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IT'S JUST BUSINESS

Just the other day, as I was desperately pondering what I'd write about this month, it occurred to me that our old friends at GCSAA hadn't done anything interesting or controversial in a while. It seemed like they were hunkered down, riding out the recession and trying to avoid any big nasty issues like PDI or relocating the headquarters or giving the Old Tom Morris award to a dead guy for purely political reasons.

Then, like manna from heaven, my e-mail inbox dinged. It was a note from a well-connected GCSAA member who was forwarding a message from the Club Managers Association of America. It was a very interesting narrative about why CMAA was planning to drop out of the Golf Industry Show after 2011.

Voila! My what-to-write-about problem was solved.

By now, I suspect you've heard that GCSAA is bailing out of dirty, nasty old New Orleans for the wholesome environs of Las Vegas in 2012. Hurrah! The moral compass has been straightened!

Let's look at this from a few perspectives. First, to quote "The Godfather," let's consider the "It's not personal, it's just business" point of view.

There's no question that some people simply don't take to New Orleans' down-and-dirty atmosphere and the whole Bourbon Street drink-till-you-puke-then-drink-more mentality. There were certainly a number of folks who had plentiful budgets but stayed away from The Big Easy because of the perception that they were fiddling while Rome was burning back at their clubs. And, unfortunately, the specter of Hurricane Katrina and a ruined and violent city still looms large in the minds of some.

So, I suspect that there were a few very vocal critics within the membership (and perhaps on the board) who simply can't stand New Orleans. The

city is like Cajun food...an acquired taste. It holds little attraction for those who don't enjoy the spectacle, the weirdness and the Bacchanalian atmosphere.

So, I think that from a strictly business standpoint, the GCSAA was worried that New Orleans would no longer be the draw that it had been in the past. Attendance of 12,000 to 14,000 (I – and others – dispute the 17,000 number GCSAA released after the 2009 event) simply isn't acceptable when the event drives half the revenue of the association and its partners every year. A few thousand more attendees are worth a big pile of cash to everyone involved.

One final business thought: Las Vegas is hurting right now. There's no question that the city is headhunting any major convention it can get. I think Vegas – once again in Godfather parlance – made the GIS an offer it couldn't refuse.

Second, consider the exhibitors' perspective. According to the GCSAA news release about the change in locations, the GIS contacted exhibitors in advance of the decision. There's no indication of what the exhibitors – who pay all the bills – thought about this in the text of the release, but I can tell you what I've heard from my friends in industry. The short, less-profanity-laced version is, "Oh my, I mildly dislike shows in Las Vegas." Why? Two reasons.

First, the Las Vegas Convention Center is a strict union shop. As an exhibitor, you can't fart without permission from a Teamsters steward. Want to plug in an electrical cord? That'll require two union members and cost \$150. Want to have coffee and donuts in your booth? We'll send six people over – one to push the cart, one to count the donuts, one to check the temperature of the coffee and three to back them up.

So, despite the allure and glamour of Vegas, it's one of the most expensive

places to do business in the country. But, perhaps worse, it also represents the ultimate bait-and-switch from a conference point of view. The city does everything it can to attract shows like the GIS. Then, once attendees arrive, it does everything possible to keep them from actually going to the seminars and trade show. Quite simply, people who are in classes or looking at products on the show floor are not losing money at the tables. Once they get you there, they want you in the casinos. Period.

Years ago, those same issues – cost and distraction – led GCSAA to drop Sin City from the show rotation. Have those challenges gone away? Doubt it. But, I'd be shocked if Vegas didn't offer a tremendous deal to get the show back. And, money talks. In this case, it talked loudly enough that it seems – and the CMAA's announcement alleges – that GCSAA acted "unilaterally" to change the venue. And the club guys were chapped about it.

When you treat a great association like CMAA like a second-class citizen, you shouldn't be surprised that they'd react like this. What's more, it was pretty clear that CMAA's members and exhibitors felt like they were lost in a sea of superintendents at the combined show. The culture of the organization and its premiere event was rapidly being degraded by being literally and figuratively stuck down at the end of the hall.

When it was formed, the justification for the new, combined GIS was that it was a reflection of the concept of "team management" within the club/facility structure. That notion assumes the fact that the GIS partners would also act like a team. Correct me if I'm wrong, but teams work together. When one member of the team decides that its interests are more important than the other members', no one wins. **GCI**