

What to know when you plan your corporate event

A corporate event is deemed successful when it is executed flawlessly — where the event nearly runs itself. Behind the seamless integration of technology and logistics is a talented planner who tracks every aspect in minute detail. This planner has the knowledge, experience and resources to pull off a corporate event under myriad circumstances. Lessons learned include everything from planning early to contract negotiations and many details in between.

From any planner's point of view, the first thing to consider is the timing of the event. Booking early is advisable, as premium venues and resources fill up early. It is important to consider holiday or traditional vacation periods that may interfere with scheduling the event. Remaining open to potential obstacles that may cause attendance to drop is crucial to the initial planning.

Prior to booking the event, however, it is imperative to compare the hospitality products of different venues. Interview several different vendors before selecting one, and compare like venues to make sure the price is appropriate to the service and amenities. Things to consider include the venue's reputation, proximity to travel routes and the need for overnight accommodations.

The reputation of the facility is also important to ensure that the staff will treat guests with respect, dignity and autonomy. Checking references or relying on prior experiences provides a sense of how the event will take place. An on-site inspection of the venue, staff and amenities is important to make sure they will fit your needs. Visiting two or three venues will give you a sense of what will and won't work for your event.

Denise Josephs, principal of bloomspring, an event planning company based in Seekonk, advises that it is important to interview the facility staff — especially for first-time planners. "You'll want to work with an experienced team in order to reduce event detail oversights. You'll also want to ensure the venue has the resources in house to be able to work with you through any last minute changes such as an added lunch or cocktail reception, or a new speaker with specific audio visual needs," she said.

One of the biggest challenges for a facility manager is when the person who booked the event is different from the person who will be on-site during the event. Miscommunication is common, causing the vendor to scramble to find last minute solutions to overlooked details. Spelling out expectations in detail prior to the event will alleviate this error. Documenting agreed-upon details also ensures that each party is on the same page. A reputable facility will know which questions to ask to open up a dialogue between the event planner and the company contact.



The event planner should scrutinize items such as on-site resources, room lighting in comparison to the meeting or presentation needs, overnight accommodations, parking amenities and entertainment spaces. In addition to ensuring the chosen day doesn't conflict with pre-planned holidays, an additional consideration should be the convenience of the venue to the majority of guests who will be traveling to the event. Additional charges may apply for audio-visual equipment, so these costs should be included in the planning.

Finally, being fully aware of the contractual obligations for the event is essential in making decisions or providing a guest count. Cancellation policies can be costly because charges will often apply even if significant numbers of guests choose not to attend.

Event planning is a product built on customer service. The attitude of facility staff, as well as their execution, is paramount to how the event will play out. As the customer is the key to repeat business, it is imperative that a facility promotes clear communication, guiding a new or seasoned event planner through the logical steps towards a successful event. The things to remember are product, place, and price. After these criteria are established, your successful event is ready to take place.

Paul Dooley has been director of sales and marketing for the Four Points by Sheraton Norwood – Forefront Conference Center since 1996.

