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PLANNING CONFERENCES

The internet has brought about great changes to the way businesses and people interact and learn. One of the impacts has been the growth of web conferencing, which has become a less time-consuming and cheaper alternative to face-to-face conferences. This means face-to-face conference organisers need more than ever to present compelling topics and engaging speakers; all this with a seamless running of the event to provide the attendee with the perfect experience.

Katrina Wythes, function manager at Kamberra Wine Company, which is used as a conference venue in Canberra, says

organising a conference requires attention to the small but important details. "Organising a one-day conference is not all that complicated, but there are many details to think about which all have an impact on how successful your event will be. Miss one of these and you might have disgruntled attendees."

According to Wythes, these 10 basic elements should be taken into consideration when planning your next conference:

- **Location** – Make sure the venue you choose for your conference is easy to access for your attendees and provide them with sufficient directions. It should also have ample parking space and, if possible, free parking.
- **AV requirements** – Don't assume that all the audiovisual will be set up for you on the day. If you require wireless internet access, a laptop, projector, microphones or lecterns, make sure you liaise with the venue to have this set up for you before the conference.
- **Event promotion** – Include all the details about your

conference on your website, in your newsletter, on your intranet or in any communication tool you have to liaise with potential attendees. If your event is conducive to interactions on social media, you might also want to consider creating a Twitter hashtag. If you do so, make sure you let people know what the hashtag is so they can use and monitor it.

- **Food and drinks** – Ask your attendees for any special dietary requirements including allergies and food intolerance and provide a range of options during breaks and meals. If the event runs for a whole day and you are not providing lunch, choose a venue close to restaurants.
- **Carefully select the speakers** – Relevant and engaging speakers will make a huge contribution to the success of your event. You can opt for someone you have seen speaking before or liaise with a speaker circuit. If you will speak in front of an audience for the first time, make sure you get some public speaking training before the big day.
- **Visual presentations** – When many speakers participate in the conference and use visual presentations such as PowerPoint, request the speakers' slides ahead of time and compile them into one document in order of presentation to avoid jumping from one to the other between presentations.
- **Be there early** – Arrive at the function centre early to check the set up and, if required, distribute any documents that need to be placed on tables.
- **Time management** – Stick to the time that was allocated for each session and make sure to leave plenty of time for questions and answers at the end of each session and/or end of the day.
- **Questionnaire** – It is important to thank your attendees for their participation and, if appropriate, ask them for their feedback. A good way to do this is to distribute a questionnaire to be filled at the end of the conference or send it via email after the event.
- **Making presentations available** – If agreed by your speakers, make the presentations of the day available on your website after the event and direct your attendees to them via email. You might also want to post the presentations onto sharing websites such as Slide Share. **DB**