



Melissa Takamatsu

CMP, Owner of Pinetree Meetings & Marketing

Don't skip the request for proposal (RFP).

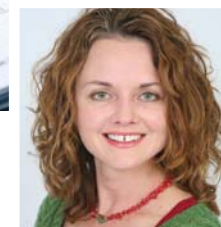
Having a complete meeting RFP helps save time and ensures you get truly comparative pricing. "E-mail or fax your RFP to all your hotel options at once and you get apples-to-apples quotes back," advises Takamatsu. "When I first got started there was no e-mail, so I would call hotel salespeople to give them my meeting specs. Eventually I wised up and faxed them."

Check room capacities.

If you are using rear screen projection, ignore the hotel's stats on how many people fit in the room. "Rear screen takes up an enormous amount of space so figure your seating yourself," she says. And, the veteran planner says, she has learned to "always take 10 percent off the number of people a hotel says it can jam into a room."

Understand hotel revenue sources.

"Hotels make money from heads on beds," she says. "If your meeting is light on sleeping rooms and heavy on meeting space, you have little bargaining strength unless your catering is huge."



Natalie Kennedy

President of event and destination management company, Kennedy Creative

Work backwards.

» With 13 years of event management experience, Kennedy says, "Now I take an approach of starting at the event teardown and working backwards from there to set my timelines."

Be nimble.

» "The Internet has expedited our work. The planning cycle used to be four to six months, but today you can do an event in less than three weeks involving thousands of people." She advises putting a validity date in proposals to ensure you have enough lead time to effectively do the event.

Get referrals.

» When hiring a destination management company (DMC), get referrals from the hotel hosting your group. "It's difficult for suppliers to get on those hotel preferred supplier lists," says Kennedy, whose firm is the oldest DMC in Austin. Ask the DMC for examples of past events. Note how quickly they turn around a proposal; it's a good gauge of their responsiveness. "Look for a DMC that's been in business awhile," she says. "They are the ones who'll be able to make things happen in a pinch when they have to."

Communicate.

» To get the best service, convey your wants and needs professionally. "The hard clients are the ones that are wishy-washy. Be specific and direct in what you want," she says.