

How to Find Vendors

For the new event planner, finding reliable suppliers can be a daunting task. Fortunately there are some great resources available to help you find vendors for just about any situation. For starters, check out two of the most popular magazines for the special

events industry. Both of these magazines publish yearly source guides of vendors, and much of the information is available online.

Special Events Magazine publishes a Buyers Guide (see link below) with dozens of categories covering virtually everything you might need for an event – from **Access Doors** to **Wristbands**. Although there is not a large selection of the usual types of vendors such as Photographers, this is a great place to find some of the not so usual, such as **Dunking Machines**, **Robots**, and **Video Walls**. Another excellent source of vendor information (below as well) is published by *Event Solutions Magazine*.

Special Events Magazine Buyers Guide

http://specialevents.com/buyers_guide

Event Solutions Magazine National Source Book

<http://www.event-solutions.com/articles/NatDir2004/home.html>

Canadian Event Suppliers Guide

<http://www.canadianspecialevents.com/cse/guide.html>

Once you sign up on vendor mailing lists, you'll start receiving tons of useful info from suppliers, wholesalers and vendors. Start a good filing system so this information will be at your fingertips whenever you need it.

While websites and national directories can be excellent sources for vendors, don't neglect the **local market**. You'll want to consider going local on most services including catering, equipment rentals, and even entertainers (unless your budget allows for national acts). In addition to the Yellow Pages and online searches, you may be able to find local suppliers through your Chamber of Commerce. Many chambers publish a membership directory which provides company contact

information. You can also ask

the venue you are working with for recommendations, as they are likely to know about a variety of local services.

Choosing Vendors

Before you can recommend vendors to your clients, you will need to check them out. One of the best ways for you to educate yourself about vendors in your area is to **meet** with them. Simply phone and ask to arrange an appointment with the **owner** or **manager**.

Solicit bids from at least **two suppliers** for each service. Compare prices, but pay careful attention to other “make-or-break” details. It is true that you often get what you pay for, so it’s not always wise to go the cheapest route. Some key items to discuss before making your decision:

- price
- product specifications
- turnaround time
- delivery services
- customer service
- payment schedule
- deposits needed

Questions to Ask

To ensure you get all the information you need from your meeting, it’s a good idea to come prepared with a list of specific **questions** to ask. You can either take notes on a notepad or design a “survey sheet” for each type of vendor you meet with.

The particular questions you use for a visit to a retailer, wholesaler or supplier will be tailored to the specific services they provide. For instance, you can ask a rental store if they deliver and set up. To illustrate what you might ask, here are some

questions you could ask a videographer, from the *.com Guide to Becoming a Wedding Planner*.

Planner:

- How many **hours** will the videographer work and what is the **cost**?
- Will the videographer attend the **rehearsal** (what is the cost for this)?
- How much **deposit** is required and when is it payable?
- When is the **final payment** due?
- What is the **cancellation** policy?
- What are the **overtime** costs?
- How many **cameras** will be used?
- Will cordless **microphones** be used?
- Will the video be **edited**?
- Will any **special effects** be added (e.g. fading in or out)?
- Will **music** be added to the video?
- Does the package price include a certain **number** of videotapes?
- How much will it cost for **additional** videotapes?
- Are there any **other costs**?
- How long after the event will the video be **available**?

Finding Reputable Vendors

Perhaps the most important piece of advice we can give you about selecting vendors is to choose those who have a **good reputation** in the community and a great service record. As the event planner, your own reputation depends on the success or failure of vendor services. If possible, get **referrals** from people who have used them and had good luck. At the very least, ask potential suppliers for their letters of recommendation.

Before choosing a vendor, ask for **references** from previous clients. Call those references to find out what services the vendor provided, and whether the clients were satisfied. To uncover any problems, ask the client what they would do

differently if they were hiring the same vendor, and which parts of the vendor's services they were **least** satisfied with. An article by Megan Rowe at www.meetingsnet.com offered a caution from Stephanie Franks-Downs, founder of ConferZone, about her experience with one supplier:

“Line up a supplier, but choose carefully. ‘I was producing an event for a client and the company went bankrupt a week before the event,’ says Franks-Downs, once a meeting planner herself...

Ask questions about the firm's client base, how long it has been in business, whether it's profitable.”

Even if all the references are positive, it's wise to contact your local Better Business Bureau to see if they have any complaints on file about the vendor. To locate a BBB anywhere in the U.S. or Canada visit their website:

Better Business Bureau <http://lookup.bbb.org>

Once you have planned a number of events you will know which vendors deliver what they promise, and you will have built a preferred list of vendors you can recommend.

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