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Renting Right

Avoid Rental Snafus with these 5 Tips

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Columnist

Next month, I've been asked to plan an outside event using tents and other event equipment. Can you give me any tips or suggestions for hiring rental companies and ensuring that the event is a success? I am very nervous about this event!!

Your outside event sounds interesting. Renting equipment or other items is a great way to stay within an event budget while adding great elements to your event. Working with rental companies can prove to be of great value as long as you can negotiate the best pricing and focus on managing the process.

Here are five things to consider when renting a product or service:

1 Researching products and services is critical.

At times, there are multiple companies that offer the same rental item or product. For example, rental companies that provide tent rentals can offer a large array of products. Consider searching the Internet for common like products to gather pricing and other information such as age, shelf life, condition and size.

One tip here is to ask about the condition and maintenance of the product in which you're interested — you want to be sure that you are not renting a tent that has a shelf life of more than five to eight years. In my experience, I've found that tents can tend to be worn and become outdated and less effective against weather over time.

2 Multiple bids can create competitive pricing.

As a rule of thumb, three basic proposals or bids should be compiled to help confirm the pricing ranges for products or services. The pricing range could help to give you an idea of the most that you can expect to pay for a product.

With the advent of Sarbanes-Oxley, we owe it to our client or our company to ensure that we follow best practices procedures when it comes to bids and pricing. Multiple bids can help you negotiate better terms as you speak with your suppliers and is a great way to help level the playing ground for each supplier.

3 Detail drop-off and pickup of items in writing.

Nothing is worse than producing a successful event and then seeing your rental items still sitting on the lawn 10 days afterwards. On several occasions, I have been frustrated by waiting for a rental company to pick up rental items. I've learned that it is important to address your concerns prior to the signing of any contract. It is critical to confirm and document the drop-off and pick-up times for your rental items. Your contract (or included proposal) should also display the rental costs clearly.

4 Identify staff requirements and contact information early.

I was asked to plan a wedding for 500 guests in the spring of 2006. The wedding took place in a beautiful glass atrium filled with botanical flowers. I decided to hire 10 additional waiters to help to expedite the food service during the dinner.

The wedding dinner was scheduled for 6 p.m. All waitstaff was required to be on-site and ready for work at 3 p.m. Once 3:15 p.m. arrived, I noticed that the additional waiters were not present. I gave the staff another five minutes to arrive — but by the time those five minutes were up, no one had arrived.

I immediately called the staffing company and was directed to an answering machine with a pager number. Quickly, I paged the on-call contact. To my surprise, I was told that the additional staff was already on property — they were on property but at another wedding!

It turned out that the staff had gone to the wrong address. If I had had the contact information for the crew leader, I would have been able to call to verify their status. Needless to say, they staff arrived 20 minutes prior to the dinner and all was well.

> *"Nothing is worse than producing a successful event and then seeing your rental items still sitting on the lawn 10 days afterwards."*

5 Consider innovative rentals items.

Don't be afraid to explore beyond your typical rental items — there are really new products and services in the marketplace such as rental RVs for events, rental beach bungalows for weddings, wireless devices for attendees, food preparation rentals and more, so take advantage of them. (There is even an awards program that recognizes and honors the innovative rental products in the industry. Read more at www.infocommshow.org/html/.)

In conclusion, here are few key points I want to share:

- Research rental products and pricing to ensure competitive bids.
- Build relationships with rental companies. Most of the time, they offer a full array of products and referrals.
- Gather as much information about your rental partners as possible — and always ask for references.
- Confirm event details in writing and be sure to keep track of critical information.
- Gather contact information if you are hiring contractors or additional staff.
- Meet the rental company at the arrival time to ensure that all items are accounted for.
- Gather other innovative suggestions for rentals.

Thanks for reading. Until next month, love what you do and do what you love!

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