—including 35 convention centers—and is building a sales organization to scale

the Miami Beach Convention Center], we've got eight senior managers from other [SMG] venues helping host this event. For a client that big and an event that big, we're actually mirroring the service contractors, a GES or a Freeman, by making our people portable.

[In a followup conversation, SMG Senior Vice President of Operations Thom Connors added that, like hotel chain nation-

Wine Train

to the era of relaxed lavishly restored lounge & Vista Dome brunch or dinner scenic world berries and vineyards.