

# New Column Offered to Corporate Planners



Each segment of our readership, it seems, has its own set of challenges. While the independent event planner has a great deal in common with the planner on a corporate payroll, we recognize that many of the day-to-day issues that arise are completely different.

In our quest to provide useful information to all of our readers, we're designing elements for the magazine that we'll publish regularly that appeal to each separately, as well as the usual selection of focus sections and stories that appeal to professionals across the industry.

This month, we're introducing the inaugural guest column by Dion Magee, the senior manager for corporate programs and events for Verizon Communications. His "Meeting Space" column will regularly address issues specific to the corporate planner, as well as provide you with valuable tools for navigating through the corporate world, where top executives often don't fully understand what their planners are going through.

In this month's column (see page 12), Magee addresses the conflicts that can arise between corporate values and the needs of event planners.

"Those of us who are employed by a corporation are dedicated to its mission, goals and business direction, and our decisions must help grow, change and enhance the corporate brand," Magee writes. "At times, it can become difficult to balance your love for events and meetings while staying true to the company's values."

Love for meetings and events is one of those things all of our readers have in common, and as Magee continues to address issues that arise for the corporate planner, I'm betting that numerous tips and ideas he uncovers will be useful to all planners, regardless of whether they're corporate, association, non-profit or independent.

## Digital Black Book

I'm happy to announce that this year Event Solutions' Black Book will be available on a searchable, interactive CD-Rom, as well as in print.

Print copies of the Black Book have been mailed to the several thousand readers who participated in this year's survey, and they're also now available for sale. Visit [www.event-solutions.com](http://www.event-solutions.com) to order yours for just \$149.

To receive the CD-Rom version, you'll have to join us in Denver, where it will be included in a special offer exclusively for attendees of The Idea Factory that runs Aug. 20-23 at the Colorado Convention Center.

Compatible with any computer, the CD version allows users to search our directory of thousands of event-industry suppliers by company name, keyword, service category and state, and includes click-through from the table of contents to any of the dozens of articles and graphs contained in the massive industry survey in the 2006 Black Book.

Pat McCarrell  
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## When Consolidations Get Tough, Event Partners Must Get Going



Dion Magee  
Columnist

Welcome to my monthly column. In these times of reinvention, I wanted a place to provide a platform for honest answers and true dialogue about corporate event business. I hope this becomes an open forum for your questions as I provide you with candid feedback. Here's the first question I received:

**Why is corporate business more difficult to obtain as a client? Are corporations supporting the special events industry with consolidation and procurement processes?**

As with most corporations and large companies, procurement is critical to the sustained growth of any organization. Those of us who are employed by a corporation are dedicated to its mission, goals and business direction, and our decisions must help grow, change and enhance the corporate brand. At times, it can become difficult to balance your love for events and meetings while staying true to the company's values.

### Trend to Consolidate Continues

In the past five years, we have all noticed the effects and implications of corporate consolidations. For example, meeting consolidation requires a corporation to implement a procurement process that is in-house or outsourced. An outsourced meeting procurement model is ideal for companies with a limited staff. An in-house meeting procurement model works well for companies with larger staffs and the desire to tightly manage its group meetings spend and business.

In most cases, group meeting consolidations are still gaining popularity and will continue to impact our industry over the next few decades.

### Corporate Planners are Savvy

If you've heard me speak at the Event Solutions Idea Factory, you've heard me say more than once that corporate planners are becoming subject matter experts in most event fields and have gained the knowledge to procure, host and manage these events in-house.

As the costs of services and products rise, most event budgets stay the same or decrease. At Verizon, we have a financial commitment to produce meetings and events that are strategic in nature and demonstrate a reasonable value. It's easy to measure price points

by using metrics or reports; however, it's a challenge to measure success rate or guest outcome.

### Companies are Losing Buying Power

In my own experience, I have noticed that it has become more difficult to acquire the best room rates or food and beverage pricing at hotels and venues.

For example, I called a hotel chain to request meeting space and dates for a conference in 2007. Here's how my conversation with the salesperson went:

Salesperson: "The hotel room rate is higher than the average corporate rate."

Me: "Why would the rate be higher when as a corporation, we should have a negotiated rate?"

Salesperson: "Your company has not had a significant amount of spend with our hotel and we'd hate to place your program here when we were hoping to save the meeting space and hotel rooms for our more active clients. If the space is not booked within 30 days prior to your program, we will be happy to meet your program needs."

As you can imagine, I was upset, so I immediately called the sales director and demanded an explanation. The director offered an apology and but had no resolution. I understand that not all properties operate

in this manner, but unfortunately, it showed me that big business and large significant spend rule our industry.

At Verizon, we are redefining our procedures, rewriting corporate policy and creating preferred supplier programs to build our corporate buying power. Some would even say there is an unspoken war between hotel chains and corporations.

Here's the tough part:

regardless of the sourcing models, corporations are dedicated to building strategic relationships with event and meeting partners, and our partners have to help drive and create a return on the investment.

Corporations and companies continue to support our industry, whether it's directly or indirectly. Companies may not directly hire suppliers, but they can expect that preferred suppliers will build resources by contacting them to provide support. At the end of the day, it's important to justify our work and provide sustainable results for our clients — large and small.

In conclusion, here are few nuggets I want to share:

- Foster personal and professional relationships with corporate planners.
- Approach any new client as a strategic partner — supplement the team, don't lead it.
- Build a personal brand of integrity, professionalism and "can do" attitude.
- Make yourself available to all planners and suppliers.

Thanks for reading. Until next month, love what you do and do what you love!



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