

All in the Details

written by Beth D'Addono

No matter how big or small, your next event is easy to organize with these tips.



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The first time Stephanie Haase organized a trade show for her company, Tunnell Consulting, Inc., of King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, she forgot to order nametags. “I didn’t realize I needed them,” she recalls. “I was literally learning as I went along.” If you’re not a professional event planner, staging a corporate seminar, company party or team-building session can send your stress level through the roof.

That’s where the five W’s come in, says Jodi Wolf, co-author of *Event Planning Made Easy* (McGraw-Hill, \$24.95) and president of Paulette Wolf Events & Entertainment. Wolf says you should “ask yourself, ‘Who are your guests? What is your event? Where and when is it? And why is it happening?’”

Once you answer those questions, you can put together a budget and what Wolf calls an “event blueprint,” which she recommends organizing in a binder—something Haase now does religiously.

A detailed event checklist is a lifesaver,

says Anya Grottel-Brown, management supervisor for Dentsu Communications, Inc. Grottel-Brown, who has organized events for 50 to 500 attendees, also recommends allowing 20 percent to 25 percent of your estimated total budget for miscellaneous expenses. “There’s always something you’re going to forget,” she says, “like the time I was organizing a photo exhibition and had to buy \$400 worth of Velcro at the last minute.”

Here are a few more tips from the pros:

- **Don't forget signage.** When your guests, speaker and panel members show up, will they know where they're going?
- **Send an electronic invite when possible.** It's cost-effective, and chances are attendees will ask for information to be e-mailed to them anyway.
- **Unless you're having a sit-down meal, order food for half the number of attendees.** “Most people come to nibble and make contacts,” says Grottel-Brown. “They are not expecting a full-course meal.”
- **Staff up.** Have assistants on hand before and on the day of the event.
- **Always have a backup plan.** Once all the details are in place, imagine what could go wrong. Then solve the problem.

Haase now works from a template she designed herself, complete with a calendar for deadlines, e-mail reminders to participants and an exhaustive list of trusted vendors. “Since I still have to do all of my other job duties,” she says, “being organized—and coming in to the office on an occasional Sunday afternoon—is the only way I can stay sane.”

The last big event writer Beth D'Addono planned was her 2001 wedding.