

A LA CARTE...

“EVERYTHING IS INCLUDED IN A SINGLE, PRICE-PER-ATTENDEE FEE THAT YOU KNOW EXACTLY BEFORE YOUR EVENT TAKES PLACE.”

Complete Packaging offers

by Rowland Stiteler

Planners who have come to know and love the complete meeting package (CMP) that has been offered for years now by conference centers affiliated with the International Association of Conference Centers (IACC) like to refer to it as insurance against bad surprises on your event bill, or as one veteran planner puts it, “the perfect solution for the three-pound hotel bill.”

“That’s exactly what it is,” says Pamela Wynne, CMP, CMM, manager of corporate meeting planning at Educational Testing Service, who heads a staff of six planners who handle dozens of conferences a month. “Instead of a 35-page hotel bill with all



Pamela Wynne

kinds of addendums and add-ons and charges you never anticipated, with the CMP, everything fits on a single page, with no surprise costs, because everything is included in a single, price-per-attendees fee that you know exactly before your event takes place.”

in which a group might be having a multi-day event during which they are having a dinner one evening at some other venue away from the conference center and do not wish to pay for that meal at the center as well.

“That’s a perfectly legitimate request,” said Dolce, “and in a case like that, the group could be given a credit against their CMP bill, so there is nothing about the CMP that means they have to pay for a dinner they are not going to consume.”

At the end of the day, according to Dolce, Schmidt, Farina and others, the CMP is a flexible tool and not a rigid, cast-in-stone edict from which there will be no deviations.

To be sure, conference center managers say, their policy is to book the majority of events at their centers under the CMP, which actually becomes the right fit for the majority of planners once they get to know how it works.

“We have had many customers tell us that to know the CMP is to love it,” says Kelly Commerford, Western regional director of sales and marketing for Dolce. “What planners

who try it come to learn is that it really is a great cost-saving tool, in which everything you need for the perfect meeting is included in the price already.”

Commerford said the proof in the pudding that the CMP is cost-effective is that fact that procurement departments for corporations that meet at conference centers have come to like the pricing method because it offers an excellent “apples-to-apples” way of comparing costs from one conference center to the next.

“Once you know your rate per attendee and your number of attendees,” says Commerford, “you know your exact cost. And because IACC sets a very specific list of standards of what will be included in the package at every IACC conference center, you know exactly what you are getting.” **MEET**



Rowland Stiteler was a newspaper reporter for 22 years before becoming a freelance journalist, specializing in the travel and meetings industry, in 1994. He has been a regular contributor for *Meeting News* for 12 years and for *The Meeting Professional*, the monthly magazine of MPI, for five years.

OR PACKAGE PRICING?



the perfect solution to a three-pound hotel bill.

It is that “no surprises,” all-inclusive aspect of the complete meeting package that makes it the building block for what sets conference centers apart from hotels and other venues, according Jeff Farina, president of IACC North America and is also chief development officer for Benchmark Hospitality, a major operator of conference centers.



Jeff Farina

“The complete meeting package is really the fundamental component of who we are and what we do at conference centers,” Farina says. “The fact that the CMP includes everything from room accommodations to 24-hour-a-day usage of state-of-the-art meeting space, to meals to continuous breaks to the services of highly-professional, in-house meeting planners—all at a single, per-attendee price—is what takes the guesswork out of conducting a quality event—and that’s what we hang

our hats on at conference centers.”

Farina said conference center management is fully aware, however, that the all-inclusive nature of the pricing plan is what gives rise to the salient question among planners not yet familiar with the plan: “Must I pay for services that can’t use and don’t want?”

The answer to that question, according Farina and numerous others who set the policies for conference centers, is simple and straight-forward: “No.”

“Our vision is never to sell our customers something that they don’t need,” said Jack Schmidt, chief marketing officer of Benchmark Hospitality. “That’s just fundamentally good marketing policy and the right thing to do.”

Danny Dolce, national director of sales, North America, for Dolce International, which operates conference centers around the world, cites a typical example *(cont. next pg.)*