

MPI THCC
August 18 Monthly Meeting
Doing More with Less
Summary Handout

Event Marketing Tips

Cindy Lo, Red Velvet Events

- Depending on your event audience, do what is “free” first through social media, e-mail blasts and website updates.
- DO spend the money on having a professional graphics designer develop “a brand” for your event. This is probably one of the best ways to ensure your event is tied together from introduction to the very last day. Make sure your “brand” is no more than 3 colors and easy to decipher what it is and what meaning it has as you will use this on practically everything, from handouts to possible SWAG items.
- DO spend the time to first sit down and list all your business objectives vs. just doing what everyone else is doing to market their events be/c not everything works for your target audience. For example, it wouldn’t make sense to use Facebook or Twitter for a group that caters to retirement homes. Or it wouldn’t make sense to use only electronic media for the fine arts loving folks; instead they would appreciate more a commissioned piece of art serve as the “brand.”

CVB Tips

Dana Williams, Dallas CVB

- General Overview
 - Services are for groups booked through CVB. For budget purposes, this is necessary.
 - Size doesn’t matter
 - The number of rooms booked through a CVB assists a city in getting development in the city (convention center hotels, improvements in the city, as well as enticing businesses in the area)
 - Allows a group leverage in a city if all meetings from a particular association company or association are booked through the CVB
- CSM is your personal meeting concierge, for all sized meetings including the small meetings. Offer services such as getting competitive bids from off-site venues, transportation companies, DMCs and the random requests such as a juggler, or a manicurist.
- Coordinate site visits for all size meetings
- More competitive bids from hotels
- Promoting meetings through: microsites, attendance boosters, and promotional e-mails and mailers

Food and Beverage Tips

Susan Greenberg, DoubleTree Austin

- Ask the hotelier if a discontinued wine label is available that can be consumed at a reduced rate.
- Skip the dessert, salad, or soup. Dessert can be served at breaks.

- Don't pay more for drinks. Whether it's a cash bar or hosted bar, don't pay more for drinks than you pay in the hotel outlets (bars and restaurants).
- Lock in the menu prices. If the hotel will not provide a specific menu in advance, at least agree that the menu prices will not increase more than a fixed percentage per year.
- Find a local winery or microbrewery to sponsor your liquor costs.

Audio/Visual

Juan Juarez, Bear AV

- Take advantage of existing available stage sets from AV Vendor to enhance meetings . Mix and match.
- Look at the possibility of multiyear contracting with AV Vendor. Advantage of locking rates and discounts for multiple years.
- Maximize your sponsor exposure with digital signage, cyber café, custom gobos.
- Compare apples to apples.
- Acquire additional discounts from AV Vendor by allowing them promotion and exposure of their service to your customers.



NEGOTIATING and RENEGOTIATING

Once the destination has been selected, send a RFP to the Convention Bureau or to the hotels that best suit your requirements. Be sure your RFP is very specific, as it facilitates the comparison process and directs the RFP only to hotels that qualify for the business.

After your site visit, narrow down the selection to a minimum of two hotels. (For meetings requiring a headquarters hotel or convention center, and overflow hotels, the selection process is more detailed.)

Take the best of both offers and request a final bid from both. When hotels know there is competition, they will make a concerted effort to compete more vigorously for the business! One of many important negotiating features is to stipulate that additional rooms required are to be confirmed at the group rate.

A question I usually ask in RFPs....."What unique features does your hotel provide that would influence our decision-making process.

Where possible, select a hotel that has nearby properties, in case it sells out during your meeting dates, and a backup property is required.

Room Blocks

The ratio of rooms requested versus the total group allotment of rooms is a key factor. The larger the hotel the less 'clout' when negotiating less than, say, 30% of the group capacity....and attempting to specify in the contract that the negotiated group rate(s) must be less than promotional rates offered by the hotel on their web site. It's all about yield management, especially in the last 60 days prior to the meeting.

Provide past history on attendee booking patterns. This definitely affects the hotels willingness to work with you in keeping the meeting rates below promotional rates. Encourage attendees to book early (incentives????)

Contract should stipulate that any rooms booked directly with the hotel by attendees will be credited toward your room block and concessions.

-2- Negotiations and Renegotiations

If you plan to work with a company such as TPI, to assist with destination analysis, site inspections, contract negotiations.... AND housing reservations.....be sure their services include researching the hotel websites on a continuing basis to monitor the promotional rates. Also, provide periodic cross referencing of registrations and housing reservations to determine the percentage of attendees who may be booking hotels directly. TPI has developed a system that can detect in advance, as well as on site, attendees who book their own hotel. TPI provides the respective hotel(s) a name list to help maximize concessions and avoid attrition...rather than relying on the hotel(s) to 'search' for names from a master registration list.

CURRENT RENOGIATIONS AND FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS

(How many planners or hotel sales representatives in the room booked their 2009 meetings at least two years out???)

No one was prepared for the recession and major issues regarding the meeting trends developed in late 2008, that are still with us in 2009 and will probably remain in the early part of 2010.

TPI handled an EXPO in Las Vegas for 15,000 persons in September 2008. Most of the hotel (15) contracts for September 2009 Expo confirmed the 2008 rates or raised them no more than 3%, based on the 2008 pickup.

Between March 1, 2009, when housing went 'live' and the beginning of August....the rates were Renegotiated FOUR times. Monitoring the web sites of the contracted hotels as well as competitive hotels resulted in decreases between 40% and 50% over the 2008 rates!

In February 2010...TPI is handling a major Expo in Cancun at the Moon Palace Resort. Attendance is estimated at 2,500. The dates fall over Valentine Day and President's Weekend....the highest of high seasons. We negotiated a ten percent reduction based on our working relationship with Palace Resorts...which is well under the public rate being offered during that time. What is also boosting attendance is the airfare to Cancun which is guaranteed for February 2010 and among the lowest rates in over six years!

In some instances, hotels have confirmed blocks without attrition fees, reducing F&B minimums and adjusting meeting room rentals (if applicable). Renegotiations can be ongoing.....depending on the circumstances and the hotels' willingness to work with you.

FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS (mid 2010 and beyond)

Be conservative, although predictions are encouraging.

-3- Negotiations and Renegotiations

BLOCK LOW! Base it on your 2009 pickup and request a minimum of 15% attrition. Request the right to increase the block AT THE NEGOTIATED contract rate. If they cannot guarantee a rate at the time of signing.....agree to no more than a 5% increase per annum.

Select a property that has the capacity to increase your meeting space if the meeting grows..... and remember a nearby property is essential if additional sleeping rooms are required.

Second tier cities are likely to negotiate more favorable rates, along with resort areas such as Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Costa Rica and the Caribbean. Rates in Canada and some specific international destinations are once again more favorable based on the current rate of exchange. Many overseas destinations are also willing to guarantee rates in U.S. dollars...and renegotiate in your favor if the dollar gets significantly stronger.

Major cities including New York, Washington D.C., Chicago, Atlanta, Orlando, San Diego where city-wides are predominantly driven based on future association meetings, expos, government business, corporate business and leisure travel. Las Vegas is the wild card in the deck that bares more discussion.

Thank you for your attention. Hopefully we have time for Q&As. Otherwise I am available following this session. My contact information is listed below if I can be of further assistance.

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Travel Planners, Inc. is a woman-owned corporation that has in business for over 40 years, assisting organizations with the planning and implementation of meetings worldwide...from 200 to 15,000 attendees. Services include destination analysis, site inspections, hotel negotiations, housing and registration services; social events, shuttle and tour arrangements, discounted air transportation, on-site staffing...YOUR SINGLE SOURCE SOLUTION!

Pressure to Impress is Higher than Ever

By Cindy Y. Lo

July 27, 2009

Let's face reality...it's 2009 and we're in a slump, BUT the pressure is there to still host a successful fundraiser or have that client appreciation dinner that everyone is still talking about. So what to do when budgets have been slashed but the need to be the talk of the town is still there? Here are just a few concepts we've seen crop up in our own backyard as solutions to the current economy. And regardless of the economy, remember to always plan with value in mind and stay on target with the message.

- No more formal galas, and instead more cocktail receptions heavy on the hors d'oeuvres, more fun-filled activity evenings like casino parties with a few donated prizes. After all, everyone is busy and they don't necessarily have the time to spend 3+ hours on a formal dinner. If you do decide to go the formal dinner route, be sure to incorporate ways to "force" network so that people can at least benefit from the network of great attendees; it is not necessary to give back with extravagant party gifts.
- If you really want to do something completely different, how about a "Gala in a Box?" GENAustin, Inc. did just that and introduced this "out-of-the-box" idea (pardon the pun) in 2008, where 75% of the net proceeds would go back to charity. No need to shop for the perfect outfit or confirm who's going to be sitting at your sponsored table, and instead, a virtual gala in a box was shipped to your home to enjoy in your own privacy.
- With sponsorship dollars down this year, we have seen an increase in admission rates and opening up registration beyond their normal target market to make up for the missing dollars. For example, an event that was previously closed to specific vendors would now be available for them to attend for a higher admission price in the form of a sponsorship.
- Going back to basics; rather than hiring professional speakers, clients are going back to their existing board of advisors to see who they can pull in to be the "expert" speaker. This cuts costs dramatically since there is usually no speaker fees involved, just travel-related expenses.
- For those with themed events, we have seen clients taking it back to common themes that allow us to take advantage of our existing props and not producing new ones for their event. For example, 70s, casino, and western are all very common themes that if you hire a professional planner, they usually have existing inventory related to these themes.
- Introducing new technology, although not necessarily lower cost, has definitely allowed our clients to reach beyond their normal target audience. This can be through virtual seminars, using social media effectively or creating a viral marketing campaign that even after the event is done, folks are still interested in talking about it from a case study perspective.

The bottom line is, no matter how you choose to cut costs for your - or your clients' - events, the key question to ask is what are you trying to achieve with this event? And are you doing everything through entertainment, communication, and food to reinforce this message? Stay on message and look to eliminate the elements that do not reinforce the objectives.

25 Ways to SAVE Food & Beverage Dollars

1. At Continental Breakfast serve in bulk: Whole Fruit (instead of sliced Fresh Fruit), Bowls of Yogurt & Granola with Toppings, request large pastries be cut in half , minimize choices (day 1 muffins & whole grain bread, day 2 croissants & Danish, etc – people tend to take (1) of each when there are allot to choose.
2. For cocktail receptions, use High Top tables instead of sit down tables. People are more likely to network, which is good, but also, they are less likely to hang around and drink and eat all night—saving you money.
3. Lines are OK, to a point. At cocktail receptions, don't be afraid of having medium-sized lines at the bar. Long lines are a no-no, but lines that are 5 or 6 deep encourage networking and discourage over-indulging on cocktails.
4. Ask the chef. Meet with the chef or catering personnel before the meeting to see if you can use the same menu as a group that was meeting in the facility. Asking the chef to preparing more of the same food in advance can result in cost savings. Also, check with the chef for seasonal or regional specialties, which may be less expensive.
5. Don't pay more for drinks. Whether it's a cash bar or hosted bar, don't pay more for drinks than you pay in the hotel outlets (bars and restaurants).
6. Lock in the menu prices. If the hotel will not provide a specific menu in advance, at least agree that the menu prices will not increase more than a fixed percentage per year.
7. Eliminate alcohol altogether. Or eliminate the hard liquor and mixed drinks. Serve only soft drinks, bottled mineral water, juices, beer, and wine.
8. Order as much as possible "by consumption." Uneaten food and drink can be returned and not charged. This works well with soda and packaged foods like potato chips.
9. Instead of a hot breakfast, serve an extended continental breakfast by adding fresh fruit, yogurt, and cereal to the regular offerings.
10. Use sit-down meals, which can cut food preparation labor costs as much as 20 percent.
11. Skip the dessert, salad, or soup. Dessert can be served at breaks.
12. Distribute box lunches instead of holding a formal sit-down lunch.
13. Ask the sales office which other groups are using the hotel at the same time. You may be able to have the same menu, thereby gaining economies of scale that can be passed on in cost savings to you.
14. Place expensive food items in harder-to-reach places on the banquet table.
15. Try staffed food stations, such as stir-fry stations and pasta tables.
16. Avoid shrimp, oysters, and other expensive delicacies.
17. Find a local winery or microbrewery to sponsor your liquor costs.
18. Use a controlled-pour system. Make sure the bartenders measure what they pour: If you are being charged by the drink served, you may find a "liberal ice" policy and weaker drinks in general. If you are charged by the bottle, the mixed drinks may be too strong.
19. Eliminate alcohol altogether. Or eliminate the hard liquor and mixed drinks. Serve only soft drinks, bottled mineral water, juices, beer, and wine.
20. Ask the hotelier if a discontinued wine label is available that can be consumed at a reduced rate.
21. Offer pitchers of water rather than bottled water.
22. Use opened bottles of liquor and wine for hospitality or VIP suite.
23. Use smaller plates—people will eat less.
24. Reuse centerpieces, or ask attendees to bring something related to the meeting's theme that can be used in centerpieces. The items later can be donated to an appropriate charity.
25. If your hotel is near a lot of restaurants and shopping, provide an early evening reception with heavy finger foods and a little entertainment and let them go for dinner on their own. This is cheaper than providing dinner and some will fill up enough they won't feel like they missed a meal.