



Overseas Events
Sourcing and evaluating suppliers



Introduction

Sourcing a new supplier, particularly in more remote parts of the world, can be a challenge. Personal recommendations, trade associations and the internet will all provide initial information but it is only by meeting and working with a supplier that you can form a true opinion.

If you are using a full-service event production company they will have existing networks or contacts and the experience to seamlessly manage the process for you. However, if you are producing the event in-house you may have to invest considerable time and money in procuring suitable suppliers and Destination Management Companies (DMCs).

In this whitepaper we look at some general factors to consider when sourcing and evaluating overseas suppliers.

Sourcing New Suppliers

Getting proposals and quotes from foreign suppliers can be time consuming and it is frustrating if you have waited for a response only to find it is unsuitable, or the company isn't geared up to deliver the type of service you need. If you are working to tight deadlines you may not have time to start the process again and be forced to settle for second best.

For this reason, never put all your eggs in one basket. Even if you have found what appears to be the perfect supplier or DMC take the extra time to research and approach alternatives. Bear the following in mind:

- Always ask a minimum of two, preferably three suppliers, for full proposals and costings. You may be surprised just how different their suggestions or services are, not to mention the budgets!
- Do not discount smaller, local companies. They will often go the extra mile to offer additional services or something a bit different. Their overheads will be smaller and they are generally more flexible in their approach.
- Always insist on professional credentials. One of the simplest ways to obtain these guarantees is to check whether companies are part of a recognised and regulated authority specific to their field.
- Ask for, and take up references, if possible from UK companies who have held a similar event.
- Ensure you meet your day-to-day contacts before committing yourself. However good a supplier may appear on paper, you need to be comfortable with the team you will be working with. All too often, the management team who presented their services disappear once contracts are signed.

The benefits of a logistics recce

In an ideal world, and if budget permits, an initial recce will be carried out to the main destinations you are considering. If this is the case then you should maximise the opportunity and meet with new suppliers and in particular with two or three DMCs. This has a number of advantages:

- It is easier to accurately explain your needs and requirements, ensuring the goals, standards and objectives of your event are understood when communicating face-to-face. Also, language barriers are greatly reduced. However, it is important to remember that no matter how hard you describe your expectations, you can never be 100% sure that what will be supplied is up to scratch and appropriate unless you have had first hand experience and judged for yourself.
- Treat the recce as an opportunity to form strong working relationships with local suppliers. When you are on-site these partnerships will be key. It is vital you have confidence in your suppliers to deliver a professional service and this is only achieved over time as relationships develop. Everyone you work with from the DMC to the hostesses, and from the hotel staff to the coach drivers, will have a direct impact on the success of your event and each delegate's experience.
- Even if you then choose an alternative destination this will still be time well spent as comparisons always provide inspiration and the suppliers you saw might be suitable for future events.

Making the most of supplier meetings

Recces are characterised by too much to do in too little time. To make the most of your visit, and ensure you find out all you need to know, follow a few simple guidelines:

- Before the appointment issue the suppliers with a brief. Describe the services and support you need and tell them what you expect to achieve during the meeting. By setting out your requirements in advance you can save time and eliminate appointments with unsuitable suppliers. If possible give them a budget to work to.
- Ask them to "pitch" for the business. They should discuss their credentials, the services and roles they offer, company information, industry accreditations, examples of their previous experience and testimonials.
- Don't be afraid to seek complimentary services or discounted rates from prospective suppliers during the recce. In particular if you are managing large budgets you should negotiate recce costs with local suppliers, or ask your DMC to do so. Hotels will often waive the cost of your recce accommodation upon the signing of a contract for a group booking/conference. Meals at potential venues can usually be arranged as "tastings" or with a percentage discount in-lieu of prospective business.
- It is always best to confirm all the costs with local suppliers, and in particular the DMC, before arriving on-site. This avoids any unexpected charges or misunderstandings. If expenses are being picked up by the DMC be clear at the outset what you will be charged, agree their margins and ensure you establish what percentage is given for tips. This will avoid any later misunderstandings.
- Do your own research so you understand any cultural or business factors which could impact your relationship.

Managing Suppliers

Managing the relationship is an art in itself. Some challenges are the same whether you are working in the UK, continental Europe, the Americas or Asia. Others are affected by geography, language and culture. Here are a few key points to remember:

- Different countries deal with things in different ways. For example the system of provisional bookings and first option holds in the UK isn't always the same abroad. Never assume that a provisional booking ensures that the booking is yours until you release/confirm it. If another company comes along with a confirmed booking they may quickly brush your provisional booking aside. Be clear that you should be given first refusal and check regularly it is still being held.
- You may find the speed at which other countries work differs to your own. If using a third party to book elements insist on immediate confirmation when approval is given so you don't miss out on securing your preferred gala dinner venue or hotel, or have to accept a lower standard of coach or entertainment.
- Be aware that differing office hours, time differences and public holidays can and do create an extra hurdle.
- Make sure you ask trusted suppliers for their recommendations and listen to their advice; they have valuable local knowledge and can make suggestions based on proven experience of the destination.
- Conversely, don't be afraid to challenge suggestions or processes. Quite often a little more time explaining your vision and expectations thoroughly will give them a better idea of what you require. This then ensures they are not just providing solutions to a formula.
- Don't feel pressurised into using a particular supplier recommended by your DMC if they aren't offering, producing or delivering what you need. Tell the DMC your concerns and issues and if they still aren't matching your expectations look for alternatives. It may seem someone has the monopoly on a particular service at your destination but some further research may offer other good choices.

Summary

Researching a previously unknown destination and appointing local suppliers and DMCs is a time consuming and skilled task. Often it is only after working with a supplier on a couple of events that you will truly know their strengths and weaknesses and be able to get the best from the relationship. Similarly they will understand the level of service you demand.

For these reasons many companies choose to employ an event production company who can easily identify the most appropriate supplier for each element of the event. It is then their responsibility to get the best from the supplier and manage the relationship. Knowing you can thoroughly rely on foreign suppliers and get the right level of service, within your budget parameters, is key to your event and peace of mind.

About Mirage

Mirage is a full-service live event management and production company.

We continue to delight clients, and exceed expectations, for the simple reason that Mirage does not produce events to a formula. We tailor our creativity to meet your brief and create a memorable, vibrant event, which is professional without being predictable. We help define your objectives, refine your messages and then we inject fun, velocity and life into your content, ensuring your key messages are understood, reinforced and embraced.

Mirage has an impressive portfolio of blue-chip clients whose events range from product launches, conferences, roadshows, business forums, AGMs through to themed parties and fun days, award ceremonies, team-building and motivational activities. Our complete range of services includes venue selection, programme content, logistics, staging, print and electronic media, delegate management, guest speakers and celebrities, video conferencing, speaker support and AV.

To learn more about how your events could have greater impact, relevance and creativity call us on +44 (0) 1883 740400, email diane@mirageemail.com or visit our website at www.miragewebsite.com or visit our party planners site: www.mirageparties.co.uk.



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