



## Seeing Is Believing

The fundamentals of a site inspection

BY DANA LYNN BERNSTEIN

A thorough site inspection requires preparation, organization, and judgment. It's your chance to familiarize yourself with hotel policies and meeting space. It also helps the convention services manager (CSM) understand your goals and concerns.

Planning for a site inspection begins before you set foot on property. Here's what you should look for, in chronological order.

### General Information

- ✓ Hotel name (get the exact name and spelling for your invitations).
- ✓ Address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses for the sales department.
- ✓ The name of the managers of: sales, banquet, convention services, accounting, setup, and front-desk, as well as the manager on duty and the head concierge.

### Preparation and Groundwork

- ✓ Ask the hotel for references from planners who have held a meeting at the facility within six months with a comparable number of attendees.
- ✓ Does the hotel have any open dates where you can negotiate lower

room rates?

- ✓ Is there a complete meeting package (CMP) rate? Can the group have meal functions separately? Are there special menus to choose from?
- ✓ Send a copy of your program agenda to the hotel sales department, and bring a copy with you. Also send a preliminary audiovisual list, preliminary banquet event order, credit profile, and contract additions. Sending the information in advance lets hotel staffers familiarize themselves with the meeting specifications and flag any concerns.

### During the Site Inspection

- ✓ Be prepared to project the number of attendees you're expecting for sleeping rooms and catering functions.
- ✓ Review the hotel contract and any additions with the hotel staff and try to negotiate face-to-face.
- ✓ Establish and verify the dates, times, and rooms for the meeting, along with the sleeping rooms.
- ✓ Negotiate the date until which the hotel will hold the meeting space, so you are not pressured to sign the contract the minute you return to the office.

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- ✓ Ask to see a meeting in progress.
- ✓ Conversely, also see the meeting room when it is empty, rather than when occupied with another meeting or set up in a different format.
- ✓ Discuss the following with the CSM:

- 1) the time by which the meeting rooms need to be completely set up and ready
- 2) additional provisions to be included in the contract
- 3) the meeting's purpose and objectives
- 4) the attendees' demographics
- 5) the meeting format

- ✓ Use a rating scale—one being the lowest score and five the highest—and evaluate the appearance of the:
  - grounds
  - reception area
  - front-desk personnel
  - lobby
  - hotel's overall appearance
  - ease of check-in and check-out

### General On-Site Questions

- ✓ Is the hotel ADA accessible?
- ✓ How old is the property? When was the last renovation and what exactly was done?
- ✓ Will there be any renovations going on before or during your scheduled meeting?

- ✓ To what address and to whom should the registration boxes be shipped? Ask about restrictions—for example, the hotel will receive only 15 boxes before there is a charge, or boxes can be no more than 100 pounds.
- ✓ Are employees unionized? When does the contract expire and what are the restrictions?
- ✓ Can the hotel provide a welcome desk for the day of the group's arrival? Is there a cost?
- ✓ Is there a weekend package rate for guests staying prior to or after the meeting?
- ✓ Are there any competitors meeting (in the hotel) at the same time as your group?
- ✓ Is signage allowed? Are the reader boards sufficient and in key locations? This will help you determine if extra signage is needed.
- ✓ What are the hours of operation for business services? Fees? Equipment available?

### Meeting Space

- ✓ How wide is the room? Will a screen, podium, and head table all fit?
- ✓ Can it be set up the day before the meeting? (This is mandatory for a morning meeting.)

- ✓ Are there any obstructions, such as chandeliers or pillars, and how will these affect audiovisual needs?
- ✓ Does the room have a light control?
- ✓ Is there a temperature control in the room, or does the engineering department control it?
- ✓ Is a house phone in the room? If so, can the ringer be turned off?
- ✓ Are there air walls separating the rooms (noise factor)?
- ✓ What other functions will be near the room on the meeting date (noise and traffic factor)?
- ✓ How close is the kitchen to the room (noise factor)?
- ✓ Where are the service hallways (noise factor)? Does the hotel staff know not to enter the room during the meeting?
- ✓ Is there a group in the room before you? Can you split audiovisual costs with them?
- ✓ Are the restrooms and public telephones near the room?

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## Come On (line)!

So, everyone is bringing meetings, conventions, and trade shows to the Internet, and now you think it might be time to follow suit. But where do you start? Remember, you're a planner, not a programmer. If you'd like some expert assistance, the following companies can help you build the right online component to your next event.

When Meeting Professionals International (MPI) offered portions of its Professional Education Conference over the Internet, it looked to Broadcast.com ([www.broadcast.com](http://www.broadcast.com)). Broadcast.com provides "streaming media," which is broadcasting audio and/or video programs over the Internet or a company Intranet. RealVoices ([www.realvoices.com](http://www.realvoices.com)) offers streaming media services, too, and worked with the National Speakers Association to broadcast audio portions of its Western Educational Workshop over the World Wide Web.

Eloquent ([www.eloquent.com](http://www.eloquent.com)) is also in the streaming media business, and handles everything from video and audio production to graphics and Web design. Eloquent offers both Web and CD distribution.

E-Conference ([www.e-conference.com](http://www.e-conference.com)) is another supplier of live, multimedia Internet presentations. The Colorado Association for Continuing Medical Laboratory Education used E-Conference to deliver medical training to doctors and laboratory technicians in 20 hospitals and medical centers across the United States.

When the Biotechnology Industry Association wanted to take the technological plunge with its annual meeting, it turned to BlueDot.com ([www.biuedot.com](http://www.biuedot.com)). They created a Web-based messaging system available to registered attendees for the duration of the five-day event via on-site kiosks, and available one month before and after the event via the Internet. The system worked to connect members, attendees, exhibitors, and investors, before, during, and after the event.

Team Tech International ([www.team-tech.com](http://www.team-tech.com)) offers Event Kiosk Solutions, with features like survey research, booth management, lead generation, online registration, session scheduler, and on-site e-mail in a Web interface.

— Cynthia Kadlec

