

fees for sending customers to certain restaurants, shows, etc.? While this practice is commonplace, concierges who aren't motivated by this type of payment typically have a broader selection of vendors and therefore can provide better service.

Other concierge questions may include:

- How long have you been around?
- How big is your firm?
- How many staffers do you have? What training do your concierges go through? What is their level of experience?
- Are all of your concierges notaries?
- Are you a member of one of the two dominant, professional concierge associations? The best private concierges are members of the International Concierge and Errand Association or the National Concierge Association, if not both.
- How are fees structured? Hourly or project-based? In Colorado, hourly fees for a concierge run between \$35 and \$85, with some mountain locations having the higher fees. Your overall cost can usually be adjusted to fit your budget.

What services are offered, where the conference is conducted, whether the concierge is onsite and the number of attendees all affect your total concierge cost. Most larger conferences choose onsite concierges, but meetings with smaller budgets can achieve stellar results using offsite services that are accessible via Web site, e-mail, fax and phone.

- What are your favorite restaurants, transportation services and entertainment venues?
- How do you measure your effectiveness and performance? Points are scored here for firms that have a solid evaluation system and are willing to share its details with you.
- If required by the venue, is the concierge company bonded and insured?

As you would when hiring other service firms, check references. Don't just call their previous clients; also call some of the conference city's major restaurants, transportation firms and entertainment venues. Ask how the concierge is to work with and about their reputation.

The concierge industry continues to grow rapidly due to strong demand in many settings. Auto concierges? Ski concierges? Golf concierges? They're all out there. While this growth is a strong indication of how useful a concierge service can be, it also means there are a wide variety of skill and competency levels represented by these firms.

In addition, as the concept of concierge services has become more accepted, conference attendees and others are putting more trust in concierges. For example, running to the ATM with a conference attendee's bank card and PIN isn't unusual. Of course for you, the person in charge of making your conference a raging success, it makes it that much more important for you to choose a concierge firm you can trust.

While hiring a concierge is only one of many decisions you have to make when hosting a conference, if done thoughtfully, it can help your conference run smoothly and leave your attendees looking forward to next year.

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