

Big Challenges = Big Solutions

Mariette Haras

CMP, Big Events Inc.
Waterloo, Ont.

It's not surprising that topping Mariette Haras' list of the most important attributes for independent planners are "perseverance" and "the ability to wear many hats and switch them quickly and easily."

Case in point: when the Waterloo, Ont.-based owner of Big Events Inc., a 14-year-old business specializing in corporate events that range from an intimate dinner for 50 to a monstrous 15,000-person Truck Fest with 100 volunteers, decided to move her website to a new server, her existing web host decided to make things messy by holding her domain name hostage.

With no in-house legal department, Haras donned her lawyer hat to explore every possible solution, from contacting the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA), a not-for-profit organization mandated to operate and oversee dot-ca domains, to contemplating a switch from dot-ca to dot-com (not a viable option at a cool US \$17,000). In the end, Haras had to go back to the original server. "I had to say: 'Okay, you win. Now let's get this mess cleaned up.'"

Luckily, Haras has the winning combination of "great staff" and "flexible suppliers," which she says enables Big Events to push ahead and sustain momentum. "Our five staff members work extremely well together on every level, and everyone has their specialty," she says.

But finding suppliers willing to be flexible can be a bit more difficult. "If I want quail eggs served in a nest, I don't want to hear, 'We don't do that but you can pick something else from the prepared menu.'"

To find this can-do attitude, Haras has scoured events looking for creative chefs who are up to the challenge. If she finds a potential candidate, she'll start with a small event and see how it goes.

In all cases, Haras treats suppliers as part of the team. "I invite them to pre-op and post-op meetings, and for really large events, I'll hold a wrap-up party for everyone involved."

"Our five staff members work extremely well together on every level, and everyone has their specialty."