

Tips on how to run a successful conference or seminar:

It is very important to make sure that any business event that you are planning on having is successful and generates a return on investment. I will outline in short articles the factors to consider in having a successful conference or seminar. These will be written under the following headings:

1. *Corporate reasons for having a conference*
2. *How to plan for a conference*
3. *Budgeting for a conference*
4. *Finding the right venue*
5. *Marketing for a conference*
6. *Event management and logistics (in several parts)*
7. *Conference on-site logistics (in several parts)*
 - a. *Conference Office and Delegate Registration Desk*
 - b. *Delegate packs, hosting and extra staff*
 - c. *Room set-up, audio visual set-up*
 - d. *Running order*
 - e. *Speaker & session chair management and presentations*
 - f. *Exhibition management*
 - g. *Food and beverage*
 - h. *Social events*
8. *Review of the conference and follow up*

Part 7G Food & Beverage Management at a Conference

The previous fact sheets reviewed the corporate reasons for having a conference, and how to plan and market a successful conference. There can be many business reasons why a company should consider having a conference, not least that events are an important part of the marketing mix. Conference on-site logistics is a large area to consider so we will cover this in several sections. In this section, part 7G; we will cover the food and beverage (F&B).

Food and Beverage Management

- *The management of F&B is probably one of the more important aspects of running a conference as delegates will remember the quality of the food as well as its quantity and variety and the punctuality of service — did the food cater to their needs and was it well presented and inviting to eat? If all of this is correctly managed the delegates will certainly feel better disposed towards the event experience.*
- *It is very important to have established a good rapport with the venue banqueting manager so that the venue can understand what is required. This is necessary both pre-*

event in the planning and as regular follow up. During the event daily onsite meetings should take place. Good communication is essential in order to deliver the required service, provide updates on the number of attendees, finalise room layout, choose the menu, highlight delegates with specific food requirements, and to ensure that the drinks policy is understood.

- *When the delegate registers it is important to find out if they have any special dietary requirements or food allergies and to gain insight into the background and culture of the delegate in case there are implications for their food and drink needs and preferences. If specific Halal meat is required it is probably best to specify that all the meat ordered should be Halal. Specific cultural requirements must be considered so that, if necessary, pork is not on the same buffet table as other vegetarian or meat offerings. Most chefs will allow for vegetarians but if more of the delegates prefer vegetarian options to the meat choices then numbers and quantities must be adjusted.*
- *If food is served as a buffet it needs to be clearly labelled to help those with allergies. The ingredients of served dishes must be clear. Serving utensils and dishes must be kept separate where necessary.*
- *Most venue banqueting staff will require final numbers at least four to seven days in advance; this will be the number that your bill will be based on. It is important for the event manager to keep a tally by spreadsheet or using conference management software that details which delegates will be present for which meals. This is especially true if there is a mixture of day and 24 hour delegates, and some delegates are on dinner bed and breakfast while others are on bed and breakfast only.*
- *The event manager will need to keep good record spreadsheets on the different meals to include numbers, menu, times and types of service. All should be included in the event running order for each day of the event. This needs to be kept up to date and amended as required.*
- *The event manager should allocate a specific person responsible for F&B at the conference. This person should liaise every day with the venue banqueting manager double checking menus and the number of delegates as well as making clear any specific dietary requirements. They should prepare a daily update of menus, the numbers of meals required and people attending. They also need to check the room set up of tables and chairs, the number of waiting staff and the food set up before each meal. Correct room sizing for each type of food service has already been discussed in Part 7C in this series of guides.*
- *Banqueting includes tea & coffee breaks and lunch and dinner. If delegates are staying overnight it will also include bar service, room service and breakfast.*
- ***Breakfast** is normally served as a buffet for fast turnaround. If possible have a private breakfast area for conference guests away from hotel residents as they will need to be served quickly before going into the conference.*
- ***Coffee and tea breaks.** Make sure that soft drinks and water are available and that there are plenty of cups ready and full hot coffee thermos flasks or waiter servers for the break. Put coffee dispensers at the back of the room to draw people in and put condiments at a*

separate table to help reducing queues. This is more important for a large conference if all the session breaks are at the same time. Delegates like to network at the breaks and there should be plenty of time allowed for them to get their coffee as well as to find the next session room.

- **Lunch.** A buffet is recommended as it is usually time efficient and delegates like to be able to choose either a hot dish or a salad as well as the quantity they are served. Make sure that if lunch is seated you have enough place settings for all the delegates. If the lunch is a stand up fork or finger buffet make sure that you have bar tables or places where empty plates can be left. Also ensure that there are enough buffet tables for the number of guests to stop long queues for food. Normally only soft drinks and water are served at lunch.
- **Drinks Reception.** Decide on the beverage policy and what drinks are to be offered: this can be a package price, flat delegate fee based on a range of drinks offered, or a per bottle price with specified consumption. Make sure that you have enough drinks and canapés as the amount consumed will depend on length of the reception. Check that there are plenty of soft drinks for those people not drinking alcohol.
- **Dinner** is often plated and menu is pre-chosen, with specific attention given to menu variety so food is different for each day and meal. Dinner tends to be more relaxed, and often alcohol is served. A good rule of thumb for quantities is half a bottle of wine per person. One point to note is that when using a waiter to serve wine consumption tends to be less than when leaving the bottles on the table. Make sure that water is available on the table.
- **Beverage & bar service.** During the planning of the conference a decision needs to be made on what is being paid by the hosted organisation as an open bar and what is paid by the delegates, for example by way of a cash bar or payment of drinks at meal time. A drinks policy must be understood by the venue and it should be made clear who has the authority to sign off of any extra drinks, as explained in part 6B.
- Good communication, and keeping everyone who needs to know informed of what is happening, is paramount.

Further articles on how to run a successful business event that has ROI will follow. To receive these valuable ideas and make sure that you do not miss any of the articles [register on our web site](#) and we will deliver them to your inbox free. The articles will be full of tips and ideas, to help you and your business in event management.

Next Tip Sheet: Part 7H – Social Events

Reference reading:

John G Fisher - How to run a Successful Conference