

Industry Essentials

Transportation Drives Successful Events

By Catherine Chaulet

Time-pressed and budget-conscious meeting planners and executives increasingly are turning to experts in group transportation for help. That's because the success of any event extends well beyond a venue and the complex logistics involved — the food and entertainment, the theme and



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multimedia. Transportation sets the tone. It either primes your guests for a great time or creates so much aggravation that not even the most luxurious property or state-of-the-art convention center can make up for it. After an event, transportation can be a welcome finishing touch or a bad last impression that tarnishes the entire affair.

BostonCoach, a global provider of transportation services, conducted research that revealed that 70 percent of attendees at industry events and meetings harbor negative feelings about those events in large part because of their

travel experience. As one of the 129 respondents in the online survey put it, "I stress about the logistics to attend the event, the planning to be away from home, how to get to the event and back again."

While a slight majority of those surveyed, 55 percent, do love the excitement of conferences and meetings and the prospect of networking and learning new things, the logistics of traveling and the mounting work awaiting their return at the office overshadow their overall assessment of events. In one respondent's words, these negatives made them feel that the business trip was "not worth their time."

One solution: Work with transportation partners who help create a stress-free experience from the moment attendees leave for an event or meeting. In addition to the downside of being out of the office and away from home, 30 percent of attendees are passionately or partially negative about business travel, with hassles in the air and on the ground, and with what they perceive to be a loss of control. Business travelers who attend events want to feel that it was worth the trip, but some don't, because their most passionate needs aren't being met.

For very senior executives on a tightly scheduled road show to meet with investors, that may mean a higher level of service than that retained for mid-level managers on the move. Such service can translate into a business-class van outfitted for comfort and productivity with a conference table and presentation screens and include access to a specially trained client service team assigned to manage that carefully choreographed trip.



Five-point Checklist For Success

Meeting those needs of attendees aligns well with

planners' needs to focus on strategic business goals. By entrusting transportation delivery and management to a partner, a planner is freed up to spend more time on big-picture issues.

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To select the right transportation partner and redefine success for you and your organization:

1. Think about more than vehicles.

A great transportation partner must provide more than cars and drivers: It must be able to handle complete transportation management and delivery. While a door-to-door pickup and drop-off certainly makes an impression, additional services such as airport greeters and luggage handling give your attendees the high-touch treatment they deserve. For example, transportation management of a company golf tournament should include a daily briefing of supervisors and coordinators, who through their interactions with spectators, function as ambassadors at the event since they are often among the first event staff that spectators meet. The staff can help spectators navigate not just the course but their day at the tournament.

2. Expect the unexpected.

Transportation is one of the more challenging aspects of an event. Ask your transportation partner about contingency plans for everything from the weather to security emergencies to traffic to special needs or VIP requests that can require a change in plans. Select a partner with a proven ability to respond to whatever issues surface. In working with a destination management company that produces many sales-incentive events, we faced sudden bad weather, which upended the travel plans of many arriving attendees. To accommodate a spate of real-time changes, we staged additional vehicles on site along with a coordinator to manage the shifting transportation needs of dozens of attendees.

3. Make safety a priority.

Work with a partner that considers the safety of your guests of utmost importance. Vehicles should be impeccably maintained and drivers well-trained. If your partner isn't providing you with details about its safety policies and training program, ask for them. Our Coach College training program, which exceeds the requirements set by the National Limousine Association, is one piece of a multifaceted curriculum that also includes The Smith System Driver Improvement Training, a proven method of accident prevention that has been successfully employed for more than 40 years.

4. Make it easy on yourself.

Work with a partner with an international presence. Not only will that provide you with the peace of mind that all your guests are getting the same level of quality service, you'll have one contract, one invoice, one of everything to deal with instead of a patchwork quilt of paperwork and service delivery standards.

5. Plan ahead. Share information.

Simply sharing the dates, locations and estimated number of expected guests is helpful. Doing so doesn't commit you to anything, but it does help your partner highlight issues that should be considered ahead of time. Planning early can help you avoid resource issues, lock in preferential

pricing and secure the best of the best in personnel and vehicles. Waiting until the end of August to book transportation in New England during peak foliage season may strain your budget and limit your options.

That doesn't mean, of course, that just-in-time transportation planning and delivery can't happen. The transportation partner should be flexible enough to make it happen. Imagine a scenario in which a meeting planner calls on a Friday to arrange transportation for 100 people arriving the following Monday morning. By being flexible in arranging some group, instead of individual, pickups and being open to utilizing different kinds of vehicles, the planner gets her attendees where they need to be, on time, in 30 different rides.

There are so many things that can go wrong with an industry event or intricately choreographed meeting, that relying on a company to help you manage the complex logistics of ground transportation is paramount. After all, an event with attendees who either don't arrive or show up in an ill-tempered mood has failure written all over it.

Get the consultative and hands-on support you need, and create a great experience that transports guests, in every sense of the word, and makes the journey worth the trip. **C&IT**