



iSPARK EVENT PLANNING SURVIVAL GUIDE

VOLUME 4

Event Sustainability | Hotel Concessions | Speaker Tips



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Krista Benoit is President & CEO of iSPARK Consulting Inc. - a full-service boutique marketing and events agency based in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. Since 2000, the company has executed events all throughout Canada and all over the world, including Salt Lake City (USA), Sydney (Australia) and Pune (India).

Krista is known for her efficient and organized work style, and her attention to detail along with her ability to effectively deliver on commitments, realize objectives and complete projects on time and within budget. She is dedicated to her clients and provides creative solutions tailored to each client's specific needs. Krista brings a tremendous amount of energy and out of the box thinking to every project. Her personal manifesto is *"There is never a crowd on the extra mile"*.

www.isparkconsulting.ca

Introduction

Event planning... Are we having fun yet?! In Volume IV we delve into three new (and important) topics:

- Event Sustainability
- Hotel Concessions
- Speaker Tips

Making Your Event More Sustainable

Maybe you've noticed that there has been a major shift toward zero waste events. It is becoming more and more important to offer an eco-friendly experience at your next conference, gala, festival, or corporate event. Here are a few of our best tips on how you can leave no trace behind.

REUSABLE SWAG

Handing out freebies at events is fairly mainstream these days, especially for sponsors eager to get their brand out there. However, lots of the freebies fall into the category of 'trash and trinkets', meaning the items are not of high value or useful.

When it comes to swag bags, we suggest that you become really picky about what types of items you accept to go into the bags. Consider taking only items that have a shelf life or a distinct (and functional) purpose. Practical items are much better than generic souvenirs or one-time use items. Alternatively, you can offer the swag items (notebooks, key chains, magnets, etc.) in a large bowl or basket at the welcome desk and allow guests to take only what they want or need (to avoid waste). Put the kibosh on promotional flyers and pamphlets that will most likely end up in the blue bin anyway. You event sponsors can distribute these items in other ways – at their trade show booth (if there is an exhibitor component to your event) or on a re-usable USB key instead.

Ensure the bag itself is re-usable and made of environmentally friendly materials.

REUSE YOUR EVENT SUPPLIES

Lots of event supplies can be re-used from one year to the next or from one event to the next. Tablecloths can be printed with your event logo/branding (no date) and used over and over again. The same goes for event signage and wayfinding... consider producing generic items that can be customized as needed.

*Hint: Check out **Volume I** of our eBook for some creative ideas for environmentally friendly wayfinding.*

Consider centrepieces that can be reused the following day for something else or partner up with another event to share use of centrepieces (florals, if cared for properly, can last a few days). What about donating event florals to a seniors home, hospital or gifting them to guests or event staff?

Event clothing can also be produced with generic branding that allows you to outfit your event staff and volunteers for multiple events. How many one-time use event golf shirts do you have at home in your closet?



Baskets and bins that you may need at the welcome desk can easily be transported from one event to the next and re-stocked as necessary.

Name badge holders and lanyards are items that can be collected at the end of the event and reused. If they are sponsored, here's your chance to lock in the same sponsor for a 2-yr deal and save the environment at the same time!

REDUCE PRINTED MATERIALS

Conference apps make the traditional printed event program almost obsolete. If you are still printing an event program, an agenda, or menu cards, consider printing a limited # and encouraging only those who need a hard copy to take one. For menus placed on tables at a dinner, place only one or two per table as opposed to one at each place setting. Or, incorporate the menu into the centrepiece for all to see.

You can post electronic copies of presentations or workshop materials online or email information to event attendees as opposed to passing out printed copies onsite.

OFFER ONSITE WASTE SERVICES

Outdoor events typically involve lots of clean-up during the event and post-event. Place bins for garbage, recycling and compost in multiple locations to encourage guests to help out. Ensure bins are properly labelled so that it is clear what goes where. Ensure your clean-up staff are walking around and cleaning up as the event goes on and reminding guests about

taking responsibility for disposing of things properly themselves.

DONATE LEFTOVERS

If your caterer or venue offers a program for donating untouched food to a local shelter, consider participating in this program and promote this to event attendees. Offering smaller serving sizes and individually packaged (or portioned) food makes it easier for guests to only take what they will actually eat. How many times have you seen wait staff scraping mounds of food off plates into a bin following a buffet breakfast or lunch? So much waste.



CHOOSE A GREEN VENUE

Choose a venue for your event that complies with zero-waste policies. For example, pens and pads of paper are placed at the back of the room (for only those that need them) and recycling bins are available throughout. Many hotels offer guests the option to opt out of daily housekeeping service which reduces laundry and excess water use within the hotel. Ask to see a copy of the venue's sustainable events policy or program to see what specific services they offer that make the most sense for your event.

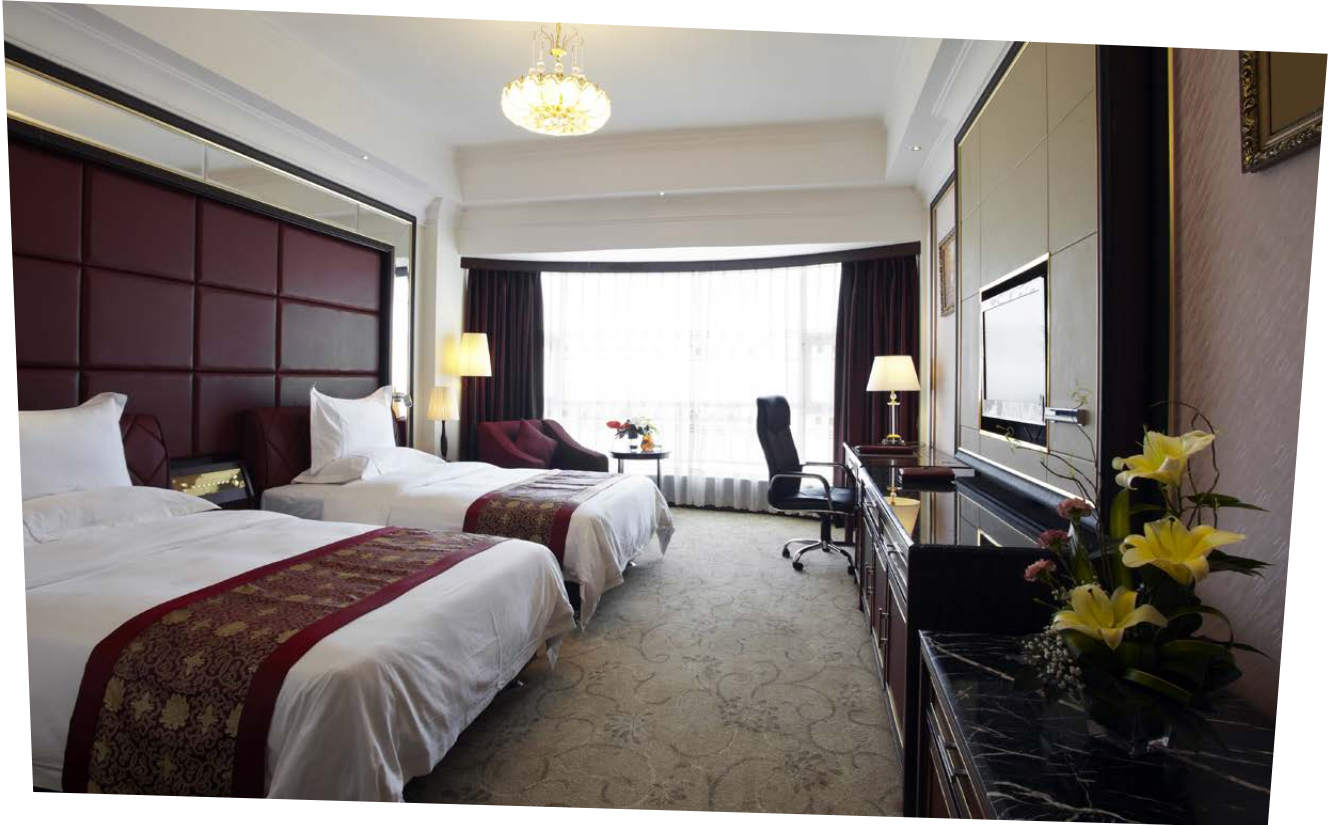
TRAVEL GREEN

Encourage guests to be environmentally conscious when travelling to and from your event. For example, event attendees can carpool to and from the airport, share rides, take the train, or walk to and from off-site activities. There are lots of ways for attendees to get where they need to be without leaving a massive carbon footprint.

CONCLUSION

These are just a few suggestions on how to make your event more sustainable. Once you get in the habit of considering the environment when planning your event it will be easy and you'll be surprised how quickly your event attendees adapt and embrace your green approach!

Hotel Concessions | Five Things to Ask For!



Many of our clients get really nervous about negotiating a hotel contract. They are anxious about asking for freebies or perks (or concessions as they are known in the hotel biz). Plus, it's no secret that hotel contracts are intimidating. If you are not a lawyer all that jargon makes no sense at all.

Here is a list of our top five most popular hotel concessions that anyone can ask for (and usually get):

- 1) Comps** – Ask for 1 for 40 comp rooms. In other words, for every 40 room nights booked, the hotel will give you one room night for free!
 - 2) Reduced or complimentary meeting space rental fees** - Having to pay to rent meeting space on top of all of the other costs you're incurring sounds crazy, right?
 - 3) Suite Upgrades** – Whether you're looking to impress your boss or need a hospitality suite, free upgrades can be a huge cost
- Ask for free meeting space (or at minimum ask for a reduced rate relative to the revenue you are pushing to the hotel in the form of guest rooms and f&b – a sliding scale).

savings. You can also keep them in your back pocket for when you have a dissatisfied client or stakeholder who may be appeased with a room upgrade.

4) Complimentary room nights for site inspections and pre-planning purposes –

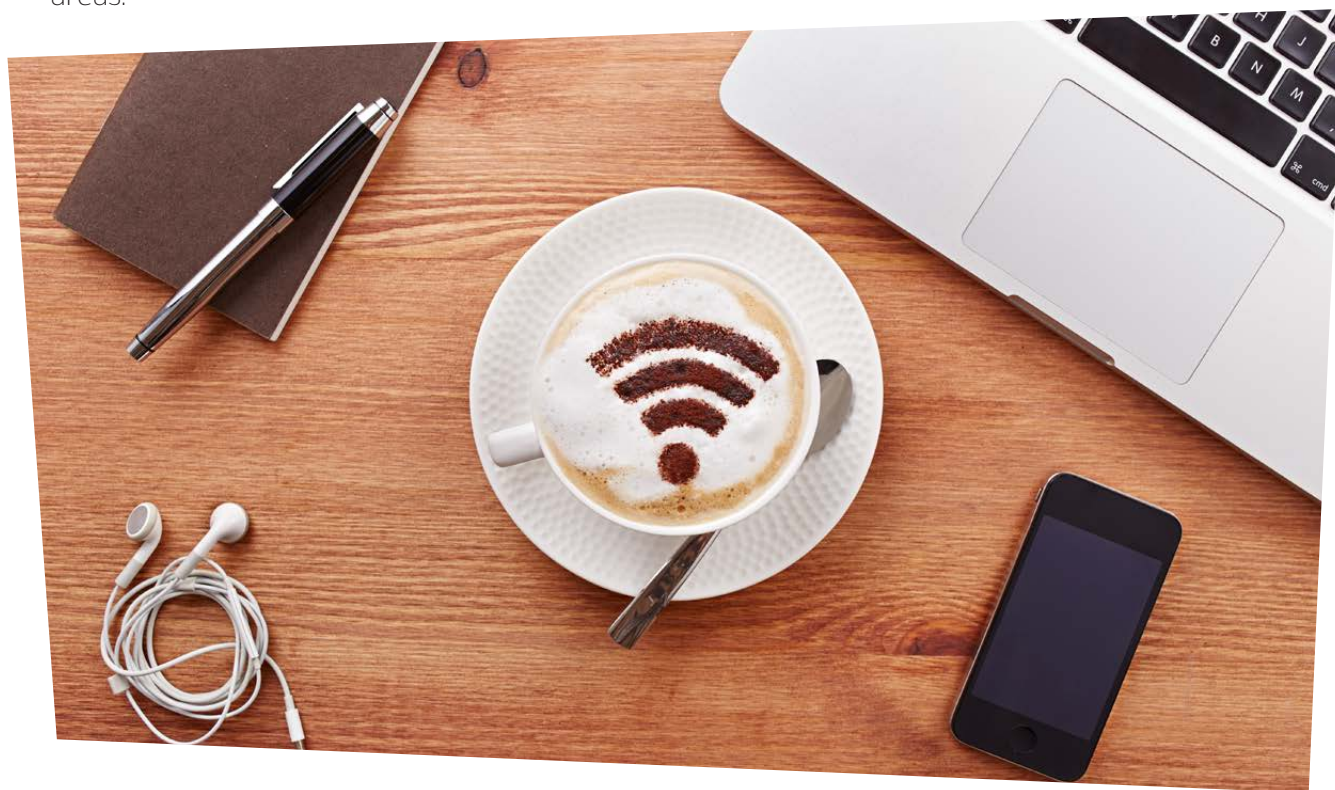
As a planner, you know you will be visiting the host hotel at least one more time before the event to discuss set-ups, see renovation updates, attend a menu tasting, or deal with all the other planning details that require a face-to-face meeting. So, why not decrease your expenses and ask for some free stays?

5) Complimentary WiFi – Almost everyone is carrying around a phone, tablet and laptop when they travel, so WiFi is a hot commodity to stay connected – in guest rooms and in meeting space and common areas.

CONCLUSION

There are many things you can ask for, but what is important to remember is to prioritize the concessions for each event you are planning based on the specific needs of your attendees. And don't be afraid to ask for one or all of these items.

*Hint: For more tips on how to negotiate concessions in a hotel contract, **contact us** directly for advice and suggestions. We have partnered up with a venue contract specialist who will review your hotel contract and offer some practical advice that will not only save you money, but also protect you against disaster or unforeseen costs.*



Speaker Tips & Tricks

Would you like for your event attendees to be both entertained and informed? If so, here are some tips to pass along to your speakers and presenters to set-up them up for success!

TELL A STORY

Event participants don't want to be talked at - they want to be entertained. And they want to know that the presentation is specifically for them (it's not a template your speaker uses for everyone).

The best way for a speaker to approach the presentation is to deliver it as if they are telling a story. The story should involve aspects the audience can identify with, challenges the speaker has overcome, and weaknesses or obstacles that he or she has faced. The point of the storytelling is to establish a bond between the speaker and the listeners. A speaker can best illustrate key points with meaningful anecdotes!

The presentation needs to be about what the presenter can teach the audience. One of your speaker's objectives should be to give attendees something new that makes their lives better or easier. If your speaker is helping to solve a problem, this provides value to the audience and gives them a tangible take-away.



BE PREPARED

Speakers also need to showcase that they are prepared for the presentation and know the content really, really well. Attendees are not interested in a university-style lecture either (or listening to a speaker who robotically reads a pre-written speech or presentation).

Tip: The expectations have switched from a one-way content style of presentation to a much more dynamic role of thought leader and discussion instigator. If presenters aren't connecting with the audience, you, the event organizer, are failing them.

TIMING

We have shorter attention spans these days so audiences expect presentations to be shorter (think TED Talks). So, even if a presenter has been given 90 minutes he or she should not feel like they need to use it! Talking too long is a sure-fire way to lose the audience. Less is more.

Tip: Instruct your speakers to avoid talking faster to make up time. Speakers should be practicing or rehearsing the presentation in advance over and over again to get the timing down to a science. If a presentation is running over time, the best way to catch up is to skip over some sections of content entirely, not speed things up.

TECH WOES

In the slim chance of a technology glitch ('cause that like never happens), it's the role of the

event organizer to ensure that speakers come prepared with a plan b. The show will have to go on – with or without video, internet or PowerPoint.

It helps to prepare speakers in advance by sending them a detailed list of what type of technology and equipment will be provided and to ask for specs on their presentation or any special requests he or she may have for equipment or set-up.

Speakers who arrive early, participate in getting their presentation set-up, do a sound check and basically make friends with the AV guy are rock star speakers that make the job of an event organizer so much easier (and less stressful).



SPEAKER ETIQUETTE

This may seem like common sense to most event professionals, but you'd be surprised how many speakers goof this stuff up! We've seen it all. Here are a few examples of speaker fails:

- Wearing clothes or accessories that are distracting or ill-fitting (if the speaker looks good, he or she feels good and this translates into a great presentation).
- Failing to turn off their cell phone during the meeting or presentation.
- Eating something messy right before or even during the presentation.
- Missing the memo on dress code altogether (over or under-dressed).

WHAT AUDIENCES LOVE

Have you ever wondered what the audience is really thinking? Here's a list of seven things audiences truly love about exceptional speakers:

- 1) Speakers who are real.
- 2) Speakers who talk about stuff the audience can relate to, needs or wants.
- 3) Speakers who talk conversationally with the audience – eyeball to eyeball.
- 4) Speakers who keep things simple and easy to follow.
- 5) Speakers who speak with energy and passion from their heart.
- 6) Speakers who make it interactive.
- 7) Speakers who are genuinely funny (real funny – not fake funny). Only if it's appropriate to be funny, of course.

HOW TO ANNOY THE AUDIENCE

Have you ever been to an event where there is the one speaker that everyone is talking about (in a bad way, not a good way)? Here are six things that a lot of speakers and presenters do that really annoy event attendees:

- 1) Using too much industry jargon, acronyms that no one understands, fake biz buzz words and marketing jargon.
- 2) Mispronunciations.
- 3) Talking quietly in a soft-spoken manner.
- 4) Ad-libbing too much (or going off on a tangent).
- 5) Starting the presentation off with a company overview (boring!) or lengthy personal bio (too over the top and ego-centric).
- 6) Reading from the slides.

GAUGING INTEREST

Presenters are human, so they want instant feedback on how they're doing up there.

Sprinkled between the nodding heads, beaming faces, and encouraging smiles are inevitably going to be a few people who look as if they can't get away soon enough. If your speakers spend energy trying to win those people over, they will end up distracted and deflated.

Old school speakers will tell you they look for eye contact and gauge audience interest that way. Today, the most engaged members of the audience are tweeting out the content at a frantic pace. So, their heads may be down as they type away furiously on their phones, but this is actually an indicator of attentiveness.

SPEAKING OF TYPING AWAY...

What differentiates a good event speaker from a mediocre one is participation in the hallway discussions and conversations on social media before and after the presentation. Successful presentations don't always end with applause (or a standing O) these days. So, ask your speakers to embrace the Tweeters and the Instagrammers! Ask presenters to share their social media handles in advance so that event organizers can get the conversation started.

Tip: Ask presenters to pre-schedule tweets about their presentation content so that attendees can comment on or retweet content generated by the presenter in real-time. Or, ask a member of the event planning team to live tweet the presentation and pro-actively engage others in the room.

BRING EMOTION

Attendees will be captivated by an emotional presentation. If the speaker is feeling it in that moment, he or she should be encouraged to give into it, be vulnerable, and reap the benefits of a more engaged audience.

However, emotion cannot be forced. It has to flow naturally. An experienced speaker will know when to change gears when an anticipated emotional moment falls flat.

Tip: Check lighting. In a dim setting, the audience will be more likely to give into the emotional moments along with the speaker (as compared to a brightly lit room).



HANDLING QUESTIONS LIKE A PRO

Questions are a good thing! It means people are interested, engaged and listening. When a speaker sidesteps questions (rather than admitting they don't know) it reflects badly on the presenter. Tossing in a side order of BS is also a major no-no. No one is fooled by this and the speaker just ends up looking silly. A speaker who refuses to answer questions isn't making any friends either.

And forget about rhetorical questions. When a speaker asks the crowd "What if I could save you..." they are obviously not expecting an answer back and it seems like an obvious ploy to set themselves up for their next slide.

Tip: In a large room, set-up floor mics or have volunteers with handhels available to pass over to an event attendee with a question. There is nothing more annoying than someone trying to shout out their question in a big room.

DEATH BY POWERPOINT

You knew it was coming... the inevitable guidelines for creating a dynamic and attractive PowerPoint deck. We know that most speakers don't want to face the laborious task of re-formatting a PPT presentation that they have already spent hours on, but, trust us. It will be worth their time.

If your presenter's slide presentation deck hasn't changed since 2004, he or she needs major help. It's the role of the event organizer to encourage presentations that will engage attendees.

Speakers who follow these guidelines will guarantee that the audience remains engaged and is focused on their message and not their poorly formatted (ugly) slides. Nothing is more distracting!

So, here's how your event presenters can begin to think outside the slides...

More tips:

- Speakers should be encouraged to spend $\frac{3}{4}$ of their time onstage referencing graphics and sharable quotes (think sound bites that event participants can easily digest and that also work well as tweets).
- Speakers should involve the audience throughout the presentation. For example, pausing between slides to ask for a show of hands, conducting a poll, doing live Q & A (instead of waiting until the end to ask for attendee participation).
- Speakers should start with a bang by engaging people right from slide #1 or before the first slide even hits the screen.
- Speakers should use the technology of the presentation to make an impression (i.e. the slides are not speaking notes).

CONCLUSION

Despite our best efforts as event professionals, some speakers may still show up for their presentation and deliver something truly lackluster and disappointing. Others may knock it out of the park and bring the room to its feet. Either way, if you make an effort to encourage your presenters to implement some of these strategies at your next event you will have a better chance of creating a memorable experience for your event attendees.

Did you enjoy Volume IV of our Event Planning Survival Guide?

MORE CONTENT IS COMING SOON!

Visit our website for details or [contact us](#) for more information about how iSPARK Consulting can help take your event to a new level, solve some of your pain points, and inject some new energy into your events!

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