



Sustainability

by Brian Miller, Ed.D.

“Greening” your hotel’s meetings

Another great article from *The Rooms Chronicle*® the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com

Notice: The ideas, opinions, recommendations, and interpretations presented herein are those of the author(s). The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University/The Rooms Chronicle® assume no responsibility for the validity of claims in items reported.

If you have been following this column you should clearly understand that we take seriously hoteliers’ commitments to making their operations more sustainable. In the work that we do, we are beginning to see a shift in the market place that the consumer is becoming more aware of the ways that hospitality operations work against sustainable practices. This shift toward sustainability driven by the consumer is possibly the strongest with the meetings and events’ consumer. This column will focus on strategies that hotel managers can implement to make their in-house meetings with staff and the meetings held in their hotel by guests more environmentally friendly.

Meetings with staff

Internal meetings with staff are a necessary evil. Nobody enjoys all of the meetings that are scheduled throughout the week to make sure that operations are running smoothly, but if they are managed properly they can provide a forum to discuss items that are critical to the success of the services provided to the hotel’s guests. There is a plethora of books and anecdotes parlaying factors that lead to successful meetings; however, there is a dearth of content focused on making such meetings more sustainable. The following are tips that should be implemented when holding internal meetings.

Reducing paper: Email the meeting agendas and minutes in advance to all staff who are expected to attend. Operational managers need to constantly be diligent to reduce the amount of copies that are produced in their hotels. In hotels, I often find that meeting agendas are copied and distributed before the meeting and then recopied for the meeting. If someone needs a hard copy of the meeting’s agenda, they should be expected to print up and bring their own hard copy. Send meeting related information out to staff members via email or through the use of a scheduling software tool such as Google Applications. Today’s smart phones make it easy for managers to keep their schedules up to date on their phones and to have easy access so they can view and take notes using MS Word file types.

Reducing water: Require that internal meetings forgo including the standard meeting set-ups that are prepared for your guests’ meetings. Have room sets without the tablecloths, skirting, water pitchers/bottles, and other amenities such as pads, pens, candies etc. I know that many staff like to feel pampered and enjoy having meetings in the same type of environments that the guests they serve enjoy, but managers should look for other opportunities to make their employees feel important. Consider employee rewards and recognition programs that can be funded through the cost savings achieved by not utilizing such meeting room amenities for internal gatherings.

Reducing CO² emissions: Provide opportunities for employees who are off property to participate in staff meetings virtually, using Skype or other virtual meeting software instead of requiring the team member to make the drive into the hotel only for a meeting. If appropriate, always include a discussion of the hotel sustainability initiatives and successes as an agenda item at each meeting. This will keep up the awareness in the staff as to how they are contributing to the hotel’s success in operating a more sustainable hotel.

Meetings conducted by guests

As already mentioned, professional meeting planners are beginning to “GET IT” when it comes to hosting sustainable meetings. Initially, planning environmentally responsible meetings



does take more time, and “doing something” is better than doing nothing. Hotels can add significant value to the planning process when they are driving the sustainability train. The following are a few ideas to get you started in the right direction.

Meeting Set-up: Rethink the standard set-up procedures for your guests’ meetings.

- Use minimal packaging in food and beverage presentations.
- Look for opportunities to minimize the use of linens that need to be replaced after every meeting, such as purchasing tables with interesting metal designed tops or using dark colored spandex overlays.
- Set-up creative water stations instead of using individual pitchers, or worse, plastic water bottles. With the money saved for labor to refresh the meetings you may be able to give meeting participants a reusable water bottle with your hotel’s logo.
- Replace older A/V equipment with more energy efficient models. Train staff to monitor rooms to shut off electricity to equipment as soon as the room is no longer in use.
- Equip meeting rooms with white boards with dry erasable pens to eliminate the need to provide flip charts as a standard meeting room amenity.
- Purchase LCD display screens to display meeting information and location in public areas to reduce the amount of signs that are produced for a single event.
- Place recycle containers in each guestroom for paper, soda cans and bottles.



Sustainable Techniques in Selling, Organizing, and Servicing Meetings:

- Prepare all communication documents to be distributed electronically. Look for opportunities to limit the number of hard copies that need to be printed.
- Prepare and provide material to educate employees and guests on methods they can implement to reduce the impact their meetings have on the environment.

For more ideas in “greening” your meetings, contact the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) to request a green meeting checklist, or visit the PCMA Green Meetings webpage at:

<http://www.pcma.org/Resources/Meeting-Management-Resources/Green-Meetings.htm>. ✧

(Dr. Brian Miller is an associate professor of hospitality information technology in the Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management at the University of Delaware. For more information on how to implement sustainable business practices throughout your lodging operations, contact Brian at blm@udel.edu.)