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28 Tips for Better Budgets:

## Innovations in Saving

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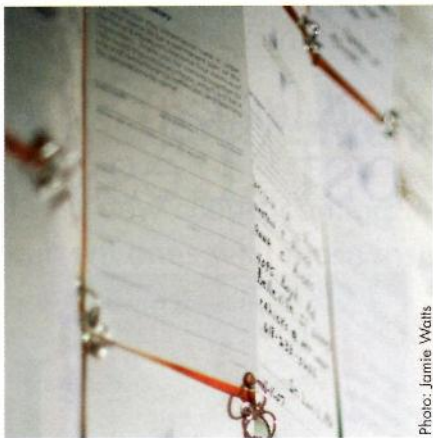


Photo: Jamie Watts



Photo: Daniela J. Gillin, Bulldog Photography



Photo: Roberto D'Addona

# Saving Secrets

Event pros are coming up with innovative ways to spend less without compromising impact. Here's how you can too

By Rachel Globus

**N**ecessity is the mother of invention: It may be the mantra of our times, but it also describes many a day in the life of an event planner — in any economic climate. Under normal economic conditions, you might be called upon to find a way to ship fragile gifts to Mexico, make a cavernous hotel ballroom feel intimate and personal, or produce an unforgettable opening session. These days, planners are turning that same creative mindset to the bottom line, finding new, innovative ways to save money. To suss out the best event cost-saving ideas, *Event Solutions* searched the country far and wide. What we found was nothing short of inspiring.

**Barter.** One way to reduce cash outflow is to eliminate it altogether — by bartering. The down economy is sparking renewed interest across the country in this time-tested practice, and one new convert is planner Dianne Velez of Colorblind Productions ([colorblindprd.com](http://colorblindprd.com)). Recently, she traded entertainment, videography and DJ services for a new driveway, front walkway and backyard patio by bartering with a local concrete company.

"Your services are more economical to give than, say, paying money," she says. "These even exchanges work out really well." Try [u-exchange.com](http://u-exchange.com), [favorpals.com](http://favorpals.com) and for weddings, [bigdaybarter.com](http://bigdaybarter.com).

**Incorporate a webcast.** Webcasting can reduce costs (and add revenue opportunities) in several ways. For example, says Stacey Ruth, CEO and chief creative officer of Atlanta-based The WOW Factory ([thewowfactory.com](http://thewowfactory.com)), scale down the number of attendees at an internal event to a select group and you'll spend less on staging (since it doesn't have to be as elaborate), not to mention airfare and hotel.

You can also extend your event's reach with a virtual component. One client that has traditionally held a conference only for its store managers and owners is now engaging its entire sales force through webcasts, she says.

Another option is making certain components of a conference online-only, such ▶

-  A/V & lighting
-  entertainment
-  hotel/venue
-  staffing
-  marketing
-  online
-  décor & design
-  food & beverage
-  transportation & shipping
-  trade show
-  event production/management





Photo: Pamela J. Gillin, Bulldog Photography



**Go for a package deal.** (Left) New York-based Shawn Rabideau Events & Design's packages offer clients scaled-back but still upscale design, incorporating less-expensive in-season flowers, containers the company has in stock, and less labor for delivery and setup ([shawnrabideau.com](http://shawnrabideau.com)).

**Don't toss.** (Center) Duvall Catering & Event Design of Charleston, S.C., cuts cost by recycling materials, carefully saving items such as the draping seen here for later use ([eventsbyduvall.com](http://eventsbyduvall.com)).

▶ as an opening or closing session, which can eliminate a day or more of the conference, suggests Chris Baker of Wind Gage Communications Inc. ([wind-gage.com](http://wind-gage.com)), which produces customized multimedia broadcast messages.

**Let the audience be the MC.**

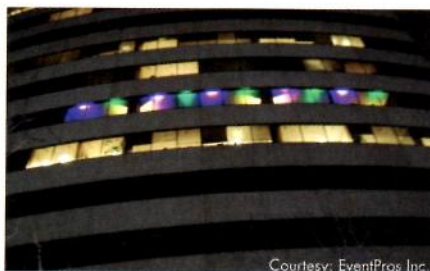
"Last year we hosted an industry awards ceremony. We wanted this one to shine, as the winners, our *RFP Magazine* Outstanding Individuals in Industry, were like the award says: Outstanding. A couple of days earlier at the last minute, we found ourselves short of an MC, so the directors and the editor took to the stage and did something rather novel that has now been dubbed the 'outstanding individual system.' It goes like this: We collected people's name cards as they came in. Before each award, we pulled the name of an audience member out of a hat and had him or her come up to present the award. Everyone was on the edge of their seats and it made the award that much more special so that everyone felt like they too could have a moment of being an 'Outstanding Individual.' It had the multiple benefits of saving money on an MC, creating a talking point, engaging the audience and making the night memorable." — *Claire Saeki, Managing Director, Facility Media, Hong Kong*

**Combine badges and tickets.**

"Instead of printing separate tickets and badges, we have redesigned our tickets to also serve as the badges, thus reducing printing and labor costs dramatically." — *Anthony Akers, Vice President of Communications, Market America*

**Stage specific drinks at specific times.**

"The longer you can delay having a full bar available, it'll cut down on cost, and by staging different drinks at different times, it really helps with the perception of abundance." — *Beckie Bruffey, director of events for DesignDayz Event Planning in Seattle*



Courtesy: EventPros Inc.

**Vacant office space: your next venue?**

Bill Svoboda of EventPros Inc. ([eventprosinc.com](http://eventprosinc.com)) in Kansas City, Mo., has found that the city's ample vacant office and warehouse space is an inexpensive venue option. "Not only is it an unusual space that adds interest, but the landlord or property

manager loves it because they get to show off the space to potential renters and they get some money in their pocket," he says.

**Find new ways to incorporate entertainment.**

Instead of an elaborate choreographed show, use elaborately costumed performers as greeters, suggests PJ Fuerstman-Meyer, owner of P'zazz ([pzazz.net](http://pzazz.net)), a Naples, Fla.-based entertainment provider.

Or go for entertainment that looks less ostentatious. It's a key concern these days, and one that Sharlene Sherman, president of Sharlene Sherman Events, is taking into account when making her entertainment decisions. "I've found that The Three Waiters and String Angels project a very sophisticated, high-quality, 'much more than they actually cost' type of image when they come to parties," she says ([mardarentertainment.com](http://mardarentertainment.com)).

**Share resources with other clients in your venue.**

"Work with your venue planner to see if you can coordinate with other clients using the same venue before or after your event to:

- Coordinate lighting and A/V rigging designs — less rigging means lower cost.