Quality control in events management

By Beaulah du Toit , issued by Litha Communications

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As November is International Quality Control month, it is appropriate to review the steps needed to maintain consistent quality in events management. Quality is achieved through project management principles that are the hallmark of successful events.

The classic project management triangle (see below) clearly indicates that failure or reduction of any one of the factors of scope, time and cost compromises quality. To reduce this risk, attention must be paid to each one of these factors at the beginning of the events management project.

Scope

The majority of projects suffer from scope 'creep' and this not only affects the quality but also can severely influence the cost of an event. To reduce this, the scope of the event must be clearly defined at the onset of the project. The client's brief is the single most important document in events management, yet too often, it is not clearly articulated or even recorded.

Part of this can relate to the client's vague terms of reference or brief – most people simply see the polished delivery of a first-class event, without being aware of the amount of effort required to produce such an event, similar to an audience's unawareness of the backstage of a theatre production. Part of this can also be attributed to a failure on the part of the events manager to elicitate all aspects of an event, according to an established project plan.

At this stage, the events manager can advise the client on programme constraints, financial risks and implications, price dynamics and risk management factors that will add to costs. The element of availability and time constraints of people and material can be fully explored upfront.

Time

Internationally, events are planned anywhere from one to four years in advance and this allows for better pricing deals and extensive Gantt charts, detailing every aspect of the event. However, events are often suddenly required – because of a need to use up allocated budget or because the client has realised, quite far into the project, that professional help is required.

When time is squeezed, it can become difficult to produce a quality event. The most appropriate venue may not be available; the top entertainers may be booked; the keynote speaker in the subject may be unobtainable, etc. Professional events managers can work around short project cycles but this affects costs, if the quality is to be maintained.

Cost

Poor budgeting is one of the key reasons why events fail to reach the expected quality.

A major misconception about events management costs is that an event can pay for itself at its conclusion or that 'free' events only need be settled 30 days after the event. However, most venues require at least 50% deposit for a booking, as do the secondary suppliers of food, drinks, audiovisual equipment and entertainers. Without these deposits, no event can be guaranteed.

This requires the events management company to create a payment plan, where tranches are made according to project phases. This can only be done if there is an official signed order and an understanding that this 'banking' privilege carries additional costs, as the events management company is at risk for several months leading up to the events and possibly another 60 days later.

Conclusion

A winning event is the combination of a professional events management team, fully versed in all aspects of project management, and the knowledgeable client, who understands that events require expert input to achieve winning outputs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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