

Taking Your Multi-Media Show On the Road

Five Ways to Save Money on Your Audio Visual Bill

By Ed Primeau, President, Primeau Productions Inc.

If you've ever had to "hit the road" with your particular show or event, either as a meeting planner or presenter, you well know the headaches and challenges that can sometimes make for long days and even longer bills. After 25 years producing conference and convention audio video, I have some insight and information that just may make your job a little easier and certainly save you more than a few dollars in the process. Sound good? Then please allow me to share with you the top five ways I believe we can help you keep things simple and cost-effective.

First, as many of you may know, scores of hotels and meeting facilities these days tend to stay out of the A/V business, choosing instead to outsource to local companies who specialize in Audio/Visual production and share in the revenue. In fact, those cuts or percentages are usually negotiated as part of their contract and can add up to as much as a 40% override. Guess who helps pay that profit sharing? That's right – you and your event!

While most of these companies do have a lot to offer by way of the rental, labor and operators for literally thousands of dollars of costly equipment, truly understanding their costs for both labor and equipment can give you an essential edge in negotiation. For example, an end-user, or meeting planner, can pay anywhere from \$50 to \$110 per hour for A/V labor, plus \$20 to \$30 per hour for operators. These companies also derive income from equipment rental and staging. Items like heavy velour drapes earn them revenue for years and only require occasional cleaning. In fact, on average, a meeting facility with heavy traffic will generate rentals up to ten times the cost of one piece of equipment in as little as six months! The rest is pure profit!

Now that you know the rules of the game, let me help you understand how to play.

- 1. Hire an Independent Production Company.** A professional production company will take bids on your behalf and manage the A/V process for you. They can often save you up to double their own costs by streamlining the process, directing the flow of both equipment and labor – eliminating excess, making smart suggestions for renting directly to cut out the facility 'middle man' and even through the professional courtesy discounts they receive off the rate card cost of equipment and services. Their knowledge base and experience with local and national facilities as well as union organizations also allows them to leverage those relationships to protect your best interests AND bottom line. The coordination and negation can be done on property as well as on the phone by an experienced production company. To locate a production company, Google the words "Production Company" or drop us an email and we will help.

Sometimes it's just nice to know that you have somebody who will go to bat for you and will be responsible for the team's accountability and qualifications. A production company can also hire freelance labor for your event, saving you hundreds if not thousands of dollars, all the while qualifying each position on the team and holding them accountable.

- 2. Get Multiple Quotes.** Many meeting planners overlook this simple but saving step. Why? For most, it just seems customary to work with the in-house A/V company-- just as they would the banquet manager. By asking for quotes from several local sources, you

may just find the one that has more room to work within your budget and is not locked into a contractual obligation to the facility to pay a percentage to the “house.” That can translate to big savings for you and your event.

I’ll give you an example. When we put together a production team for an event we first get with the meeting planner to create an ‘RFQ’ or Request for Quote. We carefully list all the necessary equipment and labor as well as the start and finish times for each day of the event. We then send that to at least three A/V companies, including the in-house organization. For those of you trying to go this alone and uncertain as to what equipment or labor you might need, start with the A/V invoice from your last event and if you don’t understand something, feel free to ask. This is where a professional producer is worth their weight in gold. Having the ability to extract what is necessary and eliminate what is not is at the heart of saving on the cost of these events.

- 3. Consider Direct-Renting.** We touched on this a bit in the first tip. Occasionally, your A/V supplier will not have everything on your RFQ. In that case, they look to local suppliers for the item, rent it themselves then pass the mark-up on to you. One of our clients, the Women’s Leadership Exchange facilitates one-day events in five cities each year. After a year of watching them read scripts, I suggested a Presidential Teleprompter System. The cost to rent through the meeting facility was \$2500 for the operator and equipment. The cost to direct-rent from a local supplier found on the internet was \$1100. Draping is another good example. We used grey velour drape for this WLE event. The cost to rent through the meeting facility was \$3200 installed to our specs. The cost to direct rent, \$1200 installed. This is where the experience of a producer or doing your homework can offer big rewards, in this case for just these two items to the tune of \$2400!

You may also want to note that most meeting facilities do not have full stage lighting and lighting directors. We suggest that you look on the internet for lighting directors and designers because lighting is to staging what oxygen is to humans. Cameras for IMAG are another outsource-able item as many A/V companies do not stock cameras or have outdated or well-worn equipment because cameras are sensitive.

- 4. Hire Your A/V Labor as You Would Hire an Employee.** Over the years, there have been times when I have hired an A/V company, began the set-up and staging and felt that something was not quite right with a team member supplied by that company. I’ll give you an example that occurred during the set-up for The Master Sales Academy™, an event we’ve produced for more than 13 years that takes place at Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas--a heavy union-property. I asked a projectionist to help a teammate carry a heavy light to the stage. I saw the person struggling with the weight but could not help because I was not a union member. To have stepped in, I would have opened up an opportunity for a union grievance to be filed and the possibility for our show to get shut down. I instead asked this projectionist who was reading a newspaper to step in and help. He refused, citing that it was not his job. I immediately dismissed him and replaced him with someone with a better team attitude and an appreciation for the opportunity. Much like the energy in an office that can turn sour with the wrong person in place, so too can a production crew, so hire accordingly.
- 5. Get an Electrical Quote BEFORE Your Event, Not After.** You might just be floored to learn how much electricity can cost in a meeting facility. In high-event cities such as Las Vegas, Chicago and San Francisco, it is not unusual to spend as much as \$4500 per day. Sometimes, that’s simply the rate and your hands are tied if you expect to power the

event. However, in my experience, I have often discovered that many A/V companies have an inside connection with the electrical departments and many times are able to escalate their invoice by having a customer pay for too many drops. My first suggestion is to know exactly how much power you need and negotiate a fair rate. Let me explain. Like Jack Canfield says (co-author Chicken Soup for the Soul), you don't G-E-T if you don't A-S-K!

Next, if your event requires two projectors, basic stage lighting, audio public address system (PA) and image magnification (IMAG), four 20-amp circuits will do. If you don't ask or request electricity in your RFQ, most facilities will order a standard six to eight 20-amp circuits for this set up. Why? Often, electrical crews simply don't want to run extension cords to share circuits, and quite frankly, they make more money by doubling the order and know that many event planners will not make the "connection" that they are being over-charged. I have also discovered in older ballrooms, it's better to use common circuits to help avoid sound system buzzes.

These small tips can truly make a BIG difference to the cost and quality of your event. As a meeting planner, the last thing you need when juggling your many responsibilities are complicated A/V issues. They can ruin a great experience for customers and keep you from the portions of the job that you are most passionate about. As a bonus, I'd like to offer a list of a few wonderful Audio/Visual suppliers we have come to know and trust throughout the years and hope you'll consider them for your next event:

- **Quest Drape:** Located in many major cities and have customer service second to none.
- **Presentation Services (PSAV):** The best and most reliable A/V supplier we have worked with.
- **Google:** A terrific resource for searching Production Companies, labor, suppliers and rental of lighting, teleprompters and cameras as well as the operators for each in the area of your event.

Let me wish you every success as you take your next 'show' on the road. I invite you to implement some of these strategies to ensure that it will be a fun and enjoyable event for you and your attendees. As always, we're here if you need us!



Ed Primeau is the owner of Primeau Productions, Inc., a full service multi media production company that produces audio and video for conferences and conventions throughout North America. With over 25 year's experience, Ed brings professionalism, character and creativity to every business relationship. Providing each client with the very best possible production experience is more than just his job, it is his passion. To learn more about Ed and his team, and organization visit www.PrimeauProductions.com today or feel free to call toll free at 800-647-4281.

#####