

## BEST PRACTICE

### View from the ‘Summit’

*The Riverside Company uses its annual Leadership Summit not only as a networking event but also as a marketing tool*



*Kohl and Szigethy: creating buzz*

In May, global mid-market firm The Riverside Company gathered chief executive officers, chief financial officers and outside board directors from its 81 portfolio companies together for a two-day conference known as the Leadership Summit.

Riverside used to host separate gatherings for CEOs, CFOs and board members – but combined these into a single event that draws roughly 300 attendees from all over the world to share best practices and generate new growth strategies.

“Combining them has enabled us to message to a whole management team at one time, and that is hugely valuable,” says Riverside chief operating officer Pam Hendrickson. “Most of our management teams leave with new ideas that can help them grow.”

At the “Summit” (to which *Private Equity International* had an access-all-areas pass), Riverside operating partners participate in workshops, think tanks, and “deep-dive” sessions led by external consultants. These cover a range of topics, from

pitfalls of emerging economies to incorporating technology into management best practices.

“At one of our companies, sales went up \$30 million right after this deep-dive session [and] they attributed it directly to attending this,” says Hendrickson.

The Leadership Summit is part of ‘Riverside University’, a collection of events “designed to help employees develop skills and talents to the fullest”. But it also helps generate what Riverside co-CEO Bela Szigethy calls “great buzz”.

“Great buzz is important for a couple of things, but it’s most important for getting new business,” he says. “When a seller or manager calls one of the attendees here and gets rave reviews about the value [of the event], they’re more likely to sell to us. So it really is a great marketing tool for acquiring new companies.”

At press time, Riverside was pursuing six new investments generated through referrals from the Leadership Summit. “We believe it has a very high return on investment,” insists Riverside co-CEO Stewart Kohl. “We wouldn’t do it otherwise.” ■