



## IN THIS ISSUE:

# Holiday Party Planning on a Budget

By Cynthia Kincaid, contributing writer

This year, tough economic times have companies feeling the financial pinch. Many may be deciding to scale down or cancel their holiday party altogether.

### Scaling Back

Rather than go to the extreme of canceling a party outright, there are many things a business can do to create an affordable and fun party, without breaking the bank. While finding a cheaper caterer is an option, some out-of-the-box thinking and planning might just make a successful party with less cost.

"You can still have something special, but scaled back," said Amy Orr, owner of Orrganized Events in Chico, Calif. For instance, Orr recommends having a luncheon, a brunch or even a picnic, instead of a formal dinner. "Or maybe there's something else you can give your employees instead of a holiday party," she said. "You can take them to a ballgame and give them a \$20 gift certificate. There are many ways that an employer can still thank their employees." Check with your tax attorney or accountant about tax implications to be sure you are within the legal limits before you dish out monetary gifts to employees.

Orr estimates that many holiday parties can run \$30 to \$75 a person before the expense of alcohol. This estimate does include food, the venue, and fees for service and gratuities.

Ari Rosenstein, director of marketing for Los Angeles-based CPEhr, said that companies can still maintain the core of the party by having a nice brunch or dinner, but scale back on extras that are costly and don't add much to the experience. "Some companies will print fancy invitations and have an open bar," he said. "You don't have to do that."

Alcohol, says Orr, can add another \$15 per person to the tab, but there are ways to get around that. "The company might host the bar for an hour, with water and soda offered for free, or they might consider giving out drink tickets to hold down costs," she said.

### Change the Venue, Change the Time

Changing the venue from a traditional office party

to something more unusual may not only save money, but breathe new life into a routine get-together. Booking a location at some of the more unique places within your community can reframe the party as something memorable and fun.

"I have a company that I'm working with that wants to continue to keep their employees happy," Orr said, "so they are creating a big party at an air show. They are renting a chalet, inviting all of their staff and hosting the party there. It's going to be the equivalent of their holiday party."

Orr said the company spent \$40 to \$50 per person for the event, which would be more cost effective for a smaller company with fewer employees.

Other venues, such as ballgames are also popular, she said, especially when the company picks up the tab for the venue, but people buy their own food. "Companies don't have to get into buying food because everyone can buy their own."

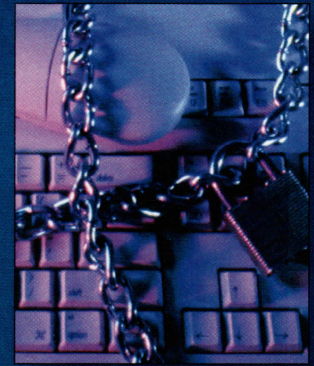
These changes in location can add zest to a holiday affair, as well as create an atmosphere where people can get to know each other on a more personal and social level. Communicate a change in the venue in the best possible light. Position the change as fun, maybe even adventurous, but include the usual awards and bonus checks, Rosenstein said.

Orr also recommends changing the timing of when a company throws a party. Since most holiday parties are held in December, when room rentals and catering fees can be at their highest, she suggests moving the party to before or after the holidays. The move may not only relieve financial pressure, but also give employees something to look forward to, say, in January.

"They can call it the beginning of the year celebration," she said. "And it can be a kind of 'thank you' for last year."

What's most important, Orr said, is the gesture a company demonstrates in hosting a party to thank its employees, despite tight economic times. "There are ways to make a champagne event on a beer budget," she said. "And the gesture is really nice." □

### Guarding Personal Data



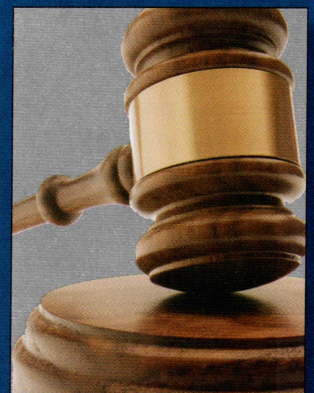
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### Dust Off Handbooks, Ditch Dormant Policies



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