

DESTINATIONS
TEXAS

2026 **ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

SEPTEMBER 2 - 4, 2026 • MARRIOTT AT LEGACY TOWN CENTER *Plano, TX*

SCHEDULE

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1 PRE-CONFERENCE

5:15 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. **Destination Tour: Behind the Screams, Inside Dark Hour Haunted House**

Offsite — Dark Hour Haunted House, Plano

Dark Hour Haunted House in Plano is one of the most acclaimed haunted attractions in Texas, known for its cinematic sets, professional actors, and Hollywood-level makeup and special effects. During this exclusive behind-the-scenes tour, attendees will get a rare look at what makes Dark Hour so immersive, from intricate set design and animatronics to costume and makeup artistry. This special experience offers an inside perspective on how one of North Texas' most thrilling attractions brings its haunting stories to life and continues to draw visitors from across the region. Light bites and beverages to follow at a neighboring local establishment.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **Partner Hall Load-In**

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. **Registration and Badge Pickup**

PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS (OPTIONAL ADD-ONS)

9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. **Destination Marketing Principles (DMP)**

San Jacinto

The DMO 101 Course for our industry that provides the best overview of the Destination Organization space in one class. Session covers DMO structures, HOT tax use and guidelines, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement and more!

Presented by Mark Thompson, Executive Director, Visit Plano, and Shannon Overby, National Sales Director, Visit Fredericksburg

11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	First-Time Attendee Luncheon (invite only) <i>Willow Creek (Level 2)</i>
11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Team Texas Meeting <i>San Jacinto</i>
12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Young Professionals Committee Meeting <i>San Jacinto</i>
12:00 p.m.	Partner Hall Opens <i>Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall</i>
1:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.	Welcome to the 2026 Destinations Texas Annual Conference! <i>Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2</i> <i>Opening remarks, welcome from the Mayor of Plano, and table networking exercise</i>
	OPENING KEYNOTE Push What's Possible: The Olympic Formula for Breakthrough Performance in Any Season <i>Johnny Quinn, Former Olympian</i> <i>Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2</i> Every high-achieving team faces unexpected moments that test everything they've got: their discipline, their focus, and their self-belief. When the stakes are high and the outcome uncertain, how do you not just survive the season, but stay ready for what's next? From NFL locker rooms to the Olympic starting line, Johnny Quinn learned that readiness isn't luck. It's built through the right mindset and daily disciplines that prepare you for opportunity before it even arrives at your door. In this relatable and instantly applicable talk, he reveals the P.U.S.H. framework that turns great teams into unstoppable ultra performers. You'll learn how to: • Collaborate under pressure by finding a way to get the job done with the people and resources available • Build the habits that keep you prepared for whatever comes your way • Turn “no” into “next” by choosing readiness over resistance
2:15 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.	Break & Partner Hall <i>Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall</i>
2:45 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	The Art of Destination Leadership: A Conversation with Texas Legends <i>Featuring Larry Woods and Bob Jameson / Moderated by Maura Gast</i> <i>Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2</i> As two of Texas tourism's most respected leaders close an extraordinary chapter in their careers, join us for an unforgettable conversation about leadership, legacy, and

the evolution of destination organizations.

In this candid fireside-style discussion, Maura Gast of Visit Irving sits down with Larry Woods, former Director of Visit Boerne, and Bob Jameson, former CEO of Visit Fort Worth to reflect on decades of industry transformation, community leadership, organizational growth, and the moments that shaped their careers. From navigating change and building strong teams to earning stakeholder trust and advocating for the value of destination organizations, these industry icons will share the lessons they learned along the way, and the wisdom they hope the next generation carries forward.

Whether you are a seasoned executive or an emerging leader, this session offers timeless insights, honest reflections, and practical takeaways from three of Texas tourism's most influential voices.

3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Texas Tourism Awards Presentation

Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

4:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Partner Hall

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall

4:45 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.

Young Professionals Reception at Haywire

Offsite – Haywire, 5901 Winthrop St

Sponsored by Tempest and Destination Bryan

6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Opening Reception at Legacy Food Hall

Offsite – Legacy Food Hall, 7800 Winthrop St

Sponsored by Visit Plano

7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Big DMO Sponsor Dinner (by invite only)

Offsite – Fleming's

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Registration and Badge Pickup

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Breakfast and Morning Remarks

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall • Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2 (remarks)

Sponsored by Tiki

9:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.

MORNING GENERAL SESSION

You Are Your Superpower: Crafting and Leveraging a Magnetic Personal Brand

Lori Robertson, Keynote Speaker and Speech Coach

Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

People don't trust brands the way they used to. In a world flooded with AI and curated feeds, audiences want to know the real people behind the organization before they ever consider buying, partnering, or referring. In this energizing opening keynote, Lori Robertson reveals why your personal brand has become one of your most valuable assets, with data showing 74% of people are more likely to trust and do business with someone who has an established personal brand. The best way to stand out in an artificial world turns out to be refreshingly human: being more of who you already are. You'll leave with practical ways to build trust, grow your influence, and put your personal brand to work.

Key takeaways:

- Why personal brand has become essential currency, no matter your role or title
- The marketing tactics and trust signals consumers respond to today
- How being more authentically human beats trying to be more polished
- Three simple ways to accelerate trust with the people you most want to reach
- Where personal branding is making the biggest impact and what that means for your growth

9:45 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Break & Partner Hall

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall

10:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

How to Get Your Destination Noticed in an AI-Dominated World

Willow Creek (Level 2)

If you missed the Innovation Summit, this is the session for you! The marketing world is changing fast. Trying to stay ahead of all the changes can feel overwhelming, but there are things you can do right now that will help position your destination for success in this AI-driven world. Come hear the two practical actions everybody can start doing that will make your destination found by travelers.

Presented by Mike Robertson, VP Brand Partnerships, Director of Culture, MediaOne

Destination Sales Best Practices: Winning Strategies for Today's Traveler

PANEL

San Jacinto

In an increasingly competitive landscape, destination sales professionals must go beyond traditional tactics to capture the attention, and bookings, of meeting planners. This dynamic panel brings together industry leaders to share proven strategies, emerging trends, and hard-won lessons from the field.

Panelists will explore what it truly takes to differentiate a destination in a crowded marketplace, from building compelling value propositions and cultivating long-term client relationships to leveraging data-driven insights and navigating the evolving role of technology in the sales process.

Topics will include:

- Crafting destination narratives that resonate with today's meeting planners and travel buyers
- Building and nurturing relationships with key accounts and decision-makers
- Aligning sales strategy with destination marketing to create a unified buyer experience
- Lessons learned from high-performing destination sales teams

Presented by Meg Winchester, Vice President, Fired Up!

Panelists: Brad Kent, CSO, Visit Dallas; Jorge Franz, Senior VP, Houston First; and Valerie Garcia, Director of Sales, Visit El Paso

Inside DMO Leadership: What Leaders Are Experiencing Right Now**Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2**

Across the tourism industry, the expectations placed on DMO leaders continue to expand. Leaders are navigating increasing demands around strategy, accountability, governance, staffing, data, stakeholder management, and organizational growth, often in organizations with limited internal infrastructure and leadership support. This session will share findings and emerging patterns from a multi-state DMO Leadership Pulse initiative designed to better understand the realities of leading destination organizations today. The study explores how leaders are spending their time, where they feel most stretched, how prepared organizations feel for the future, and how leadership challenges differ across organization size and structure. Rather than simply presenting data, this session will focus on the practical implications for destination leaders and teams.

Participants will:

- Identify emerging leadership patterns and challenges across destination organizations
- Better understand how operational demands affect strategic leadership capacity
- Explore practical ways to strengthen leadership effectiveness and organizational alignment
- Gain perspective on how destination organizations can better prepare for future leadership transitions and increasing industry complexity

Presented by Doug Bacon, Founder, Throwing Words

Panelists: Craig Davis, CEO, Visit Dallas; Brett Stawar, CEO, Port Aransas the Island Life, and Maura Gast, Executive Director, Visit Irving

Stop Counting Heads. Start Measuring Value.**Trinity River Ballroom 4**

Visitor counts are a starting point, not a strategy. They tell you how many people showed up, but not whether they stayed, spent, explored beyond the obvious attractions, or meaningfully engaged with your destination. In a budget environment where every dollar must work harder, destination marketers can't afford to optimize for volume when value is what moves the needle.

This session makes the case for a smarter approach to visitor intelligence and gives you a practical roadmap for getting there. We'll explore the data sources reshaping how leading DMOs understand their visitors: quality visit scoring frameworks that rank origin markets by visitor engagement with the destination, not just trip volume; lodging data that reveals booking windows, length of stay, and future demand patterns before they show up in your numbers; media attribution tools that connect your campaigns to real visitor behavior rather than impressions; and behavioral movement data that maps

where visitors go, where they don't, and what that means for your marketing and your stakeholders.

Takeaways:

- A working definition of quality visitation and a framework for applying it to your destination
- An informed buyer's guide to the visitor data landscape, including what each data type reveals
- Strategies for using visitor behavior insights to design better experiences, attract higher-value guests, and defend your budget with confidence

Presented by Katie Cook, SVP, Marketing and Client Experience, Zartico

The Wild West of Festivals and Event Grant Funding: Bringing Structure to a Thankless Task

Trinity River Ballroom 3

Every destination with money to give away for festivals and events knows the drill. The stack of applications. The recurring “concert” with 100% local attendance. The event organizer that never reports back until next year's application is due. The event you have quietly overpaid for three years running. The mayor's friend's great idea. And the group you had to turn down that also happens to “know the mayor.” Handing out festival and event grants is one of the most political and least organized things a destination does, and almost no one has a real process for it.

This session walks through how to build and run a program from the ground up: structuring the application, scoring requests fairly, sizing an award, holding events accountable after the check clears, and defending every decision to your board, your hoteliers, your elected officials, and the group that did not get funded. There is no single right way. Every step offers different paths depending on your budget, your board, and your community.

Whether you already run a program, were just handed one, or watch your local government struggle through it, you will leave with:

- A clear map of the full process, from application to post-event reporting
- The ways destinations structure funding, and the trade-offs of each
- A framework for scoring and sizing awards you can stand behind
- A way to take the politics out and make decisions you can defend to anyone who asks

Structure will not make everyone happy, but it will make every decision defensible.

Presented by Brett Oetting, Founder and CEO, Oetting Alchemy

10:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Break & Partner Hall

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall

11:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Some Stories Deserve More Than 30 Seconds: Storytelling as a Competitive Advantage in an AI World

Willow Creek (Level 2)

AI has made content faster, cheaper, and more abundant than ever. But content has never been the reason people travel, and it has never been the reason people believe in a place. Nobody crosses the country for an optimized headline or an AI-generated

itinerary. They travel to celebrate, reconnect, and collect stories they will tell for years. And the residents who shape a place every day don't stay because of a 30-second highlight reel. As AI makes everything start to sound the same, destinations face a harder version of an old problem: standing out when the cost of producing content has dropped to zero.

The industry has spent years optimizing for speed and attention, six seconds, fifteen seconds, thirty if you're lucky, all in service of a single metric: occupancy. But a place is not a product, and attention is not the same thing as connection. Attention gets the glance. A real, immersive story is what builds community pride, shifts resident sentiment, and retains the talent that defines a place. Using real examples from Emmy-nominated and award-winning place-branding work, this session explores the strategic and creative decision to stop making ads and start creating long-form, human narratives. The destinations that thrive won't be the ones producing the most content. They will be the ones creating moments people can't wait to share, because AI can help tell your story, but it can't create one worth living.

Key takeaways:

- Attention vs. connection: why chasing short-form engagement can't carry the weight of a community's identity, and how to balance quick hooks with the depth that actually moves people
- Storytelling from the inside out: practical frameworks for uncovering neighborhood-level truths that residents recognize, trust, and rally behind
- The civic ROI: how shifting from fleeting impressions to immersive storytelling directly affects resident sentiment, civic pride, and long-term talent retention
- AI as amplifier, not author: how leading brands use AI to expand creative capacity rather than replace it, and where the human story has to stay human

Presented by Dan Janes, CEO, Karsh Hagan Madden (KHM)

Print or Pass? A Leadership Roundtable on the Future of the Visitors Guide

PANEL

San Jacinto

Few topics are generating more internal debate inside DMOs right now than the Visitors Guide. Is it a high-value touchpoint that drives real traveler decisions, or an expensive legacy habit that's hard to justify in a digital-first world?

Join us for a lively discussion of the opportunities and challenges of publishing a visitors guide, including:

- What it really costs to produce (time, money, and more)
- What the research says about guide usage and return on investment
- What DMOs are putting in its place if they retire the guide
- For DMOs that are continuing to invest, what KPIs they use to justify it

Moderated by Nelson Gumm, CEO, AJR Media Group

Panelists: Tony Lyle, Executive Director, Visit Galveston, and Brady Closson, Assistant Executive Director, Grapevine Convention & Visitors Bureau.

They want to Visit. Can they Trust your Destination?

Trinity River Ballroom 3

Accessible travel is one of the largest untapped opportunities in tourism today, yet many destinations still treat it as a niche or a compliance requirement. In reality, travelers with accessibility needs, Baby Boomers, and their families and companions

represent a third of the world's population, and a loyal, high-value, and fast-growing market actively searching for destinations they can trust. In this session, we'll reframe accessibility as a growth strategy, not a cost center. Drawing on insights from working with over 140 destinations, we'll explore what separates destinations that are capturing this demand from those being overlooked. You'll learn where to start, what drives bookings, and how to turn accessibility into a competitive advantage through better information, authentic storytelling, and targeted distribution. We'll also share real business cases, practical tips, and proven tactics you can apply immediately, regardless of your destination's size or budget. If travelers with accessibility needs searched your destination today, would they book? By the end of this session, you'll know how to make sure the answer is yes.

Learning objectives:

- Recognize the business opportunity of accessible travel and understand why travelers with accessibility needs, seniors, and their companions represent a high-value and growing tourism market
- Identify the key elements that drive traveler confidence and bookings, including reliable accessibility information, authentic storytelling, and effective destination promotion
- Apply practical strategies to position accessibility as a competitive advantage, helping your destination attract more visitors and strengthen its tourism offering regardless of size or budget

Presented by Arturo Gaona, CPO, Wheel the World

Attendance Count & Beyond: Building Event Numbers You Can Actually Defend

Trinity River Ballroom 4

Events and festivals are central to destination strategy, but many CVBs still struggle to know which numbers to trust, how to explain them, and how to use them to make better decisions. This session helps Texas CVBs think through what reliable event measurement should look like, starting with the most basic question: how many people were actually there?

From there, we'll explore how attendance estimates can be strengthened with timing, foot traffic patterns, visitor origin, direct spend, and post-event reporting, and how to move from a single number to a clearer picture of when crowds built, how long they stayed, and where visitors came from. Attendees will leave with a practical framework they can apply whether they rely on simple internal methods, surveys, ticketing, mobile location data, or a combination of tools, with real-world examples showing how better measurement supports funding, sponsorship, marketing, and staffing decisions.

Key questions addressed:

- How reliable is our attendance number, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of common counting methods?
- When did attendance build, peak, and decline, and how did people move through the event footprint?
- Were attendees residents, day trippers, or overnight visitors, and did the event generate direct visitor spend?
- What does the data tell us about marketing, staffing, and planning the next event?

Presented by Kyla Boast, Client Experience Director, Datafy and Caleb Sullivan, Senior Director of Business Development, Datafy

12:00 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.

Lunch and the Destinations Texas Annual Business Meeting

Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

Lunch Sponsored by Greenhaus

1:45 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.

GENERAL SESSION

The Accountability Era: How Destination Leaders Are Defending Their Numbers Under Scrutiny

Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

The questions facing destination leaders have changed. Boards want more than optimism. Elected officials want economic justification they can stand behind. Communities want proof of value they can see and feel. The reporting models DMOs have leaned on for years were never built to withstand this kind of pressure, and leaders across Texas are feeling the difference.

In this candid panel, Texas DMO CEOs from markets large and small sit down with Chuck Davison of Tourism Economics to talk openly about what scrutiny has done to the job. Which numbers can you truly defend, and which ones make you uneasy? What does responsible leadership do when a metric doesn't hold up? What did your board or city council need to hear that you weren't telling them?

Attendees will leave with:

- A clear-eyed view of where traditional destination metrics fall short, and what credible reporting looks like now
- Practical language for defending economic impact to boards, councils, and communities
- A simple test for what's worth measuring versus what's comfortable to report
- The confidence to answer the hard questions before someone else asks them

Moderated by Chuck Davison, Tourism Economics.

Panelists: P. W. McCallum, Executive Director, Visit Grapevine; Marla Roe, Executive Director, Visit Frisco; and Aaron Werner, Executive Director, Visit McKinney

2:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Break & Partner Hall

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall

3:00 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

SEO Isn't Dead (It's Just Deprecated): Navigating Modern SEO, "GEO" and Hard Truths

Willow Creek (Level 2)

AI has already upended how travelers find information, and if your website hasn't kept pace, you're already behind. This session cuts through the noise and outdated checklists to show what still works, what doesn't, and how to build a future-proof strategy rooted in helpful, original content. No gimmicks. No fluff. Just what it takes to stay visible and relevant in the age of AI and zero-click search.

Attendees will leave with:

- A clear picture of how search has shifted in 2026 and why it matters for DMOs
- Practical ways to adapt their content strategy both on and off their website

- The hard truths every destination marketer needs to hear (and act on) right now

Presented by Sarah Bellamy, Content Marketing Manager, Tempest

Sports City USA: Building Support and Sharing Success Through Political and Corporate Partnerships **PANEL**

San Jacinto

What happens when one of Texas' fastest-growing cities, major sports brands, elected officials, and a DMO all unite to bring a shared vision to life? Just up the road in Frisco, that's exactly what we did, and we built a playbook in the process. Ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup coming to North Texas, Frisco launched Sports City USA, an integrated brand and docuseries that aligned the community, its political leadership, and global brand partners such as the Dallas Cowboys and the PGA of America. Frisco has rapidly transformed from a small North Texas town into a global hub for professional sports, and with these powerful brands came an awesome responsibility to harness their collective power.

This panel brings together the people who built it: the destination marketer, the city leader, the corporate brand partner, and the agency strategist. Together, we'll walk through the integrated launch playbook that the destination and its partners used to include and celebrate the community, garnering buy-in from elected officials and local businesses. Attendees will leave with three concrete takeaways: how to set and communicate a shared brand vision across local businesses, elected officials, and corporate partners; how to establish goals, roles, and boundaries for steering committees made up of public and private representatives; and how to demonstrate value to residents and stakeholders in ways that build durable community and political support. We'll also share practical handouts: steering committee planning and roles-and-responsibilities templates, partnership framework worksheets, the launch playbook outline, and checklists for engaging elected officials.

The timing matters for Texas DMOs in particular. With the FIFA World Cup spotlight on the region, intensifying scrutiny on HOT allocations, and growing pressure across the state to prove community value, this session will help attendees think creatively and systematically about how to turn high-profile moments into long-term advocacy capital. Whether you're a Hill Country CVB, a Gulf Coast destination, or a North Texas neighbor, we can't wait to help you realize the power of your own Sports City USA.

Moderated by Josh Dill, Assistant Executive Director, Visit Frisco

Panelists: Jeff Cheney, former Mayor, City of Frisco; Nicole Mayberry, Community Relations and PR Lead, PGA of America; Amy Pratt, Director of Sales, Dallas Cowboys

US Travel Trends and Texas Travel Insights: An Expedia Group Data Deep Dive

Trinity River Ballroom 3

Using Expedia Group's extensive first-party search and booking data, this session explores how Americans are traveling today, where demand is growing fastest across the US, and how Texas is performing within that broader landscape. We'll unpack emerging patterns around seasonal travel, highlight key origin markets and behaviors shaping Texas visitation, and discuss what these trends suggest for future planning. No product pitches or sales content, just data-driven insight.

Key takeaways:

- Understand the latest US travel demand and behavior trends, including how Americans are planning, booking, and spending on trips
- See how Texas is performing within the national landscape, including key origin

- markets, seasonality, and high-value visitor patterns
- Learn what is influencing travel to Texas and comparable US destinations
- Take away data-driven implications for destination planning, like how to think about timing, markets, and mix

Presented by Matthew Klug, Sr. Regional Manager, Business Development, Expedia

More Than a Plan: Building Political Support, Community Buy-In, and Lasting Momentum

Trinity River Ballroom 4

Every destination wants a strategic tourism plan that drives results, but the biggest challenge often isn't writing the plan. It's building the support needed to make it happen.

In this session, Amy Tidwell, Director of Visit Corsicana, shares the practical lessons learned from leading a successful tourism planning process that resulted in strong community support, city leadership engagement, increased tourism investment, and organizational growth. Attendees will learn how to build political and stakeholder buy-in before, during, and after the planning process while creating momentum that lasts well beyond the plan's adoption.

The session will also explore which parts of strategic planning destination organizations can realistically tackle on their own and when investing in outside expertise provides the greatest value. For organizations with limited budgets, practical strategies will be shared for maximizing internal resources, engaging partners, and making meaningful progress without a large consulting budget.

Whether you're preparing for your first strategic plan or updating an existing one, you'll leave with actionable ideas to help your destination develop a plan that is realistic, well-supported, and built to be implemented, not left on a shelf.

Presented by Amy Tidwell, Director, Visit Corsicana

3:45 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Break & Partner Hall

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall

4:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

AI With a Soul: Keeping Your Place Human in a Digital-First World

Trinity River Ballroom 3

AI is changing how destinations research, plan, and tell their stories, but the real soul of a place still lives in its people, history, quirks, and lived-in moments. In this session, we'll explore how AI can be a brilliant sidekick for destination branding and tourism storytelling, without turning your community into a "Copy-Paste City" or losing that beautiful local weirdness we all love. You'll learn when AI is a powerful creative partner (and when it absolutely needs to stay in the corner), along with practical ways to protect culture, heritage, and local voice. Through real-world examples, lively discussion, and a dash of creative play, we'll show how to keep humanity in the spotlight, while letting AI quietly carry the luggage in the background.

Topics include:

- What makes a place brand human?
- Where AI truly helps (without taking over)

- When you should NOT use AI
- Guardrails that protect authenticity and culture

Presented by Steve Chandler, Owner and Brand Strategist, Chandlerthinks

The Resurgence of Print in a Digital World **PANEL**

San Jacinto

As Texas prepares for several milestone events, print is seeing a resurgence in demand from travel destinations. To stand out, destinations need to consider how print meets the precision of digital media.

Join Texas Monthly for an energetic session around the modern campaign ecosystem and how print remains a key touchpoint and complement to digital. We'll also explore how Texas destinations can leverage first-party data and tap into emotional storytelling to build authentic connections with travelers.

Takeaways:

- Match your audience to the right media environments along the customer journey
- Leverage first-party data across your campaign ecosystem
- Learn how print and digital storytelling work in tandem
- See how to track and measure the effectiveness of print marketing today

Panelists include Caitlyn Perry, Chief Sales Officer, Texas Monthly; Heather Miller, General Manager, Texas Monthly; and Chris Riggins, Director of Marketing & Communications, Destination Bryan

The Visitor Center Debate: Keep It, Change It, or Leave It Behind? **PANEL**

Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

Visitor centers have long been the front door to a destination, but as traveler behavior continues to evolve, so does the role of these facilities. Today's visitors are increasingly planning their trips online and expecting personalized, digital-first experiences, prompting many destinations to rethink how they deliver visitor services.

Join three destination leaders with very different approaches to visitor services. One will share the value of a traditional visitor center, another will showcase an innovative model that's redefining the visitor experience, and a third will discuss the decision to operate without a visitor center altogether.

Through an open and candid discussion, we'll explore the challenges, opportunities, costs, visitor expectations, community impact, and return on investment associated with each approach. Whether you're considering renovations, reimagining your visitor experience, or questioning the future of your own visitor center, you'll leave with fresh ideas and practical insights to help shape your destination's strategy.

Moderated by Michelle Moon, Chief Advancement Officer, Visit San Antonio

Panelists: Michelle Moon; Lisa Blackmon, Chief Destination Development Officer, Destination Waco; and Heather Yadon, Tourism Coordinator, City of Alpine

The Visitor Experience Is Everyone's Job: Architecting a Destination-Wide Service Culture

Trinity River Ballroom 4

Destinations don't deliver experiences. People do. And for visitors, that experience is

shaped long before arrival and long after departure.

In this session, we'll explore how leading destinations around the world intentionally design, activate, and anchor a consistent visitor experience across every touchpoint. Not just hotels, restaurants, and attractions, but also police officers, transportation staff, retail staff, and frontline municipal employees.

Drawing from real-world destination work, we'll walk through how to:

- Define the experience you promise to visitors
- Translate that promise into clear service behaviors for every stakeholder
- Train across sectors with wildly different roles and employers
- Measure the experience in a way that drives accountability and improvement

Presented by Will Tarrant, Freeman Group

Back to Basics – The Art of Destination Sales

Willow Creek (Level 2)

Successful destination sales is not about having the perfect sales pitch—it's about building relationships, earning trust, asking the right questions, and creating opportunities that benefit both your client and your destination.

Drawing on nearly 60 years of experience in hospitality and destination marketing, Larry Woods shares the timeless principles that have shaped his career through engaging stories, practical examples, and real-world lessons. Whether you're new to destination sales or a seasoned professional, you'll leave with renewed confidence, fresh perspectives, and actionable ideas you can put to work immediately.

Presented by Larry Woods, Founder, Business of Travel, LLC

4:45 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Partner Hall

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Networking Happy Hour at Bottle Rockets Bar

Offsite — Bottle Rockets Bar, 5800 Legacy Dr, Ste c-11

Sponsored by Texas Monthly

Evening

Explore Plano on Your Own: Free Night and Partner Dinners

On your own

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4 DESTINATION SPIRIT DAY

7:30 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.

Partner Hall

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall

8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.

Breakfast

Trinity River Ballroom Foyer / Partner Hall · Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

Sponsored by Tambourine

8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.

Small Teams Breakfast

Trinity River Ballroom 3

Sponsored by Visit Corsicana

8:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Morning Remarks

Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

9:00 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.

MORNING GENERAL SESSION

Sparks of Genius

Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

Brilliant ideas. Real results. Ideas worth stealing.

Sparks of Genius is a fast-paced, high-energy session featuring five destination professionals, each taking the stage for just 10 minutes to share one brilliant idea that's made a real impact in their organization.

Sponsored by Trip Advisor

9:55 a.m.

Wall of Wine Drawing and Bandwango BINGO Winners

Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

Winners must be present.

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER – SHIRT SLEEVES SESSIONS

The best solutions often come from the people sitting right beside you.

These highly interactive, facilitator-led discussions bring together destination professionals to share ideas, ask questions, solve challenges, and learn from one another. There are no presentations or PowerPoint slides, just honest conversations with peers who understand your role and your destination.

Choose the discussion that best fits your interests, contribute your perspective, and leave with fresh ideas, practical solutions, and new professional connections. Because sometimes the most valuable session at a conference is simply a great conversation.

Featuring:

CEO & Executive Leadership Exchange

San Jacinto

Marketing & Communications Exchange

Trinity River Ballroom 1 & 2

Sales & Services Exchange

Trinity River Ballroom 3

Emerging Leaders Exchange

Trinity River Ballroom 4

10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. **DMS Elective Course: Pictures Make Them Want to Be There**

Willow Creek (Level 2)

Your city is stunning. Your events are electric. Your venues are gorgeous. And none of that matters if you don't have the images to prove it.

But not every event gets a photographer. Sometimes the best person for the job is the one who's already there, and that's you.

Together you'll learn why the best camera is the one you already have, and how a few simple techniques are all that stand between a forgettable snapshot and an image that makes people say, "I need to go there."

Come ready to learn and leave ready to capture. No experience required. No excuses accepted.

Presented by Stacey Brooks, Founder & Lead Photo Ninja, See Pink, Inc.

Pre-registration is required for the DMS Elective

12:00 p.m. Conference Ends. Safe Travels!