



Refurbishing your events room? How can I maximise the effectiveness of this critical space?

Background

Much consideration is placed on the look and ambience of events spaces and ballrooms in our hotels, these rooms are a key part of the hotel armoury, as a successful conference or function booking secures sales in so many other areas. It is therefore vital that their role, and the technology required to deliver this, is carefully considered as part of any refurbishment cycle.

Design vs. Functionality

You should not have to trade off design for functionality. With careful planning the functionality of a space can be delivered alongside beautiful design. To create a successful 'events space' it is vital that the technological aspects are considered alongside the visual appearance of the room as part of the planning process; not just what you need the technology to do, but what hardware is required in order to make this a reality. Where carefully designed together, a holistic approach to lighting, audio and video needs can be seamlessly integrated into the design of a room to deliver the functionality required in an unobtrusive, even invisible manner. When done effectively, this actually enhances the overall ambience of the space, as sound and lighting are critical in creating the optimum guest experience.

What Hardware do I need?

Before this question can be answered, it is vital that the key usage of the room is understood. Requirements for conference delegates may be very different from wedding guests and may differ again for those attending a charity fundraiser or gala dinner. Understanding how you wish to position your 'events space' is key in delivering the best technology to suit your guests. Many hotels may find that they require facilities which are flexible, to meet the needs of all these kinds of events. In addition 'types' of customers also need to be considered. Sometimes spaces are hired out directly to 'the end user' who will need the venue to provide all of the facilities and at other times they are hired to an 'events' or 'production' company who will provide their own technology and room dressing, each have very different requirements of the events space.

Designing the most flexible events space

Flexibility is often the answer, as many venues need to be able to adapt to suit many different requirements. As such, it is important to own a certain level of hardware to allow 'in house' events and conferences, as well as to have the ability to provide an adaptable and technologically compatible venue for events companies to hire. As a basic requirement, every venue needs its own PA and Projector system to allow for background music, speeches, announcements, and presentations. The specification of these will depend on the acoustics and size of the venue. It is always worth discussing your customer's needs with your lighting, audio and video integrator during the planning of your refurbishment. They will be able to suggest the best solutions for your particular events space.



How do I make my facility appealing to events companies?

Increasingly, large companies are employing events organisers to deliver important events in their corporate calendars. In turn, events organisers need reliable venues to work in partnership with, as they strive to be as professional as possible. They need interesting and unique rooms to hold events within or the ability to easily create a unique environment within an existing space. This relies on three key attributes;

1. Accessibility
2. Power
3. Compatible technology

These in turn need to be designed into the structure of the room to ensure that they are as seamless as possible. This will subsequently free up more space and therefore enable maximum occupancy within the room.

Accessibility

Dressing a room, building a stage or bringing in lighting & PA equipment requires a large team, lots of boxes and often odd shaped things! If you have the opportunity to consider the loading route for a venue, it is helpful to allow vehicles as close as possible to the events room and if possible, allow the main loading path to be on a level route or one with ramps rather than steps. If this is not possible, lifts are an option, but these need to be goods lifts with a good internal volume and load rating and not guest lifts, as even the best handles of a flight case can bang, scuff or dent a lift interior.

Power

All events need power, and lots of it! It is vital that events rooms have a good number of 13amp sockets in a suitable number of circuits, spread around every wall and between multiple doorways. If you have a venue large enough to justify a stage or a flown lighting rig it will be worth fitting what is called hard Power; some large Cee Form/commando style connectors offering higher currents of single or three phase power. These are most usefully placed near the side of the stage, just outside the loading doors near back stage or behind panels in the room where the desk/amps might be or the cable runs to the lighting rig may come down and will allow the staging area to be effectively lit.

Compatible Technology

Sound: It is essential that your systems are never compromised in the desire to make your facilities as appealing as possible to events companies. When considering sound requirements it is paramount that your 'main racks' and 'controls' are not touched by any third party as this will void your warranty with the installation company. If your existing room sound configurations do not meet the requirements of an events company, it is always safer to allow them to provide their own systems for further specific requirements. If however you have established a good working relationship with a particular events company it is possible to allow them to connect to the 'front of house' audio or video sockets to use the 'house' system in parallel with the 'events' system. If you feel this is beneficial for you, it is always advisable to contact your installation company to ensure that relevant safeguards are in place and any training required is conducted with the relevant events company staff.



Lighting: There are positive benefits in allowing an events company to integrate their DMX lighting desk with your in house lighting system. Working with your lighting system provider, it is possible through the installation of DMX sockets and a DMX merge unit to allow the events company to take control of the lighting within a designated room or area. Your lighting system provider can ensure that this is set up such that the events company can only control the area you choose and that this will not affect any other areas of the venue or safety measures such as 'lights to full' in the event of a fire. Once established, it will enable the events company to dim house lights and bring up stage lights seamlessly.

Hiding the Hardware

By their very nature, events and functions are temporary affairs and with them they bring what has become an inevitable number of cables, rubber mats and gaffer tape, running around your beautifully decorated venue! To minimise the visual impact, however, the events room infrastructure can be designed to hide a large proportion of this temporary 'hardware'. This in turn will free up more space and therefore enable maximum occupancy within the events room. Some options include fitting;

- Removable skirting board which has a void and trap doors to enable cables to be routed around the walls without being seen.
- A trough in the floor around the perimeter of the room to allow cables to be laid in and covered. This works well as it allows cables to cross doorways without impeding pedestrians or wheel chair access.
- Vertical panels in walls at strategic points to allow floor to ceiling cabling to be hidden behind panels. This allows the connection and control of lighting equipment without the need for big trips of cable hanging down from trusses.
- Video screens in the ceiling. The use of video is becoming more and more prevalent in events for video, data and lighting projection. If screens are pre fitted in the events room ceiling, it produces a clean finish as these screens are nearly invisible once installed. It also reduces the need for stands and rigging, allowing projection to be done swiftly and easily.
- Rated flying points in the ceiling*. Having properly rated flying points in the ceiling, which are compatible with the systems used by the events companies you work with, will enable a rigger to fly all of the lighting rigs and speakers from the ceiling, leaving you with the best possible space for your guests.

** Flying points always need to be designed with your structural engineer to ensure stability. Likewise it is always advisable to check riggers qualifications and insurance prior to their arrival on site even if they work for the events company.*

What else should I think about?

Your own staff or events coordinators will often know what will help to make a room work better as they experience the downfalls everyday. This may be moving doors, changing the direction in which they hinge or the type of hinge fitted to allow silent access for minimum disruption. It may also be prudent to fit general purpose cameras that can be accessed in back of house areas or the kitchens allow staff and events teams to have an unobtrusive view of the event room to enable them to deliver seamless timely service to guests. It is also important to ensure that you have the relevant PPL and PRS licenses to enable music broadcasts to prevent any legal infringements.

Conclusions

Getting both the design and functionality right will deliver a flexible and desirable events space which in turn will pay dividends for your venue. It is vital to work with your lighting, audio and video integrator during the planning of your refurbishment to ensure that the best solutions are designed for your particular events space to maximise your return.

Call CGA Integration Today to discuss your next project - 0845 058 4650 or info@cga-integration.co.uk

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