

8

Events, conferencing and banqueting

Aim

To provide an overview of the management and control of event operations.

Objectives

This chapter is intended to support you in:

- Determining the size and scope of the events industry
- Identifying the opportunities and challenges for operators
- Maximising yield and profit through the application of strategic techniques
- Identifying key organisational and staffing issues for events
- Managing the event process.

8.1 Overview and structure of the events sector

An event is the planned management of an occasion that takes place between a space provider and a customer. The sector is commonly referred to as MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) but other names used can include catering, events, conferences and banqueting. A list of event categories and examples is given in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Event categories and examples

Event category	Examples
Personal	Weddings, bar mitzvahs, anniversaries, birthdays
Local	Village fairs, community quiz nights, local drama clubs
Commercial	Conferences, exhibitions, trade shows, product launches
Fairs/festivals	Book fairs, carnivals
Public	Festivals, exhibitions, concerts, galas
Civic	Anzac Day celebrations
Special	National Day celebrations, cultural performances
Expositions	World Trade Expo, boat shows
Sporting	Dubai tennis open, Singapore grand prix
Global	Royal weddings, Live Aid
Mega/hallmark	Olympic, Paralympic Games and FIFA World Cup

In most cases the sector can be divided into two main groupings, conference and banqueting. Conference events focus on providing space for more formal business activities, whereas banquet events concentrate on activities for clients who wish to celebrate an occasion. Table 8.2 presents a comparison between the two types of event group and their characteristics. A more extensive description of event types is presented in Table 8.3.

Table 8.2: Comparison of conference and banqueting characteristics

Conference	Banqueting
Focus on conducting business or training	Focus on celebration and enjoyment
Emphasis on equipment and technology	Emphasis on food and beverage
Attendees tend to be from outside local area	Attendees tend to be from local vicinity
Lower staff to customer ratio	Higher staff to customer ratio
Booking lead times tend to be shorter	Booking lead times tend to be longer
Greater demand for accommodation	Less demand for accommodation
Duration can last from half a day to one week	Duration tends to last hours
Events tend to be less seasonal	Events tend to be more seasonal

Table 8.3: Examples of event types

Type	Description
Congress	Large assembly of individuals to convene or discuss business, culture, religion or another topic.
Exhibition/ trade fair	Large event attracting thousands of people. Targeting or promoting a specific sector of industry or consumer. Usually run over several days and can be open to the public, specify consumers only, or trade only.
Forum	Group of individuals discussing a specific topic or theme which in most cases would be led by a host who would channel discussions between a panel and the audience. Often held in an auditorium with microphones being moved around by assistants for the audience to ask questions.
Interview	Small meeting which maybe an employment or appraisal interview.
Lecture	Delivered by an expert to a large audience from a podium with the use of audio-visual equipment. Usually theatre style seating.
Meeting	A general term for a get-together of individuals with a common purpose.
Retreat	Normally in an out-of-town location and is organised by companies or associations for employees or members to meet for the purpose of team building, training, coaching or personal development.
Road show	Businesses or organisations delivering a series of presentations in multiple locations for the purpose of promoting and selling products or services.
Seminar	Similar to lecture but for smaller groups who actively participate on a particular theme or topic being explored. Interaction is the main objective of most seminars. Can also be part of a series located at different venues.
Workshop	Small groups are divided and work on specific problems, challenges or case studies.
Off-premises events	Off-premises events are delivered in another location away from the home base of the main business. These can be large or small events. Good logistical planning is essential and include activities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit the site first and check the layout, design and access • Consider equipment, transport, fuel, water, holding equipment • Evaluate what utilities are available • If the event is outside have a backup plan in case of bad weather • Obtain insurance, licences and equipment • Draw up a plan of operations – what you need and when you need it.

Events can be provided either on or off the premises. On premise is where the event is held on the physical premises of the establishment or facility producing and serving the function. With off-premises, or outside catering, refers to food, beverage, equipment and servers being transported to a location such as offices, homes, boats or open spaces, etc. The event planner may provide anything from canapés and champagne for a product launch to sit down banquets.

■ Size and scope of the industry

The events industry is a truly global industry with events being held each day around the world. Many major cities now feature large-scale conference and exhibition centres that host numerous events attracting local and international delegates. Events provide many benefits for destinations, which may include tourism, employment opportunities, publicity and financial growth. Table 8.4 shows top ranking countries for hosting meetings. In order to qualify for inclusion in the list, strict criteria of a minimum of 50 delegates attending the meetings, representing a variety of countries and lasting at least 3 days is adhered to.

Table 8.4: Ranking for top international meeting countries in 2011

	Country	Number of meetings	Percentage of all meetings (%)
1	Singapore	919	9.0
2	USA	744	7.3
3	Japan	598	5.8
4	France	557	5.4
5	Belgium	533	5.2
6	Republic of Korea	469	4.6
7	Germany	421	4.1
8	Austria	390	3.8
9	Spain	386	3.8
10	Australia	329	3.2
11	Netherlands	299	2.9
12	United Kingdom	293	2.9

Source: Rogers, 2013

Examples of venues where events can be hosted include hotel function rooms, conference centres, community centres, restaurants, bars, church halls, academic institutions and community centres. The majority of space is multifunctional so can be used to accommodate different types of events. In most cases the venue will be responsible for the planning and delivery of the event. However, events can also be organised by event management companies (EMCs) or contract caterers. Bowdin *et al.* (2006) state: 'Event Management companies are professional groups or individuals that organize events on a contract basis on behalf of their clients'. Some of the services provided by event management companies include:

- Concept development
- Planning the event theme and decor
- Marketing and advertising
- Ticketing
- Screening venues