



Working with your Destination

HOW EVENT PLANNERS WORK
HAND-IN-HAND WITH
CVB REPRESENTATIVES TO
CREATE A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

By Tamara Muldoon

In the meetings industry, few relationships are as vital to the success of an event as the one between the meeting planner and the convention and visitors bureau (CVB) or destination marketing organization (DMO). Planners rely on CVBs for many services, such as helping them choose a destination, selecting hotel and meeting venues, sourcing vendors, suggesting activities and even marketing.

The role of convention salespeople at CVBs is not just to convince planners to bring an event to their city but also to ensure that the event is successful and benefits attendees as well as the community.

HOW CVBS BENEFIT PLANNERS

"Working with CVBs benefits meeting planners such as myself," says Amanda Tran, senior vice president of the Washington State Dental Association. "We depend on them to help promote the value of our meeting to the community and leverage their community relationships on behalf of our event. The service they provide is almost like an extension of staff."

Tran uses CVBs for help with the RFP process,

vendor referrals and assistance with logistical planning. "They know the city and have tremendous resources for meeting planners. Collaborating with a CVB ultimately helps in achieving my goals and objectives for our meeting," she adds.

For Jane Kantor, CMP, director of sales for Visit Bellevue Washington, the key is in understanding what the group's objectives are for the meeting. "Whether it's their annual meeting, whether it is focused on a particular topic or if they are looking for some networking; we then figure out how we

can marry up the resources in our area to help them achieve that."

"We try to tailor it to their goals and objectives," says Kantor. "We take the experience that we have working with a variety of planners, and we try to apply the best practices to that particular thing. Because we know our destination well and the capabilities of our destination, we're able to troubleshoot or make suggestions."

Jennifer Tucker, CMP, Meeting Manager for Nlets utilizes CVBs to source hotels and vendors, for assisting in planning fun activities at the destination for delegates and their families, and for providing information that helps her negotiate hotel rates. Nlets, the interstate justice and public safety network, is a Phoenix, Arizona-based non-profit organization that supports law enforcement data sharing. It conducts around 10 meetings per year across the U.S. and Canada.

Tucker notes, "Typically we look for a hotel that has everything we need. We have a pretty large footprint when it comes to meeting rooms, so we



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have a friend when trouble hits. It's so good when you have somebody who can come to your rescue."

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Developing a good working relationship is just as important for CVBs as for meeting planners. All else being equal, a planner would rather do business with someone that they know and trust.

"At the end of the day in this industry, it is about the relationships. I know that sounds very trite, but I don't think it's ever been more true than what it is

Tips from the pros

"Make sure to work with DMOs, establish a good rapport, keep them informed, and you'll have a good relationship."

ALEX DOYLE, *21st Century Group*

"I have created really great relationships with CVBs when I do site visits with them, where they work with me in helping get appointments lined up and making suggestions on who I should meet while I'm in town."

JENNIFER TUCKER, *Nlets*

"Stay in contact with your sales manager about your meeting, what other resources are available, any potential issues that may come up in the city that could cause a delay or challenges to your meeting."

AMANDA TRAN, *Washington State Dental Association*

"We try to let [planners] know that we care about them even when they're not in town, particularly if for some reason we're not selected. The reality of it is, meeting planners move around, and I may not book you right now, but you may be with another group next year."

MICHAEL SMITH, *Travel Portland*

"Communicating early, often, and openly really makes a difference."

JANE KANTOR, *Visit Bellevue Washington*

"Be an advocate for your client and stay in touch regularly. "We don't just book the business and then move on; we really do stay in touch with our clients. That's part of our strength. We make friends along the way because we are so passionate and care so much about this community, and I think that shows."

TERRY KOPP, *Boise Convention & Visitors Bureau*

utilize [CVBs] to figure out who fits into that category of what we need."

Alex Doyle, CMP, vice president of sales at 21st Century Group works closely with destination marketing organizations. "Our DMO partners are really good at helping us analyze the needs of the organization we're working for and providing the best solution. We also use other services that they have as well - attendance builders and other marketing tools. Those are really quite helpful to us."

As a consulting firm that works with organizations holding multiple meetings per year, 21st Century Group helps clients manage the RFP process, works to match the organization's needs to the right destination and venue and then negotiates contracts on the client's behalf.

Doyle believes in the value of DMOs, especially if something goes wrong. "There have been a couple of occasions, and these are very rare, where we've had an issue in the destination and the DMO was successful at helping us get it straightened out. You

today," says Michael Smith, CDMP, vice president of convention sales at Travel Portland. "Planners have a ton of options out there these days. Competition for meeting space is really intense."

Smith is a proponent of open, honest, candid conversation. "We need to know from the get-go what the expectations are from the planner. They need to be very open with us in terms of what is really important to their organization. We're the meeting planner's advocate here in Portland. The more open we are with each other, the smoother it goes."

"As you work with these people, you develop a relationship; they become friends. You never, ever want to let your friends down. Their events have to be successful, so that puts a bit of burden and onus on us to make sure to do everything we can do to ensure that they've got the best chance of success," he adds.


Terry Kopp, director of sales at Boise Convention & Visitors Bureau agrees. "It is all about relationships," she says. "What I try to do is get to know [meeting planners], what their needs are and how they like to work. My job is to let them know they can trust me, that I will represent the entire city so they don't have to do all of those phone calls and chasing all that information. My clients know that they can call me with whatever their needs are and that I'll do everything in my power to make sure that they look very good for the meeting," adds Kopp.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Tucker finds that all CVBs are not equal when it comes to their value. "In certain areas they're limited in what they provide, and I think that's probably dependent on their funding. The areas that have good funding sources for their CVBs tend to meet my needs a lot better. Some are doing a great job; I don't think there is anything that they could do better. Others, they just lack in having knowledge and being available to share it."

Tran would like CVBs to provide more marketing resources and "help us by providing better marketing collateral. This includes digital marketing like social media, and ideas or marketing campaigns that can help increase attendance. They know the city best and we want them to help build our meeting attendance and create a memorable experience."

"Every now and again there will be a lack of follow-up for whatever reason," says Doyle, adding that problems are rare. "Everybody makes a mistake. Any good DMO will always perform, even if they drop the ball initially. They understand, they know their destination, they know their venues, and they're really good partners in that regard, steering us in the right direction."

On the CVB side, one of the frequent challenges is a short timeline for an RFP request. Kantor explains. "Sometimes time is the enemy for both of us. For example, if we receive an RFP request for 2018, and they want the RFP back to them in a couple of days, sometimes it's difficult for us to line up all of the meeting space that they need, and all the hotels and venues all together in a comprehensive piece. I think being able to understand that there are going to be tight turns, and to make our proposal as comprehensive as possible and to not assume what they're looking for, but certainly lend our expertise." 



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