

Contract the Right Service Provider

Caveat Emptor - Buyer beware as the saying goes. The last thing you need on your event day is to have a problem with a company that you've contracted for service. So before you agree to have a business work for you, here are some tips on how to find the right one.

- First you should sit down and determine the goals and objectives of your event. Having a clear idea of what you're planning will provide better information for vendors to work with and set expectations appropriately.
- Secondly, you should decide on who will be attending and create a rough agenda and timeline for the event. These first two steps will help you work out a budget.
- Having a budget will help you narrow the range of service providers to select from and also keep you on track in negotiations.
- Next, talk to colleagues, friends, and/or associates for referrals to reliable businesses that they have used. If they don't answer all your needs, you may want to ask the facility that is hosting the event who are their preferred vendors. Caution, their opinion may be biased by a current working relationship, but those vendors would already have working knowledge of the event site. Other sources for referrals are event referral directories on the internet, such as Eventageous.com. Even if you have never heard of the business before, note them down. You can check out their reliability in other ways.
- You'll next want to meet a representative from the company. Don't be hesitant to ask a lot of questions. If you don't understand a point of service or need to clarify a concept, just ask. A reputable vendor should be happy to explain things to you. If you feel you're being patronized or pressured, remember there are a lot of companies out there who want your business. It doesn't do anyone any good leaving the discussions unsatisfied or with misunderstandings. These could lead to service complications or hidden charges down the road.
- Make sure to ask for references and if possible, examples of their work. Satisfied clients should have no problem sharing their experiences about that vendor. Be wary of any business that won't provide that information. You should also check with your Better Business Bureau to see if the

vendor has a history of disputes. The Better Business Bureau can give information on the nature and resolution of claims filed against the business.

- After comparing vendors' reputations, reliability, service offerings, and price points, now is the time to make your final choices. Whoever you choose, insist that you get all of the details in writing and to include information on deposit, cancellation and refund policies. You may also need to consider details like terms of payment, penalties, delivery instructions, and setup and breakdown expectations.
- When making any kind of payment, it is advisable to use your credit card. It offers the most protection in cases where a company does not deliver its obligations. The credit card company can pull off the charge until it investigates the dispute.
- Finally, keep track of all the vendors you've hired. Schedule time to touch base with them one-to-two weeks in advance and if necessary have a pre-event meeting.

If you have any problems with your vendor or contractor, remember final payment is the only leverage you have. Consider making it a provision of the contract that final payment will only be made after service has been received or rendered.

It is your event. It deserves to come off smoothly. With a little research and clearly written understandings, you and your vendors should pull off an incredible event.

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