



You know the problem. Your budget has been cut. The MD expects the event to be as big and as good as last year's event. Or maybe last years event was as dull as ditchwater and with reduced budgets you are expected to perform miracles and conjure up a party atmosphere and create a memorable occasion.

We put together three of the industry's leading corporate party experts to assist you in creating the perfect Christmas party. Read on....

# How to make a Christmas party HAPPEN!



## Giving a Christmas party a soul

by Alison Welsh of Big Bang Events....

A party of any kind must have a soul but a Xmas party more than most! Inevitably a Xmas party is a staff event, so it is in effect a 'family do.'

Just like a family event there must be a common desire to get together and enjoy! This desire is the first element that gives a party its soul; its reason for living and its ability to live on after the actual event has ceased. Without this desire it can be as soulless as a bad Christmas lunch at the In-laws.

The second half is the host. There must be someone who believes in the event and who can knit everyone together. There is no escaping it. Unless a party belongs to someone it has no cohesion. Nothing ever gels and the event never really gets going. Something must connect everyone together and make it a fun and exciting place to be. There needs to be a centrifugal force in place to pull everyone together.

Desire and a great host are the winning combination which when mixed with a first class resource or organizer guarantee a great night. The guests of course breathe life into the event and the music gives it its heart. Venues

and caterers add great food and beverages to keep it alive and decorators make it attractive and a place people want to be. But the soul belongs to the party.

The Xmas party is the one party that does not get cancelled. Such is the desire to end the year with a bang. The Xmas party is a place where the year's desires, frustrations and achievements are lived out on the dance floor or at the casino or even outside on the pavement! The memories live on and it is talked about all year until the next one..

For the first time in my 15 years of being involved with organizing events, this is the first summer I have had cancellations just because it didn't seem right to be celebrating when others have been made redundant. This is proof that a party doesn't just happen because someone like me books a band and a few balloons. People can feel when it's right and when its not.

So when thinking of planning the perfect Xmas party make sure everyone has their heart in it and the person you choose to pull it together internally believes in the event. You will have a party whose soul lives on for ever..



# The economical Holly and the Ivy...?

by Elsa MacDougall-Pope and Jacqui Partridge, Partridge Events



As the summer approaches, forward planning companies start to consider the prospect of what their staff Christmas party could entail. This year, more than ever, holds a different sense of Christmas company musts.

The days of lavish cash splashing during the festive period, conjure up memories of gluttonous over eating, over drinking and really hold nothing to write home about.

These shifting economic times are nudging companies to take a different approach to their events.

Tightening the financial belts and more consideration to where the cash is flowing, has opened the doors to a different genre Christmas event opportunities. The new breed of festive parties shy away from the stereotypical "staff night out".

Leaning towards a far more favourable interactive and staff congratulatory mode of celebrations, creative thinking from the events industry is allowing companies to hold a far more stylish, memorable and motivating party.

At Partridge Events we have conquered up creative, smart and economical solutions for the Christmas period. We are offering fantastic and glamorous Diamond Receptions, working closely with some of London's top venues, like The Gherkin, companies can have an event which invests money back into the company and its staff.

On arrival each guest is handed a glass of champagne, containing a sparkling jewels, two of which are real diamonds, waiting to be won by two of the guests.

These packages include a variety of choices from glamorous hostesses to luxury canapés.

Christmas styling allows your staff party to still look fabulous, without costing the earth. Intelligent use of lighting and décor will give the event that special spark.

This festive period need not be effected by the economical slump; it is the time to consciously celebrate your business's achievements and your precious staff's hard work. The Christmas party can now be used as an opportunity to give something back to your employees, clever and creative options will allow the night to be truly memorable.



## Funk Soul Brother?

by Ben Turner, Ministry of Sound

As corporate hire manager at Ministry of Sound, I've hosted and attended a lot of parties and the best are when the guests enjoy themselves, after all that's what a party is organised for! That's obvious I hear you say but there are many parties I've attended where on the invite it looks great but in reality they don't have a soul or atmosphere which makes them hard to enjoy.

To give your party a soul and atmosphere i think there are several important factors that need to be considered starting off with the venue. If the venue is wrong, creating an atmosphere can be hard no matter what you do. Choose a venue that suits the number of guests attending. No one likes to be pushed around and feel uncomfortable with not enough space but on the other hand a venue that is too big makes the guests feel exposed.

Lighting on any event is important but for a party it's essential! Lighting creates a mood and atmosphere whilst also making the venue look good. I like parties that aren't too light as I don't feel comfortable and quite often I find people don't relax until the lights are turned down and if the guests aren't relaxed they won't have fun!

You can have the best venue and lighting but without the correct music policy then there is no party! It's not only the type of

music but also the level it played. At the start of the party the music should be inviting and aim to get people in the mood, especially after a hard days work when people need to adjust from work to play mode. The music should also be played a low level allowing guests to mingle and chat. As the party progresses the music should become more upbeat and gradually get louder. You can tell when the music policy is good as people start to move to the music, be it a tapping of the foot or a nodding of the head, if this happens people are enjoying themselves. Not all parties are designed to make people dance but for those that are, there is a fine line between people dancing and having fun and the music being too loud and too fast, which is quite often an easy mistake to make, if people stop dancing there is a need to alter the music or the loudness!

And finally the real soul of the party is created by the people who attend. It's not always easy to select the your guests, especially if it's an office Christmas party but if the venue, lighting and music is good and people still don't have fun, what can you do!

So there you have it! How to give your party a soul, dress it, and put smiles on peoples faces with style. Happy Christmas-planning!



For the majority of companies the Christmas party is a highlight of the social calendar. If they get it right the person organising the event will be lauded as a hero, if they get it wrong you can rest assured that no one will be offering to make you a coffee in the New Year.

To get it right first time we suggest the following:

**Know your audience** – is it the whole team who will attend, is it senior directors or is it co-workers? Talk to them and ask them what they think might be fun. Would they like a formal evening or something more casual, would they prefer a lunch or a dinner and dance? In order to try and be all things to all people you have to find out what people want. Form a small committee to make a joint decision rather than trying to do everything yourself – several heads are better than one!

**Do your research** – having prepared a brief and budget, go to the professionals to give you suggestions for how best to achieve it. Organisations such as Venue Reservations, [www.venue-reservations.co.uk](http://www.venue-reservations.co.uk) have a plethora of different ideas for Christmas parties for all scenarios including themed concepts and differing numbers. On the subject of themes, these nearly always represent the simplest way to have a uniquely memorable evening at a fraction of the cost, which would be associated with creating a one off production. Don't forget that smaller groups might like to join a shared party night, for example at Vinopolis on the Southbank or East Wintergarden in Canary Wharf. Being part of a big show can be great fun.

**What are you actually buying?** – Identify what you are actually getting for your money when you make the booking. All inclusive package prices are brilliant as they prevent a nasty shock after the event (for example you budgeted for two glasses of wine per head and the attending guests have a real blow out leaving a sour taste in the mouth of the person who has to go back to their finance department to explain the overspend). You also need to make sure that you have chosen a menu appropriate to the evening – a choice of 6 canapes is simply insufficient for a 7pm to 1am party. Don't forget that a Company's duty of care regarding staff welfare extends to events organised by the company so you should also consider how people will get home afterwards.



## By Hugo Miller-Brown, Seasoned Events Ltd - the award winning, completely independent special event catering company within the Crown Group

**Don't forget the obvious** – make sure you tell people where they're going (& which entrance to go in through if necessary!) & what will be provided on the invitation. This will avoid people arriving at 9pm having grabbed a quick bite thinking they wouldn't be fed, when everyone sat for dinner at 8pm. Make sure you outline the dress for the evening. How many times have you spent hours wondering what to wear?

Other little tricks include booking well in advance to secure the best deal, postponing the event (where possible) until January to get an even better deal, & most importantly get the professionals to do the hard work for you!

Finally, enjoy it! You've done all the hard work, you've created the perfect party, you're in safe hands – let your hair down & have a fantastic time.