

ComputerWeekly.com

Guide to buying Event Management services



How choose the right Event Management supplier for your business

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INTRODUCTION

Is your company thinking of holding a party? Have you got all your invitations sent out? Selected the venue, the entertainment, the food? Will the event be indoors or outdoors? And what happens if it rains? Or if the entertainment gets stuck in traffic on the M25? There are a lot of things to take into consideration and a lot of things that could go wrong, leaving you looking more like Basil Fawlty than the organised professional that you hope to appear as.

There is, however, one easy solution to such a scenario: hiring an event management company to put on the party for you. Not only does this mean that you can spend your work time getting on with things more central to your core business affairs, but you will be able to shine and network successfully on the actual day, secure in the knowledge that the event is being managed by professionals who have organised it down to the smallest detail and have plans in place to handle all eventualities.

EVENT MANAGEMENT BASICS

So what does an event management company actually do? Quite simply, all the administrative and logistical issues surrounding your event. They can:

- Source an appropriate venue
- Book transport and accommodation
- Deal with food and drink orders
- Manage your budget
- Market the event
- Provide reports and debriefing when the event has finished

One of the major advantages of a professional event planner is their network of contacts. They will have established relationships with venues, hotels, caterers and agencies of speakers and entertainers, allowing them to negotiate the best prices across the board.

For a successful large scale event (300+ guests), it is wise to get your event management company onboard 3-6 months before the event is due to happen. Remember you will be working very closely with the event manager over a period of months, so get to know them and make sure you feel comfortable around them. In terms of skills and qualifications, their proposal should be a good reflection of their organisational skills and work ethic. And obviously you should also judge them on their experience and testimonials from other clients. If possible look for event planners who have arranged previous events for companies in your line of work.

While the event management company is hard at work, there are still things that you can do to help them and yourselves. The graphics and logos for the event will be something for you to source, either in-house or using a graphic designer. The same can be said for setting up a website for the event. You can also take on a lot of the marketing for the event – while event management companies are invaluable, you can't just forget about the event until the night itself.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- First of all, what is the exact nature of the event you are hoping to host? Is it a corporate event or a team-building exercise? A charity fundraiser or a product launch? A press day or a staff party? A successful party is one that has been tailored to a specific audience, so it is important to know how to present the concept to your prospective agency to see how much experience they have of hosting this kind of event.
- Do you have a particular venue in mind? Will this be at your office, near your office, in the countryside, or even in a foreign country? Check whether the event management company you are approaching has experience of using the sort of venue and location you are thinking of using. Do they have local contacts to be able to do all the work on-site using local services, or will elements have to be shipped in at extra expense?
- Will the venue be built especially for the function (like a marquee or similar temporary structure)? If so, once again, check that the organiser has the necessary contacts to be able to do this as cheaply as possible. After all, one of the benefits of hiring an event management company is that they buy services in bulk, so you are able to make overall savings.
- Make sure that all transportation issues will be comprehensively covered, so that all of your guests arrive on time. Ask the company what back up measures they have in place should a disruption occur to your guests' transportation, and how your guests will be notified of this. It is of critical importance that your guests have their travel plans clearly defined so they know where they should be at what time, and that there is someone to meet them when they arrive. A final service that the event management company should be able to provide for you is a list of the delegates attending.

- Will you have any say in the food and drink arrangements? And will these arrangements accommodate vegetarians and others with special dietary requirements?
- Long before the event takes place the company should be able to provide a clear schedule for the day and be open to making any alterations that you ask for. They should also keep you fully up to date on the progress of the preparations in the weeks and days leading up to the event.
- If your company is hosting an event to promote a certain product or attract new customers, look for companies with some experience of holding marketing events and providing the necessary signage so that guests can move from one area to another without confusion. If they can produce invitations for your event, then they are probably able to produce press packs, corporate literature and promotional displays too.
- Check whether the event management agency will arrange the delegates' accommodation and be on hand to answer any delegate queries about travel arrangements and accommodation, so they feel that they are being looked after and their needs are taken care of. Also, ask whether there are any special packages available for VIPs or guest speakers?
- After the event has taken place and the clear up begins, ensure there are provisions in place to have this done as quickly and effectively as possible. Check that the event management company has adequate provisions for the removal of rubbish before, during and after the event.
- Ask whether the company is able to provide some form of objective evaluation and give feedback about how the event went, and whether it gave you value for money. In other words,

did they get your message across and were the aims of the event achieved?

- Estimate how pro-active the company is about your propositions, suggesting alternative venues and different forms of entertainment based on any local knowledge they might have. Is the service focused on you and your requirements or do you feel your event is being managed according to a set formula?

PRICING

There are obviously hundreds of variables (not least the choice of venue) that can affect the price of an event, but as a (very) rough estimate, a one day corporate event for 300 guests will cost between £10,000 and £20,000.

Below is also a snapshot of costs for popular elements of corporate events (based on a single evening's hire).

Remember that you have to pay the event management team on top of the cost of the event itself. Usually they will charge about 15% of the total event cost as their fee.

Catering

The cost of a meal for your guests is broadly comparable with the cost of a quality restaurant – assuming you want your guests to eat decent restaurant food. Catering companies generally charge between £15 and £30 per person for a sit down, three course meal. Canapés are usually charged per piece at about £1-2 each.

For larger events, you might also consider something like a hog roast, which start at £500 for about 100 servings.

Marquees

If your event is not going to be hosted indoors, a marquee could be the most expensive single investment. If you are looking for a complete marquee packages, expect to pay about £5,000 for a 100 person marquee, going up to about £10,000 for 250 people. These large marquees will generally include tables and seating, a dance floor, a DJ and a bar.

Hiring the marquee by itself will cost about £700-800 for 100 people up to £5,000 for 500 people. Obviously there are many options in between, but this is a good benchmark.

Sound Systems

Your choice of sound system depends on the size of your party. If you're entertaining 100 guests or fewer, you can usually keep the price under £150. For a 5,000 watt system, for parties over 500, expect to pay £350 or more. For the largest parties, the price can go as high £800-1,000.

DJs charge by the hour, starting at about £50.

Entertainment

A single jazz pianist can cost between £300 and £500 for the night. A full band will cost between £1,000 and £5,000 depending on the number of band members. Other entertainers (magicians, acrobats, caricature artists) charge by the hour, generally about £20-£50.

Security and staff

It's absolutely essential that you have competent security and support staff on hand throughout the event. As a guide you should be looking to pay about £10-15 per hour per member of staff, and even the smallest events will need a security team of about five people.

Bartenders and waiters are generally priced at about £10 per hour, rising to £20-25 per hour for cocktail bar staff or silver service waiters.

Event Manager

Your event manager(s) will be on site for the duration of the event to welcome and register attendees, and make sure everything runs smoothly. Their expenses will probably be somewhere in the region of £300-£500.

If you find costs overrunning, you might want to consider getting sponsorship for your event – that is to say, find another company who will pay you to have their brand present at the event.

EVENT IDEAS

The issue of how best to entertain your employees, clients and business partners away from the office can be a difficult one to get right. In fact, corporate entertainment has a tendency to go disastrously wrong unless it is given adequate consideration and a sufficient period of time is set aside for careful planning and preparation. It is worthwhile keeping an open mind at the start of the process to review all the available options. Aside from the list of corporate entertainment possibilities listed in this article, it is worthwhile seeking the advice and professional assistance of an event management company, several of which are listed in our Approved Index.

But how can you form an idea of the right kind of entertainment appropriate for your needs? A good way is to consider your audience profile and the circumstances surrounding the entertainment. It might be useful to consider the background and average age of your audience, because this will give you an idea of what is acceptable and achievable. A group of senior management professionals from the Midlands will have a different idea of a good time from a team of marketing executives on a business trip from Japan, for instance.

Also, there are some forms of entertainment that require a degree of audience participation and others where the audience can sit passively and enjoy the show, so consider whether your goal will be to invigorate and boost the group's morale or simply provide some form of light entertainment to take their mind off work. The secret of successful corporate entertainment is to give the audience what they want, which can be very different from what you want to give them.

There follows a list of passive corporate entertainment options for an audience fluent in English and familiar with English culture:

- After dinner speakers including sporting personalities and celebrities
- Comedians and magic acts, although you'll want to make a judgment about how traditional or risqué they can be
- Themed parties including Wild West, James Bond and Pirates of the Caribbean
- West End theatre trips
- Pub style quiz and party games

Here are some corporate entertainment ideas for an audience on a business trip whose first language is not necessarily English:

- Circus and cabaret acts, including clowns and jugglers, mime acts and floor shows
- Sporting events such as Formula One, horse racing, Wimbledon and premiership football matches
- West End musicals and gallery trips
- Face painting, body art and temporary tattooing featuring caricaturists and street performers
- Fireworks and fire performers

- Live music from house bands and tribute bands to lounge acts and cocktail pianists
- Discos featuring DJs, MCs and karaoke

Finally, some corporate entertainment ideas featuring a more interactive element to stimulate your guests, boost company morale and serve as an ice breaker:

- Murder mystery or treasure hunt exercises including team work and role playing
- Casino nights where the proceeds are donated to charity
- Country sports such as hot air ballooning, clay pigeon shooting, quad biking and paint balling
- Events taken from popular TV programmes such as It's A Knockout, The Antiques Roadshow and Bargain Hunt
- Cookery classes and wine tasting evenings

It is also useful to provide a check list to ensure the entertainer or entertainment you book is of the sufficient professional standard, because their professionalism will reflect on you:

- Check the entertainment provider's list of clients and engagements, and testimonial/recommendation letters. The types of events they have been involved with will also give a good indication of whether they are appropriate for your event.

- Seek reassurances that they will turn up smartly presented on time and will be able to cope with any last minute changes to the schedule. You want to work with people who are unflappable and adaptable.
- If the entertainment is interactive, ask the provider how they will be able to make your guests feel at ease and include everybody in the fun and games.
- If the entertainment requires a degree of performance, check that the entertainer is a member of an organisation like Equity, the UK performers union. Societies such as the Magic Circle and the International Brotherhood of Magicians are good indicators of the professionalism of the magician you have in mind.
- Ask whether the entertainment provider has public liability insurance, so that you are covered for any accidents that may occur.