

Hosting a great holiday party in 30 easy steps

Halloween may be just around the corner, but you should be well on your way in planning your Holiday party. The 30 steps I am about to describe make this an easy task.

According to my calendar, you should have already carried out steps 1 through 10. If not, it's high time to get started!

JUNE TO SEPTEMBER

1. Define the goals of your Holiday party. Is it intended to thank employees, convey a corporate message, demonstrate your social commitment, reward the efforts of certain employees or departments, present a rundown of the year's achievements or simply give your people a chance to celebrate? Setting your objectives will shape the event accordingly.

2. Decide on the number of guests. Are you only inviting employees or their husbands, wives and perhaps children as well? Will you also ask some of your customers, partners, vendors and retirees to join in? Guesstimate how many people will be attending.

3. Outline and schedule the event. Will the party be held in the morning, afternoon or evening? Over one or two days? During the workweek or weekend? Will you serve cocktails, meals, alcoholic beverages and provide accommodation? Will there be speeches, audio and video presentations, an orchestra or a DJ and dancing? Will you organize activities, kids' games, a competition, door prizes or hand-out gifts? All of these choices will have an impact on how the festivities unfold.

4. Select one or two possible dates and draw up a list of prospective venues that meet your needs (the number and size of rooms, according to the number of guests, locations that provide food and lodging, etc.), as well as the standard of quality you are seeking. Do you prefer a reception hall near your workplace or a resort? Remember to factor in questions of transportation and parking.

5. Check on room availability for your desired dates at the prospective sites and make an appointment to see them.

6. Visit the establishments and reception halls under consideration to make sure they are suitable (cleanliness, size, ceiling height and suggested layout, décor and atmosphere, accessibility and number of restrooms, other gatherings being held at the same time as yours and any spaces the different events will share, availability of parking, room categories, cloakroom, etc.). Assess the quality of service, request a proposed menu and rates and check on any items that you may obtain at no charge (tablecloths, centrepieces, chair covers, decorations, etc.). Also, discuss how the event should be organized, your accommodation requirements, the activities you plan to offer, food service, audiovisual needs and so on.

7. Prepare a preliminary budget and submit it, along with your recommendations as to the time and place of the event, to management.

8. Once the date and site have been selected and approved, **confirm this with the site representative** and make sure to thank your contacts at other sites that were not chosen.

Next you will want to:

➤ Produce an event schedule setting times for guests to arrive, cocktails, meals, dancing, speeches, presentations, activities, door prizes, and so forth, as well as the party's conclusion. Provide enough time between the end of the work day and the start of the event (2.5 to 3 hours) to let guests go home, get ready and travel to the site location (let them leave early if necessary).

➤ The minimum and maximum number of people for each hall.

➤ The time the hall will be available for set up and if on-site staff will help your people organize equipment (displays, gifts, etc.).

➤ Parking and cloakroom costs and if workers must be hired.

➤ The number of rooms required and dates by which room blocks must be reserved.

➤ How guests will be greeted.

➤ The number of seats per table (from 8 to 10 people, depending on table size), if seats will be assigned and layout of the intended room (including how the stage will be set up).

➤ If a cocktail (alcoholic beverage or fruit punch, etc.) and finger food will be offered prior to the meal and at what location.

➤ Selection of menus and style of service desired (buffet, stations, table service) and the per person price. Check if tips are included or are additional.

➤ If beverages are served during and after the meal and what type of service is provided (at the tables, open or pay bar, etc.). Find out if wines and beverages are included and if coupons will be distributed.

➤ Your decorative requirements (plants, lighting, centrepieces, tablecloths, holiday accessories, etc.)

➤ If a stage and audiovisual material are needed (projection of the firm's logo, video of the year's highlights, PowerPoint presentation or music). Also check if an audiovisual equipment rental firm is present at this location or if you must use your own suppliers.

➤ Different events or activities (DJ, orchestra, MC, speeches, audio and video presentations, etc.) and where the dance floor is located as well as its size.

➤ Methods of payment.

9. Have management approve everything.

10. Sign a contract with the establishment (making sure it includes all the details you have negotiated) and put down a deposit to reserve the selected date. The best idea is to book a room one year in advance.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

Organize well to celebrate well

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER

11. Develop your schedule. The schedule outlines the various activities to be accomplished prior to the event and their respective completion dates. Also determine who will be in charge of each activity. This will let you know how many people you need on your operations team.

12. Train the operations team that will help you prepare for the event.

13. Set the admission fee (if any). You can offer different options (meals, transportation, lodging, etc.) and different prices based on guest status (employees, clients, suppliers, spouses and children).

14. Seek sponsors. Do any of your clients want to give gifts to your employees, will your usual audiovisual suppliers sponsor the material for this event and will other suppliers absorb the cost of additional activities?

15. Select audiovisual, lighting, decoration and activity providers (DJ, orchestra, MC, host, etc.), provide them with the necessary information and draw up contracts with each.

16. Print tickets or produce confirmation emails that include all necessary information (date, location, time and logos of your organization and sponsors). Check if you will need numbered tickets or detachable coupons for door prizes and drinks. Provide information on the backs of tickets or by e-mail letting guests know how to find the location and where to park.

17. Send information about the event to your guests (date, schedule, place, cost, directions, etc.) so they can confirm their attendance and mark down the event in their calendars. Also indicate how reservations must be made, the deadline for doing so, how they will receive their tickets or confirmations and accepted payment methods.

18. Prepare for the day of the event by assigning duties and responsibilities to each member of your operations team.

19. Plan contests and door prize awards and buy gifts and prizes (select them based on the guest profile). Decide how gifts and awards will be wrapped and presented. Large gifts can be delivered to the winners' homes.

20. Hire a photographer then post selected event photos to an intranet folder that is accessible to all employees.

21. Write copy for speeches, produce photos, PowerPoint or video montages and print necessary display items (menus, directions to the entrance of the site, directions to the room, cloakrooms and restrooms, posters thanking partners/sponsors, displays for activities, parking coupons, drink coupons, etc.).

DECEMBER

22. Let those in charge know the final number of participants (for meals, activities, lodging, etc.). If necessary, assign seats and map out the room's layout.

23. Make a list of equipment to bring, including stands (easels, etc.).

24. Plan the transport of equipment to the site (you may need to rent a truck). Deliver it the night before if possible and check that everything has indeed arrived at the proper location.

25. Check each detail one last time with all of the suppliers and other parties concerned. Doing so will help prevent unpleasant last-minute surprises!

26. Cut cheques to be given to certain suppliers on site and **prepare the equipment to be brought.** Make sure to label your boxes with your company's name and address as well as the name of establishment and the hall in which your event is to take place. That way, someone can contact you if your boxes are lost.

27. Go to the hall with your operations team at least three to four hours before guests arrive to prepare everything: reception, gifts, displays, centrepieces, decorations, etc.

28. Deploy your plan to ensure that your holiday bash is an unforgettable sensation (and set aside half an hour to make sure everything is in place).

29. Create a system for checking alcohol consumption and include taxi coupons in your budget for those who may need them by the end of the evening.

30. Enjoy your party and your Holidays!

Lyne Branchaud is in charge of events and sponsorship for Uniprix and is a professional coach for meetings and events. You can contact her by e-mail at l.branchaud@sympatico.ca or visit her blog at www.lesblogues.com/guideevenement

ANSWER EASY SUDOKU PAGE 25

8	7	5	2	1	4	6	9	3
6	9	1	7	5	3	2	4	8
4	2	3	9	6	8	1	7	5
9	3	2	4	7	1	5	8	6
1	6	8	3	9	5	4	2	7
5	4	7	6	8	2	9	3	1
7	1	6	8	2	9	3	5	4
2	8	4	5	3	6	7	1	9
3	5	9	1	4	7	8	6	2

ANSWER MEDIUM SUDOKU PAGE 25

4	2	3	5	8	7	6	9	1
6	9	1	3	2	4	7	5	8
8	5	7	6	1	9	4	3	2
7	8	4	1	5	3	2	6	9
5	3	9	7	6	2	8	1	4
2	1	6	4	9	8	5	7	3
1	6	2	8	3	5	9	4	7
3	4	8	9	7	6	1	2	5
9	7	5	2	4	1	3	8	6

Erratum

In the September issue of *The Planner*, there was a headline on page 22 that read "Canada's capital is planner heaven". The headline was incorrect, as several of our readers pointed out, as the ensuing article was about Toronto and not Ottawa, Canada's actual capital. Managing Editor Leo Gervais noted the headline *should* have read "Canada's business capital is planner heaven".

The Planner regrets the error.