



Recipe for Success

Because food and beverage play such a crucial role in creating the right experience for your attendees, it's never too early to begin food planning. While it might look easy on *The Food Network*, there are myriad variables to consider before you can begin planning banquet menus.

Group Profile

Just as you consider your audience when planning educational programs, you must carefully consider your attendees and their needs when developing food and beverage plans. Within a corporation, you might plan a national meeting for store managers from around the country, including smaller cities and rural areas, or you might plan an incentive trip for the top-producing salespeople from North America and Europe. Within an association, you might organize an event for the board of directors or a group of student volunteers. Even though everyone is from the same company or works in the same industry, there are differences that determine what types of menus may or may not be appropriate.

Younger attendees may eat healthier foods, but they're also more likely to enjoy junk food or more casual fare. Older delegates may not want anything too exotic, spicy or heavy. Women might not mind being served chicken, fish or a salad entrée, but some men might not be satisfied unless there's a piece of beef on their plate. Other factors that can help you predict the types of foods that may be acceptable to a particular group include: occupation, socioeconomic status, ethnic background and geographic area. One thing's for certain: All attendees have become more sophisticated and demanding about their food choices.

In addition, food allergies and special menu requests are increasing, so find out as much as you can in advance about attendee needs and preferences. After the low-carb craze of the past few years, a number of attendees continue to avoid carbohydrates and other foods that are excluded from popular diets. It's best to study the history of your group to determine whether such diets are a factor. If you aren't sure, test the group on the first day of your meeting and make changes for the following days based on response.

At a recent meeting for 6,000 people, Experient planners had "carb watchers" in mind when they added a cheese tray and a big bowl of hard-boiled eggs to the Continental breakfast buffet. The planner ordered 500 eggs for the first day and 300 for day two. After the eggs were completely gone on day one, she increased the order for day two. (See sidebar on page 12 for more ideas about how to effectively deal with special requests.)

Menu Planning

In addition to the profile of your group, a number of other considerations should be included in planning your menus. When making decisions about what types of food and beverage will be served, remember the following.

- **Scheduling.** Take into account what your delegates will be doing immediately before and after the meal. If they're coming from a function at which heavy hors d'oeuvres were served, the meal should be lighter. If they're coming from a liquor-only reception, the meal should be heavier.
- **Ease of production.** Certain delicate items like lobster can't be produced and served in large quantities without sacrificing quality. Chicken and beef, on the other hand, are banquet staples for good reasons. They're easy to prepare, can be cooked a variety of ways and are palatable to most people. Beef also has the advantage of being consistently available in a wide range of cuts.

- **Labor costs.** Since payroll costs can account for as much as one-third of a meal function's total price, it makes sense to steer clear of items that require a lot of time and/or many pairs of hands to prepare. For example, you may not want to order anything that's stuffed, wrapped in puff pastry or baked in parchment. Elaborate vegetable garnishes and sauces painted on plates fall into the same category. However, more and more food items are outsourced or purchased from vendors who specialize and produce mass quantities that they can sell to numerous facilities. While this may offset the facility's labor cost, it will increase the food cost of the item.

- **Product shelf life.** Since programs don't always run on time, it makes sense to order items that will hold up well if service is delayed. Foods that will remain moist and flavorful despite service delays include chicken, filet mignon, medallions of beef, roasted potatoes, rice, green beans and steamed carrots. Items that won't hold up as well include eggs Benedict, any food served en croute and pre-sliced beef items.

- **Traffic flow.** Some foods hold up well but can cause major traffic flow headaches. Deli buffets for large groups, for example, are notorious for becoming jammed up as attendees attempt to create the perfect sandwich from a choice of seven meats, five cheeses, four breads and two mustards. An alternative is to serve pre-made sandwiches cut in half so that people can still have a choice but the lines move faster. Fajita stations and nacho bars may also add time for the attendees to prepare. Also, remember that the more food choices offered on a buffet, the slower the line will move.

- **Repetition.** When planning menus for a multi-day meeting, be sure to pay attention to what is being served at other events held during your convention such as accompanying person tours, exhibitor-sponsored functions and hospitality suites. You wouldn't want your guests to eat cheesecake at an exhibitor-sponsored function, again on a spouse tour and then again at the final-night dinner. Similarly, it's important to avoid repetition within any given meal, as in sautéed carrots, carrot and raisin salad, and carrot cake. Sometimes, however, repetition can be good. If you have one special event each year—the gala awards dinner, for example—attendees may expect the same filet mignon each year. Then again, they may want something different—chocolate dessert one year, crème brûlée the next. That's why it's so critical to know your group.

- **Political sensitivities.** While it's fairly obvious that you wouldn't serve Pepsi at a Coca-Cola convention, the licensing agreements for companies like Burger King require that certain drink products be served at their events. It's your responsibility as the meeting planner to find out about all of the subsidiaries, licensing issues and political sensitivities of your organization and plan accordingly.





- **Regional/house specialties.** More often than not, attendees appreciate the opportunity to sample some of the signature dishes of the destination. That might mean fajitas in San Antonio, crab cakes in Baltimore or cheesesteaks in Philadelphia. Individual properties also may have a standout specialty of the house that you wouldn't want to miss.
- **Variety.** There are many ways to vary meals so that delegates don't have the same experience over and over during the course of the convention:
 - **Style of service.** Think beyond the traditional American-style plated meal. Other options include lazy Susans, family-style, buffet, French service, Russian service, cafeteria-style, action stations, preset courses, box lunches and butler-passed hors d'oeuvres. (See sidebar on page 15 for definitions of food-service styles.)
 - **Entrée selection.** Consider dual entrées (beef and shrimp), salad entrées (chicken Caesar), sandwiches and wraps, in addition to the usual beef, chicken, fish and pasta.
 - **Vegetables and starches.** Potatoes can be fried, baked, boiled, roasted, mashed or twice-baked. Choices for rice include white, brown, wild, long-grain, pilaf, risotto, jasmine and basmati. Pasta comes in many shapes and sizes. As for vegetables, if you agree to go with "Chef's selection of seasonal vegetables," make sure he or she doesn't repeat it during your stay.
 - **Beverages.** In addition to the standard coffee, tea and soft drinks, you can serve lemonade, iced tea, unique juice blends or bottled water. At receptions, think about drinks with local flair such as margaritas or sangria, microbrews or local wines, mojitos or hurricanes.
 - **Coffee breaks and Continental breakfasts.** Each day, vary the breads (whole wheat, whole grain, sourdough, muffins, sweet breads), juices (orange, grapefruit, apple, cranberry) and fruit (whole fruit, slices, cubes, kebabs). It's also a good idea to upgrade to a breakfast sandwich one day.
 - **Menu balance.** The appetite is stimulated by all of the senses, so it's important to try to balance flavors (sweet, tart, salty, sour, bland), colors (aim for contrast), textures (crispy, chewy, soft, firm), shapes and sizes (flat, round, long, short, shredded, chopped), temperatures (hot soup, cold salad, salad entrée, warm dessert) and preparation methods (sautéed, grilled, broiled, roasted, steamed).

When it's time to sit down with the catering manager and actually plan the menus, start with your most important—and probably most expensive—events, such as the opening reception, closing dinner or awards luncheon. If you decide to do a Tex-Mex welcome reception, that eliminates Tex-Mex for lunch. If you want to do a four-course final dinner with a salmon entrée, that eliminates fish for lunch.

Negotiation

Food and beverage negotiations should begin at the contract stage; waiting until six months or a year out will leave you with little to no bargaining leverage. The first step is to gather all your facts and figures. Using post-convention reports, calculate exactly how much your meeting is worth to the hotel in terms of food and beverage revenue.

Don't forget to include "hidden" revenues from affiliated groups, hospitality suites, individual room service, exhibit floor concessions and on-site restaurants and lounges.

Next, draft a list of your priorities. Although everything is technically negotiable, it makes sense to determine what you absolutely must have and what you can live without—because chances are, you won't get everything you ask for. Keep in mind the following guidelines.

- **Ask for a copy of the facility's policies and procedures.** Facilities frequently change policies, and if you aren't aware of the current ones, you can't negotiate as successfully. Even worse, you may get stuck with extra charges you didn't expect. For instance, some hotels charge extra for seating during a Continental breakfast—and if that charge is included in the property's policies and procedures and isn't negotiated in your contract, you'll have to pay it.

Get Special-Request Savvy

Special requests for those with food allergies or dietary restrictions are on the rise. Here's how to ensure that your attendees with special requests will have a positive dining experience at your meeting.

- **Ask for information.** Your meeting registration forms should include fields for attendees to check whether they need vegetarian or kosher meals or have food allergies. Ask those with food allergies to list which foods they must avoid. Find out this information in advance so that you can work with your catering professionals to determine how best to serve the attendees with special needs. For instance, the chef will probably need to prepare separate meals for those with dairy allergies, as most menus will include some forms of dairy.
- **Label foods.** Attendees who are allergic to shellfish or nuts and other common allergens can usually just avoid foods containing these items. Help them do so by requesting that the facility label all foods on a buffet, including a list of ingredients, and place a printed menu on each table for plated events.
- **Educate servers.** Encourage the facility to let all servers know which ingredients are included in the foods they serve, especially if the foods include common allergens. When attendees ask, the server will be able to provide an answer rather than returning to the kitchen to ask someone else.

- **Establish cost parameters.** If you're booking five years out, you can't expect to negotiate menu prices at the time the contract is signed. But you can expect to establish cost parameters before signing on the dotted line. You may, for example, negotiate a fixed percentage off the printed menu prices in effect six months before the meeting date. Another technique is to negotiate to have the previous year's prices apply to your meeting. (Just remember to collect the menus a year in advance so you'll have these prices.) Or you could attach the current banquet menus to the contract and negotiate that the prices won't increase by more than a certain percentage each year (perhaps 5 percent or the Consumer Price Index, whichever is smaller). Catering managers usually don't like to establish firm menu prices until six months out, but you may be able to negotiate them as much as 12 months out by agreeing on a percentage ceiling above the current prices. If it turns out that prices drop in the interim, you can cover yourself by stipulating in the contract

that you will pay whichever is less—current costs or the ceiling price you established.

- **Consider menu flexibility.** If the menu prices don't meet your budget, work with the chef to design menus in your price range. You may even be able to choose the same menu as another in-house group and thereby save the hotel time and money by not having to create an entirely different preparation. (If you do this, be sure to schedule your dinner to start just before the other group's dinner so that your function won't be affected if the kitchen runs out of food.) If you can commit to specific menus more than six months out for your larger, more expensive meals, the hotel may be willing to negotiate a discount off the prices. Knowing menus and tentative numbers far in advance can help a hotel in budgeting/forecasting and ultimately ordering.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for complimentary items.** While the days of complimentary receptions are pretty much over, you still may be able to negotiate a relatively low-cost comp or two. If your group is hosting a large or lavish dinner, for example, ask the hotel to

Taking F&B International

Meetings and events are becoming more global. Not only are more North American meetings including international guests, but many North American-based groups are holding meetings overseas. As your attendee profile changes to include more international guests, so should your menu. Start by sharing your attendee mix with several hotels and the convention bureau and ask them for sample menus of what they have done in the past for similar groups. By looking through several menus, you'll probably see common threads among them that will lead you to make the right choices. In addition, if your meeting has an active local host committee, definitely get them involved.

Not only should you seek help from others, it's important to keep the following guidelines in mind.

- **Include ethnic food when you have a large contingent of international attendees at a U.S. conference.** However, if there are only a small number of international attendees registered, plan only for vegetarian and kosher requests. More events of all kinds are beginning to include sushi side dishes and fusion Chinese that is acceptable to all attendees.
- **Keep in mind that international visitors expect to be eating “American” food.** Most visitors to a foreign country will plan to enjoy local cuisine during their visit. This is especially true in the United States, as U.S. food is popular in many parts of the world. For instance, very few Chinese ate cheese until McDonald's and Burger King became popular in China; now it's much more acceptable to serve cheese to Asian guests.
- **Variety is crucial.** People will select what they like or stay away from what they want to avoid, so the key is to have a variety of foods. If your event has a large percentage of international attendees, offer buffet-style meals. Always include some vegetarian, or noodle-based vegetarian, dishes. A cheese board is always acceptable to Europeans and Americans.
- **When in Asia, still serve Western.** If you're holding a meeting in Asia but a majority of attendees are American or European, offer 40 percent Asian fusion or non-objectionable Asian dishes and 60 percent Western food. Your catering manager in Hong Kong, Singapore or Japan will know exactly what to offer.
- **When in Europe, get sophisticated.** Cuisine for meetings in Europe should be cosmopolitan and reflect a leaning toward French and Italian fusion. Those ethnic dishes are acceptable to all Europeans.

provide complimentary hors d'oeuvres, a glass of wine, a dessert or perhaps an upgrade of one of your courses. Other comps to consider negotiating include: a Continental breakfast for your board meeting, a reception or dinner for the executive board, complimentary or discounted staff meals, decorative items, one complimentary meal for every 50 to 75 covers or a credit to your master account based on a fixed percentage of your total food and beverage revenue.

- **Negotiate for agreeable guarantees and oversets.** Most hotels have increased their guarantee deadline from 48 hours to 72 hours, meaning that you need to give the catering manager a final head count for all of your food and beverage functions three days before they're scheduled to take place. If you're ordering standard food and beverage items that are offered in the hotel restaurants, for example, the property may agree to a 48-hour guarantee. Or if you are having a ticket exchange for your final banquet, you may be able to negotiate a 24- or 48-hour guarantee just for this single event, thus allowing time to sell additional tickets.

Most hotels also have decreased oversight from 10 percent to 5 percent (or even 3 percent), meaning the property will set up seating for 5 percent more than the guaranteed number of guests at any given food and beverage function. For groups of more than 1,000, however, most hotels cap the number of extra seats at 50. Depending on the menu and style of service, you may be able to negotiate a higher oversight percentage. You may be able to negotiate 10 percent on a standard buffet or Continental breakfast, for example, but you probably won't be able to make that kind of a deal for a custom-designed menu at a formal sit-down dinner. Note that the term “overset” typically refers to the setup of extra tables and chairs. It doesn't necessarily mean that the hotel will be prepared to serve food to the additional



Contracting F&B Performance

Performance clauses dealing with food and beverage functions have become commonplace in hotel contracts. Here's what to look for.

- **F&B performance should be addressed in one separate clause.** The terms are easier to understand and potential damages easier to compute if F&B is dealt with apart from other performance issues. The clause should be clear as to whether F&B attrition or cancellation or both are applicable, and it should include specific time frames as well as a specific method for determining the damages due.
- **The hotel should recover lost profit only.** If a dispute arising from a food and beverage performance clause were settled in court, the hotel would most likely be entitled to recover its lost profit in order to be made "whole." Most hotels are willing to agree to an overall profit percentage of between 30 to 40 percent for all functions.
- **Define lost profit.** Define profit both in terms of a percentage range (30 to 40 percent) and actual dollar amounts for each meal. For example, if the property's profit from F&B is 35 percent, a \$15 breakfast would net the hotel about \$5 profit per person, a \$21 lunch would net \$7 per person, a \$36 dinner would net \$12 per person and so on.
 - **Include only major functions.** Smaller events like coffee breaks and committee luncheons should not be included in performance clauses.
 - **F&B liability time frames should be close to the meeting.** Try to negotiate to have the liability not become effective until two or three months prior to arrival. The hotel does not purchase food until a week before the meeting, so technically it does not suffer any lost profit from canceled or reduced functions until after the meeting. It does suffer a loss of profit for the canceled event. Remember, the closer a cancellation takes place to the meeting dates, the harder it is for a property to resell the banquet space. Everyone's goal should be that no party loses financially if a function is canceled. Give the hotel enough lead time to book another group.
 - **Get credit for resold functions.** If the group cancels a function, and the property is able to replace it with another function, the resulting profit should be credited toward the damages owed by the group. In addition, if events are added in conjunction with the meeting, the resulting profit should be credited toward the damages owed by the group for reduction in attendance at a function or cancellation of a function.
 - **Performance fees should be due after the meeting.** This is when the hotel would receive revenue from rooms and F&B functions if the meeting had occurred. This allows you time to review the hotel's actual loss and adjust your fees should mitigation be in your contract.
 - **Do not use the term "penalty."** Penalties constitute unfair, inequitable financial payment and are frowned upon by the courts.
- **Performance fees typically should not include tax.** In many states, liquidated damages are not taxable. Ask the hotel to provide documentation of taxation of liquidated damages prior to including taxes with your payment.
- **What if there is no F&B performance clause?** If there isn't a clause, it may not mean you are free from liability if the hotel suffers a loss. Add a clause stating that the group will not be liable for any performance charges other than those specified in the contract.
- **Use either a 'per event' or an aggregate clause.** A performance clause may be based on each event as scheduled, or it may be based on an aggregate dollar amount of your total meeting's anticipated F&B revenue.

Please keep in mind that the above information is not intended to be legal advice. Meeting planners and hotel managers should consult a qualified attorney to review all contract issues.



people who might show up. So unless you specify in the contract (and remind the catering manager) that the hotel will not only set the extra places, but also be prepared to serve, some of your guests might be left waiting for their meals—or find themselves eating a meal that’s different than everyone else’s.

- **Be specific about service ratios.** Payroll costs can account for as much as one-third or more of a meal function’s total price. Consequently, some hotels are reducing the number of servers at group events. So be sure to negotiate service ratios and spell them out in your contract. For a sit-down or plated meal, there should be at least one waiter for every 25 guests at breakfast and one for every 20 at lunch and dinner. For a buffet meal, the preferred ratio is one to 40 for breakfast and one to 30 for lunch and dinner. Specify that there will be no extra labor or service charges for these ratios. If the menu is higher priced or has many courses, you want a higher level of service. Try to negotiate a service ratio of two waitstaff for every three tables. When wine is being served, you must have more servers; two waitstaff for every three tables will work. Since you will spend more by adding wine or extra courses, don’t pay extra for better service ratios.

Many properties apply a flat service charge to meal functions under a certain size (typically 25 people). Whether your meeting is large or small, it always makes sense to ask for the service charges, labor charges and/or bartender fees to be waived altogether; to be waived for meals where you are ordering the same food for numerous smaller functions occurring at the same time; or to be based on the total dollar amount spent on the function. If your group is large in number and bars are fully hosted, do not pay bartender fees.

Finally, be sure all of the specifics that you negotiate with the catering manager are spelled out in your contract. Remember: If you don’t get it in writing, you may not get it at all. (See sidebar on facing page for more information about how food and beverage agreements should look in a contract.)

Guarantees

For every food and beverage event you plan, you’ll have to provide the facility with a guarantee, which is the minimum number of people for which you will pay. If more than your guaranteed number of attendees show up, you’ll be charged for the extra people; if fewer people join you, you still have to pay for the guaranteed number because the facility will have prepared enough food for that many. While it may seem like a guessing game, establishing guarantees is really a matter of statistical analysis—a thorough, competent analysis of historical data combined with current conditions. The following tips can help you through the process.

- **Analyze your history.** When studying the history of your meeting, examine patterns of preregistrations, local ticket sales, arrival/departure patterns, number of cancellations, number of no-shows, number of attendees, guarantees, excess over guarantees and the percentage of total attendees at a

Food-Service Styles

American service: Food is plated in the kitchen, with the sauce possibly passed.

French service: Platters of food (entrée, starch and vegetables) are prepared in kitchen. Servers, using serving utensils, place food on guests’ plates. Each item is served separately.

Russian service: All courses are either served from platters or an escoffier dish. Tureens are used for soup and special bowls for salads. Waiters bring platters to the table, and guests serve themselves from platters.

Hand service: One waiter for every two guests. Every person in the room is served at the same time. This is especially impressive if using domed covers, since all are removed at once.

Buffet: All food is placed in chafing dishes or platters on tables. Guests serve themselves. Beverages may or may not be served at individual round tables.

Family-style or English service: Platters and bowls are placed in the center of the round table, and guests help themselves and pass food to one another. A lazy Susan can also be used for this type of service. Great for increasing networking and communication at the table.

Butler service: Waitstaff passes hors d’oeuvres on silver trays. Waiters wear gloves upon request.

Preset service: One or more courses are set on tables prior to guests’ arrival. These courses are usually salads or cold/room temperature desserts. Saves time on service.

Cafeteria service: Guests pass through a serving line, and waitstaff serves food onto their plates.

Box lunches: Individual meals are placed in individual containers. This is often used in exhibit halls and for recreational activities.

Choice of entrées: Guests are offered a choice of entrée in advance, with some sort of ticket or indicator to their entrée selection. Choice is usually limited to two or three options.

Action stations: Chefs prepare or carve food to order in the room where the event is held. This can include a pasta station, stir-fry or crepe station, etc.

Waiter parade: Waiters bring food (usually dessert) into the rooms all at one time, possibly all parading down the center of the room before splitting off to specific rounds.

Mixing service styles: For instance, serve preset salads, American-style entrées and buffet desserts. Use your imagination.



Doing the Math

Analyzing preregistration numbers is one way to get a handle on initial meal guarantees. Experient recommends the following method.

To use this method, you need at least one year's past history, including what was guaranteed versus what was actually served for each function, plus the preregistration total for that particular year as of the day the guarantees were determined. To get accurate histories of actual meals consumed, you need to count each empty place setting before the completion of each meal. Never rely on the count from your catering manager.

For each function, figure the percentage of preregistrants that were actually served at the function by dividing the total number of covers served by the preregistration total.

EXAMPLE 1:

The 2006 preregistration count for ABC group was 900 as of the day the guarantees were determined.

Function	No. served	% of pre-registration
Lunch — Day 1	810	90% (810/900)
Lunch — Day 2	720	80% (720/900)

How to use this information to set the guarantees for your current meeting:

- Determine the total number of preregistrants as of the day the initial guarantees are figured.
- Multiply the preregistration figure by the above percentages to establish the current year's projected attendance for each function.
- Based upon the hotel's overset policy (usually 3 percent to 5 percent, but many facilities max at 50 overset seats for larger parties), back off the numbers conservatively (somewhere within the overset percentage) to allow for flexibility and eliminate potential waste.

EXAMPLE 2:

The 2007 preregistration for ABC group is 950. The hotel overset is 5 percent. With only one year of history to rely on, we were a bit cautious and established our guarantees based on a 2.5 percent reduction of the projected attendance (half the overset percentage). To come up with the maximum number set, we multiplied the guarantees by the overset percentage—5 percent.

Function	Projected covers	No. guaranteed / No. set
Lunch — Day 1	855 (90% of 950)	834 (855 - 2.5%) / 876 (834 + 5%)
Lunch — Day 2	760 (80% of 950)	741 (760 - 2.5%) / 778 (741 + 5%)

EXPERIENCE THIS

A SPECIAL REQUEST PUZZLE

Experient meeting planners made a successful trip through the maze of special requests while planning food and beverage for a recent corporate meeting with an estimated attendance of 18,000, many of whom were international attendees. The meeting planner and client developed a detailed specialty meal requests policy, determining which types of requests would be considered and which ones would be incorporated into the general attendee meals.

The client allowed for a number of special requests such as halal, kosher and Indian. Kosher breakfast was served each day outside the special prayer service room in the hotel. Two types of Indian food were served: Hindu Indian, which is vegetarian, and Indian, which includes chicken. In addition, there were a number of Atkins, South Beach and the Zone dieters. To accommodate their needs, breakfast included hard-boiled eggs and meat platter options. In addition, there was one request for pureed food for an attendee recovering from dental surgery. Room service was called into duty to assist this attendee.

Over a six-day period, attendees dined at two receptions, five breakfasts, five lunches, 15 breaks and one closing banquet. The goal was to keep food and beverage offerings consistent across five hotels without repeating meal offerings. During the event, attendees dined on barbecue, action/carving stations, Thai, Chinese, Mexican, American comfort food, “California Marketplace” and French fusion. All meals were buffet with lunch and dinner options including a chicken, beef and fish entrée. Each meal included vegetarian options, and all the food offerings were labeled for attendees with food allergies and international attendees who might not have been familiar with some of the cuisine.

particular meal function. Look back at several years in order to obtain the most accurate picture. (See facing page for a formula to help you analyze preregistration numbers.)

- **Consider current conditions.** When you have a handle on the statistical history of the meeting, examine how current conditions could affect attendance at meal functions. Consider variables such as location, extra bodies (exhibitors, speakers, spouses, staff), local attendance, changes in program format and scheduling.

- **Err lower rather than higher.** Keep in mind that while guarantees, once given to the hotel, can never be decreased, they can almost always be increased within a reasonable period of time. Experient recommends making any changes to the guarantee no less than 24 hours in advance.

- **Weigh the risks.** The ultimate objective of the function should determine how much risk you are willing to take on guarantees. Under-guaranteeing a function, for instance, could create a negative impression due to delays in service. Saving money may not be as important as flawless service.

- **Consider a soft guarantee for multi-day events.** When you have to give guarantees for more than one day, an effective tactic is to moderately undercut the second day’s guarantee. The objective is to buy some time to see attendance at the previous day’s function before giving a final guarantee for the next day. However, first discuss this with the catering manager to make sure he is comfortable with a soft guarantee and to determine how flexible he can be in terms of in-

creasing the guarantee within 24 hours. Most facilities will work with you when you communicate openly and honestly.

- **Be flexible.** If you need a very large increase at the last minute, and your menu includes items that the hotel normally doesn’t have in stock, you may not be able to serve the same meal to everyone. You may, for example, need to vary the entrée and dessert. If such a situation arises, instruct the waiters to serve the alternate items to entire tables in one section of the room—preferably to staff sitting at tables that aren’t in the center of the room. Be aware that the hotel may not be able to secure the extra banquet staff to meet your negotiated service ratio.
- **Communicate openly with the catering staff.** Make sure you know the guarantee policy as it is applied considering the weekend. When are Sunday and Tuesday guarantees due? And if you think you may come in over your guarantee, request the hotel to overset additional tables with reserved signs.

