

Large event planning

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This hand out covers "Sound", "Staff selection" and "Dealing with Non-English speaking dancers".

Sound

Hall choice, Stage, Equipment, Acoustics

Good sound is a critical part of any large Square dance event. In fact good sound is even more important than good callers or cuers. No matter how good the staff is, if the dancers can't hear and understand, they will "vote with their feet" and not return.

The Hall

When you're planning that big event, look carefully at the halls you may want to use.

1. Try to avoid brick walls or lots of glass, especially directly across from the stage. These reflect sound and cause problems by creating echoes. The same thing happens with flat ceilings with no acoustic treatment such as tile or foam.
2. Look for wood, curtains, acoustical tile. These all help absorb sound and help reduce echo.

Rule of thumb:

Better a soft or irregular surface, than a hard shiny surface!

The same thing applies for ceilings.

The Stage

Here are a few things you should consider.

1. *How high should it be?* Portable stages come in a variety of heights. For a big event in a large hall three feet or more in height is a good rule of thumb. Of course if the stage is built in, you're stuck with it.
2. *Is it safe?* Is your stage the commercially made portable type? Or is it homemade? Either way it has to be stable and the sections must be securely fastened together.
3. *Power:* If possible have more than one power source and spread the load. There's nothing worse than tripping a breaker in the middle of the dance. The same thing applies to multi-outlet power strips. Use more than one, connected to different outlets, spread the load!
4. *Charging station:* Nowadays most callers and cuers are using laptops, iPods, Smartphones, etc to play music. A table off stage with several power outlets makes a convenient charging station, and keeps down the clutter on stage.

The Equipment

The best thing you can do is appoint one person (hopefully somebody will volunteer) to take charge of the sound.

The very first thing to think about is: **Who is providing the sound equipment?**

1. Because you're planning a large event you may have a group of local callers who are pooling equipment?
You will need a list with the following:
 - the number of halls don't forget seminar rooms, meeting rooms, etc.
 - number of amplifiers needed - Don't forget, you'll want at least one or two backup sets
 - How many speakers and stands?
 - How many power strips, extension cords, etc - Don't forget to add in the charging station!
 - Mic cords and laptop connection cables, minimum of two for each dance hall, and one for each meeting room.
 - The names and contact details of who is bringing equipment. What they are bringing, how many, and what type. Different types often require different connectors.

Insist that all equipment is marked with the owners name or an easily recognizable mark.

2. A word about Microphone cords and laptop connectors.
Nowadays mic cords and laptop cables are pretty much standard. The Hilton mic cord with remote volume control is what almost all callers and cuers are using. Consider having Mic cords and laptop connection cables already on stage and connected. This will reduce the amount of time that gets wasted plugging and unplugging every time the caller or cuer changes.

Speakers, Amplifiers and VOLUME!

More speakers, more power, more VOLUME is better??

Not necessarily! More speakers create more sound sources, and more echoes!

It's far better to have fewer speakers correctly placed, with amplifiers that have enough capacity to run at less than full volume.

Professional sound companies

Good Square dancing sound is unique. No other type of entertainment has an audience that is stomping, clapping, hollering, dancing, and at the same time trying to understand and follow directions from the performer. Most professional sound companies don't have a good understanding of what kind of sound square dancers need.

Here are a few suggestions that may help when dealing with a commercial sound company.

Voice

This is the #1 priority. It must be clear and stand out from the music. A missed or misunderstood word doesn't matter during a rock concert. At a square dance a missed word can result in broken squares and unhappy dancers.

Louder isn't always better.

Listen for clear Bass or Percussion; this is what we actually dance to.

Echo suppression/delay technology

A good sound company should know what this is and be able to provide it. We have had very good success with this in Europe.

If no delay technology is available, then speakers should be placed so that sound is projected across the shortest dimension of the hall.

Choosing Staff

Choosing staff for a large event can be a very sensitive subject. Everybody has their favorite caller or cuer!

There are lots of things to consider when you are choosing staff for a large event. Here are a few things you need to consider.

What type of event?

- Special dance?
- Weekend?
- 3-day festival?
- How many callers will you need?
- How many will your budget allow?
- Mainstream? Plus? Advanced? Or a combination?
- Rounds? What phase?
- Is the caller or cuer experienced in all the programs you want?
- Does he even call or cue all the programs/phases you want?
- How many hours will each staff member be expected to perform?
- Can a local caller carry part of the load? i.e. in Europe local caller or club caller usually serves as MC and calls when the featured staff is taking a break.

Cost

Travel costs:

This may be a major factor depending on how far your chosen caller or cuer has to travel and may include things like airfare, taxi charges, rental car fees, fuel, etc.

Accommodations:

- If coming from a long distance, will your caller or cuer need to arrive early to recover from jet lag? (Callers coming to Europe from the USA often request this.)
 - Will they be leaving right at the end of the event?
 - Or the next day?
- } and need an extra hotel night

Fees:

There really is no set standard for how much a caller or cuer should charge. Having said that, if you feel the requested fee is too high, don't be afraid to say so!

Return Engagement?

Has your chosen caller or cuer done your event previously?

If so, how long ago?

How was the atmosphere?

What was the response from the dancers?

Other engagements/events

Is the caller or cuer you would like to hire booked for another event in the same area either shortly before or after your event?

What impact might that have on your event? Positive or negative?

Image

Now we are going to touch on a sensitive subject.

What image does this caller or cuer present?

Does he or she dress to project a professional image? (Callerlab has a recommended dress code)

Does he or she have a reputation for being on time or showing late? Or occasionally not showing up at all?

There are a few, fortunately very few, callers and cuers who simply do not appear to be professional, competent, and reliable.

Non English speaking (NES) Dancers

Dancers who don't speak English often see countries like the USA as somewhat of a scary place.

A comment we often hear from our European friends about the USA is,

"It's sooooo BIG!"

There are several things we can do to make NES dancers more confident about coming to our large events and more comfortable when they arrive.

Advertisement & Registration

Advertisements

Flyers in more than one language are a big plus. Would you look twice at an advertisement in an unfamiliar language?

Registration forms

Imagine trying to fill out a long double sided form in a language you can't read??? Keep forms as simple as possible and /or multi-lingual. The same idea is good for online registration. It's not difficult to find help getting things translated.

Payment

European events use bank to bank direct transfers for pre-registration. This type of transfer is possible between US banks and foreign countries too, but it is very expensive.

It will be much easier for NES dancers to register and pay for your event, if you are set up for credit/debit cards or PayPal.

Point-of-contact (POC)

This is very important!

If possible list a POC on your website for languages other than English.

At the event

If you have a "welcome" banner, why not have it in more than one language?

Signs

Please consider using more than one language, or keep the English simple.

Programs

Words such as Mainstream, Plus, Advanced, and Rounds are pretty much universal in the international Square Dancing community, as are numbers. Words like Hall, Shop, Food, and Registration, etc, are easy to translate and doing so goes a long way towards helping NES dancers enjoy your event.

Registration desk

If you are expecting NES dancers, consider having someone who can communicate in their language available when the registration desk is open.

Helpers

An idea that we saw recently and really liked was members of the host group who spoke a second language had a dangle or a ribbon that read "*Ask me! I speak*" in the appropriate language. This was a great help to the NES dancers.

Some of our clubs keep a list of members who speak more than one language and are willing to volunteer to act as translators, guides, MC's or just general helpers at large events.

We have an advantage, Americans tend to smile more!

