

Rising Above When the Unexpected Occurs

The importance of risk mitigation and crisis management.



About the Client

Our client is one of the largest wholesale distributors of business products in the United States.

The Challenge

We were on-site and prepared to execute a meeting for 1,700 participants, however, an unexpected ice storm hit the meeting city - Nashville - on arrival day. Fortunately, 250 people made it into Nashville on Sunday. By Monday morning, the majority of the flights into Nashville began cancelling, preventing both attendees and speakers from arriving. The city essentially shut down, after an inch of ice blanketed the city streets.

The Solution

After consulting with the client, the decision was made to continue with the meeting, despite the transportation challenges. The on-site staff as well as our Travel Services team went into high gear, changing flights and fielding calls from stranded participants. On Monday alone, over 900 flights were cancelled and the majority of participants didn't make it to Nashville. Hotel negotiations began as it became clear there would be a large number of rooms unused as well as meal guarantee shortages. (With the client's desire to move forward with the meeting, the Force Majeure clause would not apply, keeping original contract terms in place.) By Tuesday, despite abundant delays, another 500 participants arrived. The planning team changed course many times as the program had to be reworked to accommodate speaker cancellations, meeting space changes, and transportation (vehicle) changes, while the team focused on ensuring an outstanding experience for those in attendance. Morning planning meetings were held daily to clearly communicate the days' changes and ensure the team's alignment.

We created a mobile app for the meeting and it became the central point of communication to alert participants of modifications to the agenda, speaker changes, and meeting room reassignments. The app itself was integral to the critical exchange of information. An early planning decision further benefited the client by creating a "greener" meeting; waste was reduced because print-on-demand kiosks were used for name badges, eliminating the printing of badges for people who never arrived.

The Outcome

Roughly half of the participants never made it to the meeting but all the key program elements remained in place for those that did. The headliner entertainment on two of the evenings was a huge hit, as was an American Idol-style competition, where local talent was pre-screened and chosen to perform live as the participants voted on their favorite singer, via the mobile app. A pre-planned community service event also went off without a hitch. Participants enjoyed the give-back opportunity helping an organization called A Soldier's Child. They sponsored a birthday celebration for local kids - supplying cupcakes and toys - and packed hundreds of birthday celebration bags for children that have lost parents in the line of duty.

As a result of our ongoing negotiations, the client realized hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings through attrition forgiveness that would have been billed because of the large number of people unable to make the meeting. In the ultimate test of managing the unexpected, the client partnership was further solidified because of the actions taken in the face of Mother Nature's unexpected challenges.

\$ Creative Group saved the client hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings through attrition forgiveness.