

TIPS WHEN NEGOTIATING INTERNET AND TELEPHONE CHARGES

Internet Access.

Many hotel brochures reference their hi-speed internet access or boast of their free WiFi. Planners beware. I've had numerous clients get caught on this issue because they assumed that the connection was free (it was not.) Or that the free WiFi was in the meeting rooms where they needed it but WiFi was available for free only in the lobby. Be sure to clarify this issue.

Then once you have paid for high speed internet access what limitations are there? A client wanted to have several computers available for the attendees to be able to check their email and planned to bring 3 laptops and use a wireless router to connect them. "No can do" said the hotel and indicated that they would need to pay for 3 separate internet lines.

The moral of the story is to try to determine what your Internet requirements are in advance. Spell out to your hotel contact what you want to do during the site inspection. Do you need a T-1 line or would DSL suffice? Where will you need access? For how many computers? If you plan to bring in a wireless router add a clause to your contract so you don't run into a problem on-site.

Related to this is the charge for using internet in the sleeping rooms. Just because it is there doesn't mean it's free, far from it. Hotels charge up to \$25 a day for combined internet and long distance service in the sleeping rooms. Who are your attendees and will this cost be charged to your meeting budget? Then negotiate a reduced charge before you sign the contract. Or perhaps have the fee waived for your meeting staff. After you have signed the contract you have no leverage so that is not the time to ask about this.

Telephone Charges.

Be very clear about what you need and ask the hotel to outline all charges related to telephone usage. It is not uncommon to see a rental charge for the phone itself, a usage charge that varies depending on whether you need local, long distance, or international long distance, and sometimes even a labor charge to hook up the phone. Ask, ask, ask. I had negotiated a clause that stated "Group will receive one complimentary long distance phone line." Boy was I surprised when I was hit with a \$100 phone rental fee.

In summary, be sure to:

1. Determine internet and telephone needs for your event prior to visiting hotel.
2. Ask facility to provide any internet, phone, hook-up charges in writing.
3. Negotiate to reduce or eliminate these charges before signing the contract.
4. Add a clause indicating that hotel has disclosed all relevant charges.

Shelley E. Griffin, CMM, the president of Boston-based Griffin Conference Group, is a respected industry leader with over twenty years experience. For more helpful tips, please visit our web site at www.griffinconferencegroup.com.