



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: CMP and Conference Centers

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Written and Published by Sue Tinnish, 847.394.9857, sue@suetinnish.com,
www.suetinnish.com

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Welcome

Every industry is riddled with it's share of acronyms. In the meetings and events industry, many people boast the CMP designation. But CMP has many more meanings beyond the Certified Meeting Professional. A web search for the acronym of CMP revealed these acceptable meanings: Call My Phone, Canadian Mounted Police, Chocolate, Marshmallow, and Peanut, Certified Magic Professional, Certified Mulligan Practitioner, Cow Milk Protein or even the Complete Meeting Package

This month's focus is on conference centers and understanding their pricing package known as the Complete Meeting Package or CMP.

If you haven't ever held a meeting at a conference center, I urge you to consider investigating these unique meeting places. I will explore the advantages and features of conference centers within this issue.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I will make it known that I am employed as a consultant for the International Association of Conference Centers or IACC. My endorsement for doing business with conference centers comes from my personal experience teaching, facilitating and planning meetings at conference centers. Other experienced and well respected planners share my sentiments. (See Tesimonials.) For the right meeting, conference centers are an option worth exploring.

After reading this issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events, I hope you will agree.

Sue
[Sue Tinnish](#)

PS Next month is my 7th Anniversary of writing the newsletter. I am setting an ambitious goal of adding 700 subscribers. Can you help me by forwarding this issue onto a friend, colleague, client or associate who you beleive would also enjoy reading the newsletter? I am also working on a new look for the newsletter - same great

content.

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What is a Conference Center?

A conference center is a full-service hospitality entity that specializes in accommodating small- to medium-sized meetings as its first order of business.

Conference centers surfaced in the U.S. in the 1960s when existing sites (many of them mansions and estates) were renovated into executive meeting sites. Today, conference centers are typified as:

- Executive — conference center which may or may not offer overnight accommodation (Typical space: 168 rooms, 270 dining seats, 22 meeting rooms)
- Resort — conference centers with on-site recreational activities (Typical space: 259 rooms, 217 dining seats, 22 meeting rooms)
- Corporate — conference center that primarily serves as a training center for employees of the corporation (Typical space: 221 rooms, 200 dining seats, 44 meeting rooms)
- University — conference centers located on college campuses (Typical space: 120 rooms, 267 dining seats, 22 meeting rooms)
- Ancillary — readily identifiable conference centers that are part of a larger complex

(Source: Numbers from PKF Consulting which publishes the annual Trends in the Conference Center Industry. No statistics provided for ancillary conference centers.)

Many conference centers are operated by hotel chains as well as large hospitality management firms like Benchmark, Sodexo and Aramark. A conference center, even one operated by a hotel company, will be different from a hotel in five distinct ways:

1. Design of the property
2. Personnel
3. Food & Beverage
4. Furnishings and equipment
5. Use of the Complete Meeting Package (CMP)

All five areas will be touched upon but with a special focus on the CMP — an often misunderstood area of conference centers.

A conference center is also different from a convention center. Convention centers are typically designed primarily for large groups, large association meetings, trade shows, and other large events. Conference centers are typically designed to accommodate meetings in the 20- to 300-person range.

While the term conference center is a generic term, my references to conference centers refers to IACC-certified conference centers. These are facilities I have used and which adhere to specific criteria that defines their features and capabilities. The International Association of Conference Centers creates and monitors members to ensure the center is up to standard.

Conference Center Difference

A conference center's focus on service, plus quality facilities provide groups and planners everything they need to hold a productive meeting.

Stringent criteria for IACC conference centers exist in seven key areas. The criteria results in conference centers with:

Focus

By specializing in small- to medium-size meetings, conference centers are free from the mega conventions and events, or the families and vacationing guests that can distract or overshadow groups.

Flexibility

Moment-to-moment changes in meetings - meal and recreation times, for example - are handled efficiently and as a matter of course.

Priority on Meetings

Conference centers are designed to maximize the productivity of smaller meetings (average size, 25 to 75 people) with dedicated, single-focus (not multi-use), distraction-free conference space.

Specialized Conference Room Design

Rooms are specially engineered with such features as ergonomic chairs, tables with non-glare surfaces, tackable walls, appropriate lighting and acoustics.

Conference & Business Services

A designated conference planner provides a single point of contact for meeting groups. IACC conference centers must also have a business center with access to computers, copying, faxing and other services.

Flexible Food & Beverage

Dining facilities offer a flexible schedule designed for the convenience of groups. Continuous refreshment service is available outside meeting rooms.

Modern Conference Technology

Conference centers maintain a full inventory of standard audiovisual equipment

(included in the Complete Meeting Package) as well as advanced conference technologies. Skilled technicians are on site to set up and support meetings.

Guest Rooms with Work Space

Business-friendly accommodations offer desks, telephone lines with simultaneous Internet connectivity and appropriate lighting and seating.

All-Inclusive Complete Meeting Packages (CMP)

Conference centers simplify planning and budgeting with a convenient, per-person rate for guest room, three meals per day, continuous refreshment breaks, 24-hour meeting rooms, conference services and audiovisual support.

Dissecting the CMP

The Convention Industry Council defines the Complete Meeting Package (CMP) as an all-inclusive plan offered by conference centers; includes lodging, all meals and support services. The price is quoted per person.

(The glossary available on the Convention Industry Council's website is a wealth of information. Available at <http://www.conventionindustry.org/glossary>)

A typical Complete Meeting Package (CMP) includes:

- Comfortable guestrooms with a desk suitable for working
- Three meals per day — hot breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Flexible dining designed to accommodate meeting schedules
- Continuous morning and afternoon refreshment breaks
- Twenty-four hour dedicated meeting room
- Audio Visual package consisting of current technology
- Dedicated Conference Planner to assist with planning from start to finish
- All service charges and gratuities

For meetings not requiring overnight guest rooms, conference centers offer the Day Meeting Package (DMP). It includes:

- Continental Breakfast
- Continuous morning and afternoon refreshment breaks
- Lunch
- Twenty-four hour dedicated meeting room
- Audio Visual package consisting of current technology
- Dedicated Conference Planner to assist with planning from start to finish
- All service charges and gratuities

Properties may include other amenities in their CMP:

- Complimentary use of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities
- Materials distribution, course registration services, name tags and message service

- Guest services like concierge services, cashier services, ATM
- Recreation facilities, including game rooms, fitness center and outdoor areas
- Parking, ground transportation scheduling

Understanding CMP Pricing

Comparing apples to oranges is how some people typify understanding and comparing CMP pricing to other venues. In reality, it is not difficult.

If you need to compare CMP pricing to traditional hotel/a la carte pricing, there are several companies that provide spreadsheets or calculators that are helpful, (See the Freebies section.) Otherwise, basically, the CMP price would be compared to a la carte pricing per person added across these categories:

- Guest room rate
- Meeting room rental (total rental fee/# of participants)
- Audio & visual equipment (total fee/# of participants)
- Dedicated conference planner
- Full breakfast
- Morning break
- Afternoon break
- Lunch
- Dinner
- F&B gratuities (total fee/# of participants)
- Service charges (Food, A/V, etc. all service charges/# of participants)
- Other applicable fees including resort fees, bellman charges, housekeeping fees, fitness center access, or high speed internet fees.

For many meetings, CMP pricing is more economical than a la carte pricing for each individual component of the meeting. Other benefits of the CMP is that it:

- Saves time — CMP pricing saves time when requesting information from properties—one question and one answer provides all the necessary pricing information.
- Allows forecasting of expenses — The ability to forecast expenses with a CMP is beneficial. For example, forecasting with accuracy helps when explaining the budget to upper management.
- Offers simplified processes for meeting planners — CMP pricing is simple to understand, easier to track and easier to reconcile.
- Allows time for meeting planners to focus on other details — With logistical issues taken care of, a planner can focus on attendees, planning the agenda, the sessions, the speakers, and the schedule.
- Simplifies budgeting — Budgeting under the CMP doesn't require elaborate analysis. Service charges and gratuities don't need to be included and calculated. Also last minute add-ons (for example an additional LCD projector or

flip chart) will not result in additional costs.

- Promotes on-site ease — A change in the agenda, perhaps moving breakfast from eight to nine or a change in the time for a is a simple adjustment for conference centers.
- Creates peace of mind — When presented with a bill under CMP pricing, there won't be any extras or surprises. You will know up-front what you will be paying.
- Allows for easier comparisons — CMP pricing makes it easier to compare proposals received from individual conference centers.

Pamela Wynne, CMP,CMM, former manager of corporate meeting planning at Educational Testing Service summarizes the benefits of CMP pricing, "Instead of a 35-page hotel bill with all kinds of addendums and add-ons and charges you never anticipated, with the CMP, everything fits on a single page, with no surprise costs, because everything is included in a single, price-per-attendees fee that you know exactly before your event takes place."

(Source: Stiteler, Rowland. 2006. A la Carte...Or Package Pricing. Retrieved from www.emcvenues.com/pdf/CompleteMeetingPackage.pdf)

What the CMP Buys

The CMP will buy everything you need (typically) to conduct your meeting. In addition, the CMP buys you access to great meeting facilities with both significant and subtle features that help a meeting. Consider a few of the features of conference centers:

- Ergonomic chairs — so participants can sit comfortably for long periods of time
- Tables with non-glare surfaces — so attendees can easily write
- Tackable walls — so people like me can post information and flip charts for later reviewing
- Appropriate lighting — reducing attendees' eye strain
- Acoustics treatments — so rooms are quiet and distraction free
- Individual climate controls — for the comfort of participants
- Meeting supply boxes — so things like tape, stapler, markers that aren't dried out, push pins, etc. are available for use
- 24 hour holds — so materials can be left in a room overnight for multiple day meetings

Many conference centers also have

- Natural lighting
- Overhead mounted projectors (presenters don't have to worry about moving in front of the light)
- Real walls - where possible conference centers try to avoid air walls

All these features add up to an ideal environment for a productive meeting.

Note: These are criteria adhered to by conference centers belonging to the International Association of Conference Centers. There are conference center "wannas

be's" - properties that state they are conference centers but don't have the focus on productive meeting environments. You can look for the IACC approved seal or IACC logo at conference center properties. You can also do a search for IACC-certified conference centers at www.iacconline.org. [Search for IACC conference centers](#)

Flexibility Check

One of the common complaints about conference centers and the Complete Meeting Package is a lack of flexibility. While flexibility will depend upon the specific property and your meeting, here are some examples of conference center creativity:

Off-site dining — Sherry Awbrey, associate director of sales for Wyndham Peachtree Conference Center near Atlanta's international airport, says during multiple day meetings her groups can choose carousel dining. "We work with three restaurants in Peachtree City, and we give attendees a gift card to go off-site," she explains. This allows groups to have an off-site experience.

Flexible billing — Conference centers can split bill the group, where the individual attendees will be responsible for the cost of overnight lodging and the group can pay the remaining charges, which includes all meeting and meal expenses.

Unbundled pricing — While many conference centers strongly adhere to the CMP pricing strategy, sales staff will unbundle the pricing if required for procurement. government regulations or to help a meeting planner understand the pricing package.

Testimonials

It's not just me! There are other "believers" in conference centers. Here are two quick quotes from industry veterans:

Joan Eisenstodt, Chief Strategist, Eisenstodt Associates, is quoted in Professional Meeting Management. "I am a strong advocate for conference centers. You not only get a proven commodity — a facility that provides the optimum learning environment in which you can present your meeting — you also get great value" (page 213).

Bonnie Walsh of Bonnie Walsh Associates Ltd., is enthusiastic about conference centers. She says, "Conference centers are fabulous places to have meetings...You have everything you need and all the costs are included up front. Food is healthier at conference centers, with more options than you get in hotels, and they cost less." (Source: Hill, Ruth. January/February 2006. The almighty CMP is loosening up. Meetings MidAmerica Retrieved from <http://www.meetingsfocus.com/displayarticle.asp?id=6209>)

Freebies: IACC Resources & Cost Calculators

Freebies: IACC as a Resource

As a trade association, IACC is focused on the business of meetings. IACC works hard for it's members (conference centers) and meeting planners to help create exceptional

meeting experiences. Here are some of the resources available to you through IACC:

- Find conference centers and meeting facilities — iacconline.org is the portal to IACC Conference Centers worldwide. Locate and learn about IACC Conference Centers. Available at www.iacconline.org the global site [Search for IACC conference centers](#)
- Understand the IACC Difference video available at <http://www.iaccnorthamerica.org/ConferenceCenterDifferenceVideo>
- Get invited to AmaZing Meetings in Atlanta a one day educational event sponsored by IACC. The date is Friday, September 7 at the Wyndham Peachtree Conference Center in Atlanta. To be added to the invitation list email me at sue@suetinnish.com or click here [AmaZing Meetings Invitation Please](#)
- Read more about the criteria for IACC conference centers at <http://www.iaccnorthamerica.org/about/index.cfm?fuseaction=MemCrit2> [IACC Standards](#)
- Check for Hot Dates and Rates on the IACC website at <http://www.iaccnorthamerica.org/directory/index.cfm?fuseaction=VDatesFindHotDates>
- If you are a student, investigate IACC's scholarship program at <http://www.iaccnorthamerica.org/internboard/index.cfm?fuseaction=Scholarships> [Student Scholarships](#) or view the Internship Board at <http://www.iaccnorthamerica.org/internboard/index.cfm?fuseaction=InternBoard> [Internship Board](#)

More Freebies: Cost Calculators

Email me for a list of company specific websites that contain meeting cost calculators to compare the CMP to a la carte pricing. You can contact me at sue@suetinnish.com or click here [CMP Pricing Comparison Calculator](#)

Future T.I.M.E.

Come see me in action at this upcoming conference:

HSMAI's Affordable Meetings West
Tuesday, June 19 & Wednesday, June 19, 2007
San Jose McEnery Convention Center
San Jose, CA

[HSMAI's Affordable Meetings West](#) or <http://www.affordablemeetings.com/west.html>

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see me.

Next month is my 7th Anniversary issue. I am planning a new look to the newsletter (same great content)! I also hope to add (dare I hope for this) 700 new subscribers. Can you help me by forwarding this issue onto colleagues, clients, friends, or associates who you think would enjoy reading Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events.

Virtual T.I.M.E. and T.I.M.E. Gone By

Many back issues are posted on my website at www.suetinnish.com. Or if the issue is not on the website, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter.

You can hear a podcast on the topic of Unique Meeting Venues between Jim Grillo, Here's Chicago.com and myself. Listen now!

If the toolbar does not appear, go to <http://www.hereschicagoblog.com/blog/TipsfromthePros> to hear the podcast. [Unique Meeting Venues Podcast at Here's Chicago.com blog](#)

Here's what is included in past issues ([Back Issue Request](#)):

2007

Chaos & Meetings (January)
Signage and Wayfinding (February)
Building BEST Teams (supplier teams) (March)

2006

New Year's Resolutions (January), Generational Differences (February), Speaker Suggestions (March), Building Bridges (April), Positive Posters (May), Cruises (June), Moving Knowledge and Talent (July), Relaxing Meetings (August), Keynotes (September), Podcasting (October), Unique Meeting Venues (November), Deja View (December)

2005

New Year's Resolutions (January), Brainy Side of Food and Beverage (February), Sarbanes-Oxley and Meetings (March), Visual Aids (April), Experiential Teambuilding (May), Emotional Meetings (June), Press Conferences (July), Green Meetings (August), International Meetings (September), Value of Entertainment (October), Copyright Laws (November), Deja View III (December)

2004

Branding (January), Audio Visuals (February), Networking (March), Strategic Budgeting (April), Sensory Meetings (May), Board Meetings (June), Leadership (July), Barrier-free Meetings (August), Time Management & Meetings (September), The Travel Experience & Stress (October), Voting Techniques (November), Deja View II (December)

2003

Everyday Meetings (January), Diversity (February), Problem Solving (March), Marketing Pre- and Post- Event (April), Entertainment (May), Balance in Meetings and child care (June), Mobile Events (July), Last Minute Ideas (August), Training Meetings (September), Unique Venues (October), Data, Information and Number Crunching Privacy (November), Deja View (December)

2002

Teambuilding Options (January), Promotional Products (February), Multicultural Communication (March), Outdoor Learning (April), Budgets and ROK (May), Creativity (June), High Touch Technology (July), Economic and Business Cycles (August), Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers (September), Return on Investment (October), Incentive Meetings (November), Resource Recap (December)

2001

Sales, Award Presentations (January), Change and Communicating Change (February), Open Space Technology (March), Adult Learning Styles (April), Trade Shows (May), Emotional Intelligence (June), Presentation Tips (July), Ice Breakers (August), Facilitation (September), Humor (October), Customer Care (November), Slack (December)

2000

Teambuilding (May), Green Meetings (June), Values (July), Minimum/Minimal Meetings (August), Evaluations (October), Politics (November), and Toys (December)

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