

TIPS FROM A PRO»

KNOW WHAT YOU ARE SIGNING

How to approach a venue contract from every angle.

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Contracting with venues is a regular occurrence when planning a new meeting or event. The key is to not just hand off the paperwork to the client for review, but instead use it as an opportunity to learn more about your venue, impress your clients and perhaps even help them reduce their location costs.

We work with a host of hotels, arenas both big and small, and offbeat venues to create unique events and meetings at a variety of locales both here and abroad. Once we receive a contract, we take the time to thoroughly read it multiple times from a number of different vantage points. The first things we look for are, of course, the basics. Are the date and time the space will be rented correct? Are there preferred vendors that we must work with or can we bring in our trusted partners? We also make sure that the rental fee is clearly stated as well as the payment schedule and carefully review the stated cancellation policy.

Another important consideration: Does the contract clearly state the correct timing details and adequately address your load-in and load-out needs? We usually take it one step further and ask if there are any other events taking place before or after our event that could potentially interfere with our plans. If yes, we sometimes extend our rental terms so the other events don't interfere with ours.

The next step is to clearly identify any hid-



den costs so there are no surprises for you and your client. Look for clauses that stipulate your use of their cleaning staff, security or A/V technicians. These may be referred to as “other services” and can add up quickly without your realizing it. Ideally you should ask for a breakdown or quote detailing the costs. Having a full understanding of those services can also help to make your planning more thorough from the beginning.

Don't be afraid to ask if any of the stipulated costs are negotiable. We have saved our clients thousands of dollars by simply asking this question. For example, is the venue charging you for use of their video screens when you won't be using them? Be sure that both the cost and the “scope of the event” adequately describe what the venue is really being used for.

We also find it useful to search for contract clauses that are unique or don't apply to our event. Many times a venue will simply present a standard contract template that their legal team created and might include terms not relevant to the actual space we are using or event we are producing. For example, did you know that in Texas some contracts include a stipulation that you must choose whether or not you want your event to be “gun free?” Usually a venue will agree to delete the sections of a contract that don't apply to your event or refer to resources or equipment that you won't be using.

Once you follow all of the above steps, it is time to hand over the contract for formal legal review. Don't be surprised if you go a few more rounds regarding insurance requirements, payment schedules, damages, risk and security measures.

Lastly, what is most important about decoding your contract? It's the human element! Partner with your venue contact to ensure that the paperwork reflects all that is needed for a successful outcome and that both of your needs are met. Create an ongoing dialogue and articulate your needs so that you can openly address any issues that may arise. Taking these steps will help ensure that everything runs smoothly from the initial planning stages to the completion of your event.



PRIOR TO FORMING THE CHARLES GROUP INC. IN 1987, **SUSAN DUNKELMAN** SERVED AS DIRECTOR OF CONFERENCES FOR THE RISK AND INSURANCE MANAGEMENT SOCIETY (RIMS), SHE PARTICIPATES AS A MEMBER OF ILEA AND HAS SERVED ON NUMEROUS COMMITTEES AND PANELS IN THE INDUSTRY AND LECTURED ON MEETING PLANNING AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY.

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