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## FIXING SNAFUS

# Plan B



She led me to the room where the break-out was set to start in 10 minutes. A hole was in the middle of the ceiling, and soggy chunks of plaster covered the floor.

**PLAN****The Sky Is Falling**

Misspelled signage. Broken equipment. No-show talent. You name it — nothing compares with the string of disasters I encountered during a week-long sales kick-off in San Francisco several years ago.

**A**

It all started when hotel security knocked on my door at 1 a.m. The previous day at our orientation meeting, we gave our 1,200 attendees a laser pointer in their welcome kits. That evening, some of the attendees thought it would be fun to shoot the lasers into hotel rooms across the street.

We had booked rooms at several buildings along the same street, and the laser action spanned down the block and up several stories. It also took in an elderly woman walking her dog, who mistook the pointers for the scope targets of a gun. Convinced that she was the mafia's next hit, she sought refuge in the hotel. Hotel security threatened to have me arrested if the lasers didn't stop immediately.

A few days later we gave a large presentation to all the attendees. I

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sat in the back of the room in the control unit with the audiovisual crew. Halfway into the presentation, something caught my eye on top of the chandelier lighting. The lights were on the lowest setting, but I could just make out the object. It was a mouse, running back and forth along the stretch of lighting.

Horrified, I asked the audiovisual crew if mice are known for good balance, but they didn't have time to reply. Just then, the mouse took a dive directly onto an attendee's head.

The man the mouse landed on threw his hands up to his head, confused at what had just happened. Then, he saw the mouse scurry across the floor, and putting two and two together, he leapt out of his chair. Fortunately, he was sitting in an aisle seat and didn't cause too much of a scene. He very calmly headed for the doors. But once he got in the hallway, he let the expletives fly.

While I started damage control on project "Find the Mouse," our CEO was caught in his own hotel snafu. He was getting dressed for a meeting in his room, the one and only presidential suite for the hotel, when he went to the bathroom and came out to find a family of four going through his luggage. Somehow, the hotel had checked this family into the suite without realizing that our CEO — and his party of 1,200 attendees — were still there.

Finally, as if we weren't having enough fun, the ceiling fell on our heads. I was preparing for a break-out session that was about to begin when a planner came running towards me, yelling, "The ceiling is falling." Because of the week's track record, I assumed she meant something along the lines of "The sky is falling" from the Chicken Little story. I replied, "Just tell me what it is, I'm sure we'll be able to fix it." "You don't understand," she said. "Come with me right now."

She led me to the room where the break-out was set to start in 10 minutes. There was a hole in the middle of the ceiling, and soggy chunks of plaster covered the floor. A pipe had burst above the ceiling, and there was water everywhere.

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**PLAN**

**B** Although we had some extraordinary setbacks during the week, we did manage to keep most of the attendees in the dark and the event on track.

After hotel security threatened to put me in jail and seek out the individual laser enthusiasts, I ran into a company executive in the lobby. I explained the situation and asked him to warn attendees to stop playing with the lasers during his greeting presentation in the morning. He said he would, and security dropped the charges.

About 15 minutes later I got a call that a laser was still coming from a room. I went to the room, and to my disbelief, found the executive I had just spoken to. He said he was curious and wanted to try out the lasers.

I took the situation into my own hands and left a blanket voicemail message in all the rooms of our attendees, which prevented the situation from happening again.

My next task was to calm the mouse man, who was clearly shaken by the experience. While I apologized, I made note of his name badge. That evening, I sent a bottle of wine to his room with a note

to thank him for dealing with the situation so well. He probably told the story at the bar, but word never spread to the rest of the attendees. The hotel informed me the next day that they "took care" of the mouse.

Because our CEO had uninvited guests in his room, I told the hotel that they needed to fix the situation and make it up to him. Hotel management checked the family out of the suite and sent him a Disney gift bag. The man is a billionaire — what he'd do with a Mickey Mouse watch, I don't know. But he let the situation drop, and I made a note to avoid the hotel in the future.

The word "break-out" was redefined for me after seeing the damage to our meeting room. We had no choice but to move the meeting to a different location. I ran to make more copies of the handouts, since some had been ruined, and find AV to reset in a different room. We took down signage with the previous room number on it and had people redirect attendees to the new location. The meeting was only delayed about five minutes as we finished pulling everything together.

Looking back on it, sitting in a jail cell probably would have been more enjoyable than what I went through at that event. But, at least I got a good story out of it.

—Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, vice president of events and operations, Cendant Corp., San Francisco

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The image shows a horizontal row of six promotional banners for EXHIBITOR magazine and related services. From left to right: 1. A yellow banner for the March 25-29 event in Las Vegas, featuring a lightbulb icon and the text 'EXHIBITOR 2007'. 2. A black and yellow banner for the 'EXHIBITOR ILLUSTRATED BUYER'S GUIDE' with an image of a magazine. 3. A black and white banner for 'CASE STUDIES OF BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS EVENT MARKETING CORPORATE EVENT MAGAZINE' with the word 'EVENT' in large letters and 'SUBSCRIBE NOW!' below. 4. A black and white banner for 'EXHIBITOR'S RESOURCE DIRECTORY' with 'FIND A SUPPLIER!' in a yellow box. 5. A green and white banner for 'EXHIBITOR' article reprints, showing a document and the price '\$5.00 EACH' with the text 'When Lead Counts Drop'. 6. A black banner for 'Exhibit Design Awards' with 'Enter Now!' and a white cone icon.