

EVENTIQUE

Premier Event Planning & Concierge Services



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| **UPFRONT** | YOU TELL US

On Holiday Party Ideas... Last-Minute Event Arrangements... and Choosing a Venue

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What are some of your favorite holiday event ideas?

Mets: My advice to companies, especially companies that have budget issues, is that you don't necessarily have to hold your holiday event in December. Choose another time to celebrate. What about February? It takes a lot of pressure off. Another idea is to choose a cause—anything that's green, anything with the troops (whether you support the war or not), a charity—something that's tangentially related to your organization. Or, have one company department plan another department's party. Think of the TV show *Trading Spaces*. The spirit of competition and the idea of trying to

do something special for colleagues will add to the end result. It makes the planning experience part of the event itself. Another way to give back to employees or whomever the party is for is to offer something that alleviates the pressure and at the same time gives them a chance to interact. I've taken groups to the mall to shop. We did a luncheon afterwards. While they ate, their gifts were professionally wrapped. Or, when people are stressed and tired, it might be great to do something passive... a day at the movies, for instance. Buy out the theater and have a reception in the lobby. Have fun little gifts on the seats. I think that everyone is rushing

around so much during this busy time of year they may just want to sit down! The worst idea for a holiday event is a gathering of rank and file and executive employees who are asked to bring spouses to an event. Then you add a dance floor, and everyone dreads it.

David: Stay away from cookie cutter events. Anyone can strap on some Christmas lights in the room and call it a party. Find a purpose, whether it's to create a sense of family and pride at being part of the team or just to have fun. Create an inviting scene outside the venue—no one likes a dull entrance. Keep it interactive. People don't just

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“There are all kinds of interesting spaces flying below the radar... New York City offers the most variety anywhere.” ~Nancy Eller, Eller Events

want to come and get drunk. Themed parties are great. Clients love to come and get lost in a different world for a night. Have interactive performances...give prizes...have a dance off...so throughout the night guests won't want to miss anything. Bring people out of the everyday. Serve innovative drinks and food. Lighting is a huge component too. It can really set the tone for the night. Take a risk by splashing and mixing color around the room. No one enjoys a dimly lit venue anymore.

Eller: I like to recommend as nontraditional a party as possible. Rather than the typical, formal restaurant or hotel salon party, there are other things that will make the day far more memorable. For example, a skating party at Rockefeller Center is a New York classic that people will talk about for years, or a party in a private brownstone or penthouse. Choose a venue where guests can actually stretch out, relax and be themselves. The atmosphere dictates how relaxed the partygoers can be: Hotel salon—stand and drink and leave. Private penthouse—kick back and get to know your cubicle mates. There are all kinds of interesting spaces flying below the radar... New York City offers the most variety anywhere. More people should take advantage of off-the-beaten-track venues. It will make them look good in everyone's eyes.

Do you have any trade secrets you can share about pulling together holiday parties at the last minute, including finding a venue on short notice?

Mets: The secret is flexibility and the ability to broaden your idea of what a venue is. The more you start thinking in terms of what can be an event space the better. I did an event in a shoe store that had just gone under. It cost literally pennies to do it. You see so many of these kinds of spaces. Find out who the landlord is and start the dialogue. Going to a hotel certainly is convenient, but if you've

waited a while, another location might be more economical and more interesting. You can buy out nearly anything these days: planetariums, bowling alleys, car showrooms, university clubs. Think in terms of what people like to watch, do, see, read and translate that into an experience that's fun and can be shared. Another way to go is to use an alternative time of day: breakfast is a great option.

David: This year it's all about the venue. People are out of hotels, way more into private penthouses. You can do so many unbelievable things. At Eventique we focus on finding a unique venue within the client's budget. We have relationships with old theaters, private penthouses, carriage houses, galleries, and even a private airport hanger! The client these days is younger and doesn't want to sit around in a hotel and get drunk. They also want to go out after the holiday party is over. Keeping that in mind, don't be too far from the nightlife scene downtown where they can continue their evening of fun. Clients don't realize that when you wait and book at the last minute, the venue costs can be higher and take up more of the budget. You really don't want to skimp on the venue, though. If you don't have an environment that's going to set the tone, you'll lose the guests, so we advise them to spend more of the budget on the site and use some less expensive, but great caterers we know, whose fee includes the rentals.

Eller: The only secret there is to booking last minute parties is to know that October is the last minute. Companies soon learn how hard it is to book their preferred space on their preferred date, so they are booking them earlier and earlier, frustrating many who leave the holiday task til after Thanksgiving. The best strategy for planning a last-minute event is to hook up with an event planner who specializes in corporate holiday parties. It's a full-time, year-round job to keep up with all the venues in New York City...it's not

something you can expect to do brilliantly without a lot of legwork.

How do you go about finding the right venue for your group's holiday party?

Mets: The demographics of the group are key. You have to match the group to the venue. Really sit and chat with the people who are attending the event, if you can. You want to see how they dress...what they like to eat. The most important thing is ease of transportation... getting to and from the event. You can pick a great space, but if it's a pain to get there, people won't go.

David: The first thing we do is find out where the guests are coming from. Then we find out their age group, the type of event (if it's for potential clients or employees), if they want a dance party or something more interactive, how large the group is, etc. Then we can start to narrow it down to venues that would be a good fit. If it's a financial company that's hired a bunch of 29-year-olds they're going to want to go out afterward so we're not going to hold the party at a club. We'd do a hold in an area they can go clubbing afterwards. The younger crowd wants to be able to say 'I'm going someplace you've never heard of.' If it's an older crowd, we try to stay away from areas with a lot of congestion and traffic. Keep them in an area where they can pull up, have valet parking if they're driving... a more sophisticated environment. Every event planner should make a list of their top venues and venue contacts and follow up with them in the two months before the holiday season starts. This will keep you on their mind. This way, when you call them they are comfortable speaking to you and will be more inclined to help you get set up with the best deal.

Eller: To find the right fit you first have to know your client's corporate culture. (Is the boss detail oriented? Is the staff a pizza and burger gang? Does the company have an image to project or a goal to achieve at the event?) Then you match that information with the knowledge you have of all the possible venues and resources at your disposal, and present options that would work.