

MAXIMIZE

Your Company's Event for MINIMAL Dollars

Businesses scale back on extras without minimizing the event experience

BY MARTIN C. DAKS

A stubbornly slow economy that has crippled a range of businesses has also left its mark on meeting and event planners, according to industry insiders. Though companies are still eager to hold trade shows, holiday parties, team building and other get-togethers, more than ever before they are pressing planners to get more done with fewer resources.

"Companies are watching their spending but the volume of activity is still there," says **David Warner**, president and founder of **Events Plus Entertainment LLC** in Whippany. "We are working closely with clients to be creative and deliver a high level of excitement and quality without straining their budget."

Money-saving tactics include scaling back on extras, using the Internet to solicit multiple supplier bids, and being flexible about when to hold an event.

"Companies can save money without diminishing the event experience by scaling the event to match the purpose of the gathering and the number of people that are expected," he says. "For example, the entertainment, food and other needs of a 10-person board of

directors meeting will likely differ from a large-scale team building, sales or other event."

Warner also suggests modifying the menu. "Maybe drop the lobster tails and instead serve shrimp. Or, if you've got a bar, limit the choices and drop some of the more expensive drinks. We also use the Internet to track down suppliers that can provide high-quality food, music and other goods and services at a reasonable cost."

A company that is reasonably flexible about setting a date for the event can also save money, he says.

"December is holiday season, so hotels and restaurants are likely to be well booked and will charge top prices," notes Warner. "Likewise, May and June are often filled with weddings or graduation parties. But the period of January through March is typically slow, and it may be easier to negotiate a better price during that time."

Sometimes, a company can save money if it buys event and meeting accessories instead of repeatedly renting them, says **Lorraine Mariella**, owner of **Wayne-based Celebrations Event & Meeting Management LLC**.

"If a client keeps renting a

certain item from me over and over, I may give them the option to simply buy it outright," says **Mariella**. "In the long run it may be more cost-efficient for them to do it that way."

Companies can also save money on special-order items if they think ahead, she adds.

"We recently designed a trade-show booth for a client," says **Mariella**. "In the past, the client might have discarded it after the show, but in today's economy, companies want to be able to reuse things like this. So we were careful to build the booth in a way that did not incorporate the name, date or

"Y" number of people," says the owner of **Smith Ozman & Joseph's Inc.** in Cherry Hill. "But instead I advise them to start with the basics: what kind of event are you having and what do you want to accomplish? All the logistical answers flow from the answers to those questions."

As an example, she notes, it may appear to be more cost-effective to host a get-together at a restaurant instead of a hotel.

"But depending on the specific event, a hotel may—or may not—provide an atmosphere that's more appropriate," says **Smith-Tann**. "If you've got a lot of peo-

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location of the trade show. This freed it up for future use, saving the client from the time and expense of having to design and pay for a new booth for each show."

Kimberly Smith-Tann frames the issue as price versus value.

"These days companies often start the conversation by saying they have "X" dollars to spend on

ple flying in or otherwise coming some distance, it may be easier to have the event at a hotel so they can just walk to their rooms at the end. But if they're mostly locals, a restaurant might be a better choice. It's all part of knowing what your client wants and what will meet their needs." ■

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