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## Search

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## Bright Ideas

- [Meetings Go Green](#)
- [Puzzle People](#)
- [Can You Handle a Handheld?](#)
- [Create Your Own Centerpiece](#)

### Meetings Go Green

The average two-day event for 250 people, including ground travel and hotel room power, emits approximately 72,000 pounds of carbon dioxide—one of the most prevalent greenhouse gasses. Now, a new Web site enables environmentally concerned planners to offset those pollutants, without telling attendees to stay home or sit in the dark.

With an easy-to-use calculator, [DrivingGreen.com](#) determines the total pounds of carbon dioxide that vehicles, flights or entire events emit, and its equivalent cost. You then pay that dollar amount to [DrivingGreen.com](#), which provides it to selected farmers to help fund equipment that converts animal waste into renewable energy, powering his or her farm without any fossil fuel and preventing greenhouse gases naturally emitted from animal waste from entering the atmosphere.

To make that 250 person meeting carbon-neutral would cost around \$260, or a little more than a dollar a person – a small price to pay to lessen your impact on the environment.

[\[ return to top \]](#)



### Puzzle People

Generate buzz about your meeting's destination or theme with a customized crossword puzzle, published in your magazine, newsletter or program. Myles Mellor, an internationally published crossword writer, says customized crossword puzzles are ideal tools for generating excitement about a meeting — and can focus on a variety of concepts surrounding the event. "I cover any theme requested, such as the theme of a conference or terms related to the field," Mellor says.

Custom crosswords are usually 15 squares by 15 squares, the standard size of a newspaper crossword. A puzzle can even be a fun addition to your marketing materials even at the last minute, notes Mellor, who can turn around a puzzle in under a week.

Planners simply provide a theme for the puzzle or any specific words or personalities they would like to include, and a customized crossword writer can do the rest. Even better, it's an inexpensive bit of fun. Mellor charges \$150 per puzzle. He can be reached at [mylesmellorconcepts@hotmail.com](mailto:mylesmellorconcepts@hotmail.com) or through his Web site at [www.themecrosswords.com](http://www.themecrosswords.com).

[\[ return to top \]](#)

### Can You Handle a Handheld?

Are you still lugging a laptop computer everywhere you go? These days, the right handheld PC may offer everything you need for short trips — and will lighten your load significantly.

Lisa Sykes, CMP, director of meeting services for DRI – The Voice of the Defense Bar, uses a T-Mobile Blackberry 7290, which also serves as her cell phone. When she's away from the office, the features she use most often include e-mail, appointment scheduling, phone, calculator and the alarm clock. "I love that I do not need to always take my laptop with me," Sykes says.

In addition to offering convenience, handhelds are:

- **Easy to carry.** Tiny PCs, such as the Sony Vaio UX Micro PC or the pocket-sized OQO, are extremely simple to tote.
- **Fast.** Handhelds like the Palm Treo 700P Smartphone can download information often as quickly as a desktop.
- **Portable.** PDAs such as Palm's Tungsten E2 allow you to work on documents, presentations and

spreadsheets while traveling.

[\[ return to top \]](#)

## Create Your Own Centerpiece

Just because an event's budget is tight doesn't mean you have to skimp on decorating the room. In fact, when your creative wheels start turning, you may be able to develop unique decorations that fit the event better than something you could purchase from a florist or decorator. Excellent items to try your hand at first are table centerpieces. To get you started, some do-it-yourself centerpiece ideas from other creative planners:

- **A scene to eat.** "I am a great believer in edible centerpieces; big baskets of a variety of breads is my favorite," says Patti Shock, professor and chair of the Tourism and Convention Administration Department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas' Harrah College of Hotel Administration. "You are going to serve bread anyway. Include breadsticks, lavosh, yeast rolls, sourdough, and others. Other ideas include a lazy Susan with appetizers such as olives, pickles, stuffed celery, peppers, and salami; for a picnic, jars of pickles and condiments in unique containers; vegetable bouquets; or big lollipops."
- **A theme to remember.** If your event has a specific theme, create a centerpiece with items that reflect that theme. "We have used goldfish in clear plastic or glass bowls; magicians' top hats stuffed with tissue paper and filled with decks of cards, a magic wand, et cetera; sand pails and shovels with shells, starfish and a net in the center," says Christy Lamagna, CMP, owner and chief strategist of Strategic Meetings and Events.
- **A fancy money-saver.** You can create a formal centerpiece without breaking the bank. "Look for goods that are available in bulk on eBay or at Goodwill," recommends Gloria Nelson, chief experience officer for Gloria Nelson Event Design. When you've located discount items, get creative: For instance, Lamagna has filled vases with tall, white feathers and surrounded the vases with votive candles for an elegant but inexpensive look.

[\[ return to top \]](#)