

In Balance

Meet Well. Live Well. Be Well.

Capital Strides

Health challenges infuse wellness and friendly competition into conferences

BY LORI TENNY

In a time when wellness has become an increasingly important part of the meetings landscape, one company is literally a step ahead when it comes to impactful programs that align the interests of everyone involved an event—organizers, attendees and sponsors included.

Heka Health (www.hekahealth.com), a venture-backed Silicon Valley startup whose software platform powers custom-branded, turnkey connected health and wellness solutions, has been customizing some of the most unique, engaging and rewarding wellness challenges at meetings and conventions in recent years.

Many have included prominent meetings industry shows, such as IMEX America, PCMA Convening Leaders, Destinations International's Annual Convention and ASAE's Annual Meeting.

According to Tony Salah, co-founder and CEO

of Heka Health, the programs, which include step competitions, bonus points for other wellness activities completed (such as meditation and yoga) and prizes for participants, provide a healthy way to gamify the event experience for attendees while giving sponsors a powerful way to market themselves and offering planners a turnkey wellness option for agendas.

"Meeting planners know their attendees are thinking about wellness, and they, as well as sponsors, know they receive a lot of positive feedback when they support wellness initiatives and positively engage attendees," Salah said. "Our main goal is to support all of the interests and demands of the different constituents, and it becomes really successful if you can make it fun and memorable and ultimately support healthy lifestyles for event attendees."

Customization Is Key

Heka Health's wellness challenges are com-

pletely customized for each event.

Oftentimes, it includes a custom-branded app that can be integrated with the event app to track steps and other wellness activities through participants' Fitbits, Apple Watches and phones, while activity trackers with the sponsor's logo can also be given out or even awarded as prizes for the first 500 people who sign up for the challenge, for example.

Leaderboards can display in the app, but Heka Health usually has them on large LCD displays in two or more places throughout the event, showing the top stepper and goals completed, such as 25,000 or 50,000 total steps. In the end, a variety of prizes can be awarded, and it can even include a CSR element by incorporating the donation of prizes to a favorite cause.

"My favorite examples are programs we did for American Thoracic Society and IBM events, where a donation was given to a great cause every time someone hit a certain



HEKA HEALTH CHALLENGE PARTICIPANTS




HEKA HEALTH CHALLENGE LEADERBOARD

number of steps daily," Salah said. "We also have ways for people to scan in at the sponsor booth or attend associated wellness activities to get bonus points."

Heka Health partnered with Caesars Entertainment for the second time at IMEX America in September 2019 for another successful wellness challenge. (In 2018, more than 400 people participated in the challenge, taking more than 5.7 million total steps over the two-plus-day program and winning everything from High Roller experiences at Caesars LINQ Promenade to VIP getaways at Caesars properties.)

While 2019 program results were not available at publication time, this year's challenge stepped up the offerings with the ability for participants to receive bonus points by attending a meditation in the Mindfulness Lounge, which mindfulness teacher, trainer and author Lee Papa has spearheaded at IMEX America for several years. Participants were also given extra points for attending walking sessions with IMEX officials that spotlighted the show's sustainability initiatives.

Meanwhile, Caesars had the opportunity to sponsor an important wellness initiative for IMEX attendees while also being able to promote its offerings, including the 2020 debut of the massive Caesars Forum conference center, which will have a 100,000-square-foot outdoor plaza suited for alfresco events, in addition to wellness breaks such as yoga sessions and walks.

Check out [MeetingsToday.com/podcasts](https://www.MeetingsToday.com/podcasts) for a podcast with Salah highlighting more details about Heka Health, examples of its numerous wellness challenges at events and information on the many innovative wellness opportunities meeting professionals, sponsors and attendees have through the company. 



THE HORSE SHOE FARM



- **The Horse Shoe Farm** (www.thehorseshoefarm.com), a new 85-acre riverfront estate located in Hendersonville, North Carolina, near Asheville, is offering three-night corporate wellness retreats for eight or more attendees. The programs feature meals that are all sourced with local ingredients, a yoga and meditation class or healing sound bath class each morning, a bonfire and s'mores each night at The Silo Cookhouse, and teambuilding activities daily. The property offers eight individual homes for up to 50 guests, a unique spa experience in a renovated barn, stables and equestrian facilities, personal growth and wellness offerings, and several private event spaces.

- **The Coronado Island Marriott Resort & Spa** (www.marriott.com/coronado) recently completed a multiyear, property-wide renovation designed to further emphasize its status as a leading Southern California wellness resort. The project included the introduction of the award-winning Spa at Coronado Island and Wellness Center, redesigned guest rooms and cottages, an expansive new lobby, a fresh California coastal dining concept, a refreshed pool area and renovated indoor and outdoor meeting spaces.

- **At Dossier** (www.dossierhotel.com), a Provenance Hotel in Portland, Oregon, attendees can take advantage of a number of unique wellness-minded outings through the property's local partnerships. Two options are Knot Springs and Wy'east Wolfpack. Nearby Knot Springs, featuring natural pools, a spa, a fitness club and a yoga studio, offers Dossier guests discount pricing. At local fitness and running club Wy'east Wolfpack, guests can join the pack on Tuesday evenings at 6 p.m. when it departs from Dossier for a five-mile, hour-long fun run through downtown Portland.