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Planning a Corporate Holiday Event: Venue Selection

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Long before the snow flies, savvy event planners are securing venues for holiday parties, sometimes as early as the previous January! If you have never planned this type of event, you may be very surprised at the amount of work and details required. These include venue selection, theme development and execution, décor, food and beverage planning, entertainment, guest logistics and more. This article addresses one aspect of the process - venue selection. Whether planning a party for 100 or over 1000, the venue sets the tone of your event. There are many attractive locations of all types and sizes still available for this year's holiday dates in the Front Range and mountain towns.

This detailed checklist is offered to identify the best venue for your event requirements.

1. Venue Size Vs. Event Size

- Determine venue budget or range so that your time is well spent in considering only those options.
- Keep in mind the level of formality for the event. Certain spaces work better for a formal or semi formal affair and others for a casual occasion.
- Consider the number of guests that can be accommodated based on your food plan; if it is a sit-down dinner, buffet or cocktail reception.
- Select a site that will accommodate elements of the party; if you are presenting entertainment, dancing, speakers, etc. A long narrow room can be appropriate for a sit down dinner but will not work as well to encourage dancing and socializing.
- Keep your theme in mind. It is possible not only to save on décor, but also to increase the “fun” value of the event if a venue is consistent with your theme. An example is using a Western theme held at a rustic western or mountain style site.
- Select a space that is close to capacity for the type of event, number of guests and meal type being planned so that guests feel that the event is well attended.

2. Special Services

- Ask for a written list of what will be included (and NOT included) with the venue rental such as tables, chairs, linen color selections, center piece options, holiday decorations, bar services and number of bartenders, number of servers per number of guests, special area for photos.
- Review if the venue offers any specific special services or features. For example, some hotels will offer room rate discounts for that evening only for event guests.
- Some hotels will provide a gift certificate for a night's stay that can be awarded to a lucky guest.
- Check out if a venue might offer any booking incentives such as a free bottle of wine per table.
- Other considerations are if the venue includes additional services in their price such as coat check, holiday decorations, security staff, and signage.

3. Access

- Consider the general location and the main thoroughfares providing access to the venue.
- Review parking for easy access and adequate number of spaces based on projected number of attendees.
- If there is a long walk to the venue entrance, consider additional transportation. This can include options such as valet services, Pedi-cabs, or golf carts to ensure guest convenience, especially considering the possibility of inclement weather and the projected guest attire.
- Confirm that there are sufficient elevators, stairs, or ramps to get the number of guests you are expecting to the party space in a concentrated amount of time.

4. Space Layout

Prior to the site visit, make a list of the items on your event's schedule in order to evaluate the venue's space, size and layout for the type of event you are planning. The amount of space and the room layout will be determined by many factors including:

- Total number of projected guests.
- Number, type and size of tables.
- Type of food and related service.
- Beverage services - number and location of bars.
- Entertainment and whether it will be on a stage, walk-around entertainers or both.
- If entertainment is planned, assure there is space for a "green room," which is an area for performers to change, put on make-up, relax, etc.
- If dancing is planned, confirm the location and size of the dance floor or area and if there is an added cost to set up.
- Confirm if a company representative or other person will be making a speech.
- Find out if there are plans for an auction or a silent auction requiring additional tables and space.
- Determine if there is a need for quiet space vs. activities.

Based on all these elements, evaluate the amount of space required for each activity, and how much overlap there will be (such as speakers stationed on the performance stage) in order to evaluate the room and accurately map out space usage.

5. Technical Support

- Check out if the venue provides sufficient electrical support for the technical production you have in mind.
- Determine if generators will be required for additional power.
- Ask if the venue provides on-site technicians and audio/visual support.
- Confirm if you are required to use their tech services or if outside services can be brought into the facility.
- Ask if exceptions are made for productions that are beyond the scope of the in-house audio/visual team.
- Confirm if the venue is a union house. If so, request related costs so that potential cost differences can be factored into your budget.
- Get details related to sound delivery by checking if the space is very "live" vs. if it is well balanced for amplified sound.
- If applicable, determine the best location for the stage and related best site lines.
- If using projection screens, assure that seating will be arranged to allow all audience members to be able to see a presentation.
- If live camera coverage is needed for projection, determine the locations of the best camera positions.

6. Support of Décor

- Be aware that most venues do not allow anything to be attached to perimeter walls and that some prohibit hanging anything from the ceiling.
- Ask for a list of requirements. Check out other attributes of the space that will affect how it can be decorated.
- Consider if the entrance to the party space lends itself to an interesting décor design.
- Confirm the number and location of electrical outlets.
- Check the location and size of the freight elevator and its proximity to your potential space.

7. Comfort & Safety Issues

- Check out attributes of the space that will directly impact your guests' level of comfort and security.
- Review location of restrooms and number of stalls in each.
- Determine if additional portable restrooms will be required which can be a possibility in a non-traditional venue.
- Check if a coat check room is available or if additional space needs to be allocated and set up for this event.
- Ask if the venue will provide coat check services or if guests will be required to hang their own coats that will be unattended.
- Confirm provisions for disabled guests.

Summary

As you analyze the space, keep these and all event elements in mind. Ask to see photographs of other events recently produced in the space. Ask questions about the venue. Every space is different and the people who work there every day will have valuable insights. You can now appreciate that there are many details to consider in choosing the perfect venue for any type of event!

Skyline is available to help. We look forward to speaking with you.