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A Guide for small meetings in Las Vegas

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A Guide for Small Meetings in Las Vegas

by

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Bachelor of Science
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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of the requirements for the

Master of Hospitality Administration
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Abstract

A Guide for Small Meetings in Las Vegas

by

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This paper is a deliverable guide for successful meeting in Las Vegas. The guide was created through an industry and academic review of literature. There are nine segments that are explored in order to encourage small associations and groups to hold their meetings, conventions and conferences in Las Vegas. The segments in the paper also provide information for non-professional and inexperienced meeting planners. The suggestion for future research is an experimental design process that tests the use of registration management systems and their value to small meetings.

Dedication

My professional paper is dedicated to my parents Mr. Mark McIlveen and Dr. Kathleen Hunter who encouraged me to discover the value of education. I also want to dedicate it to my sisters Laura McIlveen and Erin McIlveen because of their continuous support. Finally, to my fiancé Guy Hacco who is my co-planner for the adventures in life.

Acknowledgements

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Background and Reasoning

Introduction

Breaking into the Las Vegas meeting industry can be a challenging task for small groups. Las Vegas is fast paced and requires previous experience with the industry in town to understand how to book, plan and execute a successful meeting. This guide will serve as a reference for small groups to use while they plan their meetings, conventions or conferences in the intimidating city of Las Vegas.

Small groups are not all the same, the size of the group is where the similarity ends. Each group has different goals, expectations, demographics and budgets. Applying a blanket guide is not reasonable, each group must reflect on which of the guidelines are appropriate to their meeting. Exposing industry standards and providing tools will be the primary way that this paper provides information.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide a guide for small groups and associations to use when creating a meeting, conference or convention in Las Vegas. This will show small groups that Las Vegas is not just for large conventions and that this city is welcoming to all size groups.

Statement of Problem and Objective

Case studies show that small groups and associations have a difficult time booking their meetings in Las Vegas. The city is complex and the meeting spaces are large. Groups find that the face pace of communication is intimidating. Groups may also find it hard to contact the sales department of a convention space or to have them pay close attention to their group. Small groups want the detailed attention they feel they deserve, but large convention spaces feel these are not high priority groups.

Therefore the objective is to provide small groups with tools to hold their Las Vegas meetings in a successful manor.

Justification

Las Vegas is missing out on many small groups meetings by not being welcoming to them. These groups may have potential to become large customers in the future. If these groups feel shut out when they are small, they will not feel compelled to come to Las Vegas as a large group. Or if the meeting planner changes positions and works with a large association, their experience as a small group planner may impact the future decisions. The meeting and convention business is vital to the economic recovery and growth of Las Vegas.

Constraints

Self imposed constraints will be to focus on one area of the convention and travel business of Las Vegas. Staying on one narrow path of the convention industry will be a constraint for me to stay within. Visitor data to Las Vegas is primarily provided by the LVCVA, not having alternative data to compare to will be an external constraint for the outcome and recommendations.

The current economic status of the United States is a constraint and limitation while working in this subject matter. The impact of the economic recession has affected the meetings and events industry, as well as the tourism industry of Las Vegas. This constraint could potentially change the application of this guide.

Glossary

APEX - Accepted Practices Exchange, published and maintained by the CIC

CIC - Convention Industry Council

CMP - Certified Meeting Professional, a professional designation endorsed by PCMA and MPI,
it is certified and administered by the CIC

CVB - Convention and Visitors Bureau, a not for profit branch of the municipal government

ESG - Event Specifications Guide

IACC - International Association of Convention Centers

LAS - Airport code of McCarran International Airport

Las Vegas - Including: Henderson, Summerlin, Lake Las Vegas, and North Las Vegas

LVCVA - Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

MPI - Meeting Planners International

PCMA - Professional Convention Management Association

Small groups - attendance is less than 200

SMERF group - Social, Military Educational Religious and Fraternal group

The strip - Las Vegas Boulevard between Sahara road and Russell road

Review of Literature

Introduction

The area of convention management is extensively covered in both academic and trade publications. Topics that are studied have variety of interpretations and subject matter. In addition, the field of convention management has a wide spectrum of people who are involved.

There are professional designations and degrees available as well as many experienced professional, however many inexperienced people find themselves trying to plan the meeting, to avoid paying fees to meeting planners. These inexperienced people (often administrative assistants or board members) often do not realize that planning successful meetings is often a full time job. The tools and literature are available for people to plan their own meeting; however the time that it takes to familiarize oneself on the topic area could be just as or more costly than hiring the professional in the beginning. The articles reviewed have resources for small meetings to use in order to complete their successful meeting.

Current Readings

Baloglu and Love (2003) examined the performance of meetings in Las Vegas. Logistics such as number of rooms in walking distance to convention space was examined to grade the logistics ease of groups coming to Las Vegas. This study looked at public transportation as well as city image in relation to requirements or preferences of planners during the site selection process. The study found that room rate ranked well, however affordability of convention space did not. Capacity and quality were found to meet or exceed meeting planner's expectations.

The comparison by Baloglu and Love (2005) of 5 major US cities provides perceptions of experience meeting planner on these cities. There are important subjective terms used in a data analysis, which are vital for understanding the image that Las Vegas portray. The study provides

back up as to why Las Vegas should be considered as a destination for meeting planners. There were six areas that were analyzed: accessibility, attendees, CVB support, other opportunities, accommodations, convention center environment. The study then examined the open ended responses and marked the comments as “favorable” or “unfavorable”. Las Vegas was the only city out of the 5 examined that had a higher “favorable” than “unfavorable” percentage in each category.

Ford and Peeper (2009) examine the changing roles that CVB’s have in destination marketing. The main changes that have taken place are because of technology, competition, and funding. In addition the history of how standards have been adopted are also covered, which is a great way to view changes and how far the convention history has come. The article highlights that a convention centers are not just brick and mortar; rather, they have a role in marketing the city or destination as a whole. This is applicable to the Las Vegas convention industry as it grows and continues to seek groups to fill up the expanding space. A Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) is an organization that is often an entity of a local government agency under the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), not to be confused with a Destination Marketing Company (DMC) that is a for profit company that usually offers services of incentive travel and event planning. SMERF groups are discussed in this article these groups are generally non-profit organizations, some of them are small, but not necessarily.

Las Vegas visitor reports are released by LVCVA monthly and annually. These statistics cover visitor volume, room inventory, citywide occupancy, ADR, convention attendance, conventions and meetings held and total passengers that go through the McCarran airport. There is also a percentage change column from the previous year for each statistic. This information is an excellent source to provide accurate numbers of the Las Vegas convention capacity. Laughlin

and Mesquite are also covered, which are considered (for this paper) surrounding areas as an option for small meetings to inquire about.

The Las Vegas and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) provides a number of online meeting planning tools and resources in order to attract convention planners to Las Vegas. A calendar of conventions of all sizes that are booked in Las Vegas is one of these available resources. This calendar that is available online is a useful tool for planners to see when the city is available and will be important to examine the timing of convention season and when city wide conventions take place. This convention calendar includes small and large convention spaces in Las Vegas- from the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC) to smaller hotels all around the city. These online meeting planning tools also include the measurements of square footage and descriptions of the main convention center space in Las Vegas. Knowing the sizes of venues that are available in Las Vegas is an important resource when booking a convention or conference. This information is provided as a general outline for planners to use it is not guaranteed to be exhaustive of the venues available in Las Vegas.

In a February 2010 article from the Las Vegas Sun titled *Goodman pleased about Obama's Las Vegas comments*, shows the reaction of the Las Vegas Mayor (Oscar Goodman) concerning some recent comments President Obama has made about Las Vegas and meetings in the city. It is widely believed that with the original comments regarding the banking industry that President Obama has done damage to the large convention industry, particularly in Las Vegas- by being perceived as not supporting meetings in the city. Oscar Goodman boycotted events with regard to the 2010 presidential visit in order to stand up for the city and its tourism and convention industry. Since the comments have been made and the boycott has occurred,

President Obama has seemed to be more supportive of Las Vegas and the primary industry (hospitality) that the city relies on.

Breiter and Milman (2006) discover what attendees are looking for in conventions by use of questionnaires and analysis. The findings were that the most important things people were looking for when attending a conference are cleanliness and good maintenance. Among other criteria preferred are restrooms, signage, and cell phone signal availability. These items must be high priority while the meeting planner is conducting a site selection. This article is an example of where academic research can provide valuable information to the industry.

Boo and Kim (2009) discuss the importance of the economic contribution that a convention center has on a city's room nights. The discussion expands into the explanation of the convention center being a potential revenue generator for the city that it is located in. This is a type of ripple effect that a city's convention center has on the economic prosperity of the city. There are several other areas that the convention center has on the city including bringing in families for shoulder nights, and expanding the convention rate for people to stay in the city for a weekend holiday.

The importance of the destination selection is revealed in this article by Rompf, Breiter, and Severt (2009). The process of selecting the venue is an item that has to occur after the goals and objectives for the meeting are created. Selecting a venue or city that does not embrace and reflect the goals of the meeting/event can be detrimental to the success of the event. Success can be measured by attendance and revenue. Rompf et al review event selection specifically on finding the venue; however the methods that are outlined for using site selection can be transposed to theorize the same is applicable for the city selection.

Intimate Venues, Massive City by Rowland Stitler is an industry reading published by Meeting Planners International (MPI) in the February issues of ONE. This article highlights the notion that an attendee's experience can be positive in both small and large groups. Stitler uses interviews of Las Vegas meeting and event professionals to expose items that small groups can use to their advantage. Small groups have more options of venues, and the ability to use creative venues like penthouses and executive suites. These intimate venues can bring an experience to small groups that large groups would not be able to take advantage of because of their size of attendance.

The article *Steering Clear of the Most Common Legal Hazards in Association-Hotel Contracts* by Tenenbaum and Caseman was published in the July 2007 e-newsletter of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). This article is an excellent way to familiarize oneself on commonly used clauses in meeting industry contracts. Contracts can be used to the meeting planner's advantage, and the meeting planner should also negotiate for terms that she is comfortable with. An important section that is covered in this article is the explanation of the mitigation duty that hotels have. In the convention industry, attrition charges can reduce profits.

The Convention Industry Council (CIC) has produced and maintains a manual on accepted industry practices. This manual is called APEX or the Accepted Practices Exchange. This is an outstanding guide that includes an extensive glossary of terms used in the industry as well as a section on contracts. The APEX manual is a valuable tool for professional and non professional planners. Accepted formats of commonly used documents are also available in the APEX manual.

Conclusion to Review of Literature

These current articles on the area of convention management cover the topic area of this paper. As seen by this review of literature, the industry is rich with academic and trade publications. The variety of articles on the topic allow for confirmation of accuracy and legitimacy. The way that the industry articles overlap with the academic articles draw the conclusion of reliability and validity on the published topics. There are gaps in the literature of the topic; however these are areas for future research and should be regarded as opportunities. The nature of this paper is to provide a guide for non professionals to use when considering holding a meeting/conference or convention in Las Vegas. Discussion of industry accepted practices is important to familiarize a non professional with commonly used terms in the convention industry.

The Guide

Introduction

The hospitality industry in Las Vegas has seen a decrease in visitors and convention bookings over the past two years. The LVCVA tracks convention attendees in its annual visitor statistics report. The change from 2008-2009 was a decrease of 23.9% for the number of conventions held in Las Vegas. As Las Vegas looks to recover from the current economic situation, conventions and meetings will play a large role in bringing up the numbers of visitors. Focusing on increasing convention bookings will be vital to the recovery of Las Vegas. Small groups (<200 attendees) play an important role in filling the time between the large (attendance of more than 5000 attendees) conventions. Attracting these conventions, conferences and meeting groups is the first step, retention is the second. These groups while small have potential to be important and could potentially grow into large groups. Retaining small groups and attracting them while small is valuable to bringing in new conventions to Las Vegas. The following is a guide for the intended use of providing general guidelines and tips for planning a successful meeting in Las Vegas.

Why choose Las Vegas

In the year 2009, Las Vegas had over 36 million visitors (LVCVA 2009 frequently asked questions). This city is designed to host a wide variety of people in groups big and small. Las Vegas' hotel room inventory is currently (March 2010) over 148,000 rooms according to the LVCVA year to date visitor statistics. This large inventory of rooms allows for all sizes of groups to come into Las Vegas. This large variety of rooms makes Las Vegas a prime choice for visitors. It may seem like the amount of rooms available are excessive, however the occupancy rate in Las Vegas for 2009 was 85%, which is far above the national average of 55% (LVCVA

2009 frequently asked questions). As studied by Baloglu and Love (2003), the city of Las Vegas is an ideal destination for a meeting based on accessibility, attendees, Convention and Visitors Bureau support, other opportunities, accommodations and convention center environment.

Know when to go

Las Vegas has several scheduled city-wide convention and events on an annual basis. During these times, room rates are at the highest points, hotels sell out, and transportation is booked. Holiday weekends are also very busy with recreational tourists. Working around these dates is vital when trying to break into Las Vegas. The Las Vegas city wide convention calendar is available online from the LVCVA; this calendar provides a searchable database that lists the busy times for Las Vegas. In 2010, Las Vegas had over 30 conventions that had 10,000 or more attendees according to the LVCVA calendar.

The convention industry generally has two primary seasons; September-December and February-May. Attendees are generally not receptive to attending conventions in the month of December, because of the holiday season. April is a month that is not received well also because that is tax time, and many companies are closing their books. These are generalizations, and some industry's conventions could potentially thrive during perceived down times.

The weather in Las Vegas should be considered prior to booking a conference. Although attendees are primarily indoors where it is air-conditioned, the temperature outside in the summer can be considered extreme. The summer months of mid June through mid August often have days with temperatures over 110 degrees Fahrenheit or close to 43 degrees Celsius. These days can be extremely dangerous for elderly people, or people with health conditions. The National Weather Forecast Office has a formula that determines when to issue and excessive heat warning. Mid June- mid August, the temperature must reach over 111 degrees Fahrenheit. On

these days, individuals are encouraged to stay inside, and drink plenty of fluids. The meeting planner must keep this in mind when creating their program. Individuals should not be expected to spend long periods of time outside, including time it would take to walk to a destination.

Meeting planners who create programs in summer months should provide plenty of water and hydrating fluids, even when the meeting is in doors.

Meeting Planning is a full time job

There is a reason why there are professional designations and college degrees in meeting planning. The task of planning a meeting is much more time consuming than some people think. There are elements in contracts and negotiations that a professional meeting planner has experience with that a non-professional would not recognize. Event or meeting planning can seem like a glamorous job, however the professional meeting planner is using years of experience to provide this seamless experience for the attendees. Meeting planning is a profession because it is a full time job; the processes that the professional planner manages are time consuming. Members of associations must be realistic with the amount of time they have to work on the meeting prior to agreeing, or trying to do the planning on their own.

The cost of a professional planner is valuable and worth it when the event is successful and profitable. If an experienced planner is too costly for a group, there are some alternatives that can be considered. The group can hire a professional planner for specific elements of the event, such as room block management, or planning of ancillary events. The association should shop different planners to find one that best suites the budget and requirements of the meeting. The association can ask planners to provide an approximate cost of her services and what they will provide for that cost. The group can create a request for proposal (RFP) and send it to professionals so that the services and costs can be compared. When holding a meeting in Las

Vegas, the group should consider using a professional planner that is in Las Vegas. That way, the group will know that the professional planner has experience in working with local vendors, hotels and other venues as well as established relationships with them. Having a planner who lives in the destination city will also reduce travel costs that the planner would charge the group. Mistakes when planning a meeting can be costly; hiring a professional should be considered an insurance policy on avoiding these mistakes.

A professional planner knows industry standards and industry practices; they also know the terms to effectively put together an Event Specifications Guide (ESG) that outlines the entire convention, conference, meeting or event. An example layout of an ESG is available through the Convention Industry Counsel's (CIC) publication of the Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX). One of the highlighted attributes to using an ESG is that it is the industry's format of communicating the requirements of the event.

Site Selection

Las Vegas has four convention centers, Las Vegas Convention Center, Cashman Center, Sands Expo Convention Center and Mandalay Bay Convention Center. In addition to these convention centers, there are over 150 hotels in Las Vegas that have meeting facilities that range from small to large in square footage measurements. Other facilities in Las Vegas that have large capacities include Cox Pavilion, Henderson Convention Center, Sam Boyd Stadium and the Thomas & Mack Center. According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, Las Vegas has the most amount of meeting space out all cities worldwide.

Prior to booking a location for a convention, conference or event, the goals and objectives for the program should be established. The site selected for a meeting that is creating a corporate

budget would have different requirements than a meeting set up to celebrate a great sales year.

Things to consider prior to booking a venue are:

- Space requirements- include ceiling height, and square footage
- Budget
- Needs of the attendees
- Expectations of the attendees
- Ancillary events including dinners or parties
- If hotel rooms and meeting space should be in same venue
- What has been done in the past and how it was received by the attendees

The venue or site of each aspect of the conference program must compliment the goals of that specific element and the overall objectives of the meeting. A meeting planner must listen to the attendees prior to booking specific locations, would the attendees rather be in one place for the length of the convention, or would they want to go to different venues. If multiple venues are selected for the conference program, how to get there and what time to arrive must be communicated.

Rompf et al determined that the third most important agenda item when designing a convention or event is the venue selection. Numbers one and two in importance were found to be the establishment of a) goals and b) objectives. The venue must be able to support the type of meeting that is outlined. There is a tool on the LVCVA's website that provides specifications on meeting space square footage per venue.

Breiter and Miller (2006) did a study on what attendees generally want when attending a conference. The findings were that people want places that they feel safe in, and places that are clean. Knowing what attendees want is vital to ensure attendance at the conference and each of

the events. Attendees may have different wants or requirements depending on their overall demographics. The meeting planner must listen to feedback and engage attendees to discover what is important to the attendee - who is essentially the customer. The meeting planner should do a site visit to the venues prior to booking the space. The time of day can impact the cleanliness or feeling of safety within a venue. This is why it is important for the planner to execute this site visit during the similar time of day that the meeting or event will occur.

The International Association of Conference Centers (IACC) is the certifying body for a venue to be named a conference center. In order for a venue to receive its certification, they must meet thirty nine pieces of criteria. There are five categories that the criteria fit under, priority of business, conference center design, conference and business centers, food & beverage, technology, guest rooms and ancillary conference centers. This certification process that the IACC has created provides industry standards and defines a conference center. Looking for a venue that has an IACC certification is ideal for small groups, as the criteria for the certification revolve around providing business to small groups. IACC certified convention centers are used to working with small groups and know how to create a successful function.

Think outside of the Strip

There is more to Las Vegas than the tourist area of the strip. Outlying areas include: Henderson, North Las Vegas, Summerlin, Lake Las Vegas, Boulder City and Primm. These areas as a whole are referred to as the Las Vegas valley. These off strip locations all have hotels with meeting facilities and full service amenities. These locations should be considered when a group has decided to come to Las Vegas. These locations are generally close to the Las Vegas international airport, as the airport is located centrally in the city. The McCarran International airport has many in bound and out bound flight daily to domestic and international destinations.

Table 1: Distance from McCarran International Airport to Meeting Locations

Destination	Distance from McCarran International Airport (LAS)
Downtown Henderson	10 miles
North Las Vegas	19 miles
Summerlin	25 miles
Lake Las Vegas	32 miles
Boulder City	32 miles
Primm	40 miles

To calculate the approximate cost of a taxi to any of these locations, the taxicab authority has provided on their website a fare estimation tool. The formula to calculate the pickup fare from McCarran Airport is:

$\$3.30$ for initial activation + $\$.20$ each additional $1/12$ mile + $\$1.80$ Airport pick up fee = FARE

-or-

$\$3.30 + \$2.40(\text{MILES}) + \$1.80 = \text{FARE}$

Taxi fares can add up quickly, which is why group transportation should be arranged prior to arrival in Las Vegas. Most taxis in Las Vegas do not accept credit card payments, and riders can find themselves paying hefty wait times if they need to find an ATM to get cash. Taxis in Las Vegas are also not permitted to be hailed on the side of the road. Passengers seeking a taxi cab must proceed to a taxi stand, which are available at all hotels. Group transportation should be considered if the attendees are arriving on the same day, or if there is a number of them arriving on flights that land relatively close to one another. Las Vegas transportation companies offer a variety of types of vehicles for hire. Some transportation companies also offer a commission if a significant amount of transportation is booked. If a commission is not available, planners should ask if there is a discount for paying the balance in advance, or if there is a discount offered if the bill is settled with cash or a check. Companies will often offer discounts when accounts are

settled with cash or check, to avoid credit card fees. Shopping around to find the transportation company that fits the group's needs is recommended, as there are several transportation companies in Las Vegas with a variety of vehicle fleets.

The areas away from the strip often have additional benefits as they physically take attendees away from distractions that the strip has. The meeting planner will feel like they have less to compete against if her attendees do not see the reminders of the alternative items there are to do in Las Vegas. Depending on the goals and schedule of a conference, holding it away from the strip could be beneficial. There are distractions on the strip that include gaming, entertainment, dining and shopping. These can be considered distractions, however to apply a positive connotation, these items are available to use to the meetings planner's advantage in order to attract attendees to attend the conference. The convention program should be designed so that it is compelling enough for the attendees to want to attend. The planner should also consider day to day schedule to allow for attendees to partake in their choice of evening entertainment. The attendee's desires and schedule should be considered when choosing a destination within the Las Vegas valley; the conference planner should refrain from booking a conference location based on her personal preference.

There are some associations or groups that do not want to hold meetings in Las Vegas because of the gaming (gambling) that is present in the city. Some groups such as college sports teams who are part of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) are not permitted to stay in hotels that have casinos. The association should check their bylaws before entering any room block contract to see if there are any restrictions on lodging that has gaming. The groups that fall into the SMERF (Social, Military, Educational, Religious and Fraternal) category often have restrictions on lodging stays, especially if the association is paying for any part of the

lodging. SMERF groups are not necessarily small groups, but since they are generally non-profit, they may have limitations on lodging. There are some hotels on the strip that are non-gaming, and there are many hotels that surround the strip that are non-gaming. If a convention is looking to be away from the sights and sounds of a casino there are several options within a close distance to the McCarran International Airport, and to entertainment venues. The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce publishes a list of non gaming hotels and is listed in their business directory. As of April 2010, there were 52 hotels listed in this publication. To be listed, the hotel must be a member of the Las Vegas chamber of commerce, so this is not an exhaustive list.

Another lodging alternative in Las Vegas is conference housing at UNLV. This is primarily an option in the summer months, as the rooms that are rented out are student dormitories that students vacate during the summer months, however based on availability, there may be rooms available at various times through the year. A talented group of hired students operate the residence halls as a hotel under the supervision and management of a professional. As outlined on the UNLV conference housing website, the amenities are limited, however they do include: towel/linen service, in room internet, mail service, 24 hour on call maintenance and a 24 hour guest services. These amenities are a usually what travelers are primarily looking for. The UNLV conference housing is located on the main campus is easily accessible via taxi from the McCarran airport and is a short taxi ride to the strip. UNLV conference housing is an economic choice for groups on a budget, as rates for the summer 2010 start at \$23 per person, per night. Along with the lodging, a group can also book computer labs, auditoriums and classrooms to use for their conference agenda. The space available is based on the University's class schedule, during the summer and during academic recesses there would be more

availability to book spaces for conference elements. The prices for event and conference space are much lower at than it would be at alternative venues.

How to work with a Convention Sales Department

Establishing a relationship with the venue is important for the planner. The sales department and the planner must have an efficient working relationship to ensure outstanding execution of the meeting. Find a form of communication that works well for both parties, some people prefer talking on the phone, while others prefer to communicate primarily by email. When booking a meeting at a hotel, the planner must be prepared to have several different contacts for the execution of the event. The sales department is separate from the food and beverage department and there can be other contacts for audio visual components. There should be a convention services manager assigned to the group who oversees the entire event and the relationships between each department. The sales process can be compared to a job interview for the potential space to be booked. In the current economy, venues are in high competition for business and this should be kept in mind while the planner is going through the selection process.

Negotiating with the venue is important while trying to get the most value for the group. There are items on a contract that can be negotiated. An example of one of these items is complimentary wireless internet access. When looking for items to negotiate on, look at items that have little expense to the hotel. The wireless internet access is a great example, because the hotel often makes pure profit on selling internet access separately. It is harder to negotiate for items that have a cost to the hotel, such as food and beverage. When negotiating, make sure that the venue is bringing down the total cost and not just reallocating the cost to other aspects of the group's expenses.

\$32 per gallon of Iced Tea

Convention centers and hotels in Las Vegas usually have preferred or required vendors for things such as audio visual rentals, food service and freight movement. For example, ARAMARK has control of all the food served in the Las Vegas Convention Center, and they charge premium prices because of their monopoly. If a meeting or exhibit hall booth is to be catered in the venue, prepare for a large bill with high minimums. ARAMARK's exhibitor hospitality menu is available online and with close inspection of this menu, it is discovered that a single gallon of Iced Tea (16 cups) costs \$32 not inclusive of 8.1% sales tax and 19% gratuity- and one cannot just bring their own Iced Tea. These premium prices are also applied to audio/visual rentals. Renting projectors, screens, computers, microphones can be an expensive element of a program, and the venue usually has a clause that requires all rentals to go through the preferred vendor. For freight services during move in or move out times of conventions, freight is usually considered anything that is brought into the space on wheels. If an exhibitor attempts to wheel in their booth on a pull cart or dolly, they will be stopped at the door and be required to use the official freight company. The freight company will then charge you to wheel your box to your booth. The convention spaces in Las Vegas have different requirements and different levels of enforcement on these items.

Exposing these expenses is not meant to deter groups from coming to Las Vegas, it is just an example of where unexpected costs not known by an inexperienced planner can pile up and blow a budget. When creating a meeting budget, the planner must ensure that the costs are investigated and not based on assumptions of what one would pay elsewhere. If a group is attempting to plan a meeting or conference on their own, knowing these costs and requirements in advance will assist in planning, pricing and budgeting. The price of these services can go up

even higher if they are not arranged ahead of time. A professional planner would know how to negotiate these costs as well as know how to create a program that minimizes excessively expensive catered events, rentals and services.

Decide on Registration Processes

There are several types of registration elements for conventions. First, a planner must recognize all the elements that will require registration. Elements can include meetings (each session), galas or parties, exhibit hall passes and hotel reservations. The registration process for the meeting gets more complex as the number of components of the meeting increases. Small meetings should consider have a static schedule for all attendees, instead of choosing different sessions. The way that people can register include: fax in forms, mail, phone, and internet form. Limit the attendees to one or two options of how to register. Deciding which methods to use require some thought from the planner. Always think about the attendees and what they might want. Fax registration forms require fax machines, which are becoming older technology. People who have home offices may not have fax machines. Taking telephone registration would be very time consuming for a planner. Phone numbers should be available to supplement all types of registration, but would be a time consuming method for registration. Mails in forms are costly, and take time to get to deliver. Internet submissions seem like a regular occurrence, however think about who might be excluded by only having online registration.

If there is a hotel room block element of the registration process, this is another layer to add to consideration when designing the registration process. Hotel blocks are highly recommended to use because they are a great way to get the cost of meeting space to be reduced. There is also an incentive for the planner, as the hotel will usually provide one complimentary night for every 50 nights book. If there are 200 attendees staying for two nights, this would

equal a total of 400 room nights sold, which would work out to eight complimentary nights for the planner. The planner can alternatively ask for a commission from their room nights sold. Industry standard of commission provided is 8-12% of the room rate excluding fees and taxes. At a rate of \$100 a night, 200 attendees staying 2 nights would be between \$432- \$448 for the planner. This commission is often why professional planners encourage room blocks, and are eager to manage room blocks. Some hotels only allow commission when the planner is able to provide an IATA number; this number indicates a licensed travel agency. Although the hotel might only provide a direct payment when the company is a travel agency, they will often take the commission that they would have paid and apply it to meeting space booked.

There are two ways of managing room block reservations. The hotel will require an outline of how the reservations will be handled in the contract. The first way is to collect the attendee's travel dates and book the hotel rooms through one submission of a rooming list that the planner creates. This way is time consuming because travel dates often change for business travelers. This makes the person planning the meeting responsible for tracking reservations, changes and cancellations, as well as answering questions about the hotel rate and amenities. This is a very time consuming and a time sensitive element of the registration process. The planner should be realistic with the amount of time it takes to maintain a rooming list prior to agreeing to be responsible for the rooming list. When managing a room block, the planner could find themselves submitting amendments of the rooming list up until the day of the convention. Some planners prefer to submit rooming lists, because of the added level of control they have over the attendees and who stays in the room block. It is also a way to ensure that the rooms are being booked under the group's contracted room block. The second way to manage a room block is to have a phone in reservation code. Managing a room block via a call in code takes out the

planner as the middle man. During a call in code process, the hotel provides a code to reference when attendees individually call the hotel directly to book their hotel rooms. Using this method, the hotel may not offer perks like complimentary nights, or commission, however it is a significant time saver. Some meeting planners refrain from using a call in system, because of the possibility that the attendee will fail to book under the conference room block, or the reservation department will fail to apply the reservation to the contracted block.

Inexperienced planners can find themselves running into heavy attrition fees if their room block is poorly managed and drop dates are missed. When signing a hotel contract for a room block, an item to negotiate for is called automatic room drops. With an automatic room drops clause, if room nights are not booked by the cut of date, the rooms will automatically be turned back to the hotel's inventory, and the planners will not incur attrition charges. If attendees do not book their room prior to the cut off days they may not be entitled to the negotiated group rate; rather the attendees will be charged the rack (going) rate. Attendees should be told that their conference room rate is available only until the last day that rooms can be dropped from the block. If automatic drop dates are not negotiated, the hotel will provide a scale of how many hotel rooms can be released up until the day of the convention. A typical allowable amount of reduction in the initial block would be 20% of the total room nights until 30 days prior to arrival. Failure to comply with the allowable block decreases could result in the entire block losing the negotiated rate. The hotel will also reassess any complimentary room nights provided, any discounts that were given on meeting space, fees waived, and any food and beverage minimums that were lowered due to the room block size.

Contracts can have tricky language and clauses. The Convention Industry Council has a section for convention industry contracts in their APEX (Accepted Practices Exchange)

publication. This publication is not exhaustive of contract law; however it does provide a summary of what contracts should cover in relation to the convention industry. Prior to entering a room block contract, the meeting planner should educate themselves on industry standards.

If a contracted room block does not sell its entire reserved block, the meeting planner should be prepared to face attrition charges, and be prepared to minimize these charges. The hotel is required to mitigate their damages (Tenenbaum 2007); mitigation is a common law legal doctrine. This doctrine requires the damaged party (the Hotel) to reduce their own losses. This means that if a hotel block is not booked, the hotel is required to put those rooms back up for sale to the general public. If the hotel fails to mitigate their damages, they have breached their duty. The meeting planner who has not filled her block and has notified the hotel can check to make sure that the rooms are on sale to other people seeking reservations. A meeting planner can do this by calling the hotel on the days of the unfilled rooms, and attempt to make a reservation. If the reservation department says that the hotel is sold out for the night(s) the hotel has failed to try to resell the rooms, therefore they have not mitigated their damages. The planner who is attempting to do this should try several ways to book a reservation, including online, via the phone and via the hotel's online booking system. If the hotel is shown as sold out, the planner must obtain proof that she was denied to book a room.

Hotels in Nevada are not permitted to sell a room for the same night to two different parties. If a reservation is cancelled, and then booked by a different party, the entire amount must be refunded to the original guest who reserved. At the close of the conference, if the hotel claims that the blocked rooms were not filled, the meeting planner can request a print out of guest's names and the dates that they stayed at the hotel. The planner must then compare this print out to the attendance of the conference. This is accomplished easier if the planner

submitted a room list to the hotel. If the planner finds herself being charged attrition, she can negotiate by asking the hotel to apply any room nights that the attendees stayed outside of the blocked dates.

Talk the Same Language

When booking a venue for a meeting, an inexperienced planner may come across meeting industry jargon that gets confusing. The classic industry example is the difference between a lectern and a podium. A lectern in the convention industry is what a non industry person would call a podium. A podium is more representative of a stage or riser. The speaker stands on a podium, and speaks behind a lectern. Familiarizing one's self with a few industry common terms can reduce confusion when planning a meeting or conference. One of the convention industry's certifying bodies is the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA). This association endorses the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) designation that is accredited by the Convention Industry Council. Although it takes years of industry experience to gain a CMP designation, the Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) produced by CMPs is available online for free. Part of APEX is the industry glossary that defines a variety of industry related terms and commonly used industry words.

For example, if an inexperienced planner gets a message like this:

“This is your CSM calling, I am putting together your BEO that is ICW the pre-con meeting. The F&B MOD also wants to know if people not in the ECB will be IPO. Please let me know so we can draft a MOU.”

One who is not used to these terms would not be know what is being asked of them. However, one who familiarizes them self would know that the convention services manager (CSM) is asking them about the banquet event order (BEO) in conjunction with (ICW) the meeting that is

held prior to the convention (pre-con). What the convention services manager is asking is to clarify for the food and beverage (F&B) manager on duty (MOD) if people will be paying on their own (IPO) if they are not staying in the event contracted block (ECB) of rooms. To ensure that both sides confirm the subject that is being questioned, the CSM will put together a memo of understanding (MOU).

Recommendations for Future Research

One element of managing meetings that requires additional research is the use of online registration systems for meetings. Small (annual meetings of <200 people) associations and groups are looking for ways to save money and time, however just because registration systems are advertised as money and time savers, they should be tested.

This theoretical experimental design would test the value that registration companies claim they provide through their services of website and registration management. Testing an annual conference of 100 people would be valuable to analyze the cost and benefit. It should also be tested to see if this is something that the customer (conference attendee) necessarily wants or needs.

The control aspect of the experiment would be the traditional way the conference organizer has done registration in the past. This traditional system is done by a simple email form that the conference organizer puts together in house. The cost for the control would have to include the time it takes the in-house person, as well as any material that is used.

For the experimental group they would do their registration through the hired 3rd party company that does registration management the company that would be tested would be regonline. This company markets to all sizes of conventions and conferences. They advertise

that they can do attendee management, badges, signage, reporting (housing, meeting breakdowns) and surveys.

The dependent (effective) variable would measure how much money and time is saved by the conference planner. The independent (cause) variable would be the use (or non use) of the system.

Pre and Post testing would gather information from attendees. For the pre-test everyone (regardless of way they will register) would be given the same survey asking them about their preferences for registering for conferences. The post-test would ask the individuals about the ease of their registration. It would also ask open ended questions on areas to improve- this would indicate if the people that used the traditional method are looking for an online system.

Although the stimulus is applied to the conference attendees, a primary indicator or measurement of how much money and time is saved is the post test of the conference planner. It will have to be measured how much time she saved with the group that used the in house method as opposed to the group who used the new system. The experiment would also have to measure the amount of time that the conference planner needed to train on the system to learn the registration system.

Published outcomes of this potential research would have an impact on the small meetings industry and how they use their funds. Knowing the value of these systems can change expenses for these groups.

Conclusions

The meeting venues in Las Vegas are vast and varied. Small meetings have many venue options in the city and surrounding areas. The venues are world class and have the essential elements of cleanliness and security that attendees are looking for. The hotel accommodations in

Las Vegas provide a mixture of amenities at different price ranges. Meeting planners often get to take advantage of lower mid week room rates.

Marketing of the city of Las Vegas is done through the LVCVA. Their online tools are a library of information for meetings to use to their benefit. The online tools that are provided are an excellent place to get information on venues and visitor statistics. The association or group should weigh the advantages of hiring a Las Vegas based meeting planner; this adds tremendous value for the meeting. The first steps to take when planning a meeting is setting the goals and objective and basing the rest of the elements around them. The Convention Industry Counsel provides a publication on industry standards (APEX) that provides numerous resources for professionals and non- professionals. Future research in the area of registration processes would produce valuable knowledge to the industry and to small meetings.

The Las Vegas meeting industry and small groups can create a mutually beneficial relationship. Las Vegas needs these small conventions during economic stabilization, and the small groups need the convenience and amenities that Las Vegas offers.

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