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## FABULOUS EXPOSURE

Las Vegas meetings and conventions give companies remarkable bang for their marketing bucks.

Cobra Electronics, a longtime leader in consumer communications gear, has a simple marketing secret: Instead of lavish consumer advertising, the Chicago-based company focuses on trade shows held in the place where important customers, bankers and other key industry figures are most likely to see them—Las Vegas.

At the giant annual International CES show two years ago, Microsoft founder Bill Gates happened by Cobra's 3,300-square-foot booth and spent 20 minutes chatting with Cobra Chairman and CEO Jim Bazet. Good Morning America had set up its cameras inside Cobra's booth, and reporters

from virtually all the major news media passed by regularly. "Where else," asks Bazet, "could a \$100 million company get such valuable exposure?"

Cobra is a global leader in CB radios, radar detection and two-way radios. Recent innovations include the first touch-screen radar, laser and safety camera detector. Cobra displays these and other products at the International CES and at several smaller, more specialized Las Vegas trade shows. Up to 60 of Cobra's top people attend these shows, reasoning that there's no more effective place to interact with customers, bankers, industry analysts and the media.

Trade show organizers have long recognized that Las Vegas offers an incomparable value proposition. It has been North America's leading convention site for 16 straight years, contributing some \$8.5 billion every year to the local economy. In fact, Las Vegas hosts more of the largest trade shows than the two runners-up combined. Despite the sluggish economy, says Chris Meyer, vice president of sales at the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, "we're seeing a resurgence in just about every industry."

With more than 10.5 million square feet of meeting and exhibition space—including three of the nation's 10 largest convention facilities—the city hosts nearly 20,000 meetings and conventions annually. Its 148,000 hotel rooms, everything from budget to five-star luxury, are the most affordable of any major destination, according to a recent survey by Hotels.com. And Las Vegas' McCarran International Airport, with more than 900 flights daily, offers nonstop service to 130 U.S. cities.

Cobra participates in trade shows throughout the world but uses Las Vegas as its marketing focal point. Why? "People are happier going to Las Vegas than to any other meeting site," offers Cobra's Bazet. Besides its superb meeting facilities, the city offers unique opportunities for entertainment and recreation—including great golf courses, many of the nation's finest restaurants and opportunities to see celebrated musicians, comedians and Broadway shows.

Behind the scenes, Las Vegas also offers an unusual wealth of experienced and knowledgeable event planners, plus highly creative design and production specialists. The key to a successful trade show experience, Bazet counsels, is to use a local event planner to secure a prime location on the convention floor, then make sure your booth is fun to visit.

"People come to Las Vegas expecting fun," says Bazet, "which is the true reason meetings there are so successful. Las Vegas is a premier global attraction, yet it's also the easiest, most effective place to hold a meeting that I know." ●

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