

Top Tips for conference organisation

CONFERENCES are an excellent vehicle to communicate your organisation's vision and messages.

Internally, these can include training workshops, annual meetings and major annual conferences, or with key stakeholders and audiences such as at press events, product launches and technical conferences.

They are also highly valuable as networking and social events, where peers and colleagues can meet in a less hierarchical, informal environment.

For those expecting to find themselves as an organiser or meeting planner, here are some top tips to organise a great conference.

■ Think about "why" before "how".

Before diving head first into all the logistics and event management of any conference or indeed any event, the most important and probably your first job is to understand why.

Two key questions to ask yourself and your team: what you are trying to achieve by having the conference/event? What would success look like at the end? The answers can prevent the agenda being changed or even the venue! Ensure you also get the input of the key stakeholders.

■ Location, location, location.

Map out what the function venue will need to deliver, from start to finish.

Do you have enough space to accommodate the number of delegates in the seating



Expert on making event run smoothly

FROM armadillo racing in Texas to treasure hunts in dug-out canoes through the mangrove swamps of Malaysia, Caroline Kay has seen most things when it comes to events organising.

Her work has ranged from small personal weddings where she delivers a hassle-free day and steady hand to worried brides, to national sales conferences involving hundreds of delegates travelling across many continents.

Caroline has spent the last 10 years in the events industry, delivering conferences,

training events and parties for clients across the UK, Europe, Middle East, Asia and the USA.

Last year Caroline set up CLK Events which caters for both the corporate and private world. Caroline promises she will kick any event into shape - on any budget.

With a black belt in karate, she believes that the focus, discipline and unflappable composure of the sport are all useful skills for delivering perfect events for her clients.

For more information check out CLK Events' website: www.clkevents.com

or party in the evening it usually means you will need to be out of the room by 5pm so they can turn the room around for the next guests. Does this fit in with your schedule and plans?

Are any competitors or conflicting events also at the venue?

■ Pick me ups.

If you have air travellers, ensure your transfers clear. Expect 30% of delegates to walk straight past the pick-up sign at the airport and phone up the organiser complaining there is no transfer for them.

Most airports have two entrances that people walk out of into arrivals. A good tip is to have two people standing on each entrance and also a sweeper with a sign going back and forth.

For those who still miss it, leave instructions in their information pack to meet at the information desk in arrivals. This should avoid randomly lost waifs and strays!

■ Choose wisely.

If you are using an outside events company to help, trust your gut instinct. They should obviously be good listeners and highly organized. But you will be spending a lot of time talking and going through details together.

So as much as valuing their expertise and ideas, you should also enjoy their company and be able to work honestly and effectively together.

■ Start early.

The earlier you start the more choice you will have. Venues get booked early.

■ Watch the budget!

arrangement required?

Will there be energizers for the delegates where they will need space to move around?

Will there be workshops or rooms for delegates to split up into?

How high is the ceiling? There are many venues, with low ceiling height and if you have 300 delegates in the room, it can become a little claustrophobic.

What facilities are there (heat, air conditioning)?

What AV will be used? If you have rear projection this will take up more space in the conference room as the projector

needs a distance of six feet from the screen.

■ Feed and water delegates.

Don't forget the delegates with special dietary requirements. This may sound simple and something "I already know", but do you know how much food the venue is providing for the delegates who are vegans, vegetarians etc? Sometimes the choices are limited.

■ Make life cheaper.

A simple voucher system for breakfasts, lunches and dinners enables you to only get charged for what is eaten and not pay for delegates who

don't eat.

■ Car park capers.

Do you have delegates attending just for the day? If so does the venue have enough space to accommodate the day delegates as well as the venue residents?

Where is the nearest over-spill car park? How much does it cost? How far is it to walk?

Can the venue lay on a shuttle to collect the delegates if it is raining?

■ Clashing timetables.

Always ask what else is happening at the venue.

If the venue has booked out the conference room to another