

Strategize Vendor Partnerships to Achieve Best Results

Vendor selection can make or break your event. Vendor service, cost and professionalism dramatically affect how well events run and their overall impact. The process of selecting and negotiating with a vendor requires some finesse.

Jill Moran, CSEP, JSMoran Special Events (Medford, MA), offers the following tips:

- **Don't go in blind.** Ask colleagues whom they use and why. This recon will provide valuable details to help you make an informed decision as you choose your vendors.
- **Set clear expectations.** Let vendors know your expectations up front. Inform them of your client's style. As you tell them what you expect of them, ask what they need from you to be able to operate at their best and meet these expectations.
- **Develop a good list of vendor partners.** Once you find recommended vendors with whom you are satisfied, establish them as ongoing partners for your events. Repeating business with a vendor who understands your needs and has a working relationship with you will make future events smoother.
- **Become their friends.** Understand their challenges and work as a team and partner, not just as a service provider. Put yourself in their shoes to understand what their challenges are and how hard they may have to work to get your job done.
- **Make it a win-win.** If you need to ask for special pricing or favors, strengthen your relationship by including the vendor in projects that aren't deeply discounted or difficult to fulfill. They will be more apt to give you a special favor if they know you will use them for a more lucrative project in the future or have in the past.
- **Always contract.** Handshakes and phone conversations are not enough. Contracts confirm information and clarify expectations. Put everything in writing to solidify plans and costs and provide a reference for all parties involved.
- **Don't forget change orders.** If things change or there is scope creep on the project, be sure to note these.
- **Inspect what you expect.** Don't forget to send an evaluation or a post-event survey to make the process the best it can be. These can shed light on some issues that will improve your own planning process.
- **Say, "Thank you."** Don't underestimate the power of these words. They go a long way!

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Boost Sponsorship Revenue

To increase the number of event sponsors for your organization and increase existing sponsors' level of support, create a ladder of sponsorship opportunities.

Develop a list of all available sponsorship opportunities arranged in least-to-most-expensive order. Each increasing level should obviously include more attractive benefits for the would-be sponsor.

When calling on new prospects, offer less-costly sponsorship opportunities to get them on board with your organization. Invite those with a history of sponsorships to a higher level with more exclusive benefits.

This laddering method will help you add new sponsors and move existing sponsors toward increased levels of support.

Banners, Graphics Enhance Fundraising Theme

Attractive event banners not only announce this is the place, but can be focal points in your theme and decorations.

The trick is to make sure they complement — not conflict with — the overall scheme:

- ❑ **Customize and personalize your banner.** Visit your local sign shop or fast-sign franchise to explore size, material, color and display options. Modern print technology makes it easier than ever to determine exactly what you want with prompt turnaround time and agreeable prices.
- ❑ **Design your own banner online.** Dozens of Web resources have templates to create nearly any type and size banner using interactive tools, or by uploading a complete image you or your graphic artist have designed. Your banner can coordinate seamlessly with your invitations and posters.
- ❑ **Check out banner materials for flexible options.** Imagine the visual impact of a bold banner stretched across the finish line of your race and the winner breaking through it as cameras roll and spectators cheer. Breakaway banners made of Velcro can be used more than once.
- ❑ **Make a light box banner.** Fabric-faced LED light boxes allow you to use a standard flat surface or innovative three-dimensional shapes like cubes or panoramas, and to show your image from edge to edge.
- ❑ **Try floor or sidewalk graphics.** People expect to look up to see a banner, but custom sidewalk graphics can be creative stepping stones to lead guests to the party. Besides being colorful and attractive, they can be made in a wide range of sizes, used indoors or outdoors and provide a non-slip surface.