

Maritz Goes Virtual



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By Andrea Doyle

"Out of adversity is born innovation and new ideas," says Dennis Hummel, president and COO of Maritz at an unveiling of the company's newest product, Maritz LIVE. An acronym for Local Interactive Virtual Events, Maritz is now offering a suite of virtual services to its vast portfolio.

In light of challenges facing the meetings and incentives industry, including the economy and negative public perception, Maritz has partnered with VELOCITY Broadcasting, the largest, high-definition broadcasting network in North America to offer immersive, high-definition satellite broadcast events. These events are a unique approach to virtual meetings because they blend Maritz' expertise in strategic meeting management, content development, and participant measurement with VELOCITY Broadcasting's High-Definition satellite network. This collaborative approach features complete event management services from planning and creative consultation, to production and post-event evaluation, for turnkey execution.

Custom-created live television broadcasting combined with interactive technology is featured in private dining rooms equipped with private VELOCITY HD digital suites in venues including Morton's The Steakhouse, Maggiano's Little Italy restaurants, and ClubCorp's private club locations. The result is a sensory experience that eliminates the hassles and costs of overnight travel.

"We can now bring the world to your guests without them having to go to the world," says Chris Gaia, vice president of marketing, Maritz Travel.

One of the reasons Maritz LIVE was created was because Maritz conducted research that revealed that most clients have reduced the number of meetings and events they are holding or have reduced the number of attendees to drive down costs. Changes in today's labor market also led to the creation of Maritz LIVE.

"There is a transformation in the industry with five generations in today's workforce," says Christine Duffy, president and CEO, Maritz Travel Company.

Duffy and Steve Maritz, chairman and CEO of the company, were in VELOCITY HD Studios in the WQED Multi-Media complex in Pittsburgh, which was home to Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. Their conversation and a live question and answer session were broadcast to 12 sites across the country where 150 clients and prospects were gathered.

One of the virtues of delivering high-definition content to audiences in VELOCITY HD digital suites is that the carbon footprint of a traditional meeting or conference is lessened.

OutlookSoft, a business performance management software firm, in conjunction with Lionsgate, has used the services of VELOCITY with much success. "We attracted 200 c level executives who control millions of dollars in budget a year to a dinner at Morton's," says Phil Wilmington, CEO of Outlook Soft, during the broadcast. "We were able to close millions of dollars of business in that one evening."

There are 140 VELOCITY HD digital suites set up across the country that can seat up to 7,000 with an additional 60 suites set to be added this year. There will also be suites in 30 different countries by the end of the year.

Maritz's other LIVE suite of services include events held entirely online in a privately branded virtual world, online Web meeting and video conferencing, and high-quality, real-time video and voice conferencing. Maritz LIVE can accommodate an array of needs, including training and learning sessions, trade shows, and corporate and sales meetings. When coupled with incentives, rewards, and recognition, virtual meetings can play an important role in reaching business objectives and effectively engaging employees and customers.