

EVENTS MEETINGS MARKETING STYLE STRATEGY IDEAS

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STEAL THESE IDEAS

Trim the Party

Whether your company decides to host an informal office bash or a blowout, here's a grab bag of stylish holiday party ideas from smart event pros.

By Lisa Cericola & Mark Mavrigian



As manager of employee activities for Fox, **Wil Guido** has spent the past seven years planning corporate events for the company's Los Angeles-based employees, ranging from the kid-friendly "future professionals day" to the annual holiday party for more than 6,000 guests.

"Last year's holiday party [held on the studio lot] was California-themed. I incorporated lots of local touches, like Pink's hot dogs and wine stations from Napa Valley wineries, and re-created the entrance of the Santa Monica Pier with foam core to make an entryway to the event. One of the smaller touches people really loved was a special party guest, a **Venice Beach boardwalk staple**. There's a guy there who spends the day roller-skating back and forth on the boardwalk, playing his guitar and talking to people—everyone knows him. I went down to the boardwalk and asked him if I could pay him to come to the party and skate through the crowds. The moment people saw him, they identified the city and place. They couldn't believe he was there. It was a really authentic touch."



Fox's 2006 holiday party featured a surprise guest.



Planners transformed the Clifford Chance office into New York scenes, including Central Park.



As manager of events for law firm Clifford Chance's New York office, **Cynthia Jacquet** plans more than 100 events a year, including the firm's annual in-house holiday party.

"Last year, we did a '**Fifth Avenue winter**' theme, where we transformed our office into various New York City vignettes. For example, we removed all of the furniture from our reception area and created a Central Park scene with a park bench, antique lamppost, real pine trees, and lots of fake snow. We hired a photographer to take pictures of the guests sitting on the bench or playing in the snow, and then staffers took the photos and put them into snow globes. The globes were handed out at the end of the evening as party favors. They were a fun take-home gift that everyone enjoyed."



Stephanie Mantelmacher, senior director of events and promotions for Washington, D.C.-based XM Satellite Radio, plans most of the company's events, from the annual holiday party to XM's involvement in global events like this summer's Live Earth concerts and the Grammys.

"For last year's holiday party, instead of hiring an expensive band or DJ, we sent out **internal emails looking for employees to perform**. We had a stage and sound system and had one of our on-air hosts as M.C., and had about 25 people perform, doing whatever they do best. We had groups of people from our rock channels, and some DJs from the urban channels had everyone dancing. We even had a few comedians who got up and did comedy routines. Everyone really enjoyed it, and the party went very late into the night. Afterward, a few people told me that they went to the party because they had to, but they stayed because they were having such a good time."

PHOTOS: CRAIG M. RENN/ICK GUIDO, FOX PARTY; BLANCHE MACKAY PHOTOGRAPHY (JACQUET, CLIFFORD CHANCE PARTY), COURTESY OF XM SATELLITE RADIO (MANTELMACHER); STEPHEN UPIJMA/COURTESY OF HUNGRY MARCH BAND, COURTESY OF IADZIA TIRSCH, COURTESY OF DAN HURLE/605-SECOND NOVELISTS, COURTESY OF HUDSON YARDS CATERING, BIZBASH (ALL OTHERS)



Add whimsical entertainment with the Hungry March Band.



William Gasperoni is the marketing director for *Blender* magazine, where he plans issue parties and client entertaining events as well as a concert series and a series of lounges, gift suites, and parties surrounding major music events. “Blender hosted [the Dennis Publishing] holiday party last year, and we wanted to throw in an element that related to the subject matter of the magazine and its tone, to show off the way that the magazine aims to be fun and different. We thought it’d be a different vibe to bring in a marching band—but not an ordinary marching band. [We had] the **Hungry March Band** (917.676.8813, www.hungrymarchband.com) come in; someone in my office saw them performing in Brooklyn, and we called them up. They don’t take themselves too seriously, and they look and dress like they are from downtown New York—instead of a regular baton twirler, they have a girl in a lot of dramatic makeup. The band arrived in the middle of the party and marched in a loop for about 15 minutes, playing their rendition of two holiday songs and also Britney Spears’s ‘Toxic.’ Everyone had a great time; it was a total surprise.”



Jadzia Tirsch is vice president of advertising and public relations for Shiseido Cosmetics America and plans product launches and sponsored events on behalf of the Shiseido and Clé de Peau Beauté brands. She also organizes a beauty lounge offering spa services to the attendees of the annual Fortune magazine

“Most Powerful Women in Business” summit.

“I don’t want guests to just stand around; I like to incorporate activities. A cute, fun thing we offered a few years ago was the ‘60-Second Novelist’—a writer, **Dan Hurley** (973.744.0234, www.danhurley.com), who comes with his own table and a manual typewriter and asks guests a few questions to get a sense of who they are. Basically, you speak with him and he types out a short life story in one minute. He makes it imaginative and funny, and then binds it so guests can take it home. I think it’s a great way to engage people at a party, because people share their stories and get to open up and get to know each other, passing their stories back and forth and laughing about them.”



Dan Hurley, as the 60-Second Novelist, creates stories based on chats with guests.

More Ideas



A FESTIVE TABLE TOPPER Event and floral design company **Urban Dahlia** (646.734.3807, www.urbandahlia.com) can create these cute, candy-cane-inspired centerpieces of red dahlias with fuschia coxcomb and evergreen or green-and-white super parrot tulips with green beauty berries.



A SURPRISING SNACK IDEA For its own holiday party and for other clients’ events, New York’s **Hudson Yards Catering** (212.488.1500, www.hudsonyardscatering.com) serves a seasonally appropriate bar snack: a mix of dried cranberries, pecans, cloves, and—for an unexpected savory twist—small pieces of bacon.

INEXPENSIVE DECORATIONS Leslie Weekes of Washington, D.C.-based event planning company **Leslie Manning Events** (202.337.0496, www.lesliemanningevents.com) suggests dressing up an informal event with origami peace cranes in festive paper. Hang them from the ceiling, or cluster them on a bar or buffet to make a bigger impact. For origami instructions, check out www.artfulorigami.com.

