



10.27.21

## Key Take-Aways

**Moderator:** Bernard Toliver, Pres., Renaissance Meetings & Sp. Events

**Panelists:**

1. Jeania Davis, Dir. of Mtgs. & Events, National Alliance to End Homelessness
2. Cathy Diem, Director of Sales, Hilton Worldwide
3. Carrie Holmes, Dir., Conferences & Mtgs., The Assoc. of Jr. Leagues Int'l
4. Molly Kievit, Senior Dir. of Campus Sales, Metropolitan Pier & Expo (MPEA)
5. George Ntim, Mkt. Dir. of Diplomatic & Community Rel., NYC Marriott Hotels
6. Gary Pagano, Vice President - Special Events, ViacomCBS

### **Adapting to Change Amid Current Trends/Restrictions**

What the panelists shared:

- Requiring that attendees are vaccinated.
- Asking for attendees to be masked.
- Determining how to handle vax exemptions, an ongoing discussion.
- Having on site testing.
- COVID logistics based upon where attendees are coming from.
- Learning everything about COVID and your company COVID protocols – erring on the side of caution when planning events.
- Production side is one set of rules – but events are different – both do not necessarily have the same rules.
- Soliciting budgets for in house physicians and other COVID protocols.
- Striving to keep things simultaneously safe and interesting.
- Working with limited food and beverage budgets. Huge struggle for non-profit.

### **What Changes Have You Made to Your Programs?**

What the panelists shared:

- Hosting shorter programs – instead of 3-4 days; condensed down 1- 2 days
- Increasing time between sessions.
- Creating Interactive programs – people tired of getting lectured to.
- Hosting virtual meetings - not sure how many will come to live events. (Hybrid events are valuable but costly to produce.)
- Hosting live events - not shortening sessions –reducing number of people, spreading out more, keeping people distant.
- Asking folks to sign forms that they will adhere to for procedures put in place – i.e.: #1: that they will adhere to protocols, #2: that they understand that if they

aren't vaccinated, they can't attend, #3: Proof of vaccination or negative COVID test.

- Creating meeting content that is poignant; given in shorter segments for better educational grasp.
- Adding teambuilding aspects to programs that can be done both live and virtually.
- From a venue perspective - following local and state COVID protocols, yet each organization has its own approach.
- Hiring health companies to support covid testing prior to events.

### **Biggest Challenges for Hotels in the last 18 months**

What the panelists shared:

- Periodic changing of covid regulations.
- Adhering to city guidelines – establishment is responsible for checking vax cards – burdensome for hotels.
- Requiring guests show vax card each time using hotel restaurants.
- Needing more staff to manage vax card checking.
- Needing to continually train staff - can be expensive.

### **Supply Chain Issues**

What the panelists shared:

- Labor shortages: services at hotels can be limited causing guest experience to vary by destination. Guests can find leaving out from hotels local restaurants are not open.
- Shortage of DMC services.
- Staffing quite challenging, especially surrounding staff being vaccinated.
- Food and beverage costs have increased exponentially.
- Limited menu items that can be quite a challenge especially when feeding thousands at a time.

During these challenging times:

- Planners should ask hotels what is working, what may be different, and then both sides have a little grace with each other.
- Hotels should leverage relationships and partners to meet demand.
- Hotels should be transparent with the customers – dialogue is key, so all are on same page.

### **New Contracts, Clauses, Addendums**

What the panelists shared:

- Added a COVID clause to Force Majeure.
- Added language addressing climate issues.
- Added staffing clause to address housekeeping, etc. so that they can set expectations with attendees.

- Clearly state the active food outlets and their operating hours.
- Experiencing a lot of postponements (no full cancellations, yet).
- Fielding numerous addendums.
- Building strong partnerships; careful not to burn bridges.
- Flexible to including upfront cancellations of any type advising that you to apply it to future programs.
- Working together strengthens our industry as a whole.
- Expect to deal with postponements. Building partners through this process is very valuable. We want to work with people who are going to give us options if we need to cancel or postpone. When we ask for postponements, we are now talking about that we can do the same time next year.
- Contract language continues to evolve – we move with the times.
- As it always has been contracting negotiation has been about the conversation. Many relationships have been strengthened through this.
- In the hospitality business it is all about relationships.
- There is no playbook. Let your clients know that things are so gray nobody knows what is going to happen – city or state can come up with new guideline at any time.
- Clients need to know they can trust you and that you can be flexible.
- Nothing is going to be same as it was pre-COVID.

### **Overarching Take-Away for the evening:**

*“Never forget that building relationships and trust is key.”*