

## Planning a Corporate Event

With the right preparation, you can pull off a memorable event that will increase your company's profile and reel in new business.

Whether your event is a groundbreaking for a new store, an anniversary gala, an annual employee recognition program, or a glitzy holiday cocktail hour, its success boils down to planning. Winging it risks catastrophe, so don't consider undertaking a special event without resources for the planning process.

The sooner you get started the better, and no event planner would dream of plunging into anything without a detailed timeline.

Model your scheduling after this month-by-month countdown to make sure you've got everything covered.

### Six Months Before

- \* After assessing what type of event you're orchestrating and setting a budget, establish the specific location, date, and time, including associated details such as making deposits to secure the venue or signing contracts.

- \* Break down the event into core components, such as logistics and public relations, and assign tasks to individuals.

- \* Book catering or entertainment and consider your guest list and how guests will be invited.

### Five Months Before

- \* As your event begins to gel, determine the specific program. If you need a master of ceremonies, obtain one.

- \* Hire a video and sound team and a photographer to record the event.

- \* Get public relations material to use for promoting subsequent events, particularly annual ones.

### Three Months Before

- \* Plan your media relations campaign. This is also the time to weigh advertising options and to design collateral such as printed invitations, programs, posters, or fliers.

- \* Tease the event with a save-the-date postcard so invitees can put it on their calendars.

- \* Set a news release strategy.

- \* If a meal or hors d'oeuvres are involved, firm up the menu.

- \* If you have an MC, determine the script content.

### Two Months Before

- \* Have your collateral and news release in hand and ready to go.

- \* Shop your event by preparing calendar announcements or radio spots.

- \* Update your Web site with information about the event, including the time, place, and cost of attending.

### One Month Before

- \* If your event requires decorations and props, make sure you have what you need.

- \* This is prime time for sending out invitations so have a plan for keeping track of responses and for following up with those who have not responded.

- \* Target news release distribution at this time.

### One Week Before

- \* Prepare and distribute a media reminder or media alert and consider an e-mail blast to customers to encourage attendance.

- \* Nail down all the outstanding applicable logistics, such as decorations, props, catering, and entertainment.

- \* Verify and coordinate the program with the MC or main speaker (including the script), volunteers, employees, and dignitaries.

- \* Check in with all service providers.

### Day Before

- \* Organization is the key to success, so keep a checklist of tasks.

- \* Institute systems, such as an alphabetical guest list or a designated spot to distribute outstanding pay to service providers, for a well-run event.

- \* Get decorations, signs, or props onsite.

- \* Test the audio and visual equipment for glitches.

- \* Have a written timeline and agenda for how the special event will unfold and share it with participants.

### Day of Event

- \* Set up the area early and do a dry run from start to finish, tweaking problem areas.

- \* Be ready to roll a full 45 minutes before the event is scheduled and have participants ready 20 minutes before they're on.

- \* Designate a point person to handle any unforeseen problems.

- \* Follow your agenda to stay on track.

- \* Being flexible can help ward off surprises, so be ready to improvise.

- \* Ultimately, your planning pays off now, so enjoy yourself.

### After the Event

- \* You can learn from a post mortem. Sit down with your staff and discuss what worked and what didn't. Take notes and keep them handy for the next event.

- \* File press clippings, video, sound, and photos as well as information on any contractors and organize it for future reference.

- \* Thank those who helped work on the event and your attendees. If the event was a fund-raiser, make sure people know how much money was raised and that their help was instrumental in reaching that goal.