

Golf Event Magazine

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Meetings and Golf

Boost attendance by hitting the links.

By Lisa Anderson Mann



Business meetings and conferences exist in an increasingly competitive market: time-crunched executives are faced with a dizzying array of choices, high airfare and gas prices, a faltering economy and limited time. Meeting planners are finding that it's no longer enough to put on a good meeting with strong speakers and timely topics; to stay afloat in this crowded field, meetings have to be great.

Interestingly, some of the things that propel a meeting from good to great are the things that would be considered meeting "extras" in a solid economy—things like golf.

A golf event creates bonding and networking experiences for attendees. It can also prompt

them to consider bringing their family, making the meeting a vacation of sorts. This can give that meeting an edge over others. And in this market, every edge counts.

A well-planned golf tournament can go a long way in making the overall event memorable and talked about, which is beneficial for the subsequent year's events.

Organizing a successful golf outing as one piece of a larger meeting does have its challenges. Some of those are no different than planning any other piece of the overall event—choosing a day and time, reserving the course, trying to anticipate the number of participants, arranging catering or cart service if necessary, arranging transportation if the course is not at the same location as the meeting and making contingency plans (what if it rains? what about people who don't play?).

Others are unique to golf events—what kind of outing rules will the guests expect? How will the course accommodate the number of participants? How do you blend people of vastly different skill levels? How can you make the golf event memorable and fun for golfers who likely have never met? How do you schedule a golf event so that it doesn't distract from the business at hand and so that business event can fully appreciate the benefits of the golf event? How can you ensure that the more casual golf outing is firmly linked in the participants mind with the larger overall meeting?

Create Bonding Experiences

One of the most important reasons to incorporate golf into business meetings is the relationship building that occurs on the course.

"My dad used to say 'golf is like going to camp for a couple hours,'" says Nicole Suresky, founder of New York City-based The Event Catalyst, "It's relaxed, there's no pressure, so business happens more easily on the course. Golf inspires a camaraderie that screenings or other passive entertainments can't match."

"Relationship building is key," says Ellen Seebold, whose annual invitation-only CEO-Summit is capped at 100 CEO or chairman-level attendees. "Golf is the way that a lot of business gets done, so it's a natural fit for a high-end business conference."

Golf is enough of a relationship builder that some events offer more than one opportunity to play. Ernst & Young's Annual National Entrepreneurs of the Year Awards hosts one large (144 player) event at Desert