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## Q&A with Karen M. Shackman, CEO of Shackman Associates New York-a Full Service Corporate Event and Destination Management Company creating Unique Experiences for Corporate Incentive and Meeting Clients in New York City

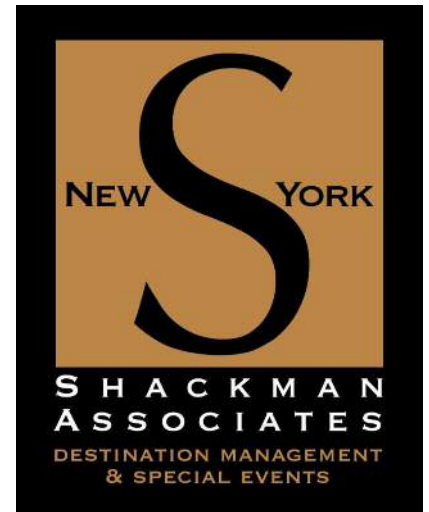


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**CEOCFO:** *Ms. Shackman, would you tell us the focus behind Shackman Associates NY?*

**Ms. Shackman:** Shackman Associates New York is a full service Destination Management (DMC) and Special Event company providing services to the international and domestic MICE market (Meetings, Incentive, Conventions and Exhibitions) for clients coming to New York for corporate meetings, conferences or events. We are a one-stop-shop opportunity for our corporate clients offering them a range of services from transportation logistics, hotel accommodation, New York experiences, to full production of special events, product launches; and much more. Essentially, we are the bridge between tourism, hospitality and events, creating memorable experiences for our clients, while promoting New York City as the best possible destination for their event or meeting.

Piggybacking on that, we also provide supplemental services for any conferences or exhibitions which come to New York - whether it be producing welcome receptions, gala events, sponsored dinners, or awards ceremonies, providing VIP transportation or developing customized spouse programs to entertain the accompanying guests while the attendees are in the meetings.

As a point of reference, we work with clients from a wide range of industries including – beauty, automotive, insurance, financial, tech, as well as with many international law firms, consulting companies and associations which are planning annual meetings, conferences or events in New York, as the city is the headquarters of many global organizations.

**“As the special event world evolves further into experiential marketing, Shackman Associates New York is uniquely positioned to translate branding messages into creative one-of-a-kind memorable events which will ultimately serve to increase the ROI of our clients.”- Karen M. Shackman**

**CEOCFO: Does a client typically come to you knowing what they want or are you helping them craft an itinerary and put together the whole package?**

**Ms. Shackman:** I will take a step back to clarify that the destination management world operates within the framework of the multi-billion global incentive travel industry. Incentive travel is a business tool which corporations use in the form of a recognition program (or a thank you) to motivate employees to achieve certain targets to improve profit, cash flow or employee engagement. The objective of the Incentive Travel program is to provide the participants with an extraordinary travel experience which they could not duplicate on their own and thereby to motivate them to achieve for the company.

Once the corporation determines which destination may be the most attractive to their target audience, the DMC will be called in to develop a truly customized program based on the specific demographics of the company and the achievers. So, in answer to your question, the more we know about the possible achievers, including age, level in the company etc. the better we can craft an engaging New York program or event. Some clients have a specific idea of what they want, but many more are looking to us to provide a program unique to them, with unexpected/WOW elements.

**CEOCFO: What do we know from statistics, gut-feeling or anecdotally, after someone has done the trip, about how that turns around to results for a company?**

**Ms. Shackman:** We are a member of an organization called SITE - the Society of Incentive Travel Excellence – which undertakes ongoing studies on the ROI of incentive travel programs and how to assess their value. On a personal level, we have many clients who use this tool repeatedly, coming back to us in New York annually, or taking their achievers to other desirable destinations. Generally we see between 60% and 70% of the same people qualifying for the incentives – due both to the appreciation of and motivation which drives those incentive winners.

**CEOCFO: Would you give us a few example engagements, and how you handle the different requests?**

**Ms. Shackman:** We qualify our leads (the RFPs) that we receive by asking a variety of insightful questions in order to assist us in preparing the most customized and relevant programs. Based on the answers received we prepare our initial proposal. From experience, we know that certain industries i.e. beauty, fashion, hair care, tend to be more cutting-edge and trendy so all elements will revolve around that – including hotel accommodation suggestions. A Board of Directors meeting has a very different set of requirements.

There are some companies that come back to New York time and time again and prefer to explore the outer boroughs of New York – venturing into Brooklyn and Queens as they feel they have seen a lot of what Manhattan has to offer. It is up to us to interpret their needs (and budgets) and to provide services accordingly.

**CEOCFO: Do you have specific people that specialize in different phases of your services?**

**Ms. Shackman:** Shackman Associates New York works along two parallel tracks. The Account Managers who work primarily within the destination management segment and develop customized programs,

and our Creative department which works on any special events which require a full production including entertainment, a run-of-show, theming, etc. These special events may be included in the DMC program as a full awards ceremony or similar, or they may be stand-alone corporate events with a specific message, a required “look and feel” and dedicated budgets which we develop for our clients.

**CEOCFO: *On your site I see “We Know the Pulse of the City.” Trends change so quickly. How do you stay ahead of the game?***

**Ms. Shackman:** We have been operating for more than 25 years, and have many contacts/relationships in and around the city who share news with us on a daily basis. It is also about being on the street seeing all the changes first-hand - what is opening, what is closing, what is under construction, what is soon to be reopened, and sharing the information in the office. This is a city that is in flux and it is about being aware all the time. As I say to my staff...“this is a job but it is also a lifestyle, so when you go out and see something that looks interesting, check it out!”

**CEOCFO: *Another thing I see on your site is “Most Importantly, We’ve Got Your Back.” How do you handle problems that occur with almost any engagement?***

**Ms. Shackman:** It is our job to be aware of what could potentially go wrong and to have a Plan B in that event. For example, traffic can be a challenge when operating large groups in the city. The streets are busy, are constantly under construction, or may have lanes blocked off due to parades, street fairs etc. There are always restrictions as to where vehicles can stop.

It is about understanding the ebb and flow of the city, and working with the city agencies to ensure minimal disruption on the part of our guests. For example, when the United Nations General Assembly is in town, we need to know what streets are closed and how to maneuver around that. When there is a parade, we need to know how it may impact our guests departing their hotel for the airport. This, for us, is the normal run of business.

In the event of any medical emergencies, it is about having a risk assessment document handy for anybody who may need a visit to the emergency room to minimize any wasted time. It is really about the contacts that we have here and knowing where to go and who to speak to in order to get things done.

**CEOCFO: *What are the themes of some of your events?***

**Ms. Shackman:** As our Creative Director comes from the Broadway world, it is about creating surprise elements throughout an event, while building the excitement and engagement level of the guests throughout the evening – often starting well before guests actually enter the venue. New York has extraordinary talent available and while expectations are generally high, our role is to constantly challenge expectations and deliver a unique event reflective of the client’s message – while keeping in budget.

Because we are New York centric and since much of what we do relates to what happens in and around New York, many of our themes tend to mimic the New York vibe, but that does not define us at all. The events will tie in to the location and to the client’s image to reflect the demographic of the guests. The impact of an event revolves around lighting, nuance, activations, and getting people engaged. And now, it is all about the social media opportunities for posting the unique

experiences. We are cognizant of this fact and incorporate these opportunities into our events, where appropriate.

**CEOCFO: *What is the key to maintaining the connections to facilitate the best possible trips and events?***

**Ms. Shackman:** Through the strength of our relationships in our wonderful city we are able to offer extraordinary programs and events to our clients. In working with our contacts, it is about being transparent, it is about being organized, it is about continued business and continued exposure while working with a sense of integrity – no matter who we are working with.

**CEOCFO: *How are you reaching out to potential clients?***

**Ms. Shackman:** We have sales and marketing offices around the world in very key locations both domestically and internationally including Australia, Brazil, Mexico, and any number of European countries. We attend many industry trade shows around the world annually, and are fortunate enough to have a good number of hotel partners recommend us to their clients. And, of course, through the medium of CEOCFO...

**CEOCFO: *What is the popularity of New York these days?***

**Ms. Shackman:** New York is still a Tier 1 city. Everybody still wants to come here – no matter what is happening in the world or in our city. In the past year, New York has welcomed over 50 million visitors and the number is climbing. And for that, we are grateful!

**CEOCFO: *How are you able to handle all the volume that comes your way?***

**Ms. Shackman:** We have very capable account managers in the office and working as a team, we are able to manage the volume of business coming in.

**CEOCFO: *How do you spend your time as CEO?***

**Ms. Shackman:** My role as CEO is to ensure that the quality of what we do and the services we provide are continually maintained at the highest level. It is also about thinking about new opportunities for expanding our reach and our client base and emphasizing the value of the services we provide to our clients.

**CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach over the years?***

**Ms. Shackman:** Probably one of the biggest changes since we started in business has been the effect of the Internet. Once upon a time the city was more or less a finite destination, and, we were the authority on the ground here. The city has grown exponentially, opening up many new areas to visit and explore, including the Meatpacking district, lower Manhattan, Hudson Yards and the new “frontier” Brooklyn. The Internet has provided much more accessibility and knowledge – although not all the information on line is completely accurate. It is our job now to moderate what the clients are reading and to counter that with what is factual and what actually is do-able.

**CEOCFO: *Why choose Shackman Associates New York?***

**Ms. Shackman:** I like to say we are steeped in experience, as a result of living and working in New York City for more than 25 years, while being very forward-thinking and engaged. Our understanding of the nuances of various cultures whether from the US or abroad has been appreciated by our significant client base – and we speak 4 different languages in the

office. In addition, the fact that we have a Creative Team on site is something that has constantly added to the value we bring to our clients.

**CEOCFO: *What should we look for going forward for Shackman Associate NY?***

**Ms. Shackman:** There is currently a tremendous focus on experiential marketing events. Brands wishing to reinforce their image, and gain further market share, are doing so by means of immersive experiences using a variety of interactive activations. As the special event world evolves further into experiential marketing, Shackman Associates New York is uniquely positioned to translate branding messages into creative one-of-a-kind memorable events which will ultimately serve to increase the ROI of our clients.

