Event Planning

Inside the Event Planning Field

An event planner is, quite simply, someone who organizes an event. When we think of an “event” we may think of something spectacular, such as the Super Bowl, the Presidential Inauguration, New Year’s festivities in Times Square, or any of the other major events we hear about or see on television. Of course event planners are needed for all these events. However, event planners also work on thousands of smaller events. Any time people gather together for a purpose, whether it is for a wedding, a conference, a festival, a formal dinner, or the grand opening of a new store, someone is needed to oversee all the details to ensure the event happens and that it is a success.

Can you juggle many things at once without missing the details? Do you have the vision to see the big picture and the personality to get other people to see it too? Are you results oriented but always cautious of the bottom line? If this describes you, then you might have what it takes to be an event planner.

Most people who want to become event planners have been organizing, orchestrating, directing and creating for years without really realizing it. All the birthday parties, family reunions, bake-sales, sorority functions, and charity work are, in one form or another, a special event. Many planners get their start this way. The boss tells you to “organize a little something” or you’re asked to do something for a friend, then if you’re lucky, a friend of a friend.

Event planners may also work for themselves out of their homes. Start up costs are very minimal...a phone, a website, and business cards. Most self-employed event planners just starting out spend the majority of their time marketing themselves and finding clients. Getting to know local venues, caterers, florists, and rental companies is also important. Some planners specialize in certain types of events, such as weddings.

The following Event Planning publications may be helpful in learning more about the profession:

- Business Travel News: www.businesstravelnews.com
- Convene: http://pcma.org
- Eventworld: www.ises.com
- Group Travel Leader: http://grouptravelleader.com
- M&C: www.meetings-conventions.com

Skills

- Organized
- Flexible
- Assertive
- Creative
- Patient
- Perform well under pressure
- Able to meet deadlines
- Able to multi-task
- Negotiating
- Budgeting
- Excellent verbal and written communication

Alternate Job Titles

Conference Coordinator
Marketing Assistant
Meeting Planning Assistant
Member Coordinator
Program Coordinator
Special Events Coordinator

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Ten Steps to Becoming an Event Planner

1. Learn about the profession
Use our career exploration resources such as: Vault.com (look for “Event Planning” industry guide), WetFeet.com Insider Guides, Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/ooh/), or O*Net (onetonline.org) to research the profession. Visit career.opcd.wfu.edu for additional resources.

2. Take stock of your talents
Successful event planners combine excellent interpersonal skills with organizational ability to find out exactly what their clients want, and get the job done. Take a career self-assessment such as the Focus 2 or the Strong Interest Inventory to explore your strengths (go to career.opcd.wfu.edu to learn more).

3. Educate yourself
While no degree is necessary to become an event planner, areas of study that impress potential employers and clients in this field are public relations, marketing, advertising, human resources, business, and retailing, as well as hotel and restaurant management, hospitality, and tourism. If you want to strengthen your skills and supplement your natural abilities, degree programs are available specifically in event management, as well as industry educational seminars and at-home study courses.

4. Develop your materials
Before you begin job-hunting, you will want to organize your self-marketing materials so that they present you at your best. If your resume is lacking in relevant experience, try volunteering to work with an event planner or organize a smaller, local event on your own. Take pictures of all your work, and use them in your portfolio to demonstrate what you have done, and can do, for your clients’ or potential employers’ events.

5. Find out who’s hiring
In addition to job advertisements (found on related job boards and classified ads), you should also directly contact organizations you wish to work for. Be creative in your job search.

6. Interview well
Prepare for the interview by thoroughly researching the company using the ZSR Library databases such as Business Source Complete or Hoover’s. This will help you be prepared for their questions and to also know what questions to have for them. Have your portfolio and other materials with you and be prepared to discuss them at length. Remember that your choice of dress can give you an opportunity to show that you are both professional and creative, so put some thought into your appearance. Schedule a mock interview with a career counselor to prep for your interviews.

7. Set up your own business
When you think you’re ready, self-employment could be the next exciting step in an event planning career. In fact, many people break into the event planning field with this goal in mind. You will want to look into the financial and legal aspects of the venture, and study the market and your competition so you are ready for the challenges that await you. Decide on an image you want to project to your clients and market yourself accordingly, using a variety of media such as Facebook, Twitter, create a blog, etc.

8. Find clients
Your main source of business will likely fall into one of two categories: corporate or social. Your local chamber of commerce can be a great resource to find the contacts in the corporate world and word-of-mouth is generally your best bet for social clients.

9. Network
Plan to attend tradeshows, join clubs and organizations and socialize as much as possible to meet potential clients and business contacts. Get comfortable talking about what you do to everyone you meet, and always hand out your business cards. Use LinkedIn.com to find Wake Forest alumni contacts as well.

10. Boost your creativity
The more events you do for one client or company, the more challenging it gets to generate fresh ideas. Your suppliers and their products can be a source of innovative ideas. Maintaining your creative edge is essential to staying on top of your game in this business, so seek inspiration constantly.
Who Hires Event Planners?

- Meetings Professionals International  www.mpiweb.org
  Perhaps the most high profile site that lists job openings specifically for event planners
- Meetings and Destinations Search International  www.madsearch.com
  MADJobs lists job opportunities in both the hotel and meeting planning industries.
- Meetings Net  www.meetingsnet.com
  News and links for the meetings, hospitality, and business travel industries.
- Society of Independent Show Organizers  www.siso.org
- International Association of Expositions and Events  www.iaee.com
  Represents the interests of tradeshow and exposition managers and is the leading association for the global exhibition industry.
- Special Event Site  specialeventsite.com
  Listings of event planning companies and related vendors.
- National Association of Catering Executives  www.nace.net (includes job postings)
- International Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus/Destination Marketing  www.iacvb.org (includes job postings)
- American Society of Association Executives  www.asaenet.org
- Cool Works  www.coolworks.com
  Information and links to both seasonal jobs and career opportunities at national parks, theme parks, resorts/lodges, cruise lines, and other tourism related companies. Most positions are seasonal, but there are a few for the career-minded individual.
- Wine and Hospitality Jobs  www.wineandhospitalityjobs.com
- Hospitality Careers  www.hcareers.com
- Hospitality Career Net  www.hospitalitycareernet.com
- Hospitality Online  hospitalityonline.com
- Casino Careers  www.casinocareers.com
- National Association of Wedding Professionals  www.nawp.com
- The Association of Bridal Consultants  www.bridalassn.com
- Association for Wedding Professionals International  www.afwpi.com
- Association of Certified Professional Wedding Consultants  www.acpwc.com
- Event Management Certificate Program George Washington University
  10 month certification program in event planning and marketing
  http://gwueventmanagement.augusoft.net/
  (A handful of other schools also offer this certificate.)