

Tips to Reduce Your F&B Costs

Have you noticed how food and beverage costs have risen dramatically over the past few years? My clients are often shocked when they hear the cost for a Continental breakfast or a gallon of coffee for their event. And that's before I tell them we need to add an additional 20% to 28% for tax and gratuity. How can you keep these costs down without making your event seem cheap? Read on.

Before you place the order for your next function, make sure you know your attendees and their reason for attending this event. What are your group's demographics? Will they arrive the morning of the function or are they staying at the hotel? (Some attendees may skip breakfast to exercise or sleep in.) Are some attendees coming from a different time zone? If your event is on the West Coast with attendees from the East Coast, you may find they have already eaten based on their internal clock. All these factors affect how many attendees will eat breakfast at your event.

At some events, as many as 40% to 50% of the attendees skip breakfast. Tracking this information will enable you to order more accurately next year. You may be able to order less for breakfast but more for the morning break.

If you haven't tracked this information before, plan to start now. Ask your catering manager for a report of what was consumed at each food function. This will vary greatly by organization and meeting type so it's important to keep this updated information or history in your event records.

But what if you don't have this kind of information? You may be new to meeting planning or planning a different type of event. One way to reduce costs--with no reduction in quality-- is to order the breakfast items by bulk rather than the standard continental breakfast. It takes just a little effort to calculate the required amounts but it is worth it for the savings. I recently saved a client 30% of their food costs just by ordering in bulk.

You can save even more by making some minor adjustments to the amount you order. Typically, all attendees will want a hot beverage, be it coffee, decaf or tea. However less than half will have juice, especially if the meal is eaten while standing. Likewise, you'll find that many of your attendees will pass on the muffins or Danish. Try reducing the amount of juice and breakfast items ordered by 25% and track the results. I've found there are still juice and muffins left over while the cost has gone down. However, I don't suggest ordering in bulk for groups smaller than 50 attendees. Need help to determine the amount to order? See the attached ordering chart.

Breakfast Ordering Chart - Hot Beverages

# Attendees	Regular Coffee	Decaf Coffee	Hot Tea
	65%	30%	10%
50	3-4 gal.	1 gal.	1/2 gal.
75	4-5 gal.	1-2 gal.	1 gal.
100	6-7 gal.	3 gal.	1 gal.
125	7-8 gal.	3 gal.	1 1/2 gal.
150	9-10 gal.	4 gal.	1 1/2 gal.

Note: These figures provide 1-1.5 cups per attendees.

Formula: Percentage x total number of attendees = # cups needed

Divide by 15 to calculate how many gallons to order.

Breakfast Ordering Chart

# Attendees	Juice	Breakfast Items	
	50%	50%	75%
50	1.5 gal.	3 doz	4 doz.
75	2 gal.	4 doz.	5 doz.
100	2.5 gal.	5 doz.	6 doz.
125	3.5 gal.	6 doz.	8 doz.
150	4 gal.	7 doz.	9 doz.

Note: When ordering juice a typical serving is 6 oz. or 20 servings per gallon.

Breakfast items refers to bagels, muffins, danish, etc.

Suggest ordering sufficient quantity for 75% initially.

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.