

5 Simple Ways to Green Your Meetings

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Pineapple Hospitality offers tips and resources to make your corporate event stages more environmentally friendly

According to recent research, more than two-thirds of meeting professionals take environmental considerations into account when planning their conferences. For those in the hospitality industry, this means that your green policies no longer can be limited to just guestrooms. Every facet of your operations - especially your meeting spaces - now must account for their environmental impact.

Marriott Hotels estimates that the average three-day meeting attended by 1,000 people produces more than 12 tons of trash, uses 200,000 kilowatts of power and consumes 100,000 gallons of water. Wastefulness on a group scale can be astounding.

Thankfully, Pineapple Hospitality - the premier distributor of Green Hotel Products & Marketing Programs for the Hospitality Industry - has top-of-mind Green Meetings awareness. Pineapple Hospitality has assembled an arsenal of green solutions and services proven to make your corporate events run more smoothly - while significantly reducing costs and conserving natural resources.

'Concerned about climate change, organizations are more aware than ever of the environmental impact of their meetings and travel,' says Ray Burger, President of Pineapple Hospitality. 'For example, Florida recently declared that government officials must look for green hotels when organizing meetings. That's just one of hundreds of such moves.

'Nowadays, it's all about socially responsible travel,' Burger adds. That's why it's essential that lodging properties embrace Green Meetings programs now. They make perfect sense for hotels, guests and employees - not to mention our precious planet and future generations.'

5 Green Meeting Tips

To help gauge just how a hotel can 'green' its meetings, Pineapple Hospitality spoke with Jeff Slye, founder of Business Evolution Consulting, a group of business professionals with expertise in guiding organizations to become eco-friendly while reducing costs and delivering high-quality services and products. While there's almost no end to the steps you can take to reduce waste and offer groups Greener Meetings, Slye provided these 5 simple sustainable travel steps to help you get started:

1) Don't green if you aren't green: Only 'green' your meeting if your hotel actually has an authentic and sincere environmental program. A hotel could do serious damage to its brand if it promotes Green Meetings while neglecting the rest of hotel's environmental impact. On the other hand, hotels should be proud to extend their environmental commitment into their meeting spaces and groups will appreciate it.

2) Add proper recycling bins (and train your staff!): This seems obvious, but there are still literally tens of thousands of meeting spaces where recycling bins are not available - or only a small box to recycle paper, tucked away in a corner. Remember: Outside of food and napkins, almost all meeting room waste is recyclable (paper, glass bottles, plastic bottles, etc.). Take the time to make several large bins available and add proper signage. This is a great opportunity to make your green side more visible to customers and employees and will highlight your commitment to reducing your meetings' environmental impact. And when you recycle effectively, you also can decrease waste pick-up schedules and related costs.

3) Make bottled water by-request (ideally, eliminate it all together): Considering the large revenue source of bottled water, it is challenging to eliminate bottled water on site. However, for standard meetings where bottled water has not been requested, water should only be made available through pitchers and reusable glasses. Higher-end brands can spend more time on the preparation and presentation of food and beverages served at events and even use fruit-infused water if they're concerned about this step.

4) Serve condiments in bulk: This is one of the easiest steps, delivers immediate cost savings and has significant environmental impact. Most hotels wonder why they didn't do this earlier. Use ramekins for bulk ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, sugar, and jams/jellies and track the results. The bottom line is significantly greener as well! Note: Some cities have health department regulations regarding this practice, so be sure to check prior to implementation.

5) Reduce paper (go and stay digital in your meetings, when needed, print double sided, only what is needed, on post-consumer recycled content paper): This might take a little creativity, but there are ways to reduce all of the binders and printed materials that are never used. Consider setting up binders by category/department/or group and only printing pages relevant to those individuals. Whenever printing, ensure all documents are printed double sided and use a minimum of 30% post-consumer recycled content paper. The ideal scenario is not to print anything and allow attendees to use laptops to access information and to take notes.

'These are some basic and easy steps to get you moving toward having more Green Meetings,' Slye says. 'There are many more areas to address, such as energy and water conservation, to truly be dedicated to hosting Green meetings - but these 5 steps are a great start.'

The Right Stuff

Along with greener policies, it's also important to have the right products available to green your meetings. As an Energy Star partner, Green Meeting industry Council member and a U.S. Green Building Council member, Pineapple Hospitality has developed an inventory of Green Meeting suppliers that are guaranteed to make your next corporate meeting greener.

Among these, just for starters, are:

T2 Site Amenities - Manufacturer of upscale recycling centers targeting the hospitality market,

Klean Kanteen - Maker of stainless steel water containers that eliminate the need for disposable plastic water bottles,

USFI | GreenWorks - Developer of innovative green products and solutions for the hospitality industry, and,

Vermont Clothing Company: Producer of organic recycled earth friendly apparel.

T2

'More meeting professionals and groups are requiring hotels and convention centers to meet certified green requirements,' says Steve Tilkin, Principal at T2 Site Amenities. 'And a lot of hotels are taking steps to improve their environmental performance behind the scenes. But it needs to be right out in the open for all guests to see and participate in.'

Doing its part, T2 offers a number of upscale recycling centers that are good-looking, versatile and, of course, functional. Available with hidden casters, the recycling centers can be rolled into conference rooms and meeting areas, giving meeting planners plenty of flexibility on how to structure the rooms. And because the stations are portable, hotel staff can easily roll them to where they are needed, rather than having stationary recycling centers remain in empty rooms.

'We have a lot of options, depending on whether the recyclables (aluminum, glass, plastics) can be co-mingled or remain separate,' Tilken says. 'We also can customize the recycling centers with your logo or a message that 'This hotel recycles.' It's a great way to build brand awareness and goodwill.'

T2 also offers a range of LightAir air purifiers. As Tilken explains, meeting rooms can be a critical mass of germs. With large groups sheltered together for long stretches of time, it's easy for germs to spread. But the highly aesthetic LightAir purifiers remove 99 percent of airborne germs and viruses.

'For meeting spaces that market themselves as greener and cleaner, LightAir air purifiers deliver cleaner, healthier air for any kind of indoor group event,' Tilken adds.

Klean Kanteen

Nothing may be more wasteful than using individual bottled water at corporate conferences and retreats. Even if the plastic is eventually recycled - a big if - there is still an environmental cost in manufacturing, labeling and shipping those bottles, especially when tap water is readily available.

Klean Kanteen is a lightweight, re-usable, body-friendly bottle - free of bisphenol A (BPA). The containers are durable enough to last a lifetime, easy to clean and carry for people of all ages, and keep drinks fresh and clean-tasting no matter how many times you refill them.

At Green Meetings, Klean Kanteen solves the problem of plastic bottles, or washing glasses over and over again. Plus, because Klean Kanteen containers will last a lifetime, they can be offered as permanent promotional value-adds for Green Meetings.

'The Klean Kanteen can be an ideal lasting reminder for a meeting or conference organizer,' says Peter Melton, Awareness Representative for Klean Kanteen. 'Our BPA-free, stainless steel water bottles can link your logo and message with the physical experience of your Green Meeting.'

'Once they use one, people really love the Klean Kanteen. We like to say, every time you refill your Klean Kanteen, you're making a positive choice for your health and the health of our planet. It's a constant reminder of the good feeling you get from helping make the world a little better, every time you have a drink of water.'

USFI | GreenWorks

'Are your attendees taking notes?' It seems like a simple question, and it is. But the answer can mean a great difference to our forests. USFI | GreenWorks offers a comprehensive range of recycled stationery, cards, forms, pens, pencils, clipboards and more to bring a greener tint to your meetings and conferences. And for the hospitality provider, keeping a stock of these items, and even reselling them, can provide an education to those in attendance whose green awareness might not yet have risen to the level of conscious action.

That's what going green is all about, isn't it? Intervening in the expected chain of events and introducing viable new choices - that's what all of us need to do. Combine the sheer utility of these items with the marketing opportunity they present, consider that they're produced in an earth-friendly manner, and you're doing at least two good things: helping your operation and helping the planet. It's only made easier when the choices are such appealing ones.

All of our products grow from the fertile creative thinking and marketing strategy of USFI Marketing Communications, whose total collective expertise is brought to bear on the most important objective of all - lifting your top-line revenue by improving guest experience and wallet share.

So visit our website at www.usfi.com/greenworks to discover a world of green/greener/greenest products today.

Vermont Clothing Co.

'A lot of little things can add up to big changes,' says Vermont Clothing Company's Jay Cummings.

That's exactly how he built his company into a leading provider of organic, environmentally friendly clothing and textiles.

The company uses only high-quality organic cotton for its range of clothing, and powers its factory through electricity generated from cow manure - and that's no bull, that's 'Cow Pow'!

As for Green Meetings, Cummings says that many corporate events use T-shirts and other apparel to designate different teams, and divvy up to them, or to give away as promotional keepsakes. Hats, golf towels and many other value-added items are available for customization. The company also offers 6-foot, 7-foot, 8-foot and 10-foot tablecloths.

'There is an environmentally friendly option for everything you do,' says Cummings. 'We're always trying to come up with better methods in our line of work. For instance, we're working on a heat recovery system for our tunnel dryers that could reduce our heating costs by 25 percent. Isn't coming up with innovation like that the point of these kinds of meetings?'

Green Meetings in Practice

A number of hotels already have jumped on this trend and implemented significant Green Meeting programs. Marriott International unveiled a menu of eco-friendly Green Meeting products and services that will enable groups of all sizes to save water and energy, reduce waste and recycle during their stays. Some of the ways Marriott will be making meetings green include offering recycle bins in meeting rooms, using green products such as pens and notepads made from recycled material, decorating with organic flowers, linen-less tables, name tag reuse and donating leftover food.

'More and more, groups want to be 'green,'' said David Marriott, Marriott International senior vice president of global sales, in a news release. 'By joining us in our effort to protect endangered rainforest and host green meetings, they will be helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that impact our climate. Each year, rainforest destruction causes more carbon emissions than all of the world's cars, trains, SUVs and trucks combined.'

Fairmont Hotel and Resorts launched an Eco-Meet program, now available at all of its properties.

Eco-Meet was developed as a Green Meeting and conference planning option. In this way, meeting planners can organize conferences and events that consider the environment, result in reduced waste, and also conserve valuable resources.

Eco-service provides "disposable-free" food-and-beverage services and recycling stations in the meeting rooms. This service is an important element to a greener meeting and, for example, includes china and cutlery used instead of disposal items, linen napkins instead of paper, and centerpieces that are edible/organic or made from reusable items such as silk flowers. White boards are used rather than paper flip charts. Find out more at www.fairmont.com/ecomeet.

About Pineapple Hospitality

Headquartered in Saint Charles, Missouri, Pineapple Hospitality(TM) is The Co-Founder and Host of the ANNUAL GREEN HOSPITALITY CONFERENCE, an EPA ENERGY STAR(TM) partner bringing fresh ideas to hospitality guests' doors and owner/operators' bottom lines - including FreshStay(R) (www.freshstay.com), EcoRooms(R) & EcoSuites(TM) (www.EcoRooms.com) Environmentally Sensitive Amenities(TM), EO(R), Neutrogena(R) and greenSPA(TM) amenities and AVIVA dispensers, Energy Efficient Lighting and Controls, Custom Linen & Towel Re-Use Programs, Green Key Cards, Energy Management Systems and Controls, High Performance showerheads, the Nature's Mist(TM) deodorization system, Zero Odor, and dozens of other products and programs. For more information, please visit www.pineapplehospitality.net, or call us at 636-922-2285.

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