



WHAT
COULD GO
WRONG?

By
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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT EXPERTS AND EVENT PROFESSIONALS TALK TIPS, TOOLS AND TOP OF MIND CONCEPTS TO KEEP EVENTS SAFE AND RUNNING SMOOTHLY.

BY the time the now-iconic photo of one Fyre Festivalgoer's pitiful cheese sandwich had gone viral, social media platforms and news outlets were abuzz with shock and bewilderment—questioning how the seemingly star-studded island excursion could have resulted in half-built FEMA-issued tents, cancelled musical acts and stranded attendees. But for seasoned planners, the legendary disaster was just another in a slew of daily reminders on the importance of contingency planning and the true value of the many hours spent crafting alternate options for the emergencies they hope will never come to pass.

While most planners are well-versed in the basic elements of contingency planning, we've checked in with crowd and emergency management experts, local planners and law enforcement professionals to talk tips, tools and concepts for planners to keep top-of-mind when planning their next event.

HIT REFRESH

Just as custom reigns king in today's event design, food and beverage and décor, cookie-cutter plans won't do in case of an emergency—a concept planners likely already know but need to dedicate more time and effort to.

"To effectively manage an issue as it arises, contingency plans should be unique to that event," says Crisis and Public Relations Consultant Rick J. Kaufman, APR. With over 30 years of emergency management experience, Kaufman works as

a consultant for schools and organizations across the country, finding that although most clients come to him with a plan in place, many are already years old or are too incomplete, requiring an audit for vulnerabilities or any possible gaps in operational response.

"A solid plan should consist of elements of prevention and intervention, response and recovery and a crisis plan. The contingency plan should also account for the needs of the client, and attendees, event activities and location specifics," he says. "In most cases, starting with a general framework is OK, but you need to get more specific and drill down from there. You need answers to big questions and that effort takes a significant amount of time."

For some, finding enough time to contingency plan may be the biggest challenge. "I was pretty lucky to start in the industry with a company that was big on security and contingency planning, so it's a passion of mine, but it should always be a top priority for all planners, right from the get-go," says Sarah Bondar, chief operating officer for The Charles Group, Inc.

"For us, the emergency planning starts the very first day we begin sourcing. Right from the start, as we're looking into venues, we're asking whether or not they have automatic fire prevention sprinkler systems," says Bondar. "As we plan, we're collecting security documents from our vendors and venues, and by a few months out we've got to have everything in place. You've got to bake those questions into each step of the planning process and stick to it."

"You don't want to get caught flat-footed. Issues that pop up are only exacerbated when the left hand doesn't know what the right is doing. Everyone needs to know where direction is coming from, what their roles are, who is responsible for what and they need to be adequately trained to take on those roles. Any confusion on those expectations can slow down response time and cause more distress or panic."



RICK J. KAUFMAN, APR
*Crisis and Public Relations
Consultant*

TEAM EFFORT

"At their events, planners are in a unique role in that they are the most knowledgeable person in the room. They are the experts in their circumstances," says Steven A. Adelman, an expert in safety and security at live events, head of the Adelman Law Group, PLLC, and vice president of the Event Safety Alliance.

"As attendees, we tend to be anti-authoritarian when we go out to play. We don't listen to directions or pay attention very well. We're more concerned with who's going to win or who's coming out on stage or what's the next cool display. We're looking for our friends. We're not looking at signage, we don't notice exits and we probably can't hear your PA announcements, so we're really relying on event organizers to have the answers if anything bad happens."

And while that may be intimidating to some, experts like Adelman and event professionals like Bondar agree it's important for planners to utilize the full strength and support of their team. Successful contingency planning relies heavily on a team approach, delegation and strong, clear communication.

"It's a team effort. No one can know everything and if you try to go it alone you're going to miss at least a few things—that's a chance you don't want to risk," says Bondar. "No one knows a venue better than that venue's team. No one knows how to handle a large event in a given city better than the local police departments who work each of those events. Everyone has a different point of view to offer and all of them can strengthen those contingency efforts."

Just as planners maintain clear and consistent channels of communication with event partners, from clients and internal staff to A/V providers and custodial staff, to ensure day-of production goes off without a hitch, planners must consider how contingencies can impact all involved with their events, and communicate accordingly.

"You don't want to get caught flat-footed. Issues that pop up are only exacerbated when the left hand doesn't know what the right is doing," says Kaufman. "Everyone needs to know where direction is coming from, what their roles are and who is responsible for what, and they need to be adequately trained to take on those roles. Any confusion on those expectations can slow down response time and cause more distress or panic."

Bondar and her team put these tenets into action with each event. "Most people say that they have an emergency plan, but if your plan isn't thorough, organized and well communicated, it's not going to work," says Bondar. "When it comes to event safety, security protocols and open communication are crucial. You need to talk with each and every vendor, every client. You have to be collaborative in it."

From planning calls to on-site meetings, Bondar and her team are always working to perfect their communication plan. "Did you know that in a large-scale emergency situation, local police can often end up jamming cell signals? If something should happen, who

on your team is going to communicate with who? How are you going to communicate?" Before each event, Bondar's team gathers all staff, vendors and any ancillary crew involved for a meeting. "We're keeping everyone in the loop throughout the planning process, but at that final meeting we're welcoming everyone, talking through major details and then we hand it over to the security team to share any key info we should all know. At the end of that meeting, everyone's on the same page, crucial info is top of mind and you're good to go."

QUESTIONS ARE KEY

"Really, when it comes down to it, contingency planning is all about asking good questions," says Adelman. When crafting a thorough contingency plan, planners may turn to local law enforcement and emergency responder professionals for help, "and that's a great place to start but there needs to be more of a dialogue."

"No matter how much time I might spend with a client, I'm never going to be as knowledgeable about their event as they are. I do know where things tend to go wrong and I know what the existing guidance is to help mitigate some of those risks. Experts may know enough about human psychology or a specific security issue, but planners need to take what they've learned from those conversations and adapt it to their events. The better and more specific the questions, the better prepared they'll be," Adelman says.

Kaufman concurs, noting "your plan can only be strengthened by the answers you've gathered along the way. What are the hazards to your event? Are they geographical? Are they intentional? Will dignitaries attend? Will alcohol be served? Who will provide the security and what are they responsible for? What time will doors open? What time does the event end?

Which exits and entrances will be used? Your questions will range from broad and high-level to the minute detail, but this is a time you don't want to hold back. It can sound elementary, but understanding that questions like these are your tools can be powerful and keep you prepared."

"It's the questions you're asking yourself that will fill out that contingency plan," says Bondar. "Who's in charge when someone is inebriated? Will you make them leave the event? How will you make sure they get home safe? If an emergency should arise, who will report it first and what number are they going to call? Who will talk to the media if needed? What number should you call if something's stolen? What number will you call if someone needs to be seen but it's not exactly a medical emergency? Asking those key questions can help you discover the details you may not have already thought of."

BIG PICTURE

Unfortunately, while man-made hazards and acts of violence continue to dominate news cycles and loom as a potential threat throughout the event planning process, experts worry planners may begin to miss the forest for the trees with less attention paid to other likely risks.

"The inclination is to react to what we see in the headlines. We have far too many instances of active shooters, so we pay a disproportionate amount of our attention to guns relative to the likelihood that we will have a gun-related incident at our event," says Adelman. From the placement of directional signage and seating or stage setup to the event of a flood or an attendee medical emergency, "we need to be able to deal with crowd management apart from active shooters, because crowd management must be done regardless of the reason the crowd needs to be managed.

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Head of the Adelman Law Group, PLLC and Vice President of the Event Safety Alliance

This can get us out of the trap of thinking only of guns.”

Kaufman also advises planners to focus on the task at hand when planning for the worst-case scenario—the response. “We often focus too much on the threat and less on the response specific to that emergency. ‘Active shooter’ may be the buzzword these days, but any number of threats could emerge that require a similar response protocol,” he says. “The reality is it’s about responding to situations we don’t have all of the info for. I counsel clients to concentrate on and practice drills using consistent protocols to create cultural conditions so that they know what to do in a real-world situation.”

In consideration of the potential for violence at live events, Adelman also notes planning for substance as well as perception. “The fear of acts of violence is far more widespread than the acts of violence themselves, but addressing perception can enhance attendee confidence. Obviously, you want to have the basics—security perimeters like a physical fence or use of bollards and a check of guests and their bags at the point of ingress, wayfinding signage and clear directions to exits—because visual deterrents not only help prevent bad behavior, they provide a sense of confidence to guests. In the past, uniformed security guards might have caused alarm, but these days when they see security, guests are more likely to think ‘great, they’re considering our safety,’” says Adelman.

ON THE RADAR

While active shooters may be one of the most concerning threats facing today’s live events, experts advise planners also keep issues like cyber security and climate change top of mind.

“Climate change should be on everyone’s

radar and may actually impact the live event industry disproportionately due to the number of events that take place outside of brick-and-mortar venues. As our climate becomes less stable, we have an increased potential for severe weather evacuations, underscoring the importance of having a severe weather action plan. Planners will need to stress site planning as well as access to accurate weather information. Hint: Your cell phone app is not a reliable source of GPS-located weather information,” says Adelman.

“Issues like climate change are going to have a greater impact on events and lead to further disruptions in the industry, but today’s political climate also poses a threat. As we begin to see more cases of protest and civil unrest—planners need to begin to plan for politically-motivated issues as well,” says Kaufman.

POWER IN PLANNING

Most importantly, although the complex process of contingency planning may be nerve-racking at times, Adelman encourages planners to embrace the power that the practice can bring planners.

“Understanding crowd management and contingency planning gives people—regardless of age, skill set, education level or expertise—helpful things they can do in an emergency that are within their power,” says Adelman. “Being told to stand in a corner and wait for further instruction—that’s disempowering. But when you break things like an evacuation plan for severe weather or finding back-up entertainment for an artist that can’t perform down into fairly simple, easily achievable elements, there’s something everyone can do to help solve a problem and to help keep people safe—that’s empowering.”

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

While the ideal combination of guides, websites and services will vary by event, local planners and industry experts have recommended a few of their go-to tools:

American National Standards Institute (ANSI): A private not-for-profit organization fostering national safeguarding standards for a range of industries, including the field of safety and security. ANSI will publish a new crowd management standard in early 2020 to provide planners with key questions and authoritative crowd management guidance for planning safe and secure events. ansi.org

Event Safety Alliance: Dedicated to helping event professionals mitigate foreseeable live event risks through education, skills training and advocacy, this nonprofit creates resources for planners like its Event Safety Podcast (an ongoing discussion for ideas and news from the world of live event safety), Event Safety Access Training (an online program for professionals in all aspects of event production), and The Event Safety Guide, the country's first published safety guidance manual created specifically for the live event industry. The guide compiles relevant safety standards, insight from industry experts and reasonable operational practices regarding emergency planning, weather preparedness and more. eventsafetyalliance.org

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) **National Weather Service:** The national organization provides weather, water and climate information for the general public, but can also help planners prepare for hazardous conditions that may put attendees in harm's way. Planners can register their event with the organization's local branch for assistance with accurate day-of forecasting. noaa.gov, weather.gov

National Center for Spectator Sports Safety and Security (NCS4): As one of the world's leading academic research institutions in addressing sports safety, security risks and threats, and offers planners a variety of online resources, best practice guides and more. ncs4.usm.edu

#BECAUSEITALY

By Morgan Halaska

Haute Dokimazo's Secret Family Reunion flew 80 experiential marketing professionals to Tuscany, a plan that wasn't disclosed until just before boarding the flight (read more about it on page 22). To pull it off, Nicole Osibodu and Liz Lathan planned for contingencies and problem-solved on the spot, while also taking it all in stride.

"We talked about all the normal worst things that people know: weather, flight delays, people not being able to make the flight ... all those normal things we had planned for," says Lathan. "The things that we didn't have plans for we figured out."

Lathan and Osibodu openly communicated with attendees, who were ready to go with the flow. "We didn't hide our stress or anything," says Osibodu, who says they were transparent about when they didn't know what to do.

"When we got there, we had challenges," says Lathan. "It started this whole hashtag, #BecauseItaly. There are things that we didn't know about and everyone embraced the #BecauseItaly hashtag."

The goal wasn't for everything to go perfectly, though. "We want [the attendees] to learn from this," says Lathan. "There are going to be things

that don't go right at all, but our whole vibe is 'steal this idea from us.' Fix it. Make it right, make it work, and steal it. None of this is proprietary to us. We want to be the playground where you can see how things could work so you can go do it at your event."

Lathan wrote an article reflecting on the lessons learned through planning an event of this scale. "A core part of our Haute Dokimazo ethos is trying new things, and knowing that they may not work as planned," writes Lathan. "My favorite phrase that I learned from improv is that there is no such thing as failure, just unintended consequences!" The article, entitled "Lessons learned from Haute Dokimazo Secret Family Reunion: The event that changed events forever," can be read in its entirety on LinkedIn.

"In business, you hold your cards close to your heart, and for us, it's like we want more people to call us and ask us how to do it. And we'll teach them how to do it," says Osibodu. "This is so much bigger than us. This is something to be shared. We're more than happy to share it. Our hearts are in the right place. And along the line our business grows, but that's really not our focus."



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CEO of Haute Dokimazo



LIZ LATHAN
Chief Experience Officer
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