

Do's and don'ts

Tips for planning your event

DO identify the five Ws of your event. These will form the framework for your event:

- **Why?** Define the objective, reason, or purpose for having the event.
- **What?** Determine the scope of the event (international, national, regional, provincial or local) and based on the purpose, define the most appropriate components (keynote luncheon, sales training, evening cocktail reception, trade show, etc.)
- **Who?** Determine who will be attending (company employees and/or executives, customers, industry executives, spouses/children).
- **Where?** Decide what type of location is most suitable for your event (resort, city centre, conference centre). Convenience to participants is a prime concern. Attendees' travel to and from the event site should be as easy and as inexpensive as possible.
- **When?** If possible, be flexible on the dates of the event. This can improve the chances of obtaining first-choice hotel arrangements within your budget. Consider the time constraints of the participants. Arrange dates to minimize attendees' time away from the office and home and avoid major holidays.

DON'T be afraid to talk money:

It is important to identify your budget in your framework to avoid overspending and to ensure your event is delivered in the most cost-effective way possible. If you have a specific amount allocated, make that amount known to your suppliers.

DO be specific about what you're looking for:

If you have a particular topic or focus in mind, say so. If you have a specific time slot to fill, let your speaker know. Make sure your theme and expectations are clearly identified to ensure the fluidity of your event.



Photography by Peter Masman

For your event, don't necessarily repeat what has been successful in the past. Vary the offering and leave some elements as a surprise for that "wow" factor.

DON'T forget to get it in writing:

Make sure the organizers have contracts/letters of agreement and if not, ask all suppliers to provide you with a contract. Remember to have both parties sign and date all contracts and initial all changes. In your contract or letter, include all important information relevant to that supplier such as:

- Day/time/location/length
- Setup and teardown times
- Speaker topic/title
- Payment terms
- Reimbursement policy
- Transportation and lodging arrangements
- Conference registration requirements
- Equipment needs

DO keep in touch with your suppliers and other key contacts:

Constant communication with your suppliers, speakers, and vendors is the key to avoiding common mistakes. For example, when ticket sales go up or down, it's important to inform all those affected — caterers, decorators, venue, and registration staff — to ensure your event needs are met. Don't be over generous with your forecast of attendees as it could end up costing you money.

DON'T procrastinate :

Respond to e-mails or phone calls in a timely fashion. Clearly identify who is responsible for fielding enquiries. Answer questions honestly. If you do not have an answer, give an estimate as to when you can get the requested details.

DO choose a menu that can be enjoyed by everyone:

Not everyone likes foie gras but that doesn't mean you have to choose chicken as a main course either. And don't let the vegetarian alternative be an afterthought. Ask your caterer for advice. Caterers are creative and can provide endless options.

DON'T necessarily repeat what has been successful in the past:

Familiarity may breed contempt (unless déjà vu is the impact you're looking for). Vary the offering and leave some elements of your event as a surprise for that "wow" factor. There are so many options these days that your event can still be informative and creative without losing its focus.

DO sweat the small stuff:

Create a detailed timeline which clearly identifies tasks and responsibilities. Event day timelines are also just as important. If your presenter is coming from out of province, who will pick he or she up at the airport? Who is responsible for setting up registration? When does the event setup begin? When does food service begin? Too much information is better than not enough.

DON'T go overboard and take on too much responsibility:

There are event planners for a reason. They are there to assist and make you look good. After all, there are no dress rehearsals in running an event.

— Courtesy of Event Specialists
(www.eventspecialists.ca)

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