

Providing Innovative Solutions with Limited Financial Resources

Attendee Number: 1,000 persons;

Location: Orlando; Type of Location: Hotel;

This Government Agency's symposium required conference event planning services for the preparation, coordination and delivery of their conference.

Highlight of Challenges and Innovative Solutions:

Personalized Attendee Registration: There were over 1,000 attendees at this conference that required advance sign up of all breakout sessions prior to arrival. Within this five day conference, there were over 280 session options available for sign up, in addition to personalized breakfast and lunch options, some requiring payment. Each attendee had specific courses that were mandated for that individual's registration. Each individual had a set of breakout sessions that he/she must take as part of their conference curriculum and these sessions must be registered in advance of the conference. In addition, there were other courses that were offered to all attendees, but had a limited capacity. The Government Agency needed a way to provide a customized registration system that guided an individual through his/her registration process, guaranteeing that he/she signed up for mandated courses necessary and offered only those courses that had not yet been filled to capacity.

To solve this challenge, we utilized technology to customize the options available for each attendee when he/she signed onto the website to register, providing only those sessions that he/she were eligible to register for, mandating the sessions that he/she must attend, and not offering sessions that were full. Once the attendee had completed his/her registration, a confirmation email was sent, detailing the exact schedule for the conference. The email specifically showed the times and dates of every session the registrant would attend.

When the attendee showed up for the conference, we provided a printed, customized copy of their personalized conference itinerary. This conference itinerary told the attendee exactly what sessions he/she will attend, the time of the sessions and all information needed for the five day conference.

Implementing the automated registration process that is specifically customized for each individual, provides a list of mandated courses and does not allow individuals to sign up for courses that are already filled to capacity saves significantly on staff time and resources. Not only does this make the registration process as seamless as possible for each attendee, it also saves considerable time from an administrative perspective. Implementing this automated process is one reason for why the professional services fee for this conference actually had a decrease in our professional services fee throughout the years of our contract.

Implementing a Scanning System: As with many conferences, having your attendees attend the individual sessions is an important challenge. For the Government Agency, the mandatory session attendance was truly imperative. The individuals responsible for organizing the conference were continuously faced with the same challenge year after year of decreased attendance in the general session on the last day, smaller attendance in the break out rooms than anticipated and the general issue of not being able to predict attendance in breakout rooms. So much time and effort was being put into the program and content of planning these mandatory training meetings – it was critical that the attendance be at 100%. During one of our after action evaluation meetings, we suggested a scanning system and worked

with the Government Agency POC to create a plan to solve this issue. A bar code was placed on each individual's name badge that allowed personal scanning.

Each person was scanned prior to each of the 280 sessions. Within ten minutes of the session starting, we provided the Government Agency of a listing of all attendees in each of the breakout sessions. At the end of the Conference, we provided them with a full listing of all attendees for every session throughout the entire five day conference, and a full listing of those individuals that missed their mandatory sessions. If an individual missed more than one mandatory session, this data was tracked. The Government Agency then had the data it needed to enforce their mandatory attendance policies. Due to the scanning system, the Government Agency saw the attendance for their events increase significantly. Their events started on time as individuals always arrive early, fearful of not getting properly scanned. Attendance at individual sessions was taken seriously.

In addition, the scanning system was connected to the CEU system, automatically allowing individuals to apply for their CEU's for the sessions they attended. However, if they did not appear on the list of individuals that attended the session, they were not be eligible for CEU's for that session.

The Conference Evaluation: Many agencies struggle to get their attendees to complete conference evaluations. The Government Agency was no different. However, the conference evaluation was a very important tool for them and receiving completed evaluations was an essential piece of information they needed. During an after action evaluation wrap up meeting, we again worked with the Government Agency to put in a special policy to enforce the completion of conference evaluations.

Receiving a certificate of attendance was very important to attendees of this conference. Therefore, we implemented a system where we automatically provided a certificate to those who completed the evaluation of the conference. All is done electronically. We have computers set up around the conference center, specifically dedicated to completing the conference evaluation. When one completed the evaluation, a personalized certificate, in a pdf format, was automatically emailed to them. The only way a person could receive a certificate of attendance was by completing the conference evaluation. This allowed the Government Agency *to increase the return of their conference evaluation from 17% to 80%*. It is now the culture of this organization to expect to complete their conference evaluation at the end of the conference. In addition to receiving a conference certificate of attendance, an individual could receive a list of courses completed and a listing of CEU credits for their corps, *after completing the conference evaluation*.

As part of our professional services fee, we compiled the data, analyzed it, according to the data points requested by the Government Agency and provided a thorough conference evaluation, complete with graphs and charts. As stated above, our professional services fee did not increase as we added these new features and in fact, has decreased throughout our years with the Government Agency. By utilizing technology, we found ways to add significant benefits and cost savings to the Government Agency, staying well within their budget.

Decreasing the Cost of Providing Attendee Certificate

In the past, each attendee received a certificate of attendance via the mail. It was personalized and printed for them and mailed to them upon their return after the conference. For a conference of over 1,000 individuals, the cost involved in personalizing, designing, printing and mailing 1,000 certificates to conference attendees becomes very costly.

During one of our after-action evaluation meetings, we recommended to the Government Agency that they begin to deliver the certificate electronically. We created an automated system that would not only create a personalized certificate to email to each attendee, but would also provide a listing of those courses that each attendee took at the conference. This is a considerable cost savings for the Government Agency as it eliminates the cost of printing and mailing of individual certificates. Furthermore, we took this a step further and directly linked the receipt of an attendee certificate to the completion of the Conference Evaluation.

Creating a Resourceful Conference Website: For the Government Agency, we designed and hosted their conference website. The required website had to present basic information on the Conference and making reservations as well as area restaurants and attractions plus transportation options from area airports. Furthermore, the website provides an easy registration process for individuals, exhibitors and sponsors. The registration page needed to capture name, rank, assignment, area of expertise, and 23 other data items. All of this data is captured in an excel spreadsheet that is available 24/7 to the Government Agency POC. The online registration system is very complex and personalized. We are experienced in providing a user friendly, quick, intuitive and secure web based registration process for any type of meeting.

By setting up the online registration form via a client website to include all attendance options; then immediately confirming the options selected by the registrant and providing a receipt for the credit card payment many of the registration glitches are avoided.

The success of the sites we have developed for the Government Agency and our other clients can be best measured by the fact that we and the Organizers receive very few calls or emails from registrants who have a question about the website.

Turning a Cyber Café into a Conference Evaluation Station: For the Government Agency, we set up and managed a cyber café that allowed the conference attendees to check their emails, fill out their conference evaluations, and connect online. Working with the hotel, we provided the technical support for this cyber café.

Aggressive Exhibit Management: The Government Agency Conference *grew from having no exhibitors to having 21 exhibitors under our solicitation and management.* One of our responsibilities was the solicitation and management of these exhibitors. We began selling exhibit space for the upcoming year, almost immediately following the close of the conference. After we finished selling the space, we served as the liaison between the exhibitors and the hotel, making sure their needs were met.

For the Government Agency meeting, one of the first things we did was identify the exhibitor area, prepare a layout for the size and number of booths or tables needed and create an exhibitor manual. We develop the specifications, secure the services, accepted payments, and stayed in touch with exhibitors before, during and after the event. We also monitored many other activities necessary to assure a successful exhibit for the Government Agency as well as for the exhibitors.

For the US Government Agency Medical CBRNE meeting, we worked with organizers to identify prospects and fees and then carried the program from beginning to end. For other clients, GA worked to secure not only vendors but sponsors for individual speakers and events. *We have been known to achieve sponsor and vendor revenue of \$450,000.00.*

Utilization of Volunteers: The Government Agency conference requires significant volunteer assistance with both the registration and the scanning of the various breakout sessions. We also used volunteers as moderators for each of the breakout rooms. Recruiting volunteers is a key component to guaranteeing that the conference runs as smoothly as possible. We were responsible for the direction, training, and liaison with 24 government-provided on-site manpower for registration assistance and breakout room moderators and scanners. Giuffrida Associates prepared and delivered training for these individuals and provided them on a daily basis with the information and materials needed to carry out their assignments and contribute to the success of the meeting. For many meetings, GA clients provide some volunteer personnel for registration and/or session moderators. We train these individuals and work with them. The GA staff oversees all aspects of the volunteer management and training