

Plan Company Events with Expert Tips

By Beverly West, Monster Contributing Writer

Event planning is one of the more creative and exciting aspects of being an administrative assistant, but it can also be one of the most unnerving. When your company is throwing a big bash and you're suddenly put in charge of the details, it can be difficult to avoid a run-in with Murphy's Law.

Fortunately, with a little organization and the following tips from experts, planning your next event will be not only stress-free, but also successful.

Keep It Together

"I would say that the number one most important thing is to keep every detail about the event in one place," says Shawn O'Gallagher, a publicist at Random House in New York City. When O'Gallagher is in charge of planning book signings or readings, he sends the venue (i.e., bookstore) an event confirmation, including the date, time, address, book title, author, event contact and his contact information. He saves both a hard copy and a soft copy.

"If we need to reference it quickly, we have everything in one page, and not a batch of paper-clipped scrap papers in a lump" says O'Gallagher.

Create an Event Bible

If your event has many bits and pieces that won't fit comfortably on one page, make a "bible," or binder, that covers every aspect of the event, suggests Anne Ryan, president of Danika Communications, a Greenwich, Connecticut-based public relations firm specializing in luxury hotels and products worldwide.

"The bible should be divided into categories with a section for every aspect of the event -- from caterers, to contracts, to seating charts, to guest lists, to emails of authorization and proposals from different vendors," Ryan says. "And the first page of every bible should be an emergency contact sheet with the contact information of everyone who is involved in the event."

Like O'Gallagher, Ryan emphasizes that you shouldn't only rely on one form of documentation. "When there's a crisis on the night of the event, you may not be able to go back to your computer and hunt through your files," she says. Your best bet is to keep both a bible and an electronic record of all event details.

Try an Electronic Database

"I always suggest people use specifically designed event software when storing event information electronically," says John Giuliano, a freelance marketing and fund-raising consultant based in Key West and New York City. Giuliano recommends using Raiser's Edge for its "excellent event module" and Giftmaker Pro for its event-planning spreadsheet.

If you can't get either of these programs, Giuliano suggests "doing it the old-fashioned way." Create an Excel spreadsheet with all the details, including site selection, entertainment, decor, catering, audiovisual services, volunteer list, staff list, task-management list, etc.

Giuliano also suggests you check out online event-registration and planning sites, such as Count Me In and Cvent.

No matter how you keep track of all the details, take the time to be organized and make sure everything on your lists is accurate. Be sure to spell-check and update your event information frequently, particularly if you're producing events on a regular basis. Lastly, even in the heat of a crisis, take that extra minute or two to check your records before you react.