

## Keeping Multi-Day Meetings Lively, Not Boring

*Dining Insights*, Fall 2010

**T**he manager of a conference center or a company's or college's conference activities, is not responsible for the content of meetings, attendance or their success.

The manager's responsibility is to ensure the facilities are set up properly, meals and refreshments are served as ordered and on time, and supports, such as audio/visual services, are where they belong and functioning properly.

Multiple-day meetings can be made more productive and satisfying to attendees if the conference center manager and event sponsor collaborate to keep the event interesting, says Leigh Murdock, a veteran event planner, in a blog posted on the website of Cvent, the conference management software company.

Some suggestions she offers:

- **Change the setup daily.** Depending on limitations that may be imposed by audio/visual requirements and other factors, rearranging the room setup can help refresh the atmosphere for attendees. Switching from a hollow square to a round tables or a U-shape, for example, will force attendees to find new seats next to different people, and some may pick a spot closer to the front of the room.

- **Incorporate a theme.** Pick a theme for each day of the meeting and incorporate activities, menus and even video clips that tie into the theme.

- **Avoid repeating menu items.** It's easy to lose attendees' interest if meals and refreshment breaks are the same every day.

Offer completely different lunches each day. If a sizeable number of attendees come from a specific region, include some of that region's culinary specialties.

Morning and afternoon breaks are intended to refresh meeting participants and re-energize them for the next session. Offer flavored coffees and herbal or flavored teas in addition to the regular versions and a good selection of cold drinks. Change the snacks provided for each break. Try some unusual afternoon snacks, like popcorn direct from the popper, at one afternoon break.

- **Send personalized amenities.** Small, thoughtful gestures can bring big results. Your event sponsor may know – or can discover – the little things that meeting participants enjoy. This may be a favorite magazine or newspaper (hometown, if possible), or a pot of a favorite tea or hot chocolate, delivered to the attendee's hotel room each evening.

The amenity will be welcomed, and the person's opinion of your conference services will soar, maybe to the extent of bring bringing new conferences to your facility.

All this takes careful advance planning, close collaboration with the sponsor, competent execution and extra effort. But it will pay off in a reputation that will bring repeat, and new, business to your facility. .

### Controlling the Planning Process

Ms Murdock offers some tips for expediting the event planning process in another blog post on the Cvent website.

- Establish a timeline, so both parties know what's expected and when.

- Ensure the event sponsor understands and agrees to all the details.
- Review the menus with the sponsor to ensure they, and other meal arrangements are agreed upon.
- Obtain a detailed list of questions from the sponsor, and provide answers promptly.
- Develop a relationship with the sponsor. “Working with a ‘friend’ is so much easier than with a ‘client,’” she says.
- Be sure sponsor understands the costs and has enough funds in the budget.

*Clarion can help you with all aspects of conference management, from organizing through delivering successful services. For information, contact Ernie Wilder at 904/940-1208 or Tom Mac Dermott at 603/642-8011 or e-mail us at [info@clariongp.com](mailto:info@clariongp.com)*