

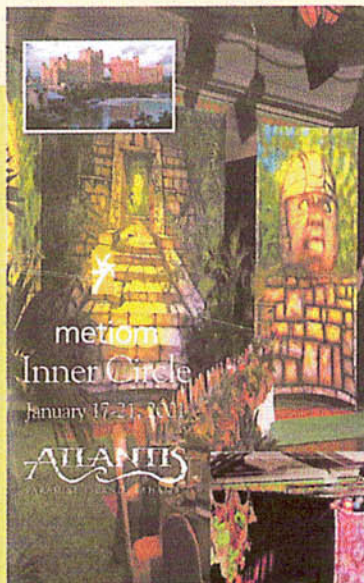
# Stretching the Shoestings

**W**hen Harith Wickrema was asked to deliver a travel reward for Metiom, a B2B e-commerce start-up company, he knew he would face challenges. While the company was relatively young, the sales force was composed of veteran sales executives who had developed a taste for incentives through years with Xerox, IBM, and Hewlett Packard. The cost-conscious start-up did not provide a significant budget for this reward effort. With a limited budget and a small group of 28 qualifiers Wickrema knew he would need substantial help if he hoped to produce the "WOW" effect clients have come to expect. Wickrema promptly suggested Atlantis Paradise Island in the Bahamas, a property he has worked with over the years, for the group travel experience.

Because Wickrema lacked the budget to create a significant theme party, he decided on an experiential event that the resort property could use in sales presentations as an "exclusive to Atlantis" theme evening, "Night of the Gods." Making the hotel property a partner in the process produced the win-win results that fuels business relationships.

Wickrema repositioned the Metiom awards night to Day Three of the program to utilize the sound, lighting, and stage set-up from a much larger group using the hotel ballroom. The result was a cost savings of \$10,000. The larger group benefited as well since Metiom had a hold on the ballroom for that night; the company did not need to strike and reset the ballroom for the final night of their program. Both groups saved labor costs by sharing the set-up.

However, set-up became a challenge due to "impossible" time constraints. To gain some extra time for ballroom set-up, the cocktail reception was switched to a 7pm reception at the property's beach caves. Based on the location, many attendees anticipated a casual outdoor function (although all attendees were advised of appropriate attire and that awards would be presented that night). With only a few lights (tiki torches



and luminaries), the otherwise dark caves came alive with Caribbean flavor. But the biggest surprise was still in store.

Guests were shocked as they were paraded from the beach caves to a Mayan Kingdom awaiting them in the ballroom. The theme, "Night of the Gods," was selected to brand Atlantis. Greek and Mayan mythology were incorporated into the event's menu and dance productions to reflect the property's image.

The Atlantis features a six-story Mayan

Temple — an architectural shape that was featured in both the menu card and the dessert presented to guests. Extensive research of Greek, Mayan, and Inca mythology enabled the team to identify ingredients, tastes, and

concepts from the past. Each course was designed with a nod to mythology.

The culinary team and wait staff were instrumental in adding incentive elements on a shoestring budget. Wickrema personally conducted a waiter rehearsal allowing the willing group to provide synchronized service choreographed to specially selected music. The culinary team became part of a parade of the mythological theme.

Metiom attendees, well-seasoned in the ways of incentives, were constantly surprised during the "Night of the Gods" event. Atlantis has a theme event that will have a long shelf-life at the resort. And Wickrema Productions was able to live up to its corporate motto, "deliver above and beyond what is expected."

Travel partners on the program included Atlantis Paradise Island and the Paradise Island Promotion Board.

In awarding this program first place honors, the judging panel praised the program "for overcoming significant operational hurdles" and for "creating a unique experience for a potentially jaded audience."

*"incentive elements on a shoestring budget"*

Outstanding Single Event

**First Place:** Harith Wickrema, Harith Productions Ltd., Orleand, PA (USA);  
Client: Metiom, "Inner Circle."