

Guidelines for IAEM Chapters Offering a "Behind-the-Scenes" tour of Convention Facilities and/or Events

prepared by the
IAEM Show Operations Special Interest Group (SOSIG) Advisory Committee
Updated 2/24/03

Purpose

IAEM Chapters regularly offer tours of convention centers and other exhibition facilities as part of their Chapter activities. These guidelines are intended to offer suggestions on how to plan, organize and conduct "behind-the-scenes" tours of convention facilities and/or exhibitions and other events.

Definitions and Scope of Guidelines

For purposes of these guidelines, "behind-the-scenes" tour is defined by SOSIG as either:

1. A non-sales, operations-oriented tour of an exhibition facility, conducted primarily by operations manager or facility employee and supported by an exhibition manager(s) who has produced shows and events in the facility. The goal is to see logistical operations (telecommunications, loading docks, security operations, service corridors and catwalks, food preparation areas, etc.) This is **NOT** a tour conducted by either the local CVB rep or convention center sales team, although either or both may participate in the tour.

2. A "behind-the-scenes" tour of an exhibition or event is a walking tour of the event during move-in/set-up or during actual event hours. The tour can be conducted by convention facility staff, a representative of the general service contractor servicing the show, event management, or a combination of the above. Event management (the show producer) may or may not participate, depending on the tour's timing and schedule. SOSIG recommends, at the very least, that event management meet with the participants either before or after the tour to provide an event overview and/or to answer questions.

Planning and Scheduling a "Behind-the-Scenes" Tour

Ideally, planning a tour should begin at least six months in advance. The Chapter representative responsible for planning the tour should consider the following:

- a. Make every attempt to be fair to all exhibition facilities and contractors that are members of the Chapter. Try to rotate tours to visit all member facilities, and to see events services by all member general service contractors.
- b. Select events that will appeal to different Chapter members, seeking a mix of trade and consumer shows, association and independently-produced shows, representing a variety

of industries, products and marketplaces. Experience and common sense indicates that large, major (Trade Show 200) events have the most appeal to the largest audience, but smaller, specialized events work just as well for "behind-the-scenes" tours.

c. Chapters should request assistance from general service contractors, exhibition facilities or CVB reps to contact event management (especially when the event manager is headquartered in another state/country and is using a facility in the Chapter's-region).

d. Once the Chapter has identified a potential facility or event, contact the event producer or facility management to request permission and, if approved, to discuss dates and times. For some events, a tour during move-in/set-up is more desirable than when the event is open for attendees. Other events prefer tour groups after the event opens (and preferably after opening-day) when the event has settled down and (hopefully) is running smoothly.

e. While tour formats and schedules vary widely, two of the more successful for IAEM Chapters include:

1. Luncheon with Overview and Q&A, followed by Tour (12 noon-3pm)
2. Overview, Tour, post-tour Q&A followed by early evening reception (2-6pm)

Chapters are encouraged to work with event management and the exhibition facility to develop a reasonable time and schedule that best fits everyone's schedule.

Organizing and Conducting the Tour

Once a "behind-the-scenes" tour is selected with dates and times confirmed, the Chapter, facility, contractor and event management should determine who handles the following:

- a. Tour Promotion – The Chapter should be the primary (and probably only) organization to promote the tour. Do not burden event management, the facility, general service contractor nor CVB with promoting the tour. Treat the tour as a regular Chapter meeting and promote accordingly.
- b. Registration, Badges and Credentials – work out a system with event management for on-site registration and identifying tour participants. Are you using Chapter badges, event credentials, or both? Does the Chapter need to provide a list of participant names? What are security requirements? Is anyone restricted from participating – competitors, press, non-members? Most (if not all) Chapters require the tour must be open to all Chapter members and any qualified exhibition industry participant.
- c. Parking Arrangements and Fees – are there special parking considerations or locations that participants must follow? Is there adequate parking, or will participants need to park remote and take a shuttle bus to the entrance? Will parking be validated – and if so, how and by whom?

- d. Meals and Refreshments – In many cases, the host facility, CVB and/or catering contractor graciously offer to host or, at the least, provide meals/refreshments to the Chapter at cost. Event management should NOT be expected to host tour participants. The Chapter should make it clear if they plan to charge a registration fee, and if so, determine whether the facility and/or caterer expects to be paid for meals, hors d'oeuvres, or snacks. If a bar is provided, determine whether it will be a hosted or cash bar.
- e. Registration Price – What is a fair price for a tour? Most chapters have an established, regular price for monthly meetings. Many treat the tour as a regular meeting and charge the standard rate (examples range from \$20-\$50/person). Determine whether the registration fee includes the bar, or if participants pay for bar drinks/tickets separately. For hosted bars, determine if tips are appropriate.
- f. Tour Leader and Guide(s) – Generally a tour works best with one designated leader, be it a representative of the facility, contractor or event management. There should be several people designated as guides, to assist the leader and to either walk along and answer individual questions or to assist stragglers or anyone who needs to depart the tour before it is completed. It works best when one or more representatives from event management assist with the tour, but sometimes that's impossible. If the schedule permits, a knowledgeable representative from event management should address the participants and answer audience questions, either before or after (if not during) the tour. A representative from the facility and/or the general service contractor may also serve as Tour Leader and guides.
- g. Handouts – while handouts are helpful, there is the issue of carrying them during the tour. Keep to a minimum – perhaps a floor plan or facility layout. Remember, this is not a sales presentation. If appropriate, brochures and sales literature may be put out at the close of the tour for participants to take or not. Do NOT expect event management to provide Show Guides or Directories, but you may wish to ask in advance if these would be available, and if so, at what cost.
- h. What to visit and see – again, the emphasis should be on operations and logistics. Determine if there are any areas or sections of the event or facility that are considered “off-limits.” Are there any safety or liability considerations? Will a large tour group distract employees, contractor personnel or exhibitors? Tour group sizes vary, but the “ideal” size is generally between 20-40 people, although some tours accommodate as many as 100 people using a bullhorn.

Communication is the Key to Success

As with exhibitions, conference and events, good communications and no surprises are key elements for success. Chapters are encouraged to keep all the players – event management, facility, CVB and contractors – advised and informed about all aspects of the tour. The more advance communication and planning the more likely your “behind-the-scenes” tour will be a success for all involved. Good luck!