



Mitigating Risk at Events and Conferences

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Michael held numerous strategic association leadership roles, both nationally and internationally and was also in charge of organizing conferences in many corners of the world. Coming from the client side, he joined the DEKON Team and serves currently as the Executive Director of the DEKON Group. DEKON has been providing Professional Conference Organizing services to international clients for more than 24 years. Headquartered in Istanbul, the DEKON Team runs a significant number of congresses worldwide.

When we talk about Risk Management for Events and Conferences, we need to explore a broad range of potential risks that threaten venues, attendees, suppliers and the organizer. Risks threaten life, health or security, but also property and finance. Depending on the size of the event planned, you might even consider retaining a specialist in Risk and Disaster Management to address possible risks.

When working with a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) to manage your meeting, he or she needs to assess all possible risks and put in place a plan to manage the response and recovery and also to consider ways of mitigating possible risks. Not all events bear the same risks, senior citizens trade fairs have different risks than a rock concert. However for both of these meetings you might need more onsite medical support than for an ordinary conference, so a standard risk management plan won't work.

Walk it through

When assessing the risks of your event, you need to walk it through in your mind, first like a delegate, then as an exhibitor, then as the organizer, as a venue owner and so on. This lets you create a list of possible hazards which could occur before, during or after the meeting. You need to explore what could be exposed to damage, loss or liability, who or what could possibly cause it and who could be affected. You also need to be aware of the legal standards applied in the host country.

The CIC (Convention Industry Council) suggests for each event doing a SWOT analysis as the best risk assessment tool. The results will help you to ask the right questions of venues, suppliers and all other involved stakeholders and be prepared before an emergency occurs. It is also crucial to ensure lined up thinking between the venue,

the medical assistance providers, the security company and other relevant suppliers to avoid creating even greater chaos by a conflicting plan. Never forget that litigation proceedings could mean that the PCO will be asked if he or she has used due diligence in choosing that supplier, venue or destination.

Analyze what you found

After identifying the risks and analyzing them, you need to decide how to address them. Nobody can plan for every single risk and natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis are unavoidable. However, if the meeting host is risk averse, certain risks can be mitigated or avoided by transferring them to an insurance company. Or in the case of a tsunami, by not choosing a coastal destination. However, many risks cannot be simply avoided. The PCO has to make sure that presentations are not disrupted by technical failures, electrical spikes and faulty projectors. Mitigating risk is only possible by careful management and making sure that the meeting venue use all possible measures to avoid damages and have contingency and back up options in the unlikely case that something goes wrong.

Manage it

Managing risk means that after your analysis, you need to find ways to reduce the probability

that disaster or emergency occurs; reduce its consequences; or get the risk transferred to someone else. There are countless types of event insurance available and the PCO needs to assess which best fits your event and complies with the legal requirements of the host country. It is worthwhile consulting a local specialist or lawyer for advice in this regard.

Another way of mitigating risks is contractual. Adding force majeure clauses in contracts with venues, hotels and suppliers gives you more control as do clauses relating to indemnification, attrition and cancellation policies. Another contractual risk transfer is the liability waiver. If you want to include zip-lining in the social program, you might be well advised to ask participants to sign a liability waiver. However, waivers should be carefully drafted and translated. To be enforceable, the participant must have understood what he or she signed.

In Short

Working with a PCO from the early stages in the planning of your event, can help you avoid potential risks and save you a lot of money. A PCO will not only prepare a preliminary budget considering the risks of the event, but also advise on the appropriate venues, the right contracts, source reliable suppliers, explore local legal implications, identify potential insurers and help you quantify and manage your risk.

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