

PROFESSIONAL MEETING PLANNERS... SHOULD ONE BE PART OF YOUR COMPANY BUDGET?

By Debbie Locklear

Reports indicate that organizations invest billions of dollars on meetings and meeting-related activities but very little on training to help spend that money wisely. Hence, hundreds of thousands of meetings are organized each year by people who do not have enough spare time to study new ideas and techniques that will make their meetings more cost efficient and effective.

A meeting is a business tool, and to be effective, it must offer concise, lively, accurate, organized information in an atmosphere that's conducive to the meeting's objective. Many organizations have a difficult time accepting the fact that their meetings are not as productive as they might think, despite their huge investment.

Individuals who devote only part time to planning can certainly handle the responsibilities-when given the proper training. Unfortunately, there is a lack of training in the meeting-planning industry, preventing many meetings from reaching the level of professionalism and effectiveness that is inherently possible.

The heart of the matter is that the difficulties and problems of planning and managing meetings are almost universally underestimated. Meeting planning is a profession that requires certain skills and past experience.

There is an art and science involved in developing and operating a successful meeting. A professional planning consultant is a synthesizer of information, creating result-oriented meetings based on a clear understanding of meeting dynamics and the systematic planning process.

The top priority of a professional meeting planner is to avoid the traditional approaches to meeting planning that are often wasteful, erratic and produce ineffective results. A planner's role is to provide expert assistance in every phase of meeting planning, making sure that even the smallest details haven't been overlooked.

Some of the benefits to hiring a professional meeting planner could include:

- Negotiating skills used in obtaining exceptional services and facilities at fair prices
- Valuable time saved, allowing freedom to concentrate on other important aspects of the meeting
- Ability to produce more creative events
- Unlimited sources for meeting-related information
- Looking after the clients' best interests.



*The Successful Approach to
Meeting Planning and Management*

Consideration should be given to determining how much time should be spent on actually planning a meeting. Those organizations that have done this view meetings as an investment in dollars as well as an individual's time. In order to maximize their investment of time and money, many of these companies have developed a department specifically for meeting planning.

As more independent planners open their doors, a work of caution: Thoroughly investigate the companies that are under consideration.

To do this, review the following checklist:

- Check several references.
- Find out the type projects they have arranged.
- What organizations do they belong to?
- Do they attend continuing education meeting in the planning industry?
- Find out if meeting planning is a fulltime career or a part-time venture.

Based on this information, an evaluation of a company's ability to produce successful meetings will be easy to make.

Hiring a professional will allow an organization to draw from years of experience to access their needs realistically and fine-tune a meeting to best suit financial and programming objectives.

Remember one fact, however: A meeting is only as good as the attention paid to the smallest detail.