

## Content is King

### Mission Should Drive Logistics, Not Vice Versa



Guest Advice  
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Imagine you're the attendee at a meeting being held at a beautiful beach resort in Florida, in May. The weather is perfect — as far as you can tell, during your few moments passing by windows on your way to your next intensive training session. Your evening events are inside a ballroom, because there are important presentations that require heavy audio-visual. Unfortunately you're stuck behind a pillar, so you're only seeing half of the IMAG screens. You've been late to most of your breakouts because they're spread out on different levels of the hotel, and you're trailing 200 other attendees trying to fit in the stairwell or wait for the elevators. If you're lucky, you'll be able to get the ink out of your khakis, since you've had to take notes on your lap; unfortunately the breakout rooms aren't big enough to set up classroom-style.

What's wrong with this picture? Ok, this may be a slightly exaggerated scenario; one would hope that an experienced meeting planner would be able to avoid such a situation. However, the various elements of the scenario are based on real cases, all of which could have been avoided had the venue selection and logistics been driven by the mission and content of the meeting.

Well-planned logistics are crucial to the success of a meeting, but they can't be planned in a vacuum — and they shouldn't be! The role of the meeting planner is to ensure that logistics reinforce and support the goals of the meeting, and to ensure that the attendees walk away educated, entertained and motivated. The actual method of the education, entertainment and motivation should be the first elements that are considered when you begin to search for the venue and to lay out the logistics.

Many times clients approach us to begin searching for a venue for their sales meeting, product launch or user conference. They may

have a general idea of where they want to be, but often they haven't thought through the other details of their event. We try to help them gather that information by probing the goals of the meeting: What do they want the audience to walk away with? Why are they (the attendees) there?

If you're an internal corporate meeting planner, this is your opportunity to show your value in your organization by helping to focus the strategic planning process. Call an initial planning meeting with the people who will be responsible for the actual content (generally your product managers, marketing or sales executives, or client relations directors) and ask them the aforementioned questions. Get them to lay out specific goals for the attendees. As a side benefit, this will also help in marketing your event.

When a meeting is being planned well in advance, it is unlikely that all of the exact details of the meeting content will be known.

However, the overall goals should still be clear: Will there be intensive training sessions? Will breakouts feature content that may require the attendees to use laptops or take notes? How much free time will be worked into the schedule? Are evening events going to be formal or casual? Will your

general session need to have a Q&A segment?

All of these questions should be taken into consideration when searching for the venue, and should inform the initial logistics plan.

Be driven by your audience's needs when you pick a venue and lay out room assignments. Think of traffic flow between breakouts. If your attendees are voluntary (as in a user conference), consider the likelihood that they may need enough break time to check e-mail

and phone the office. For a sales conference, don't torture the reps by picking a venue on the beach if your schedule is going to be packed from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m.

Our value as meeting planners comes from our ability to create an event from which our attendees walk away with knowledge, new behaviors and satisfaction with

time well spent. We may not be the ones who create the content of the general sessions or the breakouts, but we aid in their success by creating and managing the framework that makes those sessions function effectively.

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