

MEETINGS MEAN BUSINESS

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Features

Where We Are—One Year Later

One year ago, the aftershocks of the earthquake of criticism directed at meetings and events were plaguing the industry. We called it a wake-up call. The question is whether we're still on alert, determined to tell the story of how meetings contribute to the economy. How far have we come—and how far do we still have to go—to avoid further criticism and convince the public that meetings and events directly affect them, whether or not they're directly involved?

There's no question that 2009...

"2009 was very challenging for the industry and for us," says **Kelly Commerford**, marketing director of the **Manchester Grand Hyatt in San Diego**, the largest convention hotel in Southern California. "We had record attrition on room blocks and some cancellations," he says. Though the Hyatt ended the year with just 12 fewer groups than in 2008, Commerford said the hotel had to be more aggressive in negotiations to reach that number.

Glimmers of Hope

As we tiptoe into 2010 with fingers crossed for better times, there are some glimmers of hope...

- **Commerford** has seen an uptick of inquiries from companies in industries such as pharmaceuticals, biotech and environment.

Challenges Remain

With economic recovery just beginning, there are still challenges ahead. No one knows how long it will really take to get back to the levels of prosperity seen in 2007. Planners also need to watch how and when the hotel industry recovers from its own meltdown. "2010 may still be a buyers' market, but after that it's unknown," Graham says.

Hyatt's Commerford thinks 2010 will still be a tough year for hotels, but by 2012 will be close to previous levels. For this year, he suggests planners look at value propositions in first-tier cities or at first-tier hotels, even if they thought they couldn't afford them in the past.

Sandi Cain, a regular contributor to Smart Meetings, is a freelance journalist who covers the meetings, hospitality and tourism industries.