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**learn**



**Creating an A List  
Event on a C List Budget**

# Introduction



**While budgets may be tight, we still want our events - be they parties, conferences, awards ceremonies, staff meetings, product launches, team building days, exhibitions – to be quality experiences.**

But how do you square the circle? How do you create an A-list event when your budget is decidedly C-list? To answer this question we asked leading event organisers, suppliers and event experts to share their top tips with us – and they have.

The result is this fun Guide which our Londonlaunch:learn team has compiled for you.

We hope this helps you 'break the mould but not the bank' with your next event. And of course don't forget, if you're in need of further inspiration remember there are masses of special deals, great event ideas, fabulous value for money venues and suppliers plus no end of event inspiration to be found on [www.Londonlaunch.com](http://www.Londonlaunch.com) or at our new show Londonlaunch:live 2010. Set at the truly stunning Saatchi Gallery, London October 20 & 21 it will be a seriously A-list event.

**I hope to see you there!**

Cheers

*Will Broome*

**Will Broome**

CEO & founder of Londonlaunch

p.s. If you have a killer tip you'd like to share, do let me know – as we will put the best ones up on the Londonlaunch:learn website.

**Call our Team NOW to find out how we can help you drive your marketing and sales through these unique networking & learning opportunities.**

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# General

Work with suppliers as partners. If they understand what you want and feel part of the team they will generally go that extra mile.

Leigh Horton, LDH Marketing Ltd

Don't just work with your usual contractor as a matter of course. Putting things out to tender is always a good idea. If your present contractor is as good as you think, you could end up working with them again in any case – but at a lower cost.

James Grant, head of events sales at The Shephard Group

If you try to do too much with a limited budget everything will look C-level. Instead create focal points. If a headline entertainer is the focus, serve chicken. If the food and beverage are the priority, use canned music.

Andrea Michaels, president, Extraordinary Events

Barter – floral arrangements, marquees, hostess staff and catering may all be secured at a discount in exchange for small 'tasteful' advertising.

Joanna Bates, venue operations manager at Abu Dhabi Motorsports Management

Negotiate! Even top venues can be flexible, and you can often get extras added in. Those extra touches can help make your event more memorable.

Hina Gandhi, marketing manager, Miller Insurance Services Ltd

Consider forming an alliance with a complementary firm which doesn't compete but wants to attract the same customer (eg bank and law firm). Event cost can be split and the event can be promoted to multiple databases.

Sarah Gormley, head of marketing & PR at Made in Manchester

Rent the stage, PA, lights from one company – you will get a much better all in one price.

Edwin Rijs, organisator en DGA Audiomaniacs BV

Quality not quantity of guests - cut your numbers, not your level of supplier.

Jessamine Lawrence, events executive, Ernst and Young

Create an event directory and offer sponsorship and advertising opportunities.

Helen Tremlett, director, Meet in UK Ltd

Organise multiple events at the same time to give you more power to negotiate on price.

Leigh Clark, sales executive, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Set up an efficient taxi rank for the end of the evening to avoid waiting charges when worse for wear guests have no sense of time.

Eleanor Belfrage, Eleanor Belfrage Events Ltd

# Décor

Let your florist choose rather than suggesting colours that match corporate colours.

Jayne Copperwaite, Jayne Copperwaite Flowers

Buy props from pound shops or flea markets and spraypaint on interesting colours.

Caroline Hurley, director, Quintessentially Events

Group décor items artistically together on stage as if spread around a large event space they will get lost.

Alexandra Armstrong, owner at Three Tall Women Design Inc

Do not theme a party if you have a small budget. Keep it simple. Whites and creams and mirrors are very effective at creating an A-list look.

Ultra Violet Inc Ltd

Use lightweight backdrops – they take up less space leaving more space for delegates, need fewer construction staff and can be set up on the day – so there's no expensive overnight room hire or staff accommodation.

Leigh Horton, LDH Marketing Ltd

Focus on a few things. For instance for décor – focus on the stage and forget the entry which is only experienced for moments.

Andrea Michaels, president, Extraordinary Events

Most venues have 1 or 2 'house' linen options (usually black or white) that you can use as the table cloth and then perhaps rent a nice overlay to add more glamour. This is cheaper than renting both the linen and overlay.

Chris Roffe, conference service manager at The Greenbrier

If you have a beautiful floral arrangement set up at a venue, transport it after the dinner to the hotel (assuming it still looks fresh) and reuse it in the conference or reception area.

Sylvie Neves-Strunc, managing director at MCI Prague

Rather than expensive floral centrepieces try small pots of blooming spring flowers from a garden centre.

Elizabeth McCullough, general manager - Trade Shows at Canadian Institute of Plumbing and Heating

Swap a big centrepiece for a great decorated cake or cup cake tree – or a gorgeous trifle which can be the table centrepiece and double as the dessert.

Andrea Michaels, president, Extraordinary Events

Ditch expensive and labour intensive chair covers. There are lots of creative alternatives such as wide ribbon in theme colours, knotted directly on the chair back. Or double up napkins to create a pouffe and pin it to the upper corner of an upholstered chair. These can be made in advance and quickly installed on the day.

Alexandra Armstrong, owner at Three Tall Women Design Inc

# Décor cont.

Choose a venue with lots of décor in place. If it's a nightclub chances are they will already have a wonderful lighting and sound system.

Linda Miyoshi, director of business development at PRA Destination Management

Use museums – there's no need to add additional dressing.

Emily Ackroyd, events manager, Imperial War Museum

Instead of chair covers have branded t-shirts tied creatively on the chair – you have a chair cover and a give away in one!

Andrea Michaels, president, Extraordinary Events

If running an awards ceremony within your event, don't go for elaborate centrepieces that will dominate the table and may obstruct the view of the presentation. Many venues attached to resorts/hotels have some small item they can place at the centre of tables – so that it's not bare, like votive candles or hurricane lamps.

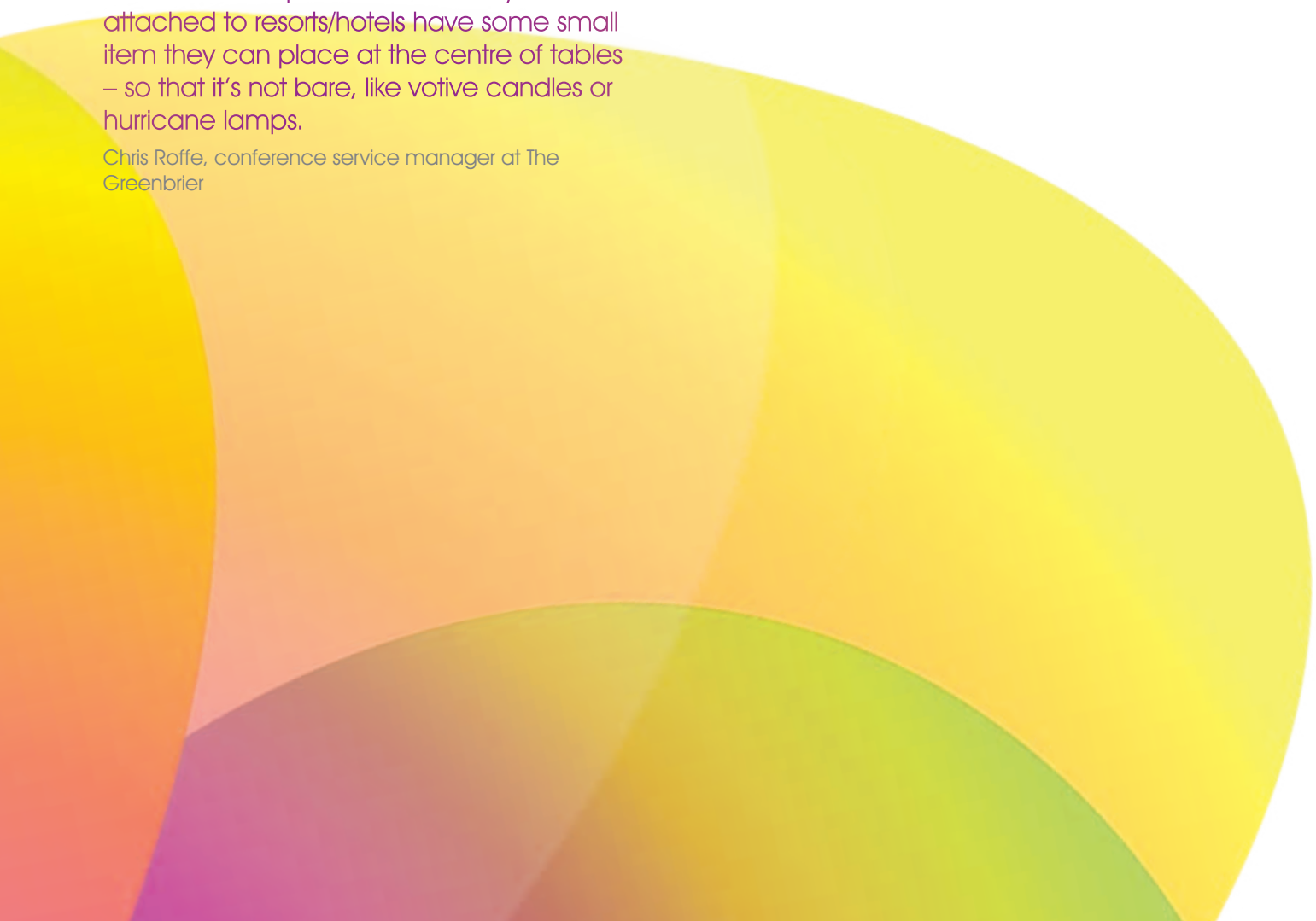
Chris Roffe, conference service manager at The Greenbrier

Always budget lighting before linens and décor. A cavernous space can look warm and inviting if the lighting is right.

Alexandra Armstrong, owner at Three Tall Women Design Inc

Screen off separate areas of the venue and reveal each session of the event through the night.

Emily Ackroyd, events manager, Imperial War Museum



# Planning

Bring a technical director on board as soon as possible – it will save \$\$\$\$ in the end.

Doug Murray, owner at Cue 1 Go Production Services

Add a short evening reception onto a day-time conference rather than holding a separate evening event.

Emily Ackroyd, events manager, Imperial War Museum

Establish very tightly defined objective measures of success for the event. This allows you to focus resource on areas which deliver the objectives.

Richard Kidd, secretariat at MPI UK & Ireland Chapter and Owner at RGK Solutions

Understand who the audience/stakeholders are – that way you can tailor your event to their tastes.

Chris Roffe, conference service manager at The Greenbrier

A breakfast meeting can be a more cost effective alternative to a half day meeting in terms of both venue hire and catering. This is because it allows a venue to take up to three events in day. You can also reduce your food offering to a more cost effective breakfast rather than a lunch with wines.

Richmond Creative Event Catering



# Drinks

Pour wine with dinner and instruct staff to always ask if the guest would like a refill – this minimizes over pouring.

Chris Roffe, conference service manager at The Greenbrier

Rather than cutting back on quality of the drinks, consider shortening the length of your event so that the consumption level will be lower. Everyone will remember the high quality, and not how bad it was that you got a budget option.

Sonny Walia, managing director, Walia Enterprises

Save money on alcohol by not using famous brands. Hide the labels of bottles with well placed serving napkins.

Madalina Black, events officer, The Royal Society

Use magnums of champagne - half the corkage cost.

Emma Purves, account manager, Experience Worldwide

Offer non bottled water where possible.

Sylvie Neves-Strunc, managing director at MCI Prague

Purchase champagne direct from the champagne house – and check out auction websites where you can get great wines and champagne at a fraction of the cost.

Joanna Bates, venue operations manager at Abu Dhabi Motorsports Management

If there is a local vineyard, which produces good wine (assuming the venue isn't tied to a supplier or the corkage policy won't negate the savings) you may be able to serve this at cost in exchange for free marketing for the vineyard.

Chris Roffe, conference service manager at The Greenbrier

Use a quality prosecco as a substitute for champagne, but don't attempt to hide it. Tell guests it's a lighter option that will be easier on their head!

Eleanor Belfrage, Eleanor Belfrage Events Ltd

Consider a mobile bar facility - this saves money, means you can use great venues that lack a bar plus you get bespoke drinks and cocktails to match your event theme.

Vicki McErlan, owner at Flavour Bar Events

Shorten your reception time by 30 minutes.

Chris Roffe, conference service manager at The Greenbrier



# Staffing

People always think they will save on waiting – but don't skimp on such service staff – smooth service is vital.

Sylvie Neves-Strunc, managing director at MCI Prague

Make each and every guest feel welcome. Have a really well prepped hostess.

Ruth Dancer, director at Ruth Dancer International Ltd

Receptionists and hostesses will often work for free if the guests are interesting.

Eleanor Belfrage, Eleanor Belfrage Events Ltd

Get a contingent of friends and colleagues to create a faux paparazzi arrival.

Dean Christopher, image & event designer



# Catering

Use food for your themeing – this means you will achieve two things in one go.

Leanne Constantino, managing director at The Forum Group

If you cannot afford filet mignon, braised short ribs are all the rage, seasoned with ethnic sauces/flavourings. Beef bourgignon and coq au vin are inexpensive comfort foods that have a 'specialness' attached to them.

Yvonne Szikia, president at Affairs with Flair

Flush out all potential catering costs before you book the venue.

Leigh Horton, LDH Marketing Ltd

Themed food stalls are an excellent way of reducing costs compared with an evening meal and they really maximise networking potential.

Richmond Creative Event Catering

For outdoor events a hog roast is a big crowd pleaser and is a cheap option.

Events team at belowzero +ABSOLUT ICEBAR LONDON

At networking events or receptions, instead of putting the food out on a table with plates, have servers walk the room with trays of individual items. Use napkins instead of plates. This means people cannot pile their plate – or make dinner out of snacks. You will need less food.

Jai Cole, partner at Plum Communications Inc.

Have three quality courses rather than four nice ones. Costs no more but creates a better impression.

Elizabeth McCullough, general manager - Trade Shows at CIPH

Cut down on portion size – I've saved 20% this way!

Benny Hui, managing director at Your Event Musicians

A cold starter is easier to prepare en masse than a hot one..so with a set menu always ask the venue if they could do a better price if you chose a cold starter.

Events team at belowzero +ABSOLUT ICEBAR LONDON

Hire a chef from France for a private party – when the Euro is low this is cost effective and has impact.

Benny Hui, managing director at Your Event Musicians

Meet with the chef – get him/her to feel part of the team, ask for their recommendations.

Elizabeth McCullough, general manager - Trade Shows at CIPH

Go vegetarian! Fresh seasonal produce is in vogue and costs less than meat and fish.

Events team at belowzero +ABSOLUT ICEBAR LONDON

# Venue

Think about truck access, power, does the venue have a CAD in the room?

Doug Murray, owner at Cue 1 Go Production Services

Work with the look and feel of the venue – use its architecture as a feature. Cushions in complimentary colours can be added to existing seating to refresh the look and feel of a room.

Ultra Violet Inc Ltd

Work with furniture available at the venue itself – rather than hiring in furniture.

Perzen Darukhanawalla, venues marketing co-ordinator at AUT University

If you can, be flexible on the dates and venues. If a venue has a hard to book date they may give you bottom rate costs if they know you are prepared to move elsewhere.

Leigh Horton, LDH Marketing Ltd

If you think somewhere may be way too expensive for your budget, it is better to tell them the figures you are working to. You never know, they may be slow for that week or month and therefore quote within your budget.

Events team at belowzero +ABSOLUT ICEBAR LONDON

If the venue has a low ceiling there are ceiling design treatments (Arabian tent, night sky) which will impress and which wont cost a lot to execute.

Jocelin Meesenburg, Merestone Meetings and Events Support Services Group



# A/V Lighting & Technical

Uplighters can be hired from an AV company and are pretty cheap yet can transform a space instantly.

Events team at belowzero +ABSOLUT ICEBAR LONDON

Use lighting to create special effects rather than props.

Leanne Constantino, managing director at The Forum Group

Illuminate floral arrangements and key features such as a bar.

Ultra Violet Inc Ltd

Don't be seduced by technologies of the moment. Think about the purpose of the event and the content of the message before delivering the technology.

Christopher Milnes, AT Communications

Always budget lighting before linens and décor. A cavernous space can look warm and inviting if the lighting is right.

Alexandra Armstrong, owner at Three Tall Women Design Inc

You can never have too many candles. Night candles in candle holders are a very cost effective way to dress a room.

Ultra Violet Inc Ltd

Use specialised audio, lighting and video contractors - and make sure when negotiating the facility contract to eliminate any penalty or surcharge for bringing in outside contractors.

Jeffrey Jayne, partner, Corporate Image Associates

Use Keynote instead of PowerPoint. In the right hands it totally changes a dull presentation.

Jon Mowat, managing director at Hurricane Media

Use virtual sets - a large screen with the set created in video and projected. This will work for the plenary session then re-set for the breakout stream, and again for the gala awards in the evening. Quick turnarounds, one simple cheap set and huge versatility.

Christopher Milnes, AT Communications

The better the technical crew, the better they can deal with the lower end of things – and less equipment.

Doug Murray, owner at Cue 1 Go Production Services

If the event is straightforward, ask for IT training before the event and save on having an IT tech present on site.

Perzen Darukhanawalla, venues marketing co-ordinator at AUT University

You don't have to resort to more expensive, intelligent lighting. Simple coloured up-washes are a great way to add drama when you turn the lights low – plus there are some outstanding 'effect' options.

Jocelin Meesenburg, Merestone Meetings and Events Support Services Group

# Entertainment

Celebrity look-alikes cheap low cost way to create an A-list effect.

Richard Pollak, owner, rainbow entertainment

Use versatile entertainment who have 2-3 acts and can become more flamboyant as the evening goes on.

Eleanor Belfrage, Eleanor Belfrage Events Ltd

Use local talent instead of a talent agency – will help save costs on travel, rooms and food for the performers.

Chris Roffe, conference service manager at The Greenbrier

Use student volunteers – performing arts students could be roving entertainers.

Leanne Constantino, managing director at The Forum Group

Look for musicians currently on tour in the area. Fees will be less as it will be viewed as a piggy back on their current tour.

Joanna Bates, venue operations manager at Abu Dhabi Motorsports Management

Very basic lighting will quickly achieve the desired ambience but a dodgy DJ will destroy all your efforts.

Ruth Dancer, director at Ruth Dancer International Ltd

A DJ is always cheaper than a band and if you spend a little more you can have an outstanding DJ that will keep the energy up all night.

Jocelin Meesenburg, Merestone Meetings and Events Support Services Group



# Promotion

Print only what is necessary.

Sylvie Neves-Strunc, managing director at MCI Prague.

Bring a plain quality paper invite to life with simple beading, ribbon, glitter.

Jennifer Brown, owner, Concept Invitations

Use social media tools to garner publicity. Facebook in particular is good when you have a celebrity at the event. Twitter is good for interaction with attendees and meetup is good if you don't have a budget to manage fee paying guests.

Benny Hui, managing director at Your Event Musicians

Use web for pre-event information and registration.

Leigh Horton, LDH Marketing Ltd

Always have a catch – this will ensure people want to come to experience something they have not done before or which appeals to them. Schedule it towards the end of the evening to ensure guests stay throughout.

Events team at belowzero +ABSOLUT ICEBAR LONDON

...make your business fly!