



# HAVE A GREAT YEAR-END BASH

## WITHOUT MAKING A HOLE IN THE COMPANY ACCOUNT

**T**imes are tough. Entertainment budgets are down and retrenchments are up. How can you have a great party, reward loyal team members for their hard work, and still be thrifty? Days of the lavish functions, the excesses of the past, seem to be over. Much like Wall Street after the extravagant days in the eighties, there is an atmosphere of austerity. Should office parties follow that strict theme? Not at all. Year-end parties can be fantastic fun even on a restricted budget.

A few key pointers will enable you to create an event that is memorable for the right reasons and importantly keeps the accountants happy.

- Get help – preferably from outside the office.
- Get quotes.
- Twist arms.
- Get back to basics.
- Enjoy but be responsible.

Attach a Rand value to your and your employees' time and work out how much money the company will lose if a team of your own staff spends their time planning your party. It may be worth it to you to hire a professional.

Helen Johns, an event planner with Jay Inc. Event Management, has had ten years of party planning experience, from a dinner for two to two thousand. Helen suggests that anyone who is thinking of planning a year-end function and wants to do things themselves, shop around. If you or your staff members have the time and patience, try to do some arm twisting for the best deals.

Outsourcing the event planning and management seems to be the cost-effective solution. Allow the event planners to use their contacts and seek out the best deals. This frees up staff time to focus on their core functions which in itself is a saving in management time. Give your event planner a budget and see what they come up with. They can do a lot more with your budget than you can.

A year-end party is to reward staff, so don't have them organise the event. If you don't want an event company to get involved but don't want to burden your staff, just hire an extra pair of hands – a virtual PA – for this once-off event.

A good starting point, whether you want to do it yourself or hire someone, is a publication such as the *Whole Lot Directory*. This has been used for the past 14 years as an aid for movie producers in South Africa. Open the book and find whatever you

need, from tent hire to babysitters. A movie shoot runs into millions of Rands and if movie producers rely on the information in the directory, so can you.

Getting back to basics is inexpensive and great fun. What about a picnic at Kirstenbosch Gardens or Zoo Lake, enjoying a light lunch on a blanket under a tree. If the weather turns out badly, you can still move the party inside. Or book out a pizza restaurant and have the office team learn how to make pizzas. Sushi lessons are a touch more upmarket, but also a laugh a minute.

The buffets at Mojo offer great value and live entertainment. They can handle crowds of any size and are specialists at corporate functions.

Make sure the restaurant kitchen can cope with simultaneous service for the full number of people in your party. There is nothing worse than food arriving at different times because the kitchen is not properly equipped. Hotels with banqueting experience or larger restaurants are the best bets for bigger crowds. Primi Piatti is fun, has a great vibe and offers very good value. The Ocean Basket chain is another option, providing great seafood at family fun prices.

Negotiate a price for liquor, in advance. A large portion of the bill is for liquor and this is a massive

money spinner for restaurants. Twist an arm, you will save money and the restaurant can still make a healthy mark-up.

Don't forget dietary restrictions. Most establishments cater for vegetarians. Halaal and kosher staff and guests are easy to cater for, but watch out for unlicensed operators. There is a number of caterers purporting to be kosher or halaal but who do not have the proper accreditation. Your best bet for information about kosher caterers is to phone the Beth Din; and for halaal, phone the Muslim Judicial Council.

Whatever type of function you are planning, think about adding a chocolate fountain which is bound to have your guests licking their lips.

Ever wanted to throw bottles in the air like Tom Cruise in *Cocktail*? Get some real spirit into your event, hire a mobile bar and arrange cocktail lessons. This is a few hours of great fun and you get to drink what you make. Shaker Bar School or Liquid Chefs are the people to speak to.

Use the party service provided by reputable liquor outlets. Picardi deliver everything you need and credit you for unopened drinks. This year, perhaps go for premium products and encourage drinking less, but better quality. Your staff will appreciate be-

ing offered something that they would not normally have and you are encouraging a healthier lifestyle. A word of warning if you wanted to arrange a competitive event: if you combine testosterone, a drink too many and any type of competition, chances are you will have an unwanted outcome. Make activities collaborative, rather than competitive.

An office party should be more office than party, but sometimes people do not enjoy their drinks in a responsible way. Ensure that you have a few transport options on hand and book taxis and cabs in advance.

To break the ice you can try a good stand-up comic (and instruct him to keep it clean), a magician or arrange some music that will wake the dead never mind break the ice.

Whatever you decide, be as generous as your budget allows. This is your opportunity to say thank you.

#### Countdown checklist

##### 90 days

Work out your budget, get help – internal or external, determine maximum number of guests, choose a date and hire a caterer/restaurant\*.

##### 60 days

Send out notification of the date so people can have ample notice\*. Get confirmations from restaurants/suppliers in writing\*.

##### 30 days

Send out invitations\*, find out food preferences\* and arrange transport\*.

##### 15 days

Send e-mail reminder\* and reconfirm arrangements with service providers\*.

##### 5 days

Final confirmation calls/e-mails\*. Make payment arrangements – a company credit card, or EFT and cash for cabs where needed.

##### On the day

Pat yourself on the back for a great event, within budget.

\*delegate to planner

Courtesy of RISKSA Magazine