

## The site/venue selection process... a few tips

### ACCOMMODATION

- What are the room rates, including GST?
- How are room rates determined (rack, sliding scale, government per diem, group)?
- What is the breakdown of sleeping rooms, by sleeping configuration (singles, doubles, one- and two-bedroom suites)?
- How many rooms comply with the Disabilities Act? In what sleeping configurations?
- On what date will the room rate be guaranteed?
- Is there a complimentary-room policy?
- What is the policy on late arrivals and late checkout?
- How is overflow handled?
- What are the in-room telephone/internet charges?
- What is the policy on cancellation and attrition?

### FUNCTION SPACE

- How many meeting rooms will be available exclusively to the group?
- Do any have visual obstructions? Are they soundproof?
- Does each meeting room have its own sound system, data ports, and light and temperature controls?
- Is there a storage area near the meeting space?
- Do ballrooms have access to the banquet kitchen?



- What is the capacity and location of the freight elevator/loading dock?

#### **FOOD AND BEVERAGE**

- What are the penalty rates/fees on functions held on weekends, public holidays or that finish after midnight?
- What is the number, type and seating capacity of on-site restaurants? Are they available for group functions?
- Does the property offer outdoor dining options?
- What is the average price of breakfast, lunch and dinner?
- Will the hotel contact provide specific food and beverage quotes for one function?
- Are complimentary coffee breaks offered?

#### **IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- Are any groups scheduled to be on-site during the dates your group will meet? If yes, what types of groups?
- Are any citywide special events scheduled to take place?
- How many parking spaces are there? What are parking rates? Is valet parking available?
- How far away is the convention center, CBD, and airport?
- Is airport shuttle service offered?
- What type of local transportation is available?
- What is the average taxi fare from airport to property?
- When was the last renovation? Does the property have any renovations planned?
- What are the scheduled dates?
- What are the concierge hours? Where is the concierge desk?
- What type of security is provided?

- Are there sports, entertainment and child-care facilities?
- What is the average length of service per employee?
- How long has the general manager been at the hotel?
- Does the property offer any promotional assistance?
- Ask for contact names of three comparable groups that recently met at the property.

## **21 things you should remember to make your next conference or meeting the best ever!**

1. Have a good mix of industry experts, recognised world leaders in their field and professional speakers as presenters.
2. Use a professional emcee throughout your conference.
3. Have a reputable professional conference manager on your team.
4. Have a theme that inspires and attracts delegates and embrace your theme in all aspects of your conference.
5. Base your budget on your super early bird registration fee that is well promoted.
6. Regularly promote your conference to coincide with early bird and full registration fees time frames.
7. Use a venue that is the perfect fit for your presenters, your theme, and the special needs, expectations and desires of your delegates.
8. Provide an attractive event timetable so that while on site your delegates get to all events on time.
9. Provide speakers notes in one PDF document that includes an action planner.
10. Choose your venue carefully, does it meet the expectations of your delegates (cost, location, destination).
11. While email and the internet are important marketing tools, you will need supporting direct mail/advertising.

12. If you are a membership organisation, call 50 of members who do not attend your conferences/meetings and ask them why. You will get valuable marketing feedback.
13. Commence your promotion as early as possible using your headline 4 or 5 keynote speakers.
14. Collect the email address of all those who enquire and communicate with them monthly.
15. Remember when making block room bookings at hotels, up to 60 % of delegates may arrange their own accommodation.
16. Use a professional AV and sound company, do not try and do it yourself with borrowed equipment.
17. Make sure you have adequate public liability insurance.
18. Have a conference enquiry phone line that is attended during business hours with well trained staff.
19. Build a comprehensive conference web site and keep it updated.
20. Check for conflicting events.
21. Ensure there is agreement concerning the objectives of your conference / meeting and the key actions to achieve them.

### **Get the most from your next small meeting**

#### **Before The Meeting... Setting Objectives**

Know the purpose of the meeting and state the objectives up front. Set up an e-mail or Web system by which participants can receive information and give input about the event well before the meeting. Be prepared to act on that input.

Give attendees an agenda. Meetings often lack agendas because they're "not important enough." If it's not important enough, don't meet.

Give attendees advance reading or assignments so they come to the meeting with some sense of what is expected and are psyched about possible outcomes. Get them involved in the outcome.

Develop an advisory council of interested parties from different regions or offices, if your attendees are coming from varied geographical locations. The group can work with senior management to prioritize the issues and topics for discussion.

### **On Site**

The mind can absorb only what the seat of the pants can tolerate. Keep attendees up and active during the day; use varied presentation styles; use participation techniques to make the attendees feel they are part of the meeting.

Try different room setups each day if the same people are meeting in the same room. Anything to keep things interesting!

Make sure your hotel convention services manager knows the hours you have reserved your meeting room. Even if you have a 24-hour hold on a room, it is safest to take all of the materials you'll need for the following day to a safe place, like your hotel room.

Seat people in a circle or semicircle to encourage interaction.

Put "reserved" on the back rows of seats in a room set larger than the audience you are expecting, forcing people to sit up front.

Suggest casual clothing if you're encouraging ice-breaking or interaction.

Have people fill out index cards to pose questions anonymously at the beginning of the session so the presenter can address them at an appropriate time.

Give attendees mental and physical breaks. One company started a meeting for 30 people with a continental breakfast at 7:30 a.m., continued in the same room through a working lunch, then broke at 5:30 p.m. Attendees never got out of the same stuffy meeting room or the same chairs.

Never get a small meeting rolling until you've given attendees a chance to introduce themselves and get their agendas on the table. This could mean simply jotting down a list of issues on a flip chart, for example, that the meeting leaders or facilitators can promise will be handled throughout the meeting. Do make sure facilitators follow through on that promise.

Don't use a resort unless you plan to make the resort's facilities a part of your meeting. Imagine a company holding a national sales meeting at a resort when corporate policy does not permit free time to use the resort's amenities. So attendees get to see the glorious outdoors from inside a meeting room and watch and weep as others have a good time!

Don't use sophisticated audiovisual or technical equipment unless it fits your audience's needs or unless the presenter knows how to use it; technology does not equal interactivity.

Don't write and distribute a meeting description until you know exactly what is going to be

presented. There's nothing worse than having attendees go to a session and come out of it muttering "That's not what I expected."

### **Presentation Tips For Instructors, Leaders, and Facilitators**

Contact your speakers or presenters ahead of time and get all of their technical equipment needs and specifications. Stress that if they don't give you the information up front, they will not get the equipment on site. The cost of LCD projectors and other audiovisual equipment is high in today's market, so you'll want to budget for it before hand.

Contact your presenters and ask them for copies of their handouts before the event so that you ensure there are enough copies to go around.

If you want people to learn and retain the information at the meeting, ask them at the beginning of the program what they want to get out of the meeting--and then ask them at the end of the meeting if they got out of it what they had hoped they would.

Set lecterns and screens at angles from each other so the presenter can see audiovisuals without turning away from audience. Many novice presenters look at the screen and talk (to make sure the correct slide is up there), rather than speak to the audience.

Consider not using a lectern at all. Use a wireless mike instead. Moving targets are much more interesting than talking heads, even at a small meeting.

Presenters should check out a meeting room and the AV setup before the meeting--whether it's a session for 20 or 200. Are the slides in order? Has the presenter mixed verticals and horizontals (which won't fit on the screen)? Will the projector's "throw" provide the necessary clarity and readability? Are overheads typewritten so small that you can't read content from five feet away?

Make sure a technician is assigned to your meeting and that you know how to get hold of him or her quickly in case of technical difficulties.

If you do use slides or PowerPoint never have more than seven bullet points per slide.

Use attention-getting techniques in your introductions, like meaningful props and giveaways. At one sales meeting, after everyone was in the room and the housekeeping details were out of the way, the executive vice president asked everyone to stand, pick up their chairs, and look under their seats. Wow. Each person had a \$10 bill attached to the bottom of the seat. The VP got everyone seated again and said, "The point is, you've got to get off your butts to make a buck." Then each person received a leather wallet to hold all the future bucks they would make as a result of what they would learn at the meeting.

Coach novice presenters not to read their speeches. At another small meeting for 20 people, a new guy on the team slowly and painstakingly read every word of his material--including jokes--to people sitting just a few feet away.

Cut back on content and give more time for processing: Most presenters prepare and then try to present much more than they need. Presentations should constitute only 25 percent of meeting time.

Leave enough time for a question-and-answer period.

Don't insult the intelligence of attendees by reading slide content to them. Visuals should supplement or clarify what you are saying. At a national industry convention, one presenter displayed his material in PowerPoint. He used his neat little laptop to pop each line of each slide onto the screen--and read it--with no other information for the audience. And the subject of the presentation was new technology for meetings!

Don't allow use of laptops during your presentation unless you're conducting an interactive exercise that requires use of the computer; otherwise attendees are distracted. Also, tell participants to turn off cell phones and pagers if you don't want them to be interrupted.

Don't distribute handouts of your presentation until after you have spoken unless you want the audience to use them during the presentation. Otherwise, the audience reads your material while you speak (or skips ahead to see what's coming) instead of paying attention to your message. If you do use handouts, consider leaving "fill in the blanks" lines as a technique to get people to take notes. Note taking encourages retention.

Don't forget to follow through. At another meeting, several presenters stopped at certain points in their visuals and said, "I'll talk about that later," but failed to get back to the subject. They built up an expectation in their audience, but left the audience holding an empty bag.

Make sure presentations immediately after lunch don't call for lowered lights. Some people might fall asleep and embarrass themselves.

Don't brush off attendees' opinions and experiences; respect them. Don't fail to take into consideration the variety of learning styles, particularly generational and gender differences.