



DEDICATED AND EDUCATED TO DELIVER CREATIVE EXCELLENCE AND PROFESSIONALISM IN SPECIAL EVENTS

in plain **w** **o** **r** **d** **s**

The Art of Negotiating Hotel Contracts

By Judy E. Brillhart, PBC, CPFM, PSCT

Attrition clauses, food and beverage minimums, and more—the maze of negotiating a hotel contract can lead to several dead ends. Understanding a few key points and how they affect the bottom line can ensure clients receive the most for their money while allowing the property to profit.

Hotels evaluate business in several ways. A good piece of business in their eyes is one that carries a strong room-to-space ratio; in other words, a booking that utilizes both event space and guest rooms. Groups with a good ratio have lots of bargaining power, while those looking only for event space—unless the event is a wedding as they are entirely different—or just guest rooms have less muscle at the negotiating table.

One way both high-ratio and room-only groups can bargain is to ask for the standard 1-per-50 comp rate. For every 50 overnight guest rooms your group books, you receive one night complimentary during the conference—200 room nights would translate into four nights.

Negotiating guest rooms also involves attrition clauses, which basically guarantee the hotel that you will use a certain percentage of the guest rooms contracted or blocked. Most standard hotel contracts have an 80 percent attrition rate, where the group is financially responsible for eight out of 10 guest rooms blocked even if they aren't reserved. It's vital to go into a contract negotiation knowing your group. If you overestimate the number of rooms needed, you may find yourself receiving a hefty attrition bill at the event's end.

Function room rental is another touch-



point. General perception is that room rental goes straight to a hotel's bottom line—but this is not the case. For hotels, the costs built into meeting room rental charges include labor and energy. When determining room rental fees, most hoteliers take into account the number of guest rooms you have and your expected food and beverage purchases. They also examine the amount of labor that will go into setting up and breaking down a particular floor plan.

The number of overnight rooms plays into this facet of the contract. If room rentals are a sticking point for your client, go back to the hotel and ask that for every 50 rooms you pick up, you get X number of dollars off your meeting room rental. This works the same way as your 1-per-50 guest room

comps. Most hotels don't offer both so be prepared to make a choice between dollars-off room rentals and complimentary overnight guest rooms.

The most bargaining power may rest in being flexible with your dates. In Cambridge, Mass., in October, it's very busy with leaf peepers viewing the autumn foliage and college reunions. A group holding its event here during this month can expect to pay premium prices simply because the supply of space and rooms is fixed and the demand is high. However, if the group is flexible with its dates and able to move to either the end of August or January, it would have the proverbial red carpet rolled out. Cambridge hotels often trip over themselves to compete for business in the winter months. Do your research to find the slow times to get the best deals.

Recently, a group approached me in search of a home for evening adult education classes. But they didn't have a solid budget,

and they would not need any guest rooms. Several hotels turned them away, but to me, this was a budding opportunity. We both agreed that they would not need the amenities provided in standard meeting rooms that cost the hotel money, such as linen on the tables or pens and pads. The client also agreed that the hotel would not provide water stations for the classes.

Flexible isn't a question—it's a requirement.



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Digital Imaging Secures New Ways to Leverage Photography

By Gene X. Hwang

Fresh, enjoyable events stay in tempo with the constantly evolving event world. One way to keep up with changing trends is to provide a mix of the expected and the unexpected. The evolution of digital photography opens up a host of options for events that were previously too expensive or simply impossible.

Photographers and photo-booth-type setups have become the norm at events. What attendees don't expect to find are instant photos ready to pick up at the same event or a real-time slide show. Also circulating in the industry are green screens and on-site printing, which, when merged, supply a compelling experience.

A green screen produces the flexibility to situate individuals in any environment imaginable—whether that's on top of a glacier, in outer space, undersea, at your corporate headquarters, etc. The images are shot against a green- or blue-screen backdrop, and the scene is digitally dropped into the scenario of your choice. The composite image can be printed on-site and inserted in branded folders or mouse pads—there are a variety of options for packaging.

Popular options include placing individuals on magazine covers related to an event or integrating product/service/conference motifs themselves into the photo. A "Brokeback Mountain" theme for Levi's illustrates the trend, where two male cowboys stand with guests and a green screen superimposed Western backdrop—Levi's Red Tab logo and type are inserted. Guests are able to pick up the photo at the event.

For San Francisco magazine's "Best of the Bay" party, guests were superimposed on the upcoming cover, appearing as the issue's stars. The images were printed on-site and the take-home gift reinforced the party's theme.

Another in-demand option is to have a live slide show playing with photos captured from the photo booths. You can set up a self-manned photo booth that posts

the photos to a projection screen, or it can be its own old-fashioned photo booth that spits out photos. Attendees love the notion, but running something unmanned has issues too, such as inappropriate photos, etc.

For multi-day events, slide shows are a great take-away to remind attendees what they've experienced. Various corporate event planners reap success from the photos. Video can also be



Go West: San Francisco 49ers Gold Rush girls pose at Levi's green-screen photo booth with a superimposed background for a "Brokeback Mountain"-themed Academy Awards party.

incorporated; however, it entails more production. Simpler Web slide shows can be added and sent to attendees, which is a medium for event producers to promote future endeavors.

As digital cameras become cheaper, event producers distribute cameras or let individuals use their own to take photos during events. The photos can be uploaded to a central gallery and shared with others or set up in a controlled manner with Webcams connected to laptops at stations throughout an event, available for live chat or to send digital postcards.

Trends continue to play off each other. Photography follows this evolution with digital imaging and emerging wireless technologies as today's key influencers. Even as events become more complex, simple images continue to be a strong marketing tool. People love to see themselves, and when they have something they can share online and take home, it gives them something to remember the event.



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ISES Eventworld® 2007 Triumphs in Montreal

August's Eventworld® 2007 in Montreal marked the first ISES International Institute held outside the United States in five years. More than 500 attendees experienced the institute's 40 educational sessions, networking opportunities and industry accolades.

Many executive-level attendees arrived a day early for the first Eventworld Executive Track—a new opportunity established due to member requests for education for business owners and leaders. The pre-conference workshop, led by Ron Yudd of Points of Profit Leadership Inc., offered two days' worth of insights on topics such as profitability and effective business management.

"I am so pleased with the success of this year's educational program," says Eventworld conference education committee chair Gwendolyn McNutt, CSEP. "The committee worked really hard to find new and diverse speakers and to raise the bar of the conference experience. One highlight for me was Mark Tewksbury's opening keynote and how his words resonated with the audience and set the tone for an outstanding educational institute."

In his keynote, Olympic gold medalist Mark Tewksbury of Mark Tewksbury Enterprises Inc. explored the fundamentals that lead clients to achieve excellent results—notably how client interaction determines what kind of legacy an event will leave behind.

That evening, Tewksbury joined ISES members at the Montreal Science Centre for the truly spectacular Welcome Event. The Montreal Science Centre was completely transformed thanks to Decor and More and ISES member Gary Jones of Gary Jones Presents. Dancers and beautifully costumed performance artists entertained attendees who took in the sights, sounds and tastes of Old Montreal. Beverage sponsor Bacardi ensured the guests partied in style.

Friday's Professional Development Luncheon introduced members to the "E-Myth"—a presentation designed to help business owners thrive by making their businesses more predictable, sustainable and enjoyable.

At the ISES Annual General Meeting and Luncheon, members listened to a recap of ISES' successes during the past year as well as plans for the 2007-08 year. The excitement was palpable as outstanding leaders, chapters and volunteers received ISES Spirit of Excellence Awards—for a list of recipients, visit www.ises.com. The meeting closed with a heartfelt speech by outgoing ISES president Marty Janis of Atlantic Services Group Inc., who passed the gavel to 2007-08 president Connie Riley, CSEP, of T. Skorman Productions Inc.

Eventworld 2007 closed Saturday with the long-anticipated Esprit Awards. Nominees, winners and their supporters alike enjoyed an unforgettable evening of dinner and dancing. Stay tuned for the next issue of the "ISES Pages" to hear more details of the Esprit Award recipients. For a list of honorees, visit www.ises.com.



Put on a happy face: 2007-08 ISES international president Connie Riley of T. Skorman Productions Inc. poses with outgoing president Marty Janis of Atlantic Services Group Inc. at the ISES Leadership Reception (top left). Members of the ISES New England Chapter pose after they won the Spirit of Excellence Award for Chapter Programming and Education (top right). The ISES international and chapter leadership gather after the ISES annual meeting (bottom left). Champagne Showgirls and ISES Eventworld attendees take in the Welcome Event at the Montreal Science Center (bottom right). Photos by Bob Blanken Photography

did you know?

The Importance of Brands *By Robert Wright*

In the special event industry, and especially for those of us who are members of ISES, we forever explain to clients, prospects and stakeholders that live events are a form of business communication—indeed, a very important and effective one.

The industry's mantra is generally that when it comes to spreading business messages, special events are on par with advertising, the Web and public relations. Just like these forms of media, it is essential that the format and theme of any event is representative of the client's brand.

Brand communication has been around for a long time. Because of the increasing diversity of media, the growing choice of options for communication as well as the multiplicity of audiences, it is important for businesses to have a clear and consistent brand image—one for which they are instantly recognized.

Essentially, a brand is a means where an organization portrays its primary characteristics. It's a symbol that the target market recognizes immediately, letting it know what to expect. So it's vital to ensure all communication from the

company reflects its brand image.

A hotshot advertising executive or public relations strategist would never create a communication campaign for a client without fully understanding its brand, and the approach should be the same when creating an event.

There's a growing choice of media to use when presenting the brand to its audiences. Along with traditional broadcasts, press, and Web and live events, many new digital options, such as social media like MySpace, Facebook and LinkedIn and even virtual worlds such as Second Life, are becoming popular ways to reach audiences and threaten to reduce live event spend.

For special events to fulfill a role as a modern method of business communication, it is our responsibility to understand our clients' brands and the reason behind the messages they are com-

municating through events. This allows us to tailor the event accordingly and plays a huge role in determining the venue, event theme, catering style, and any entertainment and activities.

For example, consider two similar events for two dissimilar organizations. The event: a lunch and meeting for 100 major shareholders. One client is a large financial institution with a brand image as a stal-

wart, dependable organization trusted to handle vast amounts of its clients' money. The other client is an Internet service provider with a young, energetic reputation that has seen its share price soar in recent years. The briefs from both are almost identical but clearly the responses should be different to maintain their respective brand images.

The core of your client's success relies on speaking their brands—the special event industry depends on it.



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