

More than 300 Ways to Improve Your Meeting's Bottom Line

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There are many, many ways to improve your meeting's bottom line. Sometimes it isn't just a matter of increasing revenues or decreasing expenses, but of "working smarter" to save time and effort or by changing the way you do things to bring more perceived value to your meeting and its content.

Never cut costs for the sake of cutting costs, do it with a strong sense of what is important to your delegates. An association of mostly male scientists may not notice expensive centerpieces at the banquet, but don't ever dare cut back on their opening reception free drink!

Look at all elements of your meeting. Is there a way to reduce, recycle or replace an item? Do you really need a delegate's bag or would an envelope do? Can you cut back on the meal portions served at a dinner? Or eliminate the soup at the lunch? Is there a way to re-think how you do something? Question why you do certain things a certain way. Can the invitations be sent by fax or e-mail? Can you announce next year's conference through a promotional item, instead of having a separate delegate's gift and invitation? Examine the 4 R's of cost saving: reduce, recycle, replace and re-think... for all the cost and revenue centers in your budget.

Seek out revenue opportunities. Ask for sponsorship in unusual areas. Add an early-bird registration discount. Charge for cancellations. Sell spin-off promotional items and services. Offer shipping services, photocopying services.

Increase the perceived value of your meeting. Through careful planning, participant evaluation and feedback - assess what is most important to your delegates, your clients and your sponsors. Little touches like welcoming letters at their hotel room can make a big difference. Add "wow" to your meetings, through creative and value-driven elements. Deliver the content in your programming, include elements of interaction, and provide networking opportunities.

BUDGETING

1. Calculate your fixed, variable and break-even costs. Know where your "soft" costs are and what is "hard core" to your program. This will give you an idea of where you could spend less or where you may need sponsorship help and what can be eliminated completely, if necessary.
2. Along with tracking the registration numbers, carefully track your other revenues and all your expenses.
3. Watch for billing errors. Review all invoices carefully.
4. Always budget at least 10% of your expenses as "contingency". There are always unforeseen expenses like:
 - things that were overlooked
 - things that were under budgeted
 - labor strikes
 - bad weather
 - overtime labor
 - extra postage and mailings
 - phone and computer hook-ups

- cancellation insurance
- speaker substitutions

5. Learn what the tax laws are for both your business location and the location of the event. Are you collecting too much tax for your international delegates? Do you have charitable status? Can you be invoiced out-of-province or out-of-state and eliminate taxes there? What are the rules for charging tax on gratuities? Are you eligible for tax breaks that you aren't claiming? A good tax consultant can answer these questions. Also talk to others in your industry that are "financial" whizzes.

6. Are you tax exempt? Learn the rules for charities and non-profit companies.

7. Follow the same budget format as your accounting department.

8. Meet with the hotelier to review the master account every day. This will catch the errors on-site when the event is still fresh in everyone's minds.

9. Use a calling card for telephone calls on the road and always check the telephone charges for your hotel before using the phone.

10. Communicate your budget information with the convention services manager. Their role is to work with you. The more information they know, the easier it will be to work together.

11. Ask for a cash discount for payment on-site.

12. Limit authorized signatures; don't accept charges signed by unauthorized people.

SPONSORS

13. Capture your sponsor's hearts with a creative, interesting and exciting project/program. Get them excited, get them involved. Create a theme around the sponsor's product, service or image - present your banquet with their product or service as the central theme idea, or a coffee break with food items that represent their industry. Sponsors will no longer dish out big cash, simply to have their logos in the program. They expect more.

14. Seek sponsorships in all areas. Ask the site facility to sponsor parking, welcome banners, conference buttons, a complimentary glass of wine at the opening reception. Look at industry sponsors for key receptions, banquets etc. like usual, but also consider unusual sources of funding. You have a golf tournament? Get sunscreen samples. You have a VIP dinner? Ask a local microbrewery to sponsor a tasting.

15. Today, it is just as hard to get the small sponsors as the larger ones. Put yourself in the sponsor's shoes... when it is all over, make sure that they saw their return on investment and felt part of the program and appreciated. It is crucial to send follow-up thank you note with back-up documentation for their files -- but also send a 3-dimensional gift. Give them a personal item, like a mug or a promotional item from the conference. Give them something that you would like to receive yourself.

16. Welcome sponsorships of in-kind products and services. Offering a product or service will be less costly to a firm than giving you a cash sponsorship. And they are often of equal or greater value to you. Consider food and beverage sponsors, think about office supplies companies providing registration badges and pens, envision PR departments of industry members providing creative vision to your promotional flyers, contemplate reduced airline fares or complimentary plenary speaker tickets.

17. Barter goods and services. Exchange a booth space with advertising space.

18. Seek meeting co-sponsors. Join forces with a complementing organization. Increase attendance, improve buying power, lower the per person costs, diversify the mix of registrants, reduce costs for speakers and meeting space. But make sure the two organizations are compatible in their corporate cultures.

SITE SELECTION

19. Get the local Convention and Visitors Bureau to do the legwork in setting up your site visit.

20. Know the needs of your group. Consider:

* Economy hotels. Do you really need to stay at a 5-star property?

* Airport hotels and all-suite properties

* College and university campuses.

* Unusual venues: public spaces, art galleries, historical sites...

* Movie theatres. Serve traditional movie foods and take advantage of natural acoustics and tiered seating.

21. Use local destinations, smaller cities often offer more for your money.
22. Use a video camera to tape what the property looks like. You can also send the tape to your organizing committee, saving travel and time costs for the group. This will help you to remember the property.
23. Never visit a hotel you won't do business with - it is a waste of your time and the vendor's time.

NEGOTIATIONS AND CONTRACTS

24. Know the value of your business. Keep a detailed history of all your events.
25. Research your suppliers. Is there competition? How busy is the market? Are you in high or low or mid-season? What is the reputation of the supplier? How many years have they been in business? Find out what they are willing to provide as "extras". This will add value to you, but may cost little in money, effort or time to the supplier.
26. Research the rack rates and corporate rates. Call the 1-800 line or reservations desk of the property or chain. This way you will know the 'worst case' pricing.
27. Always give conservative room blocks. If you are blocking too many rooms, you end up paying for those rooms and it will create a bad meeting history which will come back to haunt you in future negotiations.
28. After the meeting is over, ask for the hotel's meeting history. Make sure that this information is accurate, it will serve as the references for your future meeting suppliers.
29. Negotiate the sliding scale rates.
30. Negotiate no deposit. Or at least that the deposit will be placed in an interest-bearing account.
31. Use leverage. Have several supplier options and don't let the supplier think they are the only one.
32. Develop long-term relationship with your suppliers, their property and their chain.
33. Prepare a very detailed request for proposal. Make the supplier salivate. Make them want your business. Communicate the value of your meeting.
34. Ask for everything and anything that you want right up front, including:

- 1:30 comp rate or 1:40
- Airport transfers
- Canadian \$ at par
- Check in time
- Check out time
- Complimentary coffee and tea in the room
- Comp meeting space, comp rehearsal space, comp set-up/take-down
- Continental breakfast in the room
- Extended stay rates
- Free local calls
- Free office space
- Free or reduced parking for VIPs and staff
- Health club access or aerobics instructor for health break
- Late cut-off date

- Overset for food guarantees
- Reduced speaker room rates
- Reduced staff room rates
- Same rate after cut-off date
- Upgrades for VIPs and staff
- Welcome gift and notes

35. Add a clause in the hotel contract that you will not pay the final invoice until you have received a detailed post-convention evaluation from the property. Use the standard Convention Liaison Council post-con evaluation form.

36. Work with the hotel to fill their "hot dates", fill in their meeting space "holes".

37. Build in a "protect yourself" clause. Make sure that cancellation clause is reciprocal. What if the hotel does major disruptive renovations? Unions? Change in management? Change in the facility?

38. Hotels are more willing to negotiate if you use a proportional amount of rooms and meeting space. Also if you can build up their F&B totals with on-site meals and functions.

39. Never sign a contract unless you agree with it in its entirety. Cross out or edit clauses that you do not agree with, initial it and get the supplier to initial their agreement with it. Remember a contract is not binding, unless both parties agree.

40. Be flexible with your arrival and departure patterns. Can your meeting be moved from a Tuesday-Thursday to a Saturday-Monday? Find out what the hotel's meeting patterns are. Work with them so you are not "competing for meeting space". This will give you a buyer's edge.

41. While it seems like there is less and less of a low season, try to schedule meetings in the less busy time of year. Winter in Montreal, after ski-season in Vail... Educate your management about the value of flexibility in meeting dates.

42. Get all the charges listed in writing up front, then add a 'no additional charges' clause. These charges may include:

- SOCAN
- How taxes apply (GST on the PST? GST on tips?)
- Tips and service charges
- Labor charges (including minimum hours and minimum rates)
- Move-in / move-out charges, set-up charges
- Microphones, electricity and phone hookups
- Risers
- Tables, chairs, couches and linen charges
- Easels

43. Get every detail in writing. Even though verbal contracts are legally binding, it will come down to your word against theirs. The more details there are in writing, the better.

44. Understand the contract. Never sign something you don't fully understand. If you don't understand it, chances are, neither did the other party. Eliminate legalese.

45. Specify the dates and times in the contract i.e.: "The cut-off date for bedroom reservations is Saturday June 28, 1997 at 5:00 p.m." instead of "The cut-off date is 30-days prior to the meeting".

46. Always read every word in the contract. It is amazing how many people haven't read the whole contract before signing it.
47. Get legal advice before signing. Don't be penny wise and pound foolish.
48. Lock in the menu prices. If the hotel will not provide a specific menu several years in advance, at least agree that the menu prices will not increase more than a fixed percent per year.
49. Pay attention to cut-off dates. Keep in regular contact with suppliers even after the contract is signed. And watch the business climate in that city/region.
50. Sign a multiple meeting contract that guarantees a percentage off the rack rate at each hotel. But keep good bedroom pick-up records and always compare the prices with other vendors prior to selecting the supplier.
51. Complimentary rooms. Use your comp rooms. Cash them in for suites first, which are more valuable. Make sure it is cumulative nights and not calculated per night.
52. Double up the delegates. Provide the option of paying the price difference out of pocket for a single room.
53. Work with national sales offices to set-up site visits.

PEOPLE: STAFF, VOLUNTEERS

54. Use volunteers. You can find outstanding workers among your industry's retired personnel, students from your industry or from the local meeting planning/hotel management/tourism programs.
55. Never mix paid and volunteers in the same roles.
56. Keep the volunteers busy with varied work and blocks of time - not all day!
57. Give guidelines and a thorough, but fun briefing to volunteers. Treat them like staff. They will be on the front-line and must be well informed.
58. Use graphic art students to design your promotional materials, logos and advertising. You may end up with the most creative results, at a fraction of the cost.
59. Motivate volunteers by giving them a sense of accomplishment, recognition for their contribution, clear direction of their responsibilities and, by all means make the best use of their talents. There is nothing more frustrating for a volunteer than feeling that their talents were not used properly. Always, always, always thank them in a consistent, public and visible way.
60. One of the best ways to maximize volunteers, is to figure out "what's in it for them". Someone with a personal agenda will be most motivated. Assign a student who wants to meet potential employers to assist the host of a hospitality suite or to run the slide previewing room. Ask a retired person who wants to stay current in new industry advances to be an audio visual monitor and evaluation form collector in a session room. As long as their "personal agenda" is consistent with your meeting's objectives and the volunteer's role in the meeting, you will have a win-win situation.
61. Prior to assigning roles, give your volunteers a major group task - such as stuffing the registration packages. This will enable you to see who is the natural leader, who is good with details, who is artistic and who is good with people. Try to assign tasks according to the person's past experience and skills, but also according to their personality.
62. Give your staff and volunteers time to be properly fed/watered/etc. Provide enough people at the registration to allow for short breaks and if it is a conference with several days, try to provide enough time for sufficient sleep. Do not assume that not everyone has the stamina and energy to be a meeting pro like you!
63. Upon arrival on-site, drop off "thank you in advance" gifts with the registration staff, banquet contacts, accounting department (particularly the behind-the-scenes people). Chocolate works well, so do local delicacies or Montreal bagels or maple syrup, or inexpensive left-over promotional items from other conferences. Create a positive and friendly alliance from the start with your "front line" workers and suppliers.
64. Hire on-site registration and secretarial staff instead of paying staff to travel.
65. Know local overtime restrictions and regulations.
66. Schedule staff at straight time. Avoid overtime.
67. Pay travel per diem, and outline exact expenses and rules.
68. Use staff or high school amateur to take candid photos.
69. Provide a 'schedule at a glance' to all staff so they know who is doing what, where and when.
70. Double up staff bedrooms in suites.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

While the meeting program is the most important, if the food is bad, delegates will not be able to focus on the event's content.

71. Be very tight with your guarantees. Use your historical data; place conservative estimates; track your delegates' preferences and patterns closely.

72. Do your homework. Crunch the numbers. Compare all the pricing options on a spreadsheet. Is it better by buy in bulk, by the dozen, à la carte?

73. Deal with the chef directly. Challenge them to be creative on your budget and to work with your meeting's goals and concept.

74. Be honest, give the banquet manager your budget and work with the chef to come up with F&B that works with your group and the budget. Don't use the set menus, except as a guideline.

75. Food and beverage guarantee guidelines:

Function description

Mostly out of town delegates

50% local delegates

Early in meeting, f&b events included in registration

75% + paid guests

60% + paid guests

Last night meal, included in registration

65-70% + paid guests

60% + paid guests

Not included in registration

30-50%

30-50%

Weddings, reunions

and small groups

Never (# of tickets sold

60-75% of invited guests

Guarantee the exact number of guests that RSVP excluding staff (usually 2-5% no show)

Receptions

8-12 pieces per person

15-20 pieces per person if it is replacing a meal

Guarantee the exact amount of bedrooms in your room block

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76. Buy your coffee, tea and decaf in bulk or by the gallon, if possible.

77. Order reduced portions.

78. Centralize your break service.

79. Share the purpose of the functions, hoteliers can help you save on networking events and provide more elaborate sit-down functions.

80. Order as much as possible by consumption. Unconsumed foods and drink can be returned and not charged. This works well with pop, packaged foods like chips, granola bars, but can also be done with perishables like whole fruits, yogurts and other items.

81. Use tickets. Delegates exchange their tickets for seating. This will make your guarantees more accurate.

82. Re-use if possible. Wrap unconsumed Danishes and donuts from the coffee break and provide them at lunch with the dessert options.

83. Work with the chef. The chef will know what is in season, what is local produce and can be very creative if given the opportunity.

84. The catering people will also know what is labor intensive and what is easier to prepare. This will save them money that can be passed on to you.

85. Instead of hot breakfast, do an extended continental breakfast by adding fresh fruit, yogurt and cereal. Get creative: provide fruit/yogurt/granola layered in a sundae glass, with optional syrup toppings.

86. Serve whole fruit, not sliced.

87. Cut down on your portions. Cut Danishes and donuts in half. Offer mini-muffins, mini-donuts, mini-danishes. Not everyone wants to eat the whole pastry. Offer them the option to "indulge" without the guilt of leaving half on their plate.

Lunch/Dinner:

88. Chicken is one of the cheapest and most healthy meats to prepare. Be careful to avoid the "rubber chicken" syndrome, vary the sauces and styles.

89. Served meals are generally cheaper than buffet style, due to the need to supply more food for a buffet. Sit-down meals can be as much as 20% less in food preparation labor costs.

90. Hold a vegetarian luncheon.

91. If you have several dinners at the same time, try to have the same menu. This way, you are more flexible with your guarantees (i.e.: an over-guarantee in one room can offset an under-guarantee in another room) and the hotel may eliminate the "minimum service" labor charges.

92. Give out meal vouchers instead of having a closing lunch or dinner.

93. Skip the dessert, salad or soup. Dessert can be served at break.

94. Eat at a famous local restaurant during off-season. It will be colorful and add local flare.

95. Distribute box lunches instead of formal sit-down meal to increase networking. Or try pizza or submarine sandwiches.

96. Saturday night with a twist... serve a Sunday brunch.

97. Ask who else is in the hotel at the same time. You may be able to have the same menu and gain economies of scale that can be passed on to you.

Bar and Beverages:

98. Find a local winery or microbrewery to sponsor your liquor costs.

99. If you are able to, buy soft drinks and liquor in bulk and serve it yourself. Sometimes hotels will waive their "must use our banquet services" for small hospitality suite functions.

100. Cut the cocktail time short by 15 minutes.

101. Marry the bars 15 minutes early, so that you only have one bar at closing. This will also reduce the potential overtime charges.

102. Use a controlled pour system. Make sure the bartenders are measuring what they are pouring. Be clear about how strong the drinks should be. 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 able to "put hair on one's chest".

103. Do an inventory before and after the reception. Have the bartender sign the sheet personally. Also watch for empty bottles at the start of the event. They may accidentally be included in the bottles consumed count.

104. Do your homework. Crunch your numbers to determine which of the options is better: by the person, by the drink, by the bottle. Be clear about what "by the bottle means". If a bottle is opened to pour 1 oz. - do you get charged for a full bottle or a percentage of the bottle?

105. Eliminate alcohol all together. Have a "mock-tail" hour with designer drinks.

106. Eliminate the hard liquor and mixed drinks. Have only pop, mineral water, juices, beer and wine.

107. Host a "white" bar: vodka, gin, white rum, wines, pop. By reducing the options, you reduce the number of opened bottles.

108. Avoid salty foods.

109. Provide champagne and pop at the entrance instead of wine at dinner.

110. Use leftover wine in the president's suite or hospitality rooms.

111. Ask hotelier if there is a discontinued wine label that can be consumed at a reduced rate.

112. Serve iced tea or lemonade instead of pop at the breaks.

113. Instead of providing coffee, ask the hotel to sell coffee at kiosks in the halls.

Cocktails:

114. Your room set-up will effect the consumption:

- 180(vs. 360(: If your buffet table is against a wall, it will only offer half the consumption space of a buffet table in the center of the room.
- Far from the door: If your buffet table is far from the door, less people will eat because they will take longer to "work" their way to the food.
- Less stations: If you have less buffet tables, there also will be less opportunities to "fill up". But watch for overkill. You do not want to frustrate your invitees! Nor, do you want to appear cheap where perceived value counts most.

115. Use smaller plates, or better yet napkins only.

116. Place expensive items in harder to reach places on the banquet table.

117. Entice with dessert buffet so that meal consumption is lower.

118. Manned food stations with stir fry stops and tables piled high with steaming fresh pasta are crowd-pleasers, inexpensive and filling.

119. Have a smaller variety of foods. Everyone likes to have a "little bit of everything". If you have 50 items, the plates will get overloaded, despite the delegate not being particularly hungry... the result: a lot of wasted food.

120. If you pass the food, you can extend it longer and you can control the portions.

121. Decorate the buffet table with "fillers". "Fillers" can include food items like parsley, lettuce and ice; or decor such as props, marbles, balloons, ice carvings, mirror tiles. It can also simply be a matter of creating height and different levels of serving space. It will look nicer, but you will have less food on display to consume.

122. People will eat less if their attention is diverted with entertainment, activities and décor.

123. Set cold cheaper platters on the buffet and replenish the hot items periodically.

124. Avoid shrimp, oysters and other expensive delicacies.

125. Provide a small selection in large quantities.

126. Re-use your left-overs, or donate them to charity.

127. Compare à la carte vs. per person pricing on a spreadsheet.

REGISTRATION

128. Offer early-bird discounts.

129. Have an early-bird drawing for attendance to the next meeting or for a physical prize that would appeal to your typical delegate.

130. Offer tiered and flexible registration options.
131. Don't automatically guarantee all the rooms on the rooming list for late arrivals.
132. Recycle your badge stock as well as the badge holders. This saves the cost of replacing them annually and provides a great source of public relations regarding your group's environmental awareness.
133. Print names on meal tickets to reduce ticket swapping to non-registered attendees.
134. Sponsor your registration materials bags.
135. Use company envelopes for the registration materials.
136. Before printing your registration form, try filling it out yourself. Are you missing something? Is it user-friendly? Did you have enough space to write your e-mail address? Is it clear what is included and what is not for each event? Avoid time-consuming registration problems with this simple step.
137. Avoid light colors, reverses and fine print on registration forms. Consider how the form will be used, will you be faxing it? Will people photocopy it? Make the form logical and only ask for relevant information.

ROOM SET-UPS

138. If a meeting lasts more than 2 days, keep the meeting room set-up identical.
139. Find out which group is in the hotel immediately prior to or following your meeting and work together on your staging requirements. This will save you money in labor for setup and tear down.
140. Use skirted tables instead of renting secretarial desks for on-site offices.
141. Save money by having buffet-style luncheon rolled into your meeting room, rather than renting a separate room for lunch.
142. Communicate all your meeting and set-up needs to the convention services manager well in advance.
143. Reduce the number of breakout rooms needed, saving AV and setup costs.
144. Make sure the pads and pencils are complimentary, otherwise eliminate them.
145. Use skirted tables instead of renting a secretarial desk.
146. Hold a pre-convention meeting. Run through all the details, sometimes there will be a misunderstanding. It is better to clear it up now than on-site.
147. Double set. Use the same room with two set-ups, for example classroom style for the course and banquet set-up for the lunch and breaks. Use plants or screens to divide the space.

TRADE SHOWS

Exhibition Manager Tips

148. Think big. Add punch to your show by adding "larger than life" ideas to boost attendance.
149. Promote your wares. To spice up a show's visual appeal and visibility, encourage exhibitors to advertise their products beyond the booth itself.
150. Offer exhibitor training. This will help exhibitors to get more from their show.
151. Invite special customers. Lack of quality traffic is the biggest problem a trade show can have.
152. Embrace technology.
153. Scan the globe. Promote your show in other markets and other countries.
154. Encourage booth appeal.
155. Dress it up. The look and feel of entranceways, lobbies and floor and the colors and graphics contribute to the success of the show.
156. Feed them. Provide coffee, buffets and entertainment in the trade show area and the traffic will come.
157. Give exhibitors a small tray of food or several opened bottles of wine and host a wine and cheese where the traffic has to come to the booth!

Exhibitor Tips

158. Have a plan, work the booth, follow up the leads.
159. Wear a costume or uniform. This will create visibility and people will remember your product and booth.
160. Use pop-up booths to save on shipping costs, and it will be easier to set-up and take-down.
161. Use cardboard boxes for garbage.
162. Give prizes worth winning and promotional products that are useful.

163. Use the show contractors.
164. Mail the information to potential leads after the show. This will reduce your paper materials to ship.
165. Use a modular booth, this will be easier to ship and more flexible.
166. Store your booth at your own facility.

SPEAKERS, ENTERTAINERS AND PROGRAMMING

167. Develop good program evaluation tools and use them to provide the strongest, most effective technical program for your delegates. Watch what your competitors are doing. Keep your eyes and ears open for new innovative and hot topics in your industry.
168. Use industry experts or members as speakers. Book local speakers to save on travel expenses and avoid travel delays.
169. Hire now. Speakers and entertainers often raise their rates every year. Lock in at this year's rates.
170. Use your speakers for multiple events -- as a moderator, a speaker, poster session judge, as a chairman of a session. Use your entertainers for multiple events too.
171. Negotiate a flat rate instead of fee plus expenses.
172. Cover all expenses in the contract.
173. Always ask, could we do it differently? Make the meeting memorable. Have historians do a camp fire talk; hire a golf pro for personal coaching; give board members and VIPs stamped postcards to sent to their families. Sometimes small expenses make an event more special.
174. Piggyback speaking and entertainer engagements with other groups in the same hotel or same city.
175. Use versatile acts in more than one event, save on travel expenses.
176. Use a prepared AV module instead of live performers.
177. Understand union rules, hire minimum musicians required.
178. Take advantage of theatre discounts.
179. Eliminate riders in entertainment contracts.
180. Use "tried and true" acts instead of "hot new talent".
181. See the talent in action, check your references, make sure the entertainer understands your needs and is genuinely enthusiastic about your event, brief them in person.

DÉCOR

182. Consider non-floral centerpieces:

- Use children's toys that can be donated
- Make the dessert extravaganza into the centerpiece
- Use mirror tiles and fishbowls with rocks
- Place a basket of fancy local baked breads in the center of the table
- Use local dried flowers and pinecones
- A simple candle with confetti on the tablecloths, can work magic.

183. Do you really need a centerpiece?
184. Rent props from a local high school, college or theatre group. Keep one theme and re-use the props in different configurations. Ask your suppliers what they have in-house, in storage.
185. Decorate with balloons instead of using hard sets.
186. Don't order your décor through the hotel. Work directly with local florists for centerpieces.
187. Hire the local cheerleaders to kick off the meeting. Hire an award winning high school or college band to perform at your banquet.
188. Use one theme for the entire meeting, with the same props in different configurations.
189. Use all-inclusive facilities that have meals and talent in one price, i.e.: restaurants, cruises.
190. Encourage guests to dress in the theme.
191. Re-use flowers in arrangements that are fading.

192. Use stock themes, work with what you have and what the hoteliers and suppliers have in their inventory.
193. Minimize the need for décor by using sites like art galleries, theatres, historical locations.
194. Tag onto public events, there is nothing more magical than a background of fireworks.
195. Focus the décor in one area, like the head table or the presentation staging.

SIGNS

196. Avoid last minute print jobs.
197. Use generic, re-usable signs as much as possible.
198. Invest in "slide-in" durable signs. You simply print the information on paper and slide it into the slot on the sign. After the meeting, recycle the paper and re-use the sign for the next event.
199. Use Velcro arrows for directional signs. This way you can reuse them.
200. Get a sponsor to provide the "welcome banner" and signs that are specific to that meeting and will not be re-used.
201. Re-use the foam-core and Bristol board signs on the back for other meeting notices. Or donate it to a local school.
202. Invest in a laminator machine. For pennies, you can create color signs on your computer and make them durable and long-lasting.
203. Request complimentary easels to be included in the hotel contract.

PEOPLE TRANSPORT

204. Encourage the use of your official air carrier. Track the airline usage through your registration form or at the registration desk or with your evaluation form.
205. Analyze cost savings of airfare requiring a Saturday night stay vs. paying for the extra room night plus applicable per diem.
206. Instead of "meet and greet" services, distribute vouchers for airport and/or public transportation.
207. While negotiating for your convention hotel, request complimentary limousine service for VIPs to and from the hotel. Also inquire about reserved and complimentary parking.
208. Establish a travel policy that requires travelers to purchase the least expensive, non-refundable airfares.
209. Ask for reserved parking spaces close the entrance for VIPs and staff.
210. Bring demographics to the table when negotiating air carriers. Would a seniors discount be better than the convention rate for your particular group?
211. Transport delegates in within a 4-8 hour window to cut back on bus transfer costs.
212. Combine your bussing needs. Rent a bus for the companions program and the hotel shuttle service.
213. Send delegates local transit information - travel by bus, commuter train or subway for much less. Many cities have airport connections.
214. Ask for free drink coupons on the flights.
215. Ask for additional frequent flyer points from your official air carrier.
216. Ask the local taxi company for site-seeing coupons.
217. Ask the official carrier to make welcome announcements by the pilot on the group's flight.
218. Use the carrier's VIP lounge for the group's meet and greet.
219. Use restaurants that are within walking distance.
220. Travel during off-peak hours, ex: early AM / late PM.
221. Explore luggage truck rentals vs. per piece luggage handling charges.
222. Book hotels that provide a complimentary airport-shuttle service.

SHIPPING AND MAILING

223. Keep a "don't forget to pack" checklist. And use it.
224. Take advantage of the services of your official air carrier. Negotiate with your official carrier for discounted cargo fees for shipping your meeting materials.
225. For last minute shipments, weigh the option of excess baggage charges versus shipping by express or overnight mail.
226. Use a seasoned customs broker.
227. Use the bus shipping services. They offer pick-up and delivery at both ends and buses often leave every hour for the most popular routes.

228. Invest in easily identifiable large colored plastic storage containers. It saves time to be able to say "I have 25 red storage boxes", instead of combing through all the shipping/receiving area's inventory to track lost shipments. Also, the packing time is dramatically reduced, no more fighting with the tape gun.

229. While packing, do a simple inventory list. Indicate the contents, which room it should end up in, the weight of the box, content value and what part of the program the contents will be used for (registration, trade show, signs...). Count the boxes when you arrive.

230. Keep a tackle box or trunk filled with all your meeting office supplies. Don't forget items like fishing line, metal polish (for awards), push pins -- items that can cost a fortune in time and money to track down off-hours on-site when you really need them!

231. Test your bulk mailings. If a list is not up-to-date, you can lose as much as 50% of the postage in mail returns. By testing a small sample, not only can you see the response rate, but you can also assess how out of date the list is.

232. Use a mailing house. Many mailing houses will even offer discounts on mailings of less than 1000 pieces. Some mailing houses will work directly with your printer. Others can print labels and personalized letters directly from database files on diskette or transmitted electronically. Use technology and their economies of scale to your advantage.

AUDIO-VISUALS

233. Sit down with your audio-visual company and work out the cheapest way to set-up.

234. Avoid hiring riggers to climb above the stage to hang lights by using ground support lifts to set-up the lights.

235. Use cocktail rounds instead of renting overhead carts.

236. Buy a TV and use it as a gratuity or door prize instead of renting one for several days.

237. Use a slide projector with color gels for a spotlight.

238. Use as few microphones as possible. This will eliminate labor and the need for sound mixing equipment.

239. Ask for one complimentary microphone per room.

240. If the group is less than 50 you may not need a mic.

241. Assign your rooms according to the AV in the rooms. Work with a program and AV chart to hold sessions with similar AV needs.

242. Ask for complimentary walkie-talkie radios and charges when negotiating your AV.

243. Host a TV show on your closed circuit TV in the hotel property. This can also be used for showing video highlights from the previous day or to promote certain sponsors.

244. Negotiate with the property to provide hotel equipment and hotel electricians.

245. Encourage overheads instead of video presentations.

246. Rent the size of screen that you need. Work with your AV professional to determine the minimum size for the room size and set-up.

247. Use LCD panels instead of video projectors.

248. Tripod screens are cheaper than fast-fold screens.

249. Encourage speakers to change their own slides.

250. Hire students to change slides, turn on/off lights, replace bulbs and collect evaluation forms.

251. Don't arbitrarily put AV in every room. Ask speakers and moderators what they'll need first. And if there are succeeding sessions, assign all meetings that will need that specific AV to the same room.

252. If you are able to, bid AV services to local contractors outside the property. Their services may be cheaper, and the competition may drive the in-house operator to lower its prices. Watch out if there is a large difference between bids.

253. If you need a VCR, consider renting it from a local video store.

254. Deal directly with the AV company. It minimizes miscommunication and the hotel won't charge you for middleman services.

255. If you need AV for more than one day, negotiate a reduced rental for additional days.

256. Just prior to the meeting, re-confirm the speakers' audiovisual needs as they may have originally requested equipment that is no longer needed.

257. Travel with your own extension cords and power bars. Label them with your name, address and phone number.

258. Have your audio taping company record your meeting at no charge as part of the agreement.
259. Order one table mike to be shared by two panelists.
260. Limit wireless microphones, opting for hand-held microphones with long cords, wherever possible.
261. Limit Power Point presentations. The LCD screens can be expensive to rent. Often there are hold-ups in the program due to presenters not knowing how to hook up their computer and the screen interface.
262. When you expect to have extensive audio-visual requirements, book a conference center where most equipment is included in the cost.
263. Use your hotel's closed-circuit television capabilities to announce program & program changes, exhibit hours, announcements and activities.
264. Don't order draping for screens - no one will notice.

TECHNOLOGY

265. Learn how to use what you have. Fax machines have automatic memory, speed-dial functions. Telephone systems have teleconferencing capability. Photocopy machines can copy two-pages at a time for book copies. E-mail systems have auto-forwarding functions. Take a "rainy day" to learn about these special functions. At least, skim through the user's manual periodically.
266. Program macros into your word processor. Use boilerplates for standard phrases or words that you use continually. Use standard forms and templates. Create style sheets for all your documents. Set up the word processing formatting preferences to the most often used fonts, margins, spacing, etc.
267. Use a spreadsheet to calculate all your budgeting expenses. Weigh the options of various food and beverage pricing. Prepare a budgeting template and simply plug in the numbers. Don't calculate manually, design the spreadsheet so that it will update and calculate for you.
268. Produce your letterhead and company logo automatically on your computer.
269. Invest in a fax card and fax broadcast as much as possible.
270. Use your voicemail to screen calls or redirect calls through your outgoing message. Also, use other people's voicemail to leave detailed messages, so when the "telephone tag" ends, you can make progress.
271. Use a typewriter once in a while. Sometimes, technology for technology's sake is not the most efficient way to do things.
272. Get online! The Internet is a tremendous source of information, publicity and marketing opportunities and communication.

PRINTING & PROMOTION

273. Send out a request for quotations to a number of quality printers. Every print job has different requirements and every printer has different equipment, downtime and overheads. It is surprising how varied printer's quotations can be, on the very same specifications.
274. Learn the lingo. The clearer you are with your graphic design and printing needs, the more easily they can supply you with exactly what you need. Also, if they are more certain that their quotation is precise, they will build in less "padding" into the quotation.
275. Use a standard quotation form, with all the variables (bleeds, reverses, number of copies, PMS ink colors, paper thickness, timing and delivery...). This way, you have a standard quotation sent to all printers bidding on the job and you don't forget a crucial detail in the print job description.
276. If printing in several languages, or several versions of the same material, place the graphics and photos in the same place. Then have different versions of the text flow in the blank space and in one color. This way the printer can do a large run of the whole job in several colors and then several smaller runs in black ink only on cheaper equipment.
277. Consider photocopying. With today's technology, it is very difficult to discern the difference between a high-resolution photocopy and a print job. For less than 200 copies, consider color copying and for less than 500 consider black only copies. With a professional graphic design, the piece can be easily as effective, yet cost a fraction of the price of printing.
278. Submit on diskette or electronically with hard copy back-ups. Don't forget to indicate exactly which file it is, to save time and reduce errors.

279. Keep up with the latest technology. Always ask your printer if they have a suggestion of an easier faster or cheaper way. It is a very fast-paced business, technology has made a major impact.

280. If your printing has a number of elements, think about using a printing consultant. Often, such consultants can find the best suppliers for the whole package of print jobs in a meeting: invitations, brochures, ads, menus, program books, course note binders, proceedings volumes...

281. Rent a photocopy machine on-site and ship your own paper with your supplies.

282. Try to copy back-to-back as much as possible for committee meetings and photocopy jobs. This reduces paper costs and shipping weight. Not to mention, you will be more environmentally friendly.

283. Use art students for graphic design.

284. Use post cards to promote your meeting.

285. When designing your printed pieces, use standard paper sizes.

286. Send large mailings to a mailing house for bulk processing. Send smaller size mailings by mailing house at a substantial discount.

287. If you plan to produce a full color flyer, try to place the color photos on one side of the page only, this will enable certain printers to run one side on a two-color press, drastically reducing the costs, without sacrificing the multi-color artwork.

288. Always, always, always send out price quotation specifications to several printers. Different printers have different equipment and printing costs can vary dramatically. Use a template in your computer to produce a simple "specs sheet", this way you won't forget anything.

289. Be visual and creative. Sometimes the simplest ideas are the most effective. For example, when working at a tradeshow booth, wear a uniform that creates a professional impression.

290. Find a 'quick' printer nearby that delivers.

291. Negotiate with the hotel's business center for bulk rate or discount on copies, faxes and secretarial services.

292. Use the local CVB's photos, posters, promotional shells, meeting folders and tourist information. Often it is free.

293. Buy cheaper priced amenities and gifts. Buy directly from the manufacturer. Buy local gifts to cut the shipping costs.

TIME MANAGEMENT AND WORK HABITS

294. Return your phone calls all at one time.

295. Use your voice mail: screen your calls, leave detailed messages.

296. Train your staff to solve problems on their own or at least have several options when a problem arises.

297. Set mini-deadlines for projects. Schedule the tasks in your agenda.

298. Do the hardest most important things first.

299. Only attend meetings that you know your purpose/role and know what you want to get out of the meeting and what you will contribute.

300. Use a summary chart time table.

301. Work smarter. Delegate as much as possible. Out-source as much as you can. Can someone do it cheaper, faster and with more flare?

302. Minimize interruptions... hide for a few hours if that is what it takes to get the focused time you need. Work from home for an afternoon; close the door; use the boardroom or another desk; put your phone on "do not disturb" and let your voicemail take the calls.

303. Be religious with your agenda book and to do list.

304. Collect and use checklists.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

305. Join a professional association like MPI, PCMA or ASAE. But better yet, get involved on the local, national or international levels. You will develop contacts; and will develop both personally and professionally.

306. Use your membership to create a network of problem-solvers, mentors and source of ethical and professional suppliers.

307. Attend educational conferences and meetings to upgrade your skills.

308. Go to continuing education courses in meeting and event planning, but also consider courses in languages, writing, marketing, creativity, public speaking, time management, business skills, communications, computer skills and technology, and in your company's particular industry.

309. Use your network to solve problems, get the "inside scoop" about a property or supplier, learn about unique venues and themes, find sponsorship opportunities, locate quality suppliers and experts. The more information and guidance that you have, the easier it will be to handle "crisis" situations and to make your event the best one ever.

310. Read, read, read. Subscribe to every magazine that you can. Outstanding meeting industry publications include Successful Meetings, Meeting News, Corporate & Incentive Travel, Meeting & Conventions, Meetings & Incentive Travel, MPI's Meeting Professional and other local professional journals. But also consider general public newspapers and magazines like the Wall Street Journal, Time and more targeted journals on topics like marketing, management and future trends.

311. Learn how to speed-read. Take a course or borrow a book on the topic from a local library.

312. Use commute and travel time to listen to how-to tapes. Meeting industry associations sell tapes of their sessions. Play them back as you commute to work or on your next airline flight.

313. Work on your personal stress management. Eat right, exercise and get enough sleep. Take time to live and to love. The less stressed you are, the more productive you will be in the long term. Long hours and pressure will only burn you out.

CONCLUSION

Obviously not all of these tips are appropriate to every situation. The key is to know your group, know your event and know your suppliers and sponsors. Understand the value of your meeting as well as the perceived value and return on investment of your meeting's stakeholders.

By examining and questioning all the ingredients of your meeting, you can assess what to reduce, replace, re-cycle and what to re-think. Where can you add value to the delegate's experience? And remember, perceived value is more important than the actual cost of items.

But most importantly, take the time to communicate the value of the meeting to your boss/clients. If they don't understand the return on investment of the meeting and your contribution to the success of the event, you may find yourself out of work despite improving the bottom line.

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