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THE GIS REPORT CARD

I'm at 35,000 feet and the nose of the 737 is pointed directly at Cleveland and Vegas is to our aft. Another GIS is in the books for the GCI team. It's time to take stock and grade the industry's big event.

Golf championship. *Upside:* It was held in one of the prettiest places on Earth, at least 100 friends of mine were playing, met even more great folks and both the golf and schmoozing were excellent. Toro and GCSAA continue to exceed expectations on this thing. Also, the fact that I no longer give a crap how I play was a major plus. *Downside:* Expensive and a couple of extra days away from work. **Grade: A** (for those who can swing it).

Venue. *Upside:* I think there was a sense of excitement about Las Vegas as a "different" destination. It probably did draw better than New Orleans would have and, as I understand it, it was certainly a better financial deal for the hosts. Decent facility and show set up. *Downside:* Post-Recession Vegas is kind of a shabby shadow of its old self. The "Giant Rundown Headquarters Hotel Formerly Known as the Las Vegas Hilton" was lousy but close to the center. Though I personally loved it, thousands of "normal" folks had to put up with the ever-present toxic cloud of cigarette smoke that permeated every space. Personally, I don't drink or gamble so Vegas is largely just noise, weirdness and inconvenience for me (except for the people-watching, which is absolutely world-class). **Grade: C+**.

Conference. I'll let attendees judge the overall value of the education because I was too busy meeting and Tweeting to go to anything. That said, it's always excellent and I didn't hear any negatives. **Grade: N/A.**

Events. *Upside:* Feherty. *Downside:*

The compressed schedule of the week now makes it impossible for most people to fully savor anything. And, because GIS-unsanctioned events are *verboten* during the show and other official sessions, every company, chapter and association runs conflicting events Tuesday and Wednesday evening. If you're one of the "popular kids" you basically have to bounce from thing to thing and never really land for long. That said, the shorter schedule is a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't thing for organizers. If it was still three days, I'd be bitching about it being too long. **Grade: B.**

Show. *Upside:* Traffic reports were

I would not use the now-hackneyed term "new normal" in this column but that's exactly what the Vegas show was. The reality is fewer supers and employers feel they can justify the money, time and risk (i.e., "Why the hell is Bubba Joe off partying in Vegas while the club is struggling?"). Also, there's no lack of good education or product information regionally and there's this crazy new thing called the Inter-Web that fulfills many old-skool trade show benefits for free.

Thus, GIS-Vegas was a leaner, smarter show that quite simply is what it is. And kudos, by the way, to Rhett Evans and the board for being

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good from larger and well-established companies, particularly those who had given attendees a reason to come (promotions, invitations, etc.).

Downside: Last year, attendees were business-focused and determined to justify the trip by working the show hard. This year, my impression was that supers hit key supplier booths and fulfilled their obligations but didn't necessarily explore around the fringes. Some smaller vendors were bummed out. Note: my grade would be higher if it were not for the huge (and *always* preventable) lines at registration Wednesday morning. Unacceptable snafu. **Grade: B-**.

Camaraderie/Networking/Fun.

Upside: The finest people in the world sharing ideas, friendship and a passionate commitment to the profession.

Downside: The aforementioned time crunch makes it hard to have enough quality time with people I like and respect. **Grade: A+.**

Overall. I had promised myself that

absolutely up-front and transparent about that.

"Par" for the show back in the fat-and-happy days used to be 22,000-25,000 bodies. Now it's maybe 15,000. And no one has given me a compelling reason to think that number will grow in the future. Exhibitors will still invest in booths, but they'll have to work harder for the time and attention of fewer customers. The hosts will continue to provide education, but they need to be unique, invaluable sessions. Supers and assistants who want to be citizens of the profession will still go, but not every year. I'll always go. God help me... but I adore this stupid thing. **Final Overall Grade: B-ish.**

Well, I'm out of words and the plane's about to land. Time to return to Earth and to begin looking forward to the promise of a new golf season. I hope the seeds of optimism planted in Vegas grow into a prosperous year for all of us. **GCI**