



Blast from the Past: Planning nostalgic events

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There's no denying the power of nostalgia. And just as Hollywood thrives on depicting the past or big brands flourish by evoking fond memories, so too can meeting planners use nostalgia to draw a crowd.

"People like to revisit good memories, so if you can capture a certain time or occasion as part of your event, it can be very effective in making your whole program stand out," says Carrie Paolone, Director of Events with Scotiabank Convention Centre (SCCN). It takes more than rose-coloured glasses to take guests back in time. Replicating the true feel of a bygone era takes a mix of memorable décor, entertainment, tastes, smells, and an overall ambiance that brings everything together.

It's a lot to consider, but that's where a venue's event planning team can make the difference by helping planners understand how their facility can accommodate themed events and what's worked for similar groups in the past.

For example, says Paolone, "One of the most memorable nights we had at the Scotiabank Convention Centre was an 80s-themed event. We really went all out by having our staff dress in 80s attire with 80s hairdos, playing 80s music, and hanging up album covers and movie posters from that time. We even used brightly-coloured flowers like spider mums and gerbera daisies to get the full neon effect."

Modern technology can also play a part in transporting guests to a desired time or memory. Ideas can range from playing old movies or clips on projectors to piping iconic music and sound clips through a sound system, or even incorporate mobile apps that allow guests to share their own memories and immortalize the night's events.



Likewise, adds Paolone, food can provide a powerful connection to the past: “For that 80s night, we had everything from pudding pops to manwiches, sloppy joes, sushi, and even shake n’ bake chicken nuggets. We even put the food menus on display over the buffet using Rubik’s Cubes.”

“It takes a lot of little touches to really drive home that nostalgic feeling,” she adds. There is, however, a difference between ‘driving home’ nostalgia and going overboard. Not all recollections transfer well to modern times and there are outdated stereotypes and clichés that are better left buried. Once more, planners can avoid going too far with their theme by drawing from a venue’s experience.

“When you’re planning a nostalgic event, you really want to bounce your ideas off a number of people to make sure you’re making the right calls,” says Greg Higginbotham, SCCN’s Marketing Program Coordinator. “Even though you and your guests may have grown up together in a certain time period, everyone has different experiences and memories of that time. So, maybe, what was really memorable and sits well with you might not with another person.”

Nevertheless, whether it’s taking guests back to a memorable decade or helping a family relive a milestone moment, taking the time to plan a nostalgic event with your venue’s event team can go a long way towards creating new memories.

Carrie Paolone and Greg Higginbotham are with Scotiabank Convention Centre. For more, visit www.fallsconventions.com.

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