



I look like them
I sound like them.
I live with them.
But I'm not
one of them.

GOING NATIVE:

THE CHALLENGE OF SPONSORED CONTENT

By Michelle Russell

Run-of-book advertising is declining. Ignoring that reality is a path to the tar pits.

The late writer Michael Hastings once wrote, “I went into journalism to do journalism, not advertising.” As much as we would all prefer to just “do journalism,” many magazine editors like me have had to become creative about blending both.

While I’m not directly responsible for generating revenue, as the editor-in-chief of *Convene*, the magazine of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), it’s partly my job to think up new editorial opportunities that enable our advertisers to tell their stories. Unlike traditional association publications, we straddle two media categories: We’re PCMA’s flagship magazine, but we’re also a trade publication with nearly 30,000 non-member subscribers. There are more than 10 magazines in our competitive set, all vying for the attention of our audience of professional event organizers and the dollars of our advertisers — the hotels, convention centers, destination marketing organizations, and other entities that support the meetings and events industry.

Competition for these dollars is fierce. And run-of-book ads are not nearly as easy to come by as they used to be. Advertorial special sections — typically a one-page article telling an advertiser’s story across from its display ad — have long been a staple of trade publishing, and they continue to make up a higher percentage of our revenues than regular ads. But our sales team needs to give advertisers compelling and creative options to help them convey their brand messages.

And so we’ve come up with several hybrid-content opportunities — otherwise known as native advertising content. It’s what Wikipedia calls a form of “disguised” advertising, meaning that it fits within a media channel’s editorial surroundings.

Navigating as a Native

This can be tricky terrain. As *The New York Times* former public editor, Margaret Sullivan,

wrote: "If native ads look too much like journalism, they damage credibility; if they look nothing like journalism, they lose their appeal to advertisers."

As we've made native advertising a part of our value proposition — a way to distinguish *Convene* from our competitors in our advertisers' and readers' minds — our guiding strategy has been to leverage high-level editorial, design, and production values.

We have one unbendable rule — transparency — so we clearly label native advertising, which includes *sponsored* content (written by us on behalf of and with input from advertisers) and *supported* content. In the supported category are those advertisers that want to be aligned with a particular topic or industry issue without including any of their own messaging as part of the content. They want adjacency; for their ad to appear across from the content area they've chosen, but they do not collaborate with the writer or review/approve the content at any stage. Take, for example, a regular series in *Convene* called *Innovative Meetings*. This series showcases events that were executed in a creative way and is supported by the Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau, whose full-page ad appears across from the final page. We also publish a credit line in small print: *Innovative Meetings is supported by the Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau.*

Making sure we label native advertising as such isn't just good practice to avoid confusion among our readers. It's something the Federal Trade

INNOVATIVE MEETINGS



The interactive program included virtual reality games.

unlike the extra detail you'll find in a photograph of a desk that has other photographs propped up on it. Attendees were able to sit at three tables total over the course of the cafés.

"People really liked it," Neumann said. "At the moment, there is a lot of demand from the audience — our participants — to get really involved in the conference. They not only want to listen to presentations but also to have some more interactive elements."

The cafés were ideal for both engaging attendees and helping them network. When the third round ended, "they were standing there with 10 to 15 other people, and they could exchange business cards and get into further conversation," said Katrin Pinkwart, also a product manager of international business development for VDL, who noted that the format helped participants feel like they owned any ideas they came up with. "They get the feeling they can actually take something home because they worked on it themselves."

The interactive cafés fit into the conference's larger mission to bring a variety of people together and help them exchange ideas and learn from each other, according to Neumann. Many CESIS attendees are engineers,

but some aren't; some are VDI members, but others aren't. They came to Berlin from all over — about 15 percent from the United States, 10 percent from Asia, a third from Germany, and the rest from other parts of Europe. The majority work as C-level executives or vice presidents across a range of industries, but others are senior managers and directors. "Our goal was to bring them all together," Neumann said, "and achieve some cooperations between different industries."

The VDI team worked with their advisory board — which includes experts, strategists, and innovators from across the industry — to hammer out which topics they'd offer for the cafés. Pinkwart said that pinpointing the right subjects is essential to pulling off a small-discussion format. "You need to make sure people have a choice between different topics, and you have to find topics that are general enough so people can get into a discussion," she said. "If you find a topic which is too specific, many people at the tables won't know what to say. Then the discussion won't work."

Contributing Editor **Molly Petrilla** is a freelance writer based in New Jersey.

BREAKOUT Keeping It Hands-On

The World Cafés weren't the only interactive program at CESIS. The conference also offered a four-hour Design Thinking Workshop, which ran on the first day of CESIS, concurrent with more traditional keynotes and presentations. The 10 workshop teams were even smaller than the café groups — three to five people, with each group working with an experienced coach who helped them tackle a challenge related to the Internet of Things. At the end, each group presented its ideas onstage to the entire workshop. It was perfect for — as CESIS's program put it — "those participants who want to get particularly active."

ON THE WEB

Learn more about the Association of German Engineers' Congress for Exchange of Strategies, Innovations, and Solutions at conv.org/cesis-2016.

Innovative Meetings is supported by the Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau. irvingcon.com

36 PCMA CONVENE APRIL 2017

PCMACONVENE.ORG

PLACES + SPACES

OVERVIEW

Cleveland

Located within 500 miles of nearly half the country's population, Cleveland is eclectic, unpretentious, and gritty yet sophisticated. Having undergone more than \$3.5 billion in visitor- and meetings-related development in the last six years, this sports-loving city is home to a new, 750,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art convention center, multiple new hotel properties, and redeveloped green spaces like the city's center, Public Square.

Outside the walls of meeting rooms, this unconventional destination offers business travelers world-class arts, culture, and rock 'n' roll; diverse dining options; and a friendly environment worthy of a pre- or post-meeting stay. Attendees can step outside their hotel or the convention center and be within walking distance of attractions like the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, JACK Cleveland Casino, or the East Fourth Street entertainment district — home to the original restaurants of James Beard Award-winning chefs Michael Symon and Jonathan Sawyer.

For more information: thisiscleveland.com

Old is New A \$50-million renovation has brought new life to the city's historic Public Square.



April 14, 2018
2018 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony
rockhall.com/inductees

The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame's big night out rotates between New York City and Cleveland — and next year it's the CLE's turn. The Class of 2018 won't be announced until later this year, but whoever makes the cut, the party will be great.

ILLUSTRATION BY REDDIN DESIGN



STREETSCAPE W. 25th Street/ Ohio City

West 25th Street is at the heart of the culturally rich Ohio City neighborhood, located just across the Cuyahoga River from downtown Cleveland. Unofficially known as the city's brewery district, Ohio City is home to six (going on seven) breweries — creating a beer lover's paradise that includes opportunities for production-facility tours. Visitors flock here for food, too, including in one of the country's first public markets, the West Side Market, and in eateries galore, such as SoHo Chicken + Whiskey, Flying Fig, Crop Bistro, TownHall, and Bar Cento.

1 Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland (HCCC) clevelandconventions.com

Located adjacent to the Global Center for Health Innovation, HCCC includes 225,000 square feet of Class A exhibit space divisible into three exhibition halls, 35 meeting rooms, and a 32,000-square-foot, column-free ballroom with spectacular views of Cleveland's lakefront. In this tech-friendly underground environment, visitors can actually get mobile-phone reception throughout the building.

2 Hilton Cleveland Downtown hiltoncleveland.com

Opened in June 2016, the 600-room Hilton Cleveland Downtown is directly connected to the Huntington Convention Center and offers Superman-like views of the skyline and Lake Erie. In addition to a lakefront-facing bar on the 32nd floor, guests can dine at The Burnham, which serves fresh seafood, Cajun-creole fusion, and Midwestern comfort food.

3 Flats East Bank flatseastbank.com

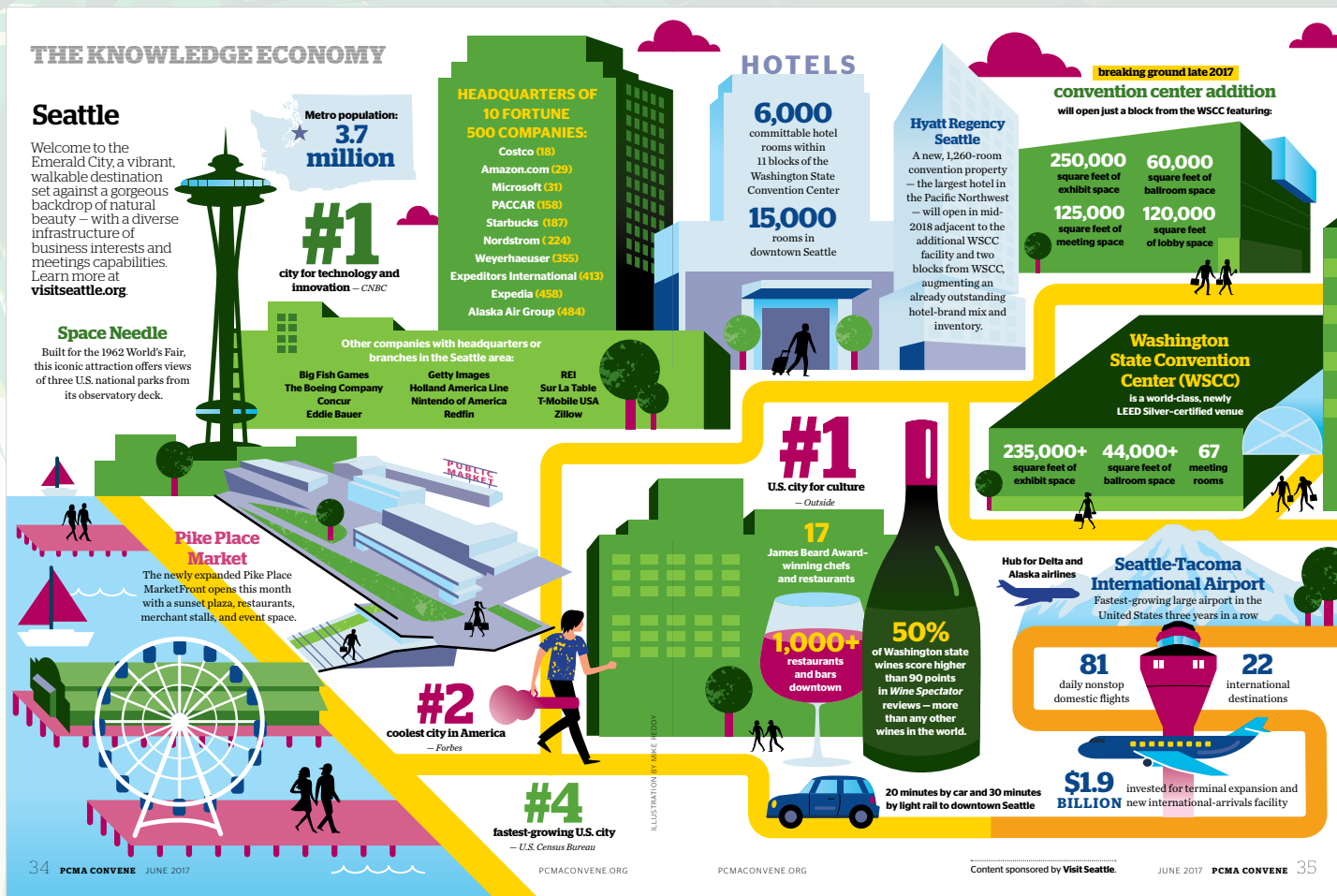
Located along the Cuyahoga River, the Flats East Bank offers an expansive boardwalk with picture-perfect sunset views. From local favorites Lago and Alley Cat Oyster Bar to Punch Bowl Social Club and the Big Bang Dueling Piano Bar, the area is brimming with dining and entertainment options. And opening in 2017: Margaritaville.

4 E. Fourth Street/ Gateway District clevelandgatewaydistrict.com

Home to three sports teams, six hotels, and the heart of Cleveland's culinary scene, the Gateway District is full of energy. On East Fourth Street, visitors can catch a show at the House of Blues or Hilarities Comedy Club after enjoying menu offerings ranging from fine to casual dining in a relaxed atmosphere.

5 Playhouse Square playhousesquare.org

With 10 unique performance spaces — including opulent, vaudeville-style theaters that have been restored to their 1920s splendor — Cleveland's Playhouse Square is the country's largest performing-arts center outside of New York City. The center hosts more than 1,000 events each year, including Broadway musicals, comedy shows, plays, and concerts.



Commission (FTC) issued a policy statement about in 2015: “The more a native ad is similar, in format and topic, to content on a publisher’s site (regardless of medium),” according to the FTC statement, “the more likely that a disclosure will be necessary to prevent deception.”

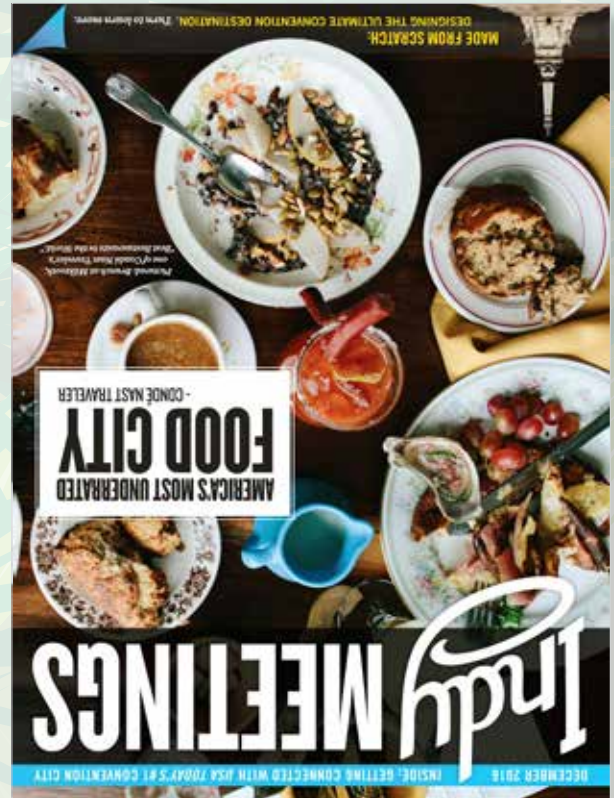
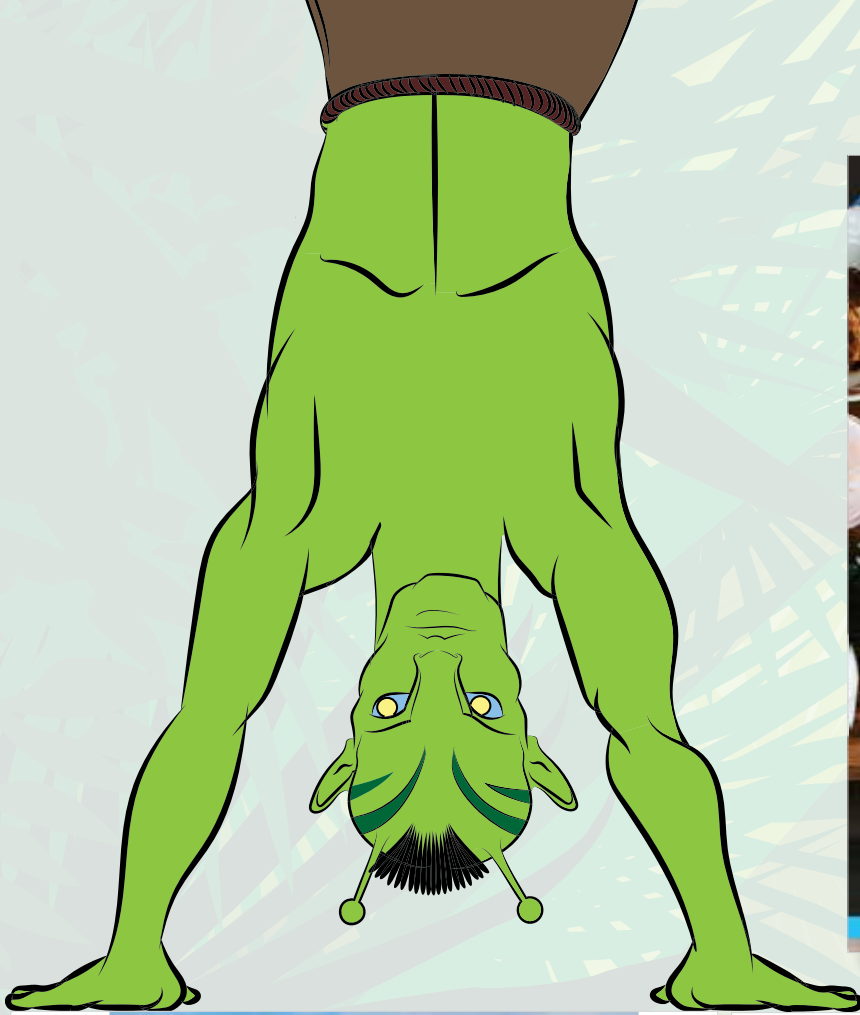
Our other rule of thumb is to work closely with our clients when it comes to creating, writing, and designing content on which we collaborate. We don’t just republish or repurpose press releases or gather information from websites. Our writer reaches out to each client to ask what they’re seeking to accomplish with the content piece and what messages they want to convey. If the advertiser is participating in a special section devoted to a particular topic (say, renovations, expansions, or new builds of hotels and convention centers), we ask them to answer questions that focus on that area, and this informs the content we produce.

We publish advertorial special sections that often fill around one-third of each of our 12 annual issues in addition to a standalone annual directory. That’s a significant amount of content to produce, so we strive to keep writers devoted to either native content or pure journalism, though there are times when we have to dig our hands into both. The cost to participate in a special section is about the same as a full-page ad — it’s considered a value-add. In addition, in

each issue we offer a few other ways for our advertisers to tell their stories. Following are some examples of our homegrown native advertising options in print.

Our Knowledge Economy series is an infographic spread that capitalizes on two trends. The first is the popularity of infographics in communicating information. The second is specific to the destination-marketing industry: an increased focus on the business and intellectual assets in communities that conferences can draw on as part of their educational programs. We ask clients to fill in specific categories with data about their destination and to prioritize that information. We then hire an illustrator to conceptualize that content. This series has become so popular among clients (we allow only one per issue) that it’s sold out into next year. We charge 50 percent more to produce a Knowledge Economy spread compared to a full-page ad plus matching advertorial, but advertisers like that they are able to repurpose the piece for their own marketing use.

Places + Spaces is a visually compelling way for a destination to showcase its highlights — hotels, restaurants, cultural attractions, neighborhoods, convention center, etc. We hire a map artist to create a customized map of the city that pinpoints five areas of interest. We charge about 30 percent more for this series than a full-page ad plus matching advertorial page.



Convene On Location

Infrastructure, innovation, and live blues in the Gateway City.

St. Louis

By Corin Hirsch

"So, what do you know about St. Louis?"

Brian Hall, chief marketing officer for Explore St. Louis, asked me this question beside a fire pit at Three Sixty STL, a rooftop restaurant at downtown's Hilton St. Louis at the Ballpark hotel. The sun had just set, and while balancing a wine glass in one hand and a seared-tuna taco in the other, I thought about Mark Twain, Lewis and Clark, and the Gateway Arch. "Not a whole lot," I admitted.

"Exactly," Hall said.

By the time I left St. Louis two days later, after a visit sponsored by Explore St. Louis, I had learned that this seemingly under-the-radar city of 318,000 people — with 2.8 million in the greater metropolitan area — brims with history, innovation, food, music, and charm.

DAY 1: UNDER THE ARCH

Of course, a river runs through it, too. St. Louis spreads along the west bank of the Mississippi, and it wasn't long after landing at Lambert-St. Louis International Airport — a 20-minute drive or train ride from downtown — that I was standing in the windows of the CityArchRiver Foundation building, looking out on Old Man River and the iconic Gateway Arch.

In the 1960s, the park grounds that surround the Gateway Arch National Monument were cut off from downtown St. Louis by a highway. Fifty years later, the CityArchRiver Foundation is guiding a \$380-million renovation of the park, the Arch, and the Museum of Westward Expansion at its base. With \$221 million from private sources, the project is the largest-ever private investment in a U.S. National Park. "We've been talking about this for decades," said Ryan McClure, the Foundation's communications director. "The stars just sort of aligned."

When the CityArchRiver project is complete in late 2017, not only will the 630-foot-high Arch have a facelift, the park's public spaces, including an amphitheater and lawns, will be revitalized. The subterranean museum — which tells the story of westward expansion — will offer 500,000 square feet of modernized space for events for up to 4,000 people. Since the project will also raise the riverfront by five feet, the Mississippi's periodic flooding will be less of a problem. "We're going to get a lot of days back," McClure said.

From the Arch, it was only a short stroll to Ballpark Village, a complex of bars and restaurants adjacent to Busch Stadium, home of the city's beloved St. Louis Cardinals. The heart of Ballpark Village is a lofty central space topped by a retractable glass roof, and around its perimeter are bars, enormous flat screens, and eateries serving everything from sushi to Southern fare. We nursed pints from St. Louis' hometown brewery, Anheuser-Busch, while



America's Center has 500,000 square feet of exhibition space.



The National Blues Museum opens on April 2, 2016.

wandering Ballpark Village's 122,000 square feet of event space, including a breezy terrace bar, the Skybox, that overlooks the field. "[The Village] can be dressed up, or it can be dressed down." Director of Sales Jill Methersaid during a tour, with spaces for events of anywhere from six to 6,000 people.

Back outside, St. Louis' wide avenues buzzed with impeccably dressed people, including women in elaborate hats. More than 35,000 members of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) were in town for their annual Holy Convocation at the America's Center Convention Complex. The country's largest African-American Pentecostal denomination, COGIC has gathered in St. Louis every year since 2010, and last summer signed a three-year agreement to hold the Holy Convocation here — a sign of faith after recent violence in nearby Ferguson, Missouri. "St. Louis fits our needs and has proven to be a great match," Keith Kershaw,

COGIC's director of the office of convention planning, said at the time.

Indeed, downtown's America's Center, with 500,000 square feet of exhibit space, is an ideal match for such a large group. The venue's airiness is the result of a \$50-million renovation in 2009. For COGIC, a red carpet stretched through the entire foyer, and a bazaar occupied one area of the 180,000-square-foot exhibit hall, which can be broken into five smaller spaces. Paige Millard, America's Center's vice president of event services, explained that the venue is so large that several conferences can go on concurrently without anyone stepping on each other's toes. (Over one weekend this past January, 14 groups met there simultaneously.) And sure enough, despite the bustle of COGIC attendees on the ground floor, the halls on the second level were quiet — as was the intimate, 1,400-seat Ferrara Theatre, which Keith Levey, Explore St. Louis'

WHAT'S NEW IN

Dubai

Natural Wonders Forever Living sales affiliates will attend the company's annual Global Rally showcase at the Dubai World Trade Centre. The event will showcase new products and give attendees a chance to network and see the sights.

The Best-Laid Plans Meeting professionals from more than 40 countries will gather at Madinat Jumeirah for four days of networking, education sessions, and panels, as well as a half-day city tour.



Rotary Zone 4.5, and 6A Institute
Dec. 16-18, 2016
Hyatt Regency Dubai
dubairotaryinstitute2016.org

"Nothing Is Impossible" is the theme for this year's gathering of Rotarians from India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The Rotary Foundation, the charitable arm of Rotary International, celebrates its centennial year in 2016-2017, and attendees will hear updates on community-service initiatives being carried out by members throughout the region. Highlights of the three-day meeting will include a catamaran reception with incoming Rotary International President John F. Germ and a seated dinner at the Armani Hotel's outdoor pavilion, which sits at the foot of Dubai's Burj Khalifa tower, the tallest building in the world.

IAPCO 2017
Feb. 16-19, 2017
Madinat Jumeirah
iapco2017.com

Around 100 members of the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers from some 40 countries will convene in Dubai next winter for four days of education sessions, industry panels, and networking opportunities. The theme of the conference is "Leading the Future, Creating Opportunities," a nod to the rapid pace of change in the global meetings industry. Attendees will also have time on the final day of the conference to experience Dubai through a half-day group excursion that will be followed by dinner.

Forever Living 2017 Global Rally
Apr. 3-9, 2017
Dubai World Trade Centre
foreverglobalrally.com

Forever Living, the grower and distributor of aloe-vera-based health, beauty, and personal-care products, was founded in Scottsdale, Arizona, in 1978, and now has more than 10 million sales representatives in 150-plus countries. The company holds its annual Global Rally in a different exotic locale each year. Next spring, thousands of affiliates will travel to Dubai to network with other top sellers, hear updates from company leadership, and enjoy one-of-a-kind activities throughout the city. They'll also get an early look at Forever Living's soon-to-be-released products and tools.

International Primary Immunodeficiencies Congress 2017
Nov. 8-10, 2017
Crowne Plaza Dubai
ipic2017.com

Hundreds of health-care practitioners, academics, researchers, and students across several disciplines related to the functioning of the immune system will travel to Dubai for IPIC17, where they will learn about new developments in primary immunodeficiencies (a group of more than 250 rare, chronic disorders). The program will be built around optimizing clinical care, with CME-credited sessions and symposiums. Held biannually, IPIC in 2015 covered topics such as new genetic research, the management of gastrointestinal complications, and the promise that patient registries have brought to the field.

Editorial content sponsored by Dubai Business Events: dubaisbusinessevents.ae

PCMACONVENE.ORG

JULY 2016 PCMA CONVENE 27

What's New In is a single-page feature that requires no special art — the images are provided by the client. This is an avenue for a destination to highlight interesting conferences and events it is hosting in the near future and is about the same price as a full-page ad plus matching advertorial page.

Convene on Location is a three- to six-page feature story written by a staff writer or regular contributor who visits the destination. The trip itinerary is set up by the client (the host destination's marketing organization), but the story is written from a first-person point of view, travelogue style, with an emphasis on what meeting groups can experience while in town. This can be a co-op buy, so that other destination suppliers, like hotels, help cover the costs — three times more than a full-page ad plus matching advertorial page.

Our **reverse-cover package** allows advertisers to buy valuable real estate in a particular issue. An advertiser can brand the back cover to look like its own publication and then take the next few pages to tell its story through ads, images, and content. The entire package is printed upside down from the rest of the issue so that it reads like its own minipublication. For this, we charge more than double our fee to produce two ad pages plus two matching advertorial pages.

Thriving as a Native

For us and for most media outlets, in print and online, native advertising is no passing trend. The Native Advertising Trends report, published last year, surveyed executives at 140 magazines from 39 countries, and 72 percent said they were positive toward native advertising, and they said printed articles are among the top three most-effective forms of native advertising. Surprisingly, only 29 percent found producing engaging native content to be their biggest challenge; training the sales team and convincing advertisers to tell real stories were bigger obstacles to overcome.

It takes a lot of thought and effort to come up with a native content opportunity that speaks to our industry and leverages our resources. But when we hit upon a concept that is successful, it can add revenues in the tens of thousands — bringing in advertisers that we may not have otherwise attracted. For example, the Knowledge Economy series has resulted in \$150,000 in revenue since its inception last summer.

The Knowledge Economy hasn't just been all about generating revenue, though. From an editorial-voice perspective, the series helps us elevate the conversation among our audience by reinforcing a strategy of choosing destinations not only on the basis of standard infrastructure considerations such as airlift, number of hotel rooms, and convention center space. With each Knowledge Economy, we're reinforcing the idea that by capitalizing on a destination's knowledge assets in specific industries, meeting organizers can greatly enrich their conference program.

Of course, what I've shared is specific to *Convene's* audience. But all kinds of publishers serving niche markets provide advertisers with more than just a target audience. We need to demonstrate that we can also lend our editorial voice and design talent in ways that engage their intended audience — while remaining true to our brand.

Michelle Russell has been editor-in-chief of Convene since 2003, where she has overseen the growth of the magazine to a monthly award-winning print and digital publication. She has more than 30 years of experience as an editor and writer, and began her career as a nonfiction book editor at Random House. Connect at tinyurl.com/linkedin-mrussell.