

25 THINGS

Every Meeting Planner Should Know



Getting Savvy About Audiovisual Technologies

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Audiovisual technology is a necessity for today's meetings. So it's more important than ever for meeting planners to select a facility that allows audiovisual to be used to its fullest potential.

Here are a few suggestions to make you a savvy meeting planner the next time you meet with your hotel sales staff, rental and staging pro, or show producer.

What to Know or Do Ahead of Time

1. Share Your Meeting Goals

Your AV provider has a better chance of fulfilling the vision you have for your meeting, if he or she knows your goal for the event and the environment. This will help your AV provider come up with a proposal in line with your expectations and hopefully exceeding them. Is the event formal, celebratory, politically sensitive or proprietary? For example, if material is proprietary, there may be a need to encrypt the microphones, recordings and streaming.

2. Look Before You Sign

Look through any venue contract carefully before you sign it. One of the contract clauses a planner should look for is whether or not there is a restriction or a penalty (to the client) on using an outside AV vendor versus the on-property preferred provider. Such clauses can often be negotiated out of any agreement. It is also a good idea to verify the exclusivity of using an outside provider. There is nothing wrong with healthy competition — ask for bids from both the in-house provider and your external preferred vendors. An AV provider may be in-house at one venue and external at another.

3. Consult an AV Professional Before You Sign

Before signing a contract with a venue, ask for the advice of an AV professional, whether it's the in-house AV provider or an outside provider you know. This will give you some insight into any known issues about doing a meeting or event in a particular venue (e.g., power availability, sightlines, chandeliers). Remember: Making smart and informed decisions about AV issues should become a partnership with a common goal — to make THE CLIENT look good!

4. Know the AV Budget and Divulge It

Be upfront about your AV budget, so a bidding company knows the number to hit in order to be considered or just to make the first cut. Also, divulge what other standard parameters must be met to be considered, such as whether or not the AV company must be green, if live streaming will be required or other must-haves. Some vendors may be able to tell that a particular event or meeting is not for them, saving time for both parties.

5. Determine Gear Before Choosing the Site

An AV provider can help you determine what kind of gear is needed to meet your goals, to make a proper judgment of the room or look for a different one. A good portion of the success of a meeting or event is going to depend on whether or not the AV requirements of the presenters have been met. The chosen space may be a huge factor in it.

6. Ask About Billing Ahead of Time

You will want to know how the final event will be billed, including equipment, service charges and taxes, so there are no surprises at the end of a successful event. Have the billing conversation before the event takes place.

Selecting the Venue

7. Why Ceiling Matters, TRUE Ceiling Height

Ideally, you will take your AV provider with you to check out a venue and look for obvious architectural issues — columns, built-in stages, chandelier placement and height, power location and capacity, sprinkler heads and track lighting. This all determines equipment needs and limitations. If your screens or presenters are going to be blocked from full view by the audience by any of these items, it may be time to discuss alternatives.

8. What About Rigging?

Are there house regulations to mount the lighting you'll want for your event? More and more, the host venue mandates certain services as exclusive — rigging, power, high-speed Internet access (HSIA) — and will then leverage the price for those services in favor of the in-house AV provider. Some venues prohibit rigging all together, so double check that rigging can be accommodated. Or suggest alternatives to your client.

9. Load-In Matters

AV gear is big and heavy. So it's a good idea to know if a truck can pull up to the venue, if there's a loading dock or not, whether there's a freight elevator or only a shared elevator with hotel staff, and what the available times are for load-in and load-out. Be aware of the path from loading dock to the meeting or event space — are there ramps, what are the corridor sizes, are there alternate route options? Even one stairwell could increase time and possibly cost.

10. HVAC and Audio Patches

An AV provider needs to know what the facilities' HVAC policies are, when AC or heat will be turned on or off, and who controls it. Some equipment-intensive meetings may require guaranteed overnight temperatures. Conversely, some properties kill all power overnight in the spirit of conserving energy. How noisy are air handlers? This affects the quality of the meeting in progress.

11. House Sound

If there is a house sound system, does it work? How good is it? Can it be tied into and zone-controlled? You may want an alternative sound system which will cost extra or may come with restrictions. House sound is really only adequate for speakers, not if using music, videos.

12. Other Meetings or Events

Ask about other events held in rooms adjacent to yours. Will there be any move-in or operational restrictions as a result? Will there be conflicts regarding noise, power or Internet access with a meeting or event in adjacent ballroom?

13. Ambient Lighting

Discover any challenges with windows, doors and ambient light. Are there blackout curtains? Ambient light can degrade the impact of a presentation. Draping may be needed which an AV provider can rent and set up, but make sure to ask for any additional costs associated with this.

14. In-House Lift or Ladders

You'll want to know ahead of time if there are lifts or ladders on the property, whether they can be used, what the charge is, if any, or does the AV provider bring in its own? Is the lift capable of being brought into the room — is there an elevator large enough to fit the lift and are the hallways wide enough?

15. Storage and Security

Is there storage on property for empty cases and back-up gear? Are overnight security or other arrangements in place to ensure safety of equipment? Double check on the security of both the storage room and the event room.

What Else Goes into the AV Time and Costs?

16. Prepare Presenters

Your AV provider will want to know the preferred presentation style and materials to budget and plan accordingly. Providers ask if the presenter is using Keynote or PowerPoint, video rolls, audio spots or needs an Internet connection. It is important for the AV provider to know all of this ahead of time to ensure that all of the equipment works with each presenter's material. High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection laws are making it increasingly difficult to show videos and share other documents, but the AV provider can ensure that all materials are presented flawlessly if the provider is aware of them ahead of time. Many meetings set up a separate presenter room so that the AV technician can make any last minute adjustments and to ensure all presentations run smoothly.

17. Do You Need Rehearsal Time? How Much?

Discuss whether you require rehearsal time and how much. This will impact additional time and dollars for room rental and staffing. And working after hours can greatly impact labor charges, even more so when working in a union venue.

18. What is the Room Setup Preference

Theater? Classroom? Will the room change setups during a multiday run? Can the room accommodate one or more screens that can be viewed from all angles, space for a technician/camera platform, enough seating for the size of the audience expected, and enough space for in-room food service? How many people can the room truly accommodate without affecting the attendees' experience? This involves time to reset a room and could affect the meeting schedule and can add to cost.

19. Live Event With Streaming?

Will you need to record or live-stream any of the meeting proceedings? The AV provider can determine the type of media needed for capture. Is this event being recorded? If so, the AV provider can arrange for media recording and capture equipment, and setup.

20. Bandwidth and Internet Access/Usage

Ask the venue how much bandwidth can be accommodated, as well as how much will be dedicated specifically to your event and at what cost. How many other events will be using the bandwidth simultaneously? This can greatly affect the quality of your streaming events. This is usually a very negotiable item.

21. Adequate Power

Is there enough power or will a generator be needed? And are power drops available or only wall outlets? These are especially critical in older buildings or with events that will require large power consumption. What are the associated costs with additional power and how are costs calculated?

22. Room Access

For complicated technology meetings, it's critical to know if there's guaranteed access 24-hours in advance, as well as the guaranteed tear-down time allotment and what the additional costs for that access will be.

23. Stage Risers

Do you need a riser for the audience to see the presenters? If so, what dimensions for the stage will work? What is the available inventory of stage risers in-house? What size are the venue's risers (they vary)? Can they be guaranteed (by contract) for your exclusive use? Will risers meet your needs or do you need staging? If you will be holding a band or multiple people on the riser, staging may be needed. Will you need one level or multiple levels of risers?

24. Lighting Control

Is there an in-room control panel for lighting? Are there house light remotes that can be left at the tech table? Is there a house lighting grid? If so, is there a charge to use it? Can you patch in a single DMX or RDM control and is there an additional cost?

Perhaps Most importantly...

25. Don't be Afraid to Ask!

If there are any technical terms, equipment needs, or anything else that just doesn't make sense or you're not familiar with, always ask your AV team. You will never be faulted for asking the important questions, and this will help you get the best service possible!

