CASE STUDY: HOW TO PLAN A SUCCESSFUL EVENT IN LESS THAN A WEEK

BACKGROUND

Ink Link Marketing was brought in on a Friday to assist with a live viewing party for a national television show the following week. The only element that was already booked by the client was the venue, a country club. Ink Link was responsible for planning and executing the rest of the aspects of the party in under a week.

STRATEGY

Having a venue booked with a reliable and helpful contact is key to a successful event. Since the venue was full-service, they were able to provide the event space, food, drinks, staff and audiovisual equipment. With those elements in place, we moved quickly to brainstorm ideas, contact local vendors and confirm all other aspects of the event.

TACTICS

• We were familiar with the area where the event was being held, so we knew what local vendors to use. If no local vendors are known, start by asking the venue for their preferred vendor list. They should be able to provide reliable contacts that are familiar with the location, the event space and the on-site coordinator. If the venue cannot provide such information, start with one vendor and ask for recommendations, or go on a wedding review site like www.theKnot.com or www.WeddingBee.com to find testimonials. Especially when in an unfamiliar market, relying on word-of-mouth recommendations from trusted sources will help the search for vendors.

• We spent a few hours brainstorming ideas for the following items: cake, signature drinks, party favors and giveaways, floral centerpieces, balloon art and entertainment. We found examples and images that represented what we wanted to be replicated. In some cases, like flowers and balloons, we went right to the vendor's website to find something they have already made that was similar to what we envisioned. Since the vendor had already made the exact product before, it was easy for them to confirm availability and provide a
price quote, which saved time. Just because we were rushed, we did not want the event to seem that way. Creating themed drinks, decorations, party favors and entertainment that tied back to the central purpose of the event were critical to this party’s success.

- Not only were we able to execute the event in such short time, we kept the costs low. Signature drinks were designed from ingredients already on the bar, and the printed menu was created using Microsoft Publisher on our own printer and put in low-cost frames. Temporary tattoos, which were stuffed in each goodie bag, cost fewer than 25 cents each, and mustache drink straws were only 34 cents apiece. The balloon centerpieces were created for height rather than volume, to create a low-cost, high-impact look to plus up the television screens. The cake was meant to be not only a delicious dessert, but a large decoration for the room and a conversation starter for guests. Further, by using local vendors only, delivery costs were kept reasonable. Each of these elements, designed artfully but executed without waste, played an integral role in the overall look of the party.
• We created a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel that contained each element of the party and the status, the next steps, who on our team was responsible for the task, the cost, the vendor name and notes. This grid was the basis of information for the entire party and was consistently updated throughout the planning process, providing both Ink Link and the client a snapshot of the event.

• Since many events are held on the weekends, vendors typically work on Saturdays and are out of the office on Mondays. Waiting until Monday to contact each vendor for the first time could have been a critical mistake. Instead, we called each of them on Saturday, when we knew they would be open. After making initial contact, we followed up on Tuesday morning when all were back in their offices. By knowing the typical hours that event professionals work, and being sensitive of that time, we were able to get ahead rather than fall behind over the weekend.

• We kept in contact with our on-site coordinator. We received the room layout to envision setup and the BEO (banquet event order) form to review food and beverage options. In addition, we went through the entire event in chronological order to make sure all details were covered, from timing of the champagne toast to the color of the napkins to how many additional tables were needed for vendor setup. When the guest count increased suddenly by 40%, we notified the country club immediately so they would have adequate time to revise the floor plan, increase food inventory and schedule additional staff.

• In an effort to simplify, we ordered as many items as possible from the same vendors. Items that could not be purchased from a local vendor were ordered from www.Amazon.com using 2-day shipping to ensure arrival before we left for the event. No detail was spared; we even planned ahead to reserve scissors from the venue given that our team could not pack a pair on the plane to the event.

• We kept a folder with all of our event information on hand. The folder contained the floor plan, BEO, contact information and addresses for all vendors, copies of all invoices and receipts of payment, and the most updated party grid. We were able to find any information we could possibly need within that folder, saving time from digging through emails and notes.

• We followed up with all vendors the day before to make sure they had everything necessary to fulfill their order, and confirmed all delivery times for a half hour before we planned to arrive. We also created an internal plan for exactly what needed to be done when we arrived at the venue to set up for the party. Having a game plan was very important to maximize our time and efficiency the evening of the event.
RESULTS

In planning an event, it is important to remember the purpose of the party. In this case, the purpose was to show the television program live. Therefore, the most important aspect of the party was that televisions and audio would be able to stream the show live and for everyone to see. Although it was an added bonus that we were able to throw in special touches along the way, it was absolutely critical that the main purpose of the event was fulfilled.

The key to planning any event, especially in a short amount of time, is to stay organized and to anticipate all outcomes. By keeping a thorough record of all communications with vendors and having contact information readily on hand at all times, we were able to reference any issue that came up. Further, anticipating any potential problems and proactively preparing for them was very important. Although the country club assured us that they would be able to play a DVD we were to provide, we still purchased a backup DVD player and laptop cord in case of emergency. We also had backup vendors on dial in case our preferred local vendors were unable to provide their services.

With the backing of a trusted venue and reliable local vendors, the event was a huge success. Through detailed planning and communication with all vendors and with the client, everyone involved stayed on the same page. We were prepared by having all materials and contact information on hand. By scheduling deliveries before we arrived, we only needed an hour and a half to completely set up before the event began, allowing us to finish on time and offer a seamless display to guests.