



Keep Microphone Expenses Under Control

Some groups and speakers demand audiovisual equipment that will facilitate high-tech presentations or individualized computer instruction. Others are decidedly non-technical in their audiovisual needs. But regardless of how techno-savvy the group or the speakers are, there is usually at least one common audiovisual request at almost every meeting: microphones.

While it may not seem like much thought is necessary in making decisions about using microphones at your meeting, there can actually be a great deal of money at stake, according to Ken Sien, CMF, an account executive at Conferon, Inc. Before rashly ordering microphones for every session, or worse, allowing speakers free rein to order their own microphones, it's smart to carefully consider your needs in advance so that you can place a well-informed and budget-conscious order.

First, make sure that your audiovisual company is aware that you (or someone you delegate) are the only person with the authority to make requests or orders for audiovisual equipment. "Some speakers may ask for a wireless mic on site," Sien said. "So it's important to make sure your A/V company will have all speakers' requests approved by you. When given the choice, most speakers will almost always select a wireless microphone over a hardwired mic, not realizing the difference in cost."

That difference in cost can be substantial. Sien estimated that the cost of an average wireless microphone ranges from \$75 to \$125, versus \$25 to \$30 for a hardwired microphone. In addition, if the wireless microphone doesn't feature volume adjustment, you'll also have to order an audio mixer (a device that enables you to control the sound on the microphones you use).

"If you're holding multiple concurrent sessions, ordering wireless mics for each room can be very expensive," Sien said. "For a general session, however, it makes sense to let speakers use the microphone they feel most comfortable with. After all, they are addressing the entire group and their presentations should go as smoothly as possible."

But before you automatically order microphones (even hardwired ones) for every room where a session will be held, carefully consider the setup and planned usage for each room. There are no specific rules on when a microphone is needed, but Sien offered the following general guidelines.

- If there are fewer than 60 people in the room, a microphone isn't necessary unless the presenter is soft-spoken or the ceiling height is 15 feet or more. If a speaker is presenting a multi-day seminar, however, you may want to order a mic to preserve his or her voice. If the session is being audiotaped, a mic is definitely required.

- When attendance is greater than 60 to 75, a microphone is recommended. Even though some speakers feel they can project sufficiently to a group of 100, it may be difficult for people in the back of the room to hear over background noises such as coughing, throat clearing, or paper shuffling.

- Standing microphones for audience questions aren't necessary for sessions of fewer than 100 people. Many attendees already feel uncomfortable approaching a microphone and most likely won't use it for small meetings.

- For large groups where audience participation is part of the program, you'll need audience microphones and, of course, a mixer so that the volume on the different mics can be controlled.

Microphone Expenses, continued

While it's easy to run up costs by ordering unnecessary microphones, a prudent and educated planner can avoid it. However, it doesn't stop there. There is also companion equipment that is often sold

How to Keep A/V Costs Within Your Meeting Budget

1. Specify contractually if quoted prices are inclusive of all charges, including labor.
2. Specify that the meeting sponsor will not be responsible for miscellaneous charges that are not properly authorized and documented.
3. Negotiate the meeting sponsor's right to use an outside vendor of its choice without incurring additional charges.
4. With certain items like extension cords, negotiate a "purchase" price versus a "rental" price.

with microphones but is also not always necessary. Audio mixers are used to connect multiple pieces of sound equipment, such as microphones, cassette players, compact disc players, VCRs, and computers, to the public address (PA) system, and allow control

over the volume of each piece of equipment. While they can be very helpful, audio mixers are not always needed and can significantly increase audiovisual costs without merit.

While it varies from company to company and facility to facility, Sien said that an audio mixer is generally needed only when:

- Four or more microphones are required.
- A cassette player, CD player, VCR, or computer sound is connected to a PA system.

The most commonly used audio mixer is a four-channel model, meaning you can connect four audio devices (such as one podium mic, one lavalier mic, one standing mic, and a cassette player) to the PA system. If more inputs are needed, additional four-channel mixers can be added or an audio mixer with more inputs can be used. The important tip to remember is not to pay for an audio mixer if the microphones or other equipment you're using does not justify the expense.

With a little research and advance planning, an educated planner can save money on the necessary expense of microphones simply by managing all requests through one person, and by refusing to order a higher number of a more advanced model of microphones when they are not needed. ♦