Event Venue Selection

What is the best way to select an ideal destination and venue that meet all of the requirements of your event including availability on key dates, group transportation options, accommodation needs, meeting space requirements, audio visual options, accessibility to area attractions and pricing to fit the meeting budget?
Best Practices & Negotiating Strategies for Meeting Planners

Site selection is often the most challenging part of the meeting planning process. Every experienced planner knows that choosing the right venue and location is a decision that plays a critical role in the success of an event. A small oversight in the site selection process could cause major hiccups in event planning and execution. What is the best way to select an ideal destination and venue that meet all of the requirements of your event including availability on key dates, group transportation options, accommodation needs, meeting space requirements, audio visual options, accessibility to area attractions and pricing to fit the meeting budget?

Be Flexible

Guest rooms and meeting room rental fees can vary greatly, depending on the time of year and city-wide availability. Venues try to maximize their event space and put as many "heads in beds" as possible during their slower periods by offering lower rates. Planners who are flexible and provide venues with alternative dates can often negotiate better pricing. To secure the best deal possible, let venues know if there are any additional dates that would work for your event.

Explore Alternative Destinations

Every destination has peak and off-peak seasons. Planning an event in a major city during peak season is challenging on a tight budget. To keep costs in check, explore secondary and tertiary markets when evaluating destinations for your next event. For example, if you are interested in hosting a 3-day meeting in Los Angeles, see what surrounding locations such as Irvine, Santa Ana, or California have to offer as well. These destinations can provide the quality facilities you need and the excellent service your attendees expect with a much better price tag for your budget.
**Know Your Meeting History**

If you know what the value of your meeting is to the hotel it will help with negotiating better rates and incentives. The best way to define the value of your meeting for the hotel is to keep accurate records of past meetings by tracking your meeting registration totals, attendance numbers, actual number of attendees and actualized room nights. Venues want to know if you have held this event before and how many people actually attended so they can confidently block off rooms and function space for your group.

Giving accurate guarantee numbers can help you negotiate reasonable room rates, food and beverage costs and minimize attrition fees. Almost every venue’s meeting contract includes an attrition clause or F&B minimum. That is, if your attendees don’t show, you will still be required to pay under the contract. Planners who keep records of their past meeting attendance are less likely to fall victim to unreasonable fees, increase their negotiating power during the contract process and are typically awarded the first option when booking rooms and event space.

**Location, Location, Location**

Transportation costs can become a large part of your event spend if your venue headquarters is not chosen carefully. Planners that select venues that are in close proximity to the airport or are easily accessible via public transportation can limit attendee travel time, increase attendance to offsite activities, decrease costs and promote the “Green Meetings” initiative. If you are hosting a conference with off-site events, be sure that these activities are easily accessible to your venue headquarters where the majority of your attendees are staying. Savvy planners should also look for hotels that provide complimentary shuttle services to destinations within a 3-5 mile radius of the property, downtown, as well as the local airport in order to eliminate the need for car rentals and taxi cab fares.
Define Your Event Requirements

The more information you provide in your RFP, the better group sales managers are able to assess your needs and determine whether or not their facility would be a good fit. As a planner, defining your needs upfront will ultimately save time in the planning process by limiting the number of inadequate RFP responses to sort through. Venues need to receive details regarding room set ups, food and beverage and audio visual needs to see whether their available rooms can accommodate your group. Planners who provide these meeting requirements and review banquet event orders with a fine-toothed comb are more likely to catch errors and, more importantly, avoid hidden fees. Misunderstandings surrounding meeting requirements and overlooked details on Banquet Event Orders (BEOs) lead to unpleasant surprises on-site and additional charges.

Collect Multiple Bids

Sarbanes-Oxley compliance and the focus on strategic procurement decisions in today’s business world require event planners to gather multiple bids from vendors. The first venue to respond to your request for proposal will not necessarily offer the best rate. Planners who carefully research, collect and compare bids from multiple venues have more negotiating power. Leverage the proposed prices you receive from venues and track your negotiating success for your manager. The money you save your organization could help justify a larger budget for your events department and a larger paycheck for you.

Consider Alternative Venues

Hotels, conference centers and convention centers are a part of a wide range of meeting and event venue options available to event planners. Planners who are open to more unique venue alternatives typically see an increase in attendance for a substantially lower price. Oftentimes, these special event venues are more appealing to attendees, who are more interested in attending an event at a new museum in the city instead of the worn out hotel they have frequented six times in the last two months. Consider your event requirements when you begin the site selection process for your next event to see if a restaurant, aquarium, outdoor space, art gallery or other type of venue could work for your group.
Negotiate Multi-Year Deals

Group sales managers have sales quotas to meet. The more guaranteed business they can put towards each month or annual quota, the better. Planners who try to negotiate multi-year deals will receive better packages with extra amenities and improved rates. Hotels that may not be able to offer reduced rates for a one-time meeting will suddenly be very flexible if a planner mentions that they will be hosting the meeting or event for the next three years. Be sure to mention the possibility of becoming a repeat customer during site selection negotiations.

As with all aspects of event management, attention to detail is critical in the site selection process. Understanding your meeting requirements, attendee expectations and leveraging your negotiating power are the keys to booking the ideal venue for your next event.

Research Preferred Suppliers

Many venues will provide quotes for their on-site or preferred service providers such as AV companies and caterers. Many times, these suppliers are charging premium rates. Once again, to make sure you are watching out for your bottom line, ask the venue about their preferred suppliers and the possibility of hand-picking your own vendor. Planners who ask about bringing in outside suppliers or researching rates on their own often pay less for their services.

About Cvent

Founded in 1999, Cvent is a leading cloud-based enterprise event management platform. Cvent offers web-based software for online event registration, venue selection, strategic meetings management, mobile apps for events, e-mail marketing and web surveys, and helps clients around the world manage hundreds of thousands of events, conferences, and meetings. Cvent’s client base includes corporations from every major industry, associations, universities, and non-profit organizations. For more information, please visit www.cvent.com, or connect with us on Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.