

Expert view

Secrets for a successful corporate event

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Corporate meetings and events have become an integral part of the corporate world as executives realize the bottom-line benefits of face-to-face interactions. According to Meetings & Conventions magazine, companies in the United States spent \$31.8 billion on meetings and events in 2005 that 79.7 million people attended.

Successful corporate events don't just happen, however. They require creativity, organization and the ability to anticipate and manage every little detail. Anyone who has ever been charged with throwing a corporate event knows how daunting - even stressful - the task can be. Planning is essential, and requires the following:

Make the business case

Whether you are planning a seminar, workshop, client recognition dinner or team-building event, clarify your business objectives. A successful meeting or event should build camaraderie and foster the exchange of ideas. It should strengthen brand awareness and differentiate your company from the competition. It should also leave your guests with an overall feeling of appreciation - which strengthens relationships and increases sales.

Analyze resources

After determining that an event is the right activity for your organization, analyze your resources. Do you have an internal staff with the time and skills to plan an event, or will you need to hire a professional event planner? Will you fund the event on your own or have a co-sponsor?

Importantly, establish absolute clarity with regard to your budget. In addition, define your expectations for the event in terms of response or exposure. Construct evaluation sheets to measure your progress against these goals.

Gather input

The key to a successful event is collecting input from all parties involved, from key executives to honorary guests and speakers. Consider the needs and requests of the primary players on everything from food and entertainment to the overall look and feel, but keep in mind the original objectives. If the goal of the event is to network with multiple clients, a buffet might make more sense than a sit-down dinner.

Manage the details

One of the most common mistakes is not leaving enough time for planning. Preparing a budget and booking the site are just the beginning. Food and beverage planning, coordination of audio-visual equipment, entertainment, speakers, transportation, security - the list goes on and on. Ideally, the planning process should start three to seven months earlier, depending on the complexity of the event.

Flexibility is a key trait of a well-planned event. Details are continuously changing and they change faster the closer you get to the event.

Make it count

Ambiance can enhance - or detract - from the business objectives of a corporate event by influencing how attendees act and feel. People in a good mood will make a meeting or event more productive. Since first and last impressions are what linger with audiences, appeal to the five senses. For the ears, fill a void space with music. For the eyes, focus on lighting, décor, table settings and flowers. Tantalize the nose with subtle aromas from the kitchen, and satisfy the taste buds with delicious food. For the sense of touch, add textures through fabrics, props and furniture.

Lastly, when planning a corporate event take the time to visualize the experience from start to finish. Walk through the travel arrangements, meeting logistics and menu options in advance. This provides insight into the details and amenities that will enhance the experience.

Of course, it may also convince you to hire a professional event planner.

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