

Session: Out with the Old: Sprucing up your Agenda

Room: Salon B

Time: 8:45 am to 10:00 am

Facilitators:

Martin Johnson, Director of Midwest Sales, Montage Deer Valley

Diane Goodman, President, Goodman Speakers Bureau

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Takeaways, below are some of the concepts and ideas that were discussed during this sessions as ways that you can use to spruce up your agenda.

Planner Table

- use live entertainment/musicians for "walk-ins" and "walk-offs" or at breaks, instead of the canned background music
- Change the room set up to change people's perspectives. Get away from the traditional round tables or theatre style and try a completely new set up such as couches and club chairs for a session that involves discussion and to create an informal setting.
- Incorporate a theme into everything - speaker, conference, decor, F&B, etc. It does not have to be overwhelming or obvious but it gives you direction and creates a consistency and continuity for the conference.
- Use your location as your theme starting point and build on it. For example in Toronto do a dinner such as the streets of Toronto where each section is different food and décor, Calgary Cowboys (don't fight the stereotypes or clichés from each city)
- Bring theme into your communications and the conference look and feel by creating a tag line and even icons to represent each word, then each year you can focus on a different word, icon and colour.
- Create an online website for the conference with interactive areas and updates to keep potential attendees interested
- Try a new format like MPI's Flashpoint - Idea Assembly where there will be 10 speakers each speaking for 15 minutes each to the entire room
- For a session that requires a lot of product teachings create a gameshow such as jeopardy to teach the product information while still capturing the audience's interest and making it interactive.
- Instead of the typical tradeshow focus on a session that is a table talk. Each table is hosted by a different vendor and attendees move around the room from table to table learning about the products etc. To take this one step further instead of just tables you can create experience zones with different look and feel at each zone.
- Instead of doing the typical Organized Activities create Experiences for your attendees. Where you create a customized day from gifts the night before that are specific to their chosen activity to custom brochures about the activities.
- Incorporate a very different type of speaker who can entertain as well as deliver a message (ie. David Ben)

- Incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility into the session through personal/company donations, usable/donatable centrepieces, local charities coming in and speaking for 10 minutes about the value of the donations and what their organizations do, etc.
- change up the location completely...who says a session can't be outside (if appropriate and weather permits)
- Change up the A/V & staging aspect of the meeting. Do plasmas instead of screens, a different stage layout.
- Add health theme to a breakfast including stations with a spa person, someone from the fitness centre, a nutritionist, etc. Use existing hotel people at limited to no cost
- Do pre assigned seating at meals to force networking and conversation. Do this at a breakfast or lunch instead of the normal dinner
- Food and beverage : bring creativity to the f&b elements
 - Registration Reception where you have a drinks station and hand out beverages to those waiting in line, maybe some individually packaged snacks to take back to their room
 - lunch served via lazy susan in more of a family style
 - edible arrangements (saves time and money) such as fruit that looks like flowers or cupcakes iced to look like flowers.
 - singing wait staff
 - snacks in stead of lunch (individual hummus and pitas, veggies and dip, mini salads etc)
 - Make your own boxed lunch. Have each item individually packaged and then you select what you would like
 - Dine arounds
- Add entertainment options - look to a local CVB for suggestions. Are there cultural pieces that can be added to a program from the community - might be added via the CVB at no charge
- add an entertainer or mc to keep your agenda flowing, that will also attend each evening function and serve as a recap of the previous days events.
- Its important to review survey results to ensure you are capturing ideas from your audience. You can do pre meeting survey to ensure you offer topics that they want.
- Instead of a formal survey have hosted tables for breakfast and have 2 to 3 hosts per table ask the attendees at those tables 3 or 4 questions as a roundtable discussion to solicit feedback etc.
- Personalization- create custom and personalized items and service where ever possible. If you already do a welcome basket then ask them what their favourite things are a tailor each basket to their likes.
- Utilize local schools for entertainment or events such as a local culinary or photography school, to showcase the area, incorporate CSR as they will usually ask for a donation instead of charging a fee and it is less expensive then a professional but often times just as good.

CVB Table

- Get people out to explore the city
- Visa Gift cards with conference logo or customized sleeve for the dine around concept
- New networking opportunities, customized group size
- Non traditional ways to get to know people
- Relate personal experiences with destination
- Unique transportation options
 - Vintage streetcar
 - Eco Cabs
 - Old Vintage Cars
 - Double Decker buses
 - Horse and carriage
- Different dinner concepts- Picnics!
- Outdoor Drive-In movie with convertible cards and picnic baskets

Speaker Table

- Hotel use speaker for internal meeting since speaker is in town
- Look local for speaker and entertainment
- Book Signings
- Webinar after for follow up
- Custom video to promote
- End of day session instead of morning in “Hot” location
- Local troupe (stomp, hip hop) for breaks
- Beat Box singer- one man band with lips. Very versatile
- Fitness break
- Electronic books (kindle etc)
- Round table discussions
- Industry Expert
- Economy- state of the industry

Hotel Table

- Have structure to site visits etc
- 1st impression with DMC and staff and Transportation at the airport
- Do not waste planner time with too much “stuff” and freetime (scheduled)
- Know what the client wants up front to tailor the agenda
- CREATE THE UNEXPECTED
- Opportunity to debrief on property
- Some planners like packed agendas for efficiency!!
- Hotel to create one page fact sheet
- Keep it moving, know the customer
- Some planners want only an hour site in and out it is about setting the expectations ahead of time so that you are both on the same page
- Always respect the other persons time and be on time

- A knowledgeable person on the site of the area, hotel and past functions
- Know allergies, food and beverage preferences and diet restrictions etc
- Time Time Time
- Use CVB who has partnerships with local hotels etc, know the flow of town
- Know client program do not show them areas where the client doesn't have time built into the program (golf, spa) for example a business meeting vs a summer incentive program
- Advance agenda of the program, past program and other specifics about the program.

DMC Table

- Dine arounds are becoming more and more popular as a way of providing a full meal to guests, while keeping the per-person price in control and allowing the group to enjoy the destination. A DMC is a very valuable partner when planning such an evening as they bring the local connections and experience to work with the right restaurants for the best outcome; however, budgets are still tight - so explore alternative ways to working with your DMC partner for the service. For example, pay a per person reservation fee for dine around coordination through a DMC and then pay for the food and beverage directly with the restaurant with your credit card. Staffing and transportation on the night of the dinner will be charged separately. The DMC will still do the early coordination (restaurant communication, menu selection, etc.) but the planner will avoid the additional service fee on the meal by paying directly.
- Plan a progressive dine around in the city if your hotel is located appropriately and the weather permits. This will alleviate transportation costs while providing your guests with more exposure to the city while enjoying a variety of cuisines and atmospheres. It also allows for more networking as guests are visiting with different attendees on the short walks between restaurants and potentially sitting with different table mates throughout the evening.
- Pay a fair flat fee to your DMC partner if you want to coordinate the full dine around directly but need their assistance in choosing from a list of pre-qualified restaurants. DMCs maintain a strong list of local restaurant partners and can provide you with their first choice recommendations. This will help alleviate some of the associated risk of working with unknown restaurants for a successful evening. This is not recommended for large groups; however, it can be helpful for smaller groups when the risk is decreased and you are using fewer local restaurants.
- Pending the overall spend with the DMC and the location of the hotel, negotiate complimentary guided city walks or nature walks in the mornings for your interested attendees. These can be short and fun for

guests who want to get an early morning stretch while learning a little bit about the history of the area; the culture of the destination; or the natural sources of the environment surrounding the property.

- Instead of asking attendees to bring books or canned goods to the meeting (thus increasing weight in their luggage) for a charity – consider announcing a fun program that allows them to wear jeans or flip flops (whatever is right for the destination and time of year) to the general session or meeting that would traditionally be a business attire function. This is in exchange for a cash donation of \$5.00 - \$15.00 per day. The end result is a great cash donation to a local charity with very little logistical coordination required by the attendee or the planner. Additionally, the program grows quickly in popularity due to the immediate “peer pressure” that is so visible in the group.
- As many groups are participating in CSR events from city to city, have an early discussion with your DMC partner on how they can assist you locally and how you can save coordination fees along the way – resulting in a stronger donation to the charity. For instance, pending the overall spend of the program – DMCs may be willing to negotiate net or complimentary costs for staff and transfers in exchange for being included in local media coverage of the event. Both companies will enjoy being highlighted as good community citizens and expenditures for the event will be decreased.