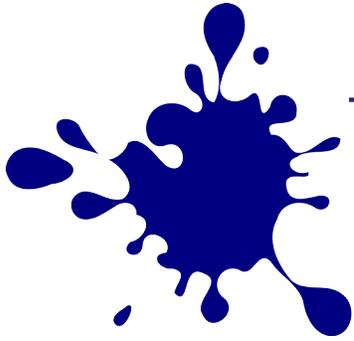


Choice of location can have a significant impact on both the nature of the presentation and the budget



finding **the Perfect Spot**

often the biggest shortfalls are hidden

Everyone wants attractive space but, from an operational perspective, all attractive space is not equally attractive.

HOW MUCH SPACE IS REQUIRED?

Short answer, it depends.

If your event is a formal presentation, theatre style, you can get by with .75 sq/m per person (*pp*) plus a 25% circulation factor. Keep in mind that the platform/screen setup for rear-screen projection typically consumes about 1/3 of the available space. For a 'meet and mingle' the 'pp' allocation jumps to 3.5 sq/m plus a 10% circulation factor.

These are minimums.

The budget allocation for most events is established well before requirements have been considered in any detail. With a cap on available resources already in place, it is important to accurately define the goals of the event and then find the best ways to achieve those results. This applies equally to internal meetings, corporate celebrations and public events. There are no end of exciting things that can be done but which excitement best supports the stated goals.

A good location promotes the overall event goals and supports communication. A poor location burdens the presentation with needless operational challenges and expense. What makes one location good and another poor are things that often seem insignificant to those contracting the space, and it is not in the best interest of those selling space to point them out.

HOTEL SPACE

One very important but rarely considered factor is accessibility; in this case not for people but rather the technical elements of the presentation. You can hold an event almost anywhere and the sound, lights, screens and staging will get there, but in a location

with poor accessibility the cost of getting equipment to the room subtracts directly from what will be on stage.

Locations with poor accessibility include places without loading docks, places requiring elevator access, places with excessive or circuitous access routes from the loading door, places with stairs and locations with clogged service corridors or a path that goes through a busy kitchen.

Such places are not hard to find. One large downtown Toronto hotel requires production elements as well as victuals to go down to the sub-basement via a small freight elevator, through a series



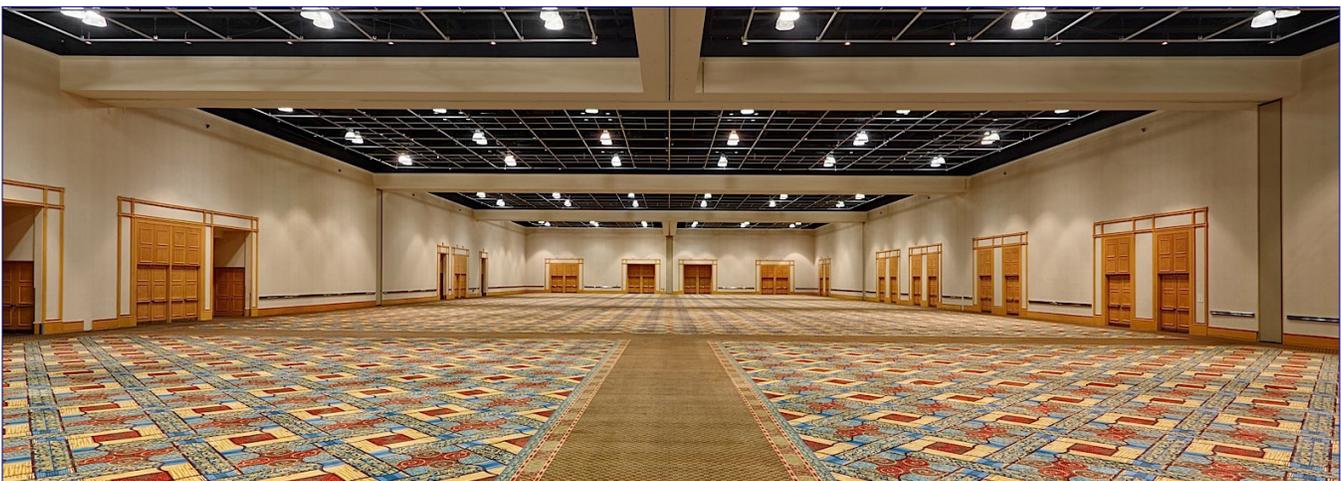
of congested corridors to a second slightly larger freight elevator that goes three floors up to the convention floor. Needless to say, this costs you money.

Exclusive services and labour affiliations, covered in greater detail in the next section, are starting to find their way into hotel meeting space and the reason is simple.

Exclusive, in-house and preferred suppliers pay 'commission' to the venue, typically ranging between 25% and 40%. More often than not this burden is a surcharge added directly to the regular rates. Some hotels now engage in the arguably deceptive practice of hiding 'exclusivity' clauses in the text of their rental agreements.

Another insidious practice of late is the 'landmark' fee. This takes the form of a percentage surcharge, typically between 15% and 25%, ostensibly because the facility has some perceived cultural or historic significance. In most cases it is simply increased rent.

Caveat emptor!



CONVENTION AND CONGRESS SPACE

Sometimes the size or nature of an event requires more space than is available at a hotel. For this, convention and congress facilities can be a good alternative. These vendors normally retain exclusive jurisdiction over several components, such as labour, rigging, material handling, internet and telephone connections, electrical and hospitality, and possibly other things. They may also have restrictions on recording rights and advertising. Unlike the hotel space rentals mentioned above, exclusivities at convention facilities are usually clearly stated and generally exist for safety reasons or because the functions involved can be difficult for many clients to source.

In a convention centre most things are *à la carte*. Little comes with the rental cost other than the space itself. They may include tables and chairs, and in some cases platforms, but it is always a good practice to define in detail what is included before committing. In most cases the event will not occupy the entire facility so it is also good to confirm with the sales department that a competitive brand or industry is not in an adjacent space. Convention facilities do their best to avoid such conflicts but sometimes they are unaware of particular sensitivities.

SPECIALTY SPACE

Sometimes an event seems to demand themed or specialty space. This is particularly true for media events; a factory floor for a product launch or operating theatre for a medical announcement. While the tie-in is completely obvious for organizers, the relevance of themed space is often completely missed by the audience who notice only the proceedings. Worse, having the event in a space designed primarily for other purposes, often makes for a very uncomfortable and costly location. Imagine having to temporarily air condition the factory floor.

For media events in particular, the fundamental goal is communicating a message. Achieving that is significantly easier in a clean, quiet, spacious room that accommodates recording devices. The framing effect of cameras effectively eliminates the surroundings, save the media background, which can be setup anywhere. If the 'look' of a location is still irresistible, create a background that incorporates a 'still' of the desired environment.

OUTDOOR SPACE

Nature is completely unpredictable. Need one say more? For pure corporate events, outdoor locations should be avoided whenever possible, simply because the organizer effectively surrenders control of the environment. That is not to suggest that outdoor events are not exciting, in many cases magical, but rather, when the purpose of the presentation is critical a more predictable environment is always preferable. Regardless, there will always be a requirement for outdoors events; sponsored presentations and golf tournaments are two that spring immediately to mind.

Outdoors, rain is not the only issue. Wind, bugs, dust, noise, securing the perimeter and myriad other factors make outdoor events expensive. Tension membrane structures (*a tent - but don't call it that around the fire marshal*) reduce some of the uncertainty but they are costly and time consumptive, very prone to poor air circulation and, because of the smooth angularity of the fabric, they can sound terrible.

Another challenge for outdoor events is maintaining critical mass. Successful gatherings require energy and that energy is derived in no small part by having like-minded people united in relatively close proximity to each other. Think of the cheering crowds at a sporting event. Indoors the walls define the available space, putting people close enough to amplify group spirit. Outdoors, this aggregating effect is often missing as the event space has a much larger footprint potentially. Too much space kills energy while promoting cliquing and isolation.



There is one event that should never venture outdoors – media presentations, regardless of the type of announcement. The sole purpose of a media event is communication – to deliver information via the media. Nothing should hamper that effort. The great outdoors are just too unpredictable an environment when it comes to `earned media` coverage.