

# Meeting Mentor



## Bureau Collaborations

### Baltimore/Fort Worth/Sacramento

■ **The collaborators:**

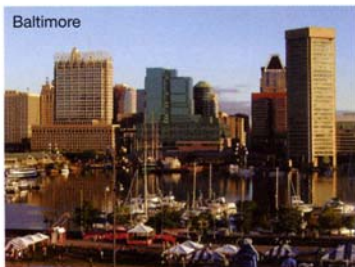
Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association, Fort Worth Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Sacramento Convention and Visitors Bureau ([www.baltimore.org](http://www.baltimore.org); [www.fortworth.com](http://www.fortworth.com); [www.sacramentocvb.org](http://www.sacramentocvb.org))

■ **The fit:**

The destinations rarely compete, and their sizes and profiles are similar, yet their brands are not at all alike.

■ **The back story:**

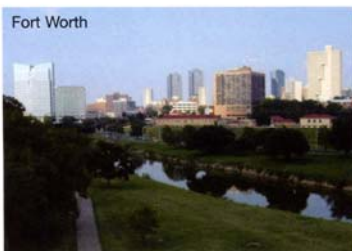
The best of friends for 20 years, David Dubois, CMP, CAE, president and CEO in Fort Worth, and Tom Noonan, president and CEO in Baltimore, both started at their respective bureaus on consecutive days in January 2007. They soon realized that



each city needed to generate more short-term corporate meetings. “We don’t compete with the West Coast and hardly ever with the Midwest, so why not have a collaboration to sell three destinations?” Noonan asked Dubois one day in a phone call. They recruited long-time friend, Steve Hammond, president and CEO in Sacramento. The three now have “stronger voices,” said Noonan.

■ **How they work together:**

A formal agreement, signed in late 2007, outlines the three destinations’ commitments. Each bureau agreed to



hire a salesperson to sell multiple-city bookings, effectively delivering three reps for the price of one. Ann Garvey (Baltimore) sells the East Coast from Washington, D.C.; Robin O’Connor (Fort Worth) covers the Midwest from Chicago; and Julie Gorman (Sacramento) handles the West Coast. Their travel expenses are divided when sales calls are made for the collaboration, and the bureaus’ CFOs do the reconciliation. The partners are beginning to plan joint customer events and create a Web site that links to all three destinations’ sites.

The three DMOs have firmed up a joint marketing program—Web site, e-marketing campaigns and promotional video—along with a collaborative three-city marketing plan to include joint collateral, online advertising, and sponsorship of local association chapters’ Web sites and newsletters. They also were planning joint events for ASAE in San Diego and MPI in Las Vegas.

■ **Incentives they offer:**

The partners have developed a value-added matrix. The standard comp room ratio, upgrades, perhaps an open reception and discount on convention center fees increase when the client books two cities. And, said Dubois, “the pencil gets real sharp” when three cities are signed, including a check to be used to drive attendance. Each city

may add individual incentives as well.

■ **Outcomes:**

It’s all about incremental business and increased bookings. If a salesperson books two meetings of 4,000 room nights over three days (an estimated 24,000 room nights) that the cities didn’t have, that amounts to \$4.8 million using DMAI’s formula of \$200 a day in average delegate spending. “With \$150,000 in costs [for each destination], you’re looking at 3 percent cost of sales; I’d love to be the owner of that business,” Dubois noted. In the first five months of the collaboration, Baltimore’s salesperson identified 25,000 lead room nights for Fort Worth. In two months, the Fort Worth salesperson had already pinpointed leads for 6,700 room nights.

■ **Pitfalls to avoid:**

While they believe their relationships are strong enough to weather any rough waters, “this is uncharted territory,” said Hammond. “If you don’t invest money, measure results and put accountability against it,” Dubois agreed, the collaboration “won’t work



well.” That’s why there is a direct line of communication and responsibility from each salesperson back to the hiring bureau. And to make sure all three destinations are sold equally, the bureaus have invested in cross-training.

— M. G.