

Management and planning of different sized conferences



Globally today, the business events industry is one of the emerging industries which is young and is maturing at a quick pace. The business events industry has seen a growth in the international market, attracting huge investments. Conferences are held to discuss a common idea or a topic of interest. They are also held to create a link between new ideas, development and a marketplace for trade through meetings, incentive travels, conferences and exhibitions (Rogers 2013). According to Silvers (2004 p. 65), ' The professional event coordinator will select a site based on the purpose, role, goals, and objectives of the event, as well as the capabilities, desirability, and safety of the venue or location'. Smart and strategic planning determines the success of an event.

The planning phase is the key for any missteps that can be avoided, lest there are critical repercussions on the organisers. For a small conference spatially, a centrally located hotel in the city would be appropriate. According to Silvers (2004 p. 90), ' The professional event coordinator must identify potential event sites by establishing selection criteria and quantifying spatial requirements'. The hotel should have a large banquet area to hold up to 100-200 delegates. A theatre style setup will be suitable for a small conference, as all seats would be facing towards the guest speaker and maximum seating capacity will be covered. The conference will require four breakout rooms, with banquet style seating, for smaller group activities and discussions. The foyer can be used by 10 exhibitors in spaces of 3x4m. This area can also be used for morning tea and breaks between the sessions. The foyer can also be utilized to display the sessions list for the day and the upcoming session for the following day. Engaging delegates in the foyer is

also important as it gives time and space for the staff to prepare the main banquet area for the upcoming session. Meals are an important part of the conference, hence the hotel selected should have sufficient space in the restaurant or a separate room to cater to sit down meals at designated times. The operational elements must be sequenced well as they indicate the progression or flow of the event (Silvers 2004). For the smooth functioning of a small conference, the venue should be able to accommodate a minimum of 200 delegates, a variety of delicacies, tables and chairs with appropriate napery to differentiate the room set up as mentioned above. The logistics and operational requirements must be anticipated by the professional event coordinator in order to provide appropriate resources to enhance the guest experience (Silvers 2004).

Sound and lighting for the conference should be apt and double checked. A team of technicians should be on standby to cater to mishaps. Requirements such as lapel microphone for speakers and presenters should be present and checked. Audio-visuals, internet access and provision for laptop adapters are a few components that add up to the functionality operational requirements for this type of a conference. Restrooms with utilities and adequate ventilation is a must and should be suitable keeping in mind the number of attendees. Rooms for the attendees will be provided by the hotel selected, since it's a small conference accommodating 200 delegates. Signages should be adequately placed to ensure ease of movement of the delegates. In context to a medium sized conference, the spatial requirements would vary compared to a small conference. A visual walk through will give the professional event coordinator an idea about the spatial requirements (Allen

2009). The choice of location will play an important role to accommodate 1500 delegates, to hold six to eight concurrent sessions over three days and considering spatial requirements for 50 exhibitors. For this kind of an event, a large convention facility will be suitable. Choosing the right kind of location determines the probability of delegates attending the conference.

For the plenary session, a large banquet hall with theatre style set up is appropriate, where all delegates would assemble to listen to the keynote speaker. At a conference, there are usually several concurrent sessions, but the delegate can attend only one session at a time (Silvers 2004). In this scenario, the facility should have six to eight halls set up in classroom style or theatre style to cater to 250 delegates per session. It is also important to have a designated space for the event coordination team to manage the day to day activities. A hall, up to 1600 square meters is suitable for 50 exhibitors. Each shell scheme of 5x5m is suitable for each exhibitor.

Connecting delegates by keeping them engaged with social networking activities help in enhancing the experience overall. This space will also be suitable for delegates for social networking purposes as well. A medium sized conference would particularly have similar operational requirements of that of a small sized conference. Signages directing delegates to different halls in the venue. Also sign such as toilets, emergency exit and information displayed about the events, is a must. Since the event is taking place in a convention centre there would be a lot of outsourced materials. Having a loading and unloading dock is a must for vendors to operate. Variety of food and beverage selections can be set up at different venues, to avoid crowding up of people. Requirements such as light and sound should be checked prior

to the event. To create a certain kind of ambience, lighting is important in such events, as it plays an effective role throughout the event (Allen 2009). Basic requirements such as tables, chairs and display boards to be placed in each of the halls depending upon the number of delegates. Having a team is important that is dedicated towards the success of this event. Hosting a major international conference is undoubted prestige for the host country, and it helps the country to gain credibility and acceptance on the international political stage (Rogers 2013). It is important to keep in mind the initial flow of the event and the overall picture of what that is to be included (Allen 2009). In this scenario, that invites 5000 delegates, several concurrent sessions and a closing gala dinner with an award ceremony, a purpose-built convention centre would be suitable. For this kind of a large-scale event, the convention centre should have a space to accommodate 500 tables in banquet style and a large stage for the plenary session and award function. Several breakout rooms will be essential for sessions and activities.

About 20 breakout rooms will be adequate for 250 delegates per hall for meeting sessions. In addition, an area of 20, 000 square meters is sufficient to host 400 exhibitors and to entertain social networking activities among delegates. It is important that the spatial requirements are carefully planned to avoid mishaps during the event. The operational requirements for an international conference would include the ones mentioned above for a small and medium conference. In addition, there would be more resources that would be outsourced. The accommodation facilities provided would present a good impression to the delegates (Comas & Moscardo 2005). Choosing the right accommodation facility adds to the glamour element at the event.

Since it's a 5-day international event, a shuttle service should be provided to delegates, between the accommodation facility and the convention centre. Providing easy access to the venue is important. A detailed schedule of the flow of the events should be given to each guest attending the conference. Adequate security is an aspect to be looked at, as this kind of an event attracts international participants.

A workforce including volunteers and paid employees are needed to support the event towards its success. This can be outsourced. A team of technicians and engineers are also required to facilitate any technical issue quickly and seamlessly. Social activities and tours need to be planned well in advance via outsourced tourism companies and travel agents. It is important to look at what is fun, new and what the host country has to offer culturally. As these elements such as live performances and sightseeing, enhance guest experience as a wonderful icebreaker (Allen 2009). Business events, such as conferences require dedicated spaces and it is important to always improvise on infrastructure, to provide different experiences to delegates. These events are also aimed at providing educational and business opportunities. Some common aspects of all the above scenarios such as lighting, sound, furnishing and audio-visual requirements are necessary to facilitate these events. These conferences give opportunity to delegates to explore the host city, sightseeing and increasing business networking. In addition, it is important for the professional event coordinator to keep in mind the spatial and operational requirements of such conferences as it shall determine the success of the event. In turn developing new ideas and improvising towards

the experience of invitees, shall help the business events industry to continue to grow globally.