

The Seating *Primer*

By Duncan A. Fisher

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“My tables,--meet it is I set it down...”

Hamlet

Act I, Scene V

Dedicated to

*the lady who had to run down a street
during a blizzard carrying a seating board over
her head for our first money making event,
my wife*

Carolyn

Table of Contents

- Chapter 1 – The Nature of the Beast
- Chapter 2 – The Seating Process
- Chapter 3 – Recording RSVP's
- Chapter 4 – Assigning Guests
- Chapter 5 – Communicating the Assignment
- Chapter 6 – Basic Reports
- Chapter 7 – Support Products
- Chapter 8 – Event Issues

- Appendix 1 – Terminology
- Appendix 2 – Sources
- Appendix 3 – Forms



Forward

The issue of seating and who sits where and with whom has been around for a long time. The expression "siting above the salt" was coined during medieval times and indicates that there was preferential seating and "other." Those above the salt had ready access to the salver, which an expensive spice at that time. Those below had very limited access and were, therefore, in less desirable seats.

Of all the different management issues a meeting planner has to deal with, doing the seating for a large, assigned table or seat event can be one of the more challenging and frustrating. If done poorly, there is embarrassment and if done well, few notice. Yet, the seating can be done well and easily, if you know the issues and techniques or methods to managing each one.

This primer is a limited review of the seating process, techniques and common terminology. It reviews the different types of events, Chapter 1, and then studies the seating process, Chapters 2 through 6, where the seating process is broken down into successively smaller tasks. The purpose of the analysis is manifold.

- Gain a better understanding the process.
- Separate and group tasks in to logical functions.
- Formulate some techniques for different phases of the process.
- Understand some of the limitations.

To make the reading a little more interesting, occasionally, the reader will see a penguin pointing to a tip about seating.

When the author first got into the business of events, he discovered that there can different meanings for the same expression. So Appendix 1 is a short lexicon of seating terminology.

The scope of this primer is limited to seating; it does not discuss the other issues of planning or "doing" an event. Further, although some of the techniques may be applicable to open seating or buffet style seating, the focus of this primer is "assigned table/seat events."

Disclaimer

THE AUTHOR IS THE DEVELOPER OF PROPRIETARY SOFTWARE PACKAGE FOR SEATING NAMED RSVP®. TO AVOID USING THIS PRIMER AS A PLATFORM FOR THE RSVP® SOFTWARE, INFORMATION ABOUT THE PACKAGE WILL BE LIMITED SO THAT IT IS SIMILAR IN QUANTITY TO THAT OF OTHER PRODUCTS AND TECHNIQUES.

Chapter 1

The Nature of the Beast

Why is Seating so Difficult?

Several factors combine to complicate seating

- ◆ The deadline is immovable.
- ◆ Mistakes and problems are not discovered until it too late to fix them and they usually cause embarrassment for both the guests and the meeting planner.
- ◆ One change causes another, which causes another, and so on.
- ◆ It usually has a "back end loaded" schedule which means that the real heart of the job can not be done until close the end. The subscription drives the number of tables, which in turn controls the room layout, which then allows tables to be assigned by number.
- ◆ Many last minute changes, in the form the acceptances and cancellations, frequently come in after the seating is finalized.
- ◆ Patrons and sponsor are notorious for not providing names until the end, if ever.
- ◆ There are literally thousands of details - your guests and their special requests and needs. Of all the things that people spell incorrectly, names are the one of the most common.
- ◆ There is usually a budget, which can mean working with volunteers.

Seating is a challenge because it is "real-time" – if a problem or glitch is discovered the clock can not be stopped to allow time to solve it.

Types of Seating.

Events come in all different "shapes and sizes" and the nature of the event defines the scope of the seating "problem". Some events can have a combination of styles, which can make the task even more daunting. Because the same phrase may mean different things to different people, some different styles commonly used to describe an event.

Assigned Seat - a guest is assigned a particular seat at a specific table. This means that some technique for designating the seat must be used, such as a table place card.

Assigned Table - a guest is assigned to a table. When the guests arrive at the table they select their seat.

Event Underwriter - an organization that pays some part of the cost of the event, which may also include being assigned tables in preferred locations and mention in the program or other recognition.

Table Sponsor/Patron - an organization that sponsors a table by purchase. In some cases, the table sponsor keeps all of the seats; in others the sponsor tries to sell the seats at the table. Some organization recognize patrons, sponsors and underwriters by allowing them access to a closed viewing of the silent auction which includes a

hosted bar, drink tickets or closed reception for the key note speaker. An added complication can be that some organizations distinguish between patrons and sponsors. Patrons pay a little more and get better seating, while sponsors get less desirable seats.

Ticketed - can come in several variations. One of the more common is the ticket has the guest's assigned table number on it. Another variation is that the ticket is just to get in and the guest still has to determine their table assignment.

Turn Backs - used in a tabled sponsored or patroned event, where the table purchaser returns a number of seats to the holding organization for guests to be assigned. Usually, the table sponsor or patron holds some seats for their own people to sit and do not provide the names of the purchaser's attendees. This style is used frequently by associations that deal with the military.

Table Raffle - guests table assignment is drawn by raffle or lottery, either before or sometimes at the event. This technique has been used by political parties at fund raising dinners where a rank and file guest may draw a seat with at the Governor's table, for example. A premium is charged for being entered in the raffle, like \$15 over the normal ticket price.

Seat/Table Auction - much like the Table Raffle, except that bids are entered for a particular VIP to be seated at the bidder's table.

VIP or Private Reception - many events have a special "closed" reception for guests who pay a premium

Mixed – can mean:

Some tables in the room are assigned seating while the others are "open seating"; often used for political fundraisers.

A combination of other styles is used.

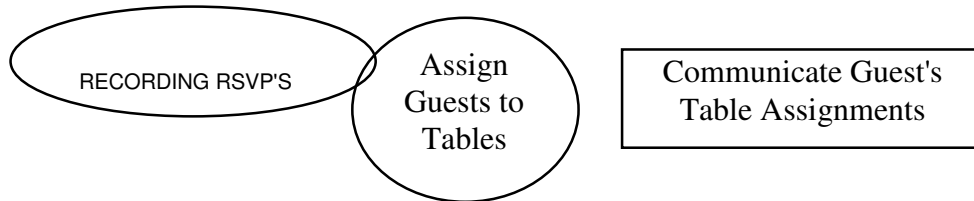
The above is just some of the styles; there are things which can make it even more complex, like accepting "will call" reservations which means some provision must be made for identifying unpaid attendees and accepting payment at the door. It is possible to define a "event from hell" by including a little from several different styles, having will calls, badges, sponsor table tents, table place cards, an auction, and turn-backs from sponsors. But even in the most complex of events, the requirement to have seating be perfect is a constant.

Chapter 2

The Seating Process

The purpose of the seating activity is to assign everyone coming to the event the best seat for them. However, it is not always possible to have everyone seated around the dance floor nor in the front row. Usually, someone ends up on the end of a row or, worse yet, at the back of the room.

Regardless of the style of event, the seating process has three parts or phases. These phases may all be done by one person, take place on one desk and be done simultaneously. However, regardless of how many people do them or how they are divided between offices, there are three basic parts to understand.



The next three chapters are devoted to these basic parts and treats them as entirely separate processes. Note that there is one small, but important area of overlap between "recording RSVP's" and "assigning guests to tables"; this is the entering the RSVP'd guest data into the seating data. This overlap is really an interface or data exchange between the RSVP Recordation part and the Seating Part. A significant "sanity" check is to have a place somewhere in the RSVP phase to note that the RSVP has been entered in the "to be assigned" data.

The table below shows the different methods that might be used of each phase and how they interact.

Recording RSVP's (1)	Assigning Tables (2) (3)		Communicating Assignments (4)
	Guest Entry	Assigning Tables	
File/Index Card	Index Card	Ticketed	Tickets
RSVP Form	Word Processor	"Canadian"	Badges
	Spread Sheet	Butcher Paper	YAAT® Cards
		Pie Plate	Seating Boards
		Index Card	Guest List Booklet-YaaT™ Combination
		Spread Sheet	
		Database	
		Delphi Diagrams	
		Meetings Matrix®	
		RSVP©	

For a particular event, one method of assigning guest to tables may be used, while a different method may be better or another event. Obviously, techniques are selected which best fit the requirements of the event. For example, for the dinner at a reunion, the "Canadian" technique might be used for assigning guests to tables, while for a larger event another technique, the "Butcher Paper" or computerized spread sheets, might be more appropriate.

An overview of the different techniques is shown in the Table on the following page. The shading indicates that the method is computer based.

Here are some basic ground rules to consider.

- ◆ For an event of fewer than 12 to 15 tables, use a manual technique; conversely switch to a computerized method for a larger event.
- ◆ For Manual techniques:
 - Double entry bookkeeping can reduce error and omissions.
 - Manual methods usually require more effort during the last phrase.
- ◆ For Computerized techniques:
 - Thou shall keep some kind of paper record. For example, do have a paper record of the RSVP's.
 - Computerized techniques can require more effort at the beginning of the recordation phase and less at end.
 - Establish and use data backup procedures.
 - Have some contingency plan in case your computer crashes.
 - Computerized techniques make it easier to create products and reports, see Chapters 4 and 5.

The first step in the seating process is to record the RSVP's

Chapter 3

Recording RSVP's

Accurately recording RSVP's is the first step in properly running an event. If data is missed or inaccurate at this stage, it may never be corrected until it is discovered at the event. The technique selected must be appropriate to all the forms that RSVP's will arrive, mail, fax, telephone, and in-person. The purpose of recording the RSVP is threefold; first to provide input to the seating process, process the payment and lastly, provide a "paper trail" at the event.

Four steps of recording an RSVP are:

1. Receive/Review the RSVP.
2. Process the payment, check, credit card, etc.
3. Add the RSVP into the seating data.
4. Archive the RSVP for reference.

Let's look at each step more closely.

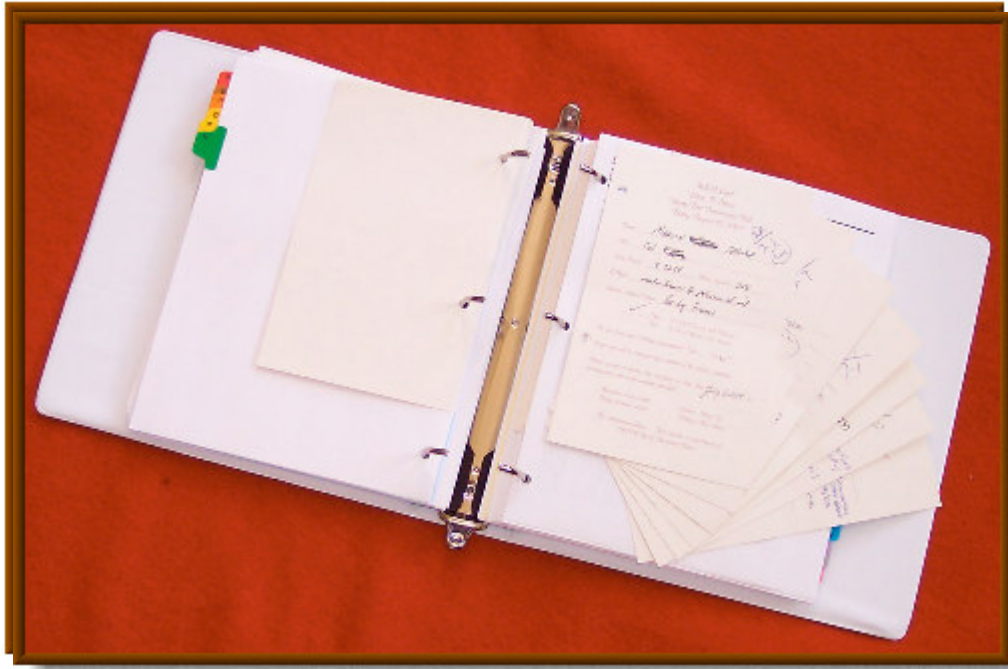
Receive/Review the RSVP. An important part of the reception process is recording the RSVP on a form designed for the event. The recording may be in the form of just stapling the card to the form and transferring some part of the data from the card. These RSVP forms are kept in what is sometimes called the "RSVP" or "Casual Binder" that contains blank forms. In addition, the cover of the casual binder shows the date, time, place, cost and other particulars about the event. The review is primarily for completeness and accuracy. For example if the guest has submitted payment for two, but not indicated if the second is a wife or date then the data may need to be tracked down.

Process the Payment. How to process a check or credit card is beyond the scope of this primer, but some organizations want the financial data broken out and processed by the finance department before the RSVP is entered into the seating data

Add the RSVP into the seating data. Regardless of which guest entry technique the event is using there are several options possible. If the RSVP is from a table sponsor or an event patron, it may be treated differently to an RSVP from an individual. For example, if it is the purchase of a table by a sponsor, it may "generate" a whole new table and a new entry in the Program of the event. Two of the most common steps of entering the RSVP into the seating data are making either an index card for the guest and or an entry in a spreadsheet. Because the entry of a guest frequently falls under the purview of the group or person doing the seating, the RSVP card or form can be sent to them for data entry and then returned with a notation that it has been entered. Even if the RSVP recording and seating are done by one person, have a place on the RSVP Form to indicate that it has been entered into the seating data.

Archive the RSVP. Putting the RSVP into a binder, alphabetically, creates the ultimate reference that is taken to the event to sort out problems. Some organization call this the "Seating Operations Binder", the "Archive Binder." Depending on how complex the event is, the binder may have a section just for patrons/sponsors or underwriter RSVP's and another

section for individual RSVPs. Keeping the binder in alphabetical order allows quick reference to it at the event.



RSVP Cards in a Binder with Alphabetical Tabs

Later, in Chapter 5, we will discuss how this binder plays a key part in the one of the important "sanity checks" to be made.

An indispensable part of the RSVP recording process is getting your organization to support it through some appropriate procedures.



Tip

Work in "whole numbers", not "adds and subtracts". It is better to see a message like "ABC Corporation wants to purchase 5 tickets instead of 4." Confusion can occur if a message comes in that says, "ABC Corporation wants to add one more attendee", and the message somehow gets repeated, they can wind up with more seats than they want

- ◆ If at all possible have RSVP's flow into one location. Try to avoid having several locations. Use a standard form to record the response.
- ◆ RSVP are recorded on the appropriate forms, not on message or buck slops. If someone calls while the RSVP person is out to lunch, take a message and call back.
- ◆ Track down and resolve what appear to be duplicates or possible discrepancies; don't assume.
- ◆ Don't allow RSVP forms to be kept separate from the binder; it is a good way to have them get lost or generate a duplicate entry. Establish a routine, such as once a day, to enter the new RSVP's into the seating process.

- ◆ Have the date and time written on all messages.
- ◆ Don't throw anything away.



Tip

The author frequently keeps a box (a box for copy paper is perfect) with all the throwaway items during the event.

Two important steps to get the RSVP's correct are:

1. Brief your organization on the RSVP process and procedures. Write the procedures out and explain to everyone, even if its one-on-one, what the steps are and why they are important.
2. Play the RSVP back to the attendee to make sure that the information is correct. These days it is so easy to send an e-mail with the details of their acceptance.

If the data is accurate at this step, there will be fewer problems later.

Chapter 4

Assigning Guests

This chapter presents several widely differing techniques for assigning guest to seats. The first two require the least amount of effort, but are the least flexible.

The Seating Method

Ticketed.

The easiest technique is "first come - first served ticketed". This method is so different because it cuts across the boundaries of the three separate phases and can compress them all into one. However, it has one terrible draw back, it is extremely inflexible and it is predicated on a lot of experience with similar events.

Some of the steps to running this type of event are:

1. Estimate your response.
2. Lay out the room.
3. Number the tables.
4. Create tickets for each seat, by table.
5. Estimate how many tables should be reserved for VIP, etc. and pull those tickets.
6. Put the rest up for distribution.
7. When seats are ordered, pull and deliver the tickets.

The main disadvantage of this technique is that once a ticket has been distributed, it can not be retrieved which severely limits the organizer's options for responding to a problem.

"Canadian"

Named for a Canadian Armed Forces protocol officer, who uses it extensively for reunions, this technique is essentially the ticket approach, except that the tickets are posted on a board. Attendees remove the tickets they want. However, it is fraught with problems, particularly attendees removing more tickets than they are allotted or not returning tickets when they want to change their assignment.

The approach is a no-brainer for the organizer. Besides creating and posting the tickets there is nothing to be done.

The following "recordation methodologies" require some management, but also allow for some deliberation in creating the seating solution. This "deliberative" process is discussed later in the Chapter under "Seating Operations".

Butcher Paper

Named for the easiest and least expensive medium for the working solution, this technique involves drawing the venue and each table/seat or row/seat on a piece of butcher paper and using that to record the allocation of seats. The butcher paper technique works well with the index card technique below.

Like the other two manual techniques following, if any type of printing will be required, there is a significant data entry task at the end.

Paper Plates

Just as the name implies, this technique uses paper plates to create the seating solution. One organizer in Washington, DC even uses pink and blue pieces of Post-It © notes to help arrange the “boy-girl” seating. Parenthetically, it worked very well until one night the janitor disposed of all the pie plates on her floor shortly before the event.

Index Card

The assigned guests for each table are recorded on an individual index card.



Tip

To create some linkage between the RSVP medium and the index cards, assign a sequence number to the cards that is recorded on the RSVP medium as well. Later when a sanity check is performed, if the RSVP card does not have an index sequence number, it means that the guest probably did not get seated

The next suite of techniques are all computer based. The immediate advantage of computer solutions is that the data is already entered and, therefore, the creating of seating products, such as seating boards or table place cards, is facilitated.

Spread Sheet

Depending upon the sophistication of the event planner, this technique can be as simple as an alphabetical listing of the attendees and their table assignment. Or as complex as a multi-page spread sheet with one sheet for attendees, another for tables another for group or sponsor purchases all linked via macros. The disadvantage of spreadsheets is that unless the user is sophisticated, the coordination of the data is left to the user. For example, if the table assignment is just an integer column somewhere to the right of the attendee’s name, there is not any intelligence in the spreadsheet to stop the event planner from accidentally oversubscribing a table. To illustrate the point, the event planner could assign 100 attendees to a table and the spreadsheet would happily record it.



Tip

When entering a table numbers in either a spreadsheet or database, enter table numbers below 10 with a leading zero (0). That way, when a sort is done on table number, the tables from 1 to 9 will sort to the top of the sequence. If tables below 10 are entered without the leading 0, they will sort to the bottom of the sequence. If the event has more than 100 tables, enter numbers from 10 to 99 with a leading 0, such as “059” and enter table numbers below 10 with two leading 0’s, such as “006”.

Data Base

Although it provides for a lot more intelligence to overcome the shortcomings of a spreadsheet, the quality of the data base solution depends on the set-up by the user. If there are controls to eliminate errors, such as oversubscribing a table, then it will produce a better seating solution. If there are not, it will have all of the drawbacks of the spreadsheet technique.

There are several proprietary software systems for planning seating.

Certain Software® Meeting Management Plus

Will have an extensive seating capability for table events in 2nd quarter 2005.

Delphi Diagrams

Documentation says “assign seating by table, as well as seat number, and include guests’ individual food and service preferences.”

RSVP© Software System

The capabilities of this software system are described on the RSVP Events web site.

The Seating Operations

This section describes the steps of a methodology for creating a seating solution.

“Most Critical to Least Critical” is the method that begins with the guests who are most critical and ends with the guests who are the easiest to seat.



Tip

If your software can not display a diagram of the event room with the tables and their numbers, before you start work create a large picture of the venue and display it in the “seating work” area as a reference. Many “copy shops” like Kinko’s, can enlarge the drawing to suitable size.

Steps:

1. If it has not already been done in some other way, perform a “sanity check” by crosschecking the RSVP Archive binder with the “to-be-seated” information.
2. Assign guests to the head table, such as VIPs, the keynote speaker and the person who is to introduce the keynote speaker.
3. If not assigned to the head table, the Master of Ceremonies should be seated so as to have access to the podium.
4. If you have anyone in wheel chairs, assign them to tables with easy access.
5. Allocate the Event Underwrite table or tables and the guests they have requested.
6. Allocate Sponsor Tables and the guests they have requested.
7. Assess the “groups” issue. If you have guests who have requested to be seated together, they may need to be seated while there are still complete tables available.
8. Before you proceed, scan the guest list to see if there are any key guests you have overlooked. Some critical guests who can be overlooked are:
 - ◆ “Handlers”: a person travelling with a dignitary who must be in close proximity to or have eye contact with the dignitary.
 - ◆ Interpreters: should be seated next to the person for whom they are translating.
 - ◆ Security Personnel: get directions from them as to how they should be seated, if they are seated at all.
9. Assign the remaining to seats. If there are any a good way to proceed is to print out a list of those who are not seated and work down it.



Tip

If you have guests who are going to be called to the stage for some kind of recognition, they should be seated so that they have easy access to the stage; having to traverse the room is both embarrassing and time consuming.



Seating workstation for a multi-day corporate event. The Ziploc™ bags are use to hold table place card sets for individual tables.

Chapter 5

Communicating the Assignments

There are two basic ways to communicate seating assignments; first, post or display the information in some manner, and secondly, give the guest something that has the table number on it.

Posted

Regardless of the exact form of the posting, this method is usually some type of seating board. Seating Boards are an alphabetical list of the guests and their table assignment. They can be as simple as a white foam core board with the alphabetical list stuck to it, all the way up to a board that is matted, framed and glassed where the alphabetical roster is printed in an appropriate, enlarged font and pasted in sections. Good seating boards usually include a simplified lay out of the room with the tables numbered.



Framed and matted Seating Board for a 1000-guest Gala with turn-backs

One great advantage of the posted technique is that they are “self serve.” The arriving guests locate their name and see their table number. The event staff does not have to be involved in the communication process. A disadvantage of seating boards is that if you have some last minute changes, making the corrections is not the easiest.



Tip

If the event uses seating boards, consider:

- *Take a bottle of “White out” to the event to make last minute changes.*
- *Do not take the effort to change the board for a cancellation. If a guest has cancelled, they are not going to see their name, so just leave it.*

Seating boards should be placed at strategic “choke points” to increase the number of guests who see the board. Recommended locations are:

- Just inside the door where guests arrive.
- As guests depart the coat check.
- Just outside the venue.

“Give Something...”

The item given to the guest can come in several forms.

- ◆ Badge with Table number.
- ◆ Ticket
- ◆ YaaT Card
- ◆ Guest List Booklet-YaaT Combination

Badges

The assignment can be printed on the front of the badge but if it is large it can detract from the appearance of the badge. However, to print it on the back of the badge requires “two pass” printing, which can be little complex. The other options are to hand write the table on the back or affix a label of some kind.

Tickets

A ticket can be something as simple as just a card with a table number on it. Ticket stock compatible with most computer printers is available from several manufacturers and some even has a perforation to produce a stub.

Yaa™ Card

This product is a more attractive form of ticket that shows the guest’s name and their assignment; frequently printed on 4X post card stock.



Tip

To help guests locate their tables, print a simplified room diagram with tables and their number on the back of the card.

Some advantages of the above three techniques are:

1. They easily accommodate changes. If a guest’s assignment is changed, a new card can be individually printed.
2. Cards can be separated into groups and important groups, such as “Members of Congress”, “Board of Directors” or “Judges” can have pickup locations removed from the general population.

A disadvantage is that the cards need to be displayed so the arriving guests can pick them up. If the cards are not be set out then they can be kept in a small cardboard box, but the box will need to be manage by event staffer.



Tip

For very large events have stations for sections of the alphabet and prominently display the portion of the alphabet that the station is handling.

Guest List Booklet-Yaa™ Combination

This rather unique product contains an alphabetical listing on of the attendees with their assignment while the front cover shows the guest's name and their individual assignment. If the event is over 1200-1500 guests, do not use this product because there are some many pages that they do not bind into the cover easily and the product looks downright tacky.

Chapter 6

Basic Reports

There are a couple of reports that are essential to the event.

“Guests Alphabetical”

This report lists the guests alphabetically and their assignment. It can come in two forms, first columized and second, extended.

The columnized format compresses the information to just that needed to help a guest locate their assignment at the event.

RSVP Events, Inc.	
GIB Recognition Gala	
Akers, Mr. & Mrs. Alex	165
Akers, Mr. John	111
Albertson, Mr. & Mrs. John	163
Amberson, Mr. Yulian	103
Austin, Mr. & Mrs. Terry	153
Barea, Mrs. Leslie & Guest	153
Barnum, Mrs. Karen	133
Bates, Mr. & Mrs. Terry	161
Beard, Mr. & Mrs. Michael	143
Benjamin, Mr. Neil	167
Grant, Ms. Janet	123
Grayson, Mrs. Veronica	129
Greer, Mr. & Mrs. William	143
Griffin, Mr. & Mrs. Owen	133
Guy, Mr. Eric	141
Hage, Dr. & Mrs. John	119
Haines, CLU, Dr. & Mrs. John	139
Halburton, Mr. & Mrs. John	133
Hall, Ms. Caryn	165
Hamilton, Mr. & Mrs. Mitchell	159

The extended format takes a full line and shows the guest’s name, title, organization and their assignment for three events.

RSVP Events, Inc.					
GIB - Recognition Gala					
As of 08-04-2004 at 11:46:23					
{Status: S=Not Invt P=Pending D=Declined W=Waitlisted C=Cancelled #=Assigned Resource}					
Akers, Mr. & Mrs. Alex	Vice President/	- Compact Fin	165 D	19 N	N Y
Akers, Mr. John	CFO	- Long Term C	111 D	13 N	N Y
Albertson, Mr. & Mrs. John	Vice President	- First Bank	163 1A	20 N	N Y
Amberson, Mr. Yulian	Chairman and CE	- GIB	103 1A	2 Y	Y Y
Austin, Mr. & Mrs. Terry	VP/CIO	- Southern Co	153 D	27 N	N Y
Barea, Mrs. Leslie & Guest	Vice President	- New England	153 16A	31 N	N Y
Barnum, Mrs. Karen	Sr. VP, Revenue	- GIB	133 3A	16 N	N Y
Bates, Mr. & Mrs. Terry	President	- First Ameri	161 D	8 N	N Y

Recognition Night Assignment.

Golf Assignment (hole number).

Las Vegas Night Assignment.

Resources Sequential With Assigned Guests.

In this report, the resources – tables – are shown sequentially with the assigned guests.

Recognition Gala - ER: 1			
As of 11-03-2004			
15:41:07			
Guest by Table/ Continuous			
T:101	Pierson	Seats At Table: 10	Unassigned: 0
	+Foster, Mr. & Mrs. Charles	President & CEO - Southern Capital Bro	
	Herrick, Mr. & Mrs. Charles	CIO - Federal Life Insuran	
	+Hix, Mr. & Mrs. Allan	President/CEO - Lennox Products	
	Kelley, Mr. & Mrs. Marcel	Chairman - Children's Fund Inve	
	Mazel, Mr. Bryon	Vice President - GIB	
	**Pierson, Mrs. Paulette	Chief Operating - GIB	
T:103	Amberson	Seats At Table: 10	Unassigned: 0
	*Amberson, Mr. Yulian	Chairman and CE - GIB	
	+Blair, Mr. & Mrs. Karl	Chief Informati - US First Credit	
	Bowles, Mr. & Mrs. Darron	President & CEO - North Gate Finance	
	Fordham, Mr. & Mrs. Garrett	CMO - CitiCorp	
	Rice, Mr. Malcom	Chairman of the - Delta National Ins.	
	Winston, Ms. Angelina & Guest	Executive VP/CO - Northwest Community	
T:105	Hitchcock	Seats At Table: 10	Unassigned: 0
	Ferris, Ms. Paula & Guest	Vice-President, - North Gate Finance	
	Hitchcock, Mr. Edward	President - GIB	
	Jorgenson, Mrs. Stephanie	Vice President - CitiCorp	

The report shows:

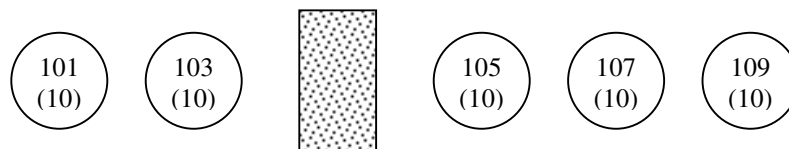
- ◆ Table number.
- ◆ Name for the host or sponsor.
- ◆ Number of seats at the table.
- ◆ Number of seats unassigned.
- ◆ Name, title and organization of each assigned guest.

The “*” and “+” indicate the fulfillment of “sit-with” requests; “*” is the requester and “+” is a requestee. On table 101, Mrs. Pierson, had requested “Foster” and “Hix” and fulfillment of the two requests is noted.

Room/Table Diagram

This report is indispensable to the execution of the event; it shows the location of the tables and their number and their size. A report similar to those shown in Appendix 4 can be created in about 20 minutes with a word processor, such as Microsoft’s Word or Corel’s Word Perfect.

Each table is represented with a table number on top and the size below in parenthesis. Some of the features of room can be included, such as a carpeted center aisle.



Chapter 7

Other Products

There are two other important products that might be used with an event.

Table Place Cards

Table Place Cards serve several purposes.

Help to have the guest sit the way that was intended. This is particularly significant when:

Event patrons and sponsor want to sit next to a key contact.

The person introducing the keynote speaker needs to sit next to the keynote speaker.

Interpreters need to sit next to their principal.

Handlers or security personnel need to sit in specific seats.

Virtually eliminates table-hopping.

Further, table place cards can be a nice touch that elevates the quality of the event just a little.

A number of manufacturers, listed in Appendix 2, have paper stock for table place cards.

Table Sponsor Packets

This product facilitates dealing with table patron/sponsors by creating a place where all of the information about an individual table can collect. The packet is a glove envelope, about 6½-in. wide by 9 in. tall, that can contain:

- Diagram of the room.
- Tickets or YaaT™ cards for their attendees.
- A list of the guests assigned to the table.
- VIP Reception Tickets or instructions.

Some other items that can go into each packet are:

- Parking Passes or parking information.
- Table place card stock and instructions for preparation and placement.
- Invoice or receipt for the table purchase.

The outside of the table sponsor packet should have at minimum the name of the sponsor and the name of the point of contact.

Chapter 8

Event Issues

Dealing with the Venue

From the assignment perspective, the key issue with the venue organizer (hotel, cater, etc.) is the layout of the room with the location of the tables and the table numbering. The best way to communicate this is the room diagram, previously mentioned in “Basic Reports”.

Fax the room/table diagram to them early in the process and every time you add a table either notify them or modify the form and fax it to them again.

Dealing with Patrons/Sponsors

While sponsorship is the greatest boon to the event organizer in terms of producing revenue, patrons and sponsors can be some thing of a headache.

Some techniques for dealing with sponsors are:

- Get the name of a contact person, their fax number, their cell, and anything else that is will help you communicate with them.
- Organize the sponsor information by putting it in a binder. Take the binder with to the event.
- If they are going to provide you with the names of their attendees, then help them get organized by providing them with a form to fill in. See Appendix 3, page 2 for a sample form.
- If you are going to solicit their input on who they would like to have assigned to their table, again help them organize their input by providing a form. See Appendix 3, page 3.
- Publish some deadlines. It will help with a few of the sponsors.
- Play their information back to them. If you can print their assignment information out, then do it and fax it to them. If there is an issue with the table, knowing it early will allow time to correct it.
- Allow the table sponsors to retrieve their packets early, like the morning of the event.



Tips

- *If a sponsor fails to provide the names of all of their attendees, then print “no-name” tickets for the missing attendees.*
- *Keep a log of who picked up the packet for each sponsor.*

Will Call Operations

One of the most important operational issues of “Will Call” is not allowing a problem to bring the process to a stop.

If an attendee has a problem, acknowledge that there is a problem by telling them that a “trouble desk” can help them and have the guest go there. Do not make other guests wait for their problem to be solved.

Appendix 1: Terminology

Assigned Seat Event: a guest is assigned a particular seat at a specific table. This means that some technique for designating the seat must be used, such as a table place card.

Assigned Table Event: a guest is assigned to a table. When the guests arrive at the table they select their seat.

Guest List Booklet: booklet containing an alphabetical listing of the guests and their table assignments.

Guest Status: in computerized seating system guests can be in one of several “statuses”.

Pending: guest has been invited but has not yet RSVP'd.

Assigned: guest is assigned to a table, row, or golf foursome.

Cancelled: self-explanatory

Head/VIP Table: This term can have two different interpretations. The first is a table that is separate from the other tables in the room, possibly on a raised dais or stage is usually only set with guests on one side. The other interpretation is a table or several tables that are on the floor with the other tables, but contain dignitaries, VIP or otherwise important guests.

Event Underwriter: an organization that pays some part of the cost of the event, which may also include being, assigned tables in preferred locations, mention in the program or other recognition.

Menu-Table Place Combination Card: a small piece of card stock, usually about half of a page, that is set in a table place and shows both the name of the guest assigned and the menu for the event.

Mixed Style: an event that has some combination of seating styles.

Multi-X Event: an event that is actually a sequence of several events, such as:

2X – a theatre event followed by a gala.

3X – Luncheon, golf tournament, then dinner

6X – Luncheon, Afternoon Breakout Session, Dinner, Morning Breakout Session, afternoon Golf, Dinner

Requester: a person who issues or makes a request for to be assigned with another guest.

Requestee: a person who is the subject of a request.

Round Robin: this describes an event where the primary intent is just to meet the other attendees via several short sessions. Depending on the size of the event, there can be multiple sessions over several days.

Seat/Table Auction: much like the Table Raffle, except that bids are entered for a particular VIP to be seated at the bidder's table.

Table Place Card: a small piece of card stock that is set in a table place that shows the name of the guest assigned to that place. Table Place Cards come in a variety of styles.

Folded Business Card: usually 4 per sheet, available from a variety of manufacturers and in a large range of styles and colors.

Diplomatic Wing Back: this stock can not easily processed on a computer printer and usually has to be hand lettered or have a clear label placed on it.

Table Sponsor/Patron: an organization that sponsors a table by purchase. In many cases, the table sponsor keeps all of the seats; in some the sponsor tries to sell the seats at the table. Some organization try recognize a patron or sponsor by allowing them access to a closed viewing of the silent auction which includes a hosted bar, drink tickets or closed reception for the key note speaker.

Table Tent: a card, usually placed on a stanchion for visibility that shows some important information about the table, such as “Reserved” or “ABC Corporation”.

Ticketed: can come in several variations. One of the more common is the ticket has the guest's assigned table number on it. Another variation is that the ticket is just to get in and the guest still has guest still determine their table assignment.

Trouble Desk: a location separate from the “Will Call” desk for handling seating problems.

Turn Backs: used in a tabled sponsored or patroned event, where the table sponsor returns a number of seats to the holding organization for guests to be assigned. Usually, the table sponsor or patron holds some seats for their own people to sit. This style is used frequently by associations and fundraisers.

VIP or Private Reception: - many events have a special "closed" reception" for guests who pay a premium

Will Call: an area (usually a table) this is staffed by event personnel to distribute information relating to the event.

YaaT™ Card: (Acronym for “You are at Table...”). A paper product that communicates to the attendee their table assignment; an elegant form of a table ticket.

Because handling “sit with requests” has some unique situations, some terminology has evolved to describe it.

Asymmetric Request/Conflicted Request: guest A requests to sit with guest B who has requested not to sit with guest A.

Cross Class Request: can only occur in events that have tickets of different prices and someone from a lower class has requested to sit with a person from a higher ticket class or vice-a-versa.

Daisy Chain Request: a situation where guests A request to sit with guest B, who has requested to sit with guest C, who has requested to sit with guest D.

Looped Daisy Chain: situation as above except that guest D requests to sit with guest A.

Appendix 2: Sources

Paper Products:

General Purpose Manufacturers:

Baudville

5380 52nd Street, S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49512-9765
(800) 728-0888

www.baudville.com

Idea Art

P.O. Box 291505
Nashville, TN
(800) 443-2278

www.ideaart.com

Marco

2640 Commerce Drive
Harrisburg, PA 17110
(800) 232-1121

www.marcomeetings.com

Paper Direct

P.O. Box 2970
Colorado Springs, CO 80901-2970
(800) 272-7377

www.paperdirect.com

pc/nametag

124 Horizon Drive
Verona, WI 53593
(800) 233-9767

www.pcnametag.com

Golf Events:

JMK Sports
2711 Mullins NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49544-1219
(616) 735-2953
e-mail: gregkupris@mac.com

Tournament Score Sheets, Cart Assignment Cards and other paper products for golf events.

Software

General Purpose

Microsoft

Special Purpose Seating Software

Meeting Management Plus

Certain Software©

Mister Protocol

DEL DRAGO

Obere Rainstrasse 7

CH - 6345 Neuheim

Switzerland

Email: sales@misterprotocol.com

Meetings Matrix

CEO Software

Tucson, AZ

(800) 441-2581 for a free evaluation copy or visit www.ceosoft.com and download a copy).

Table Allocator

EMS Software Solutions LTD.

5 Bucklersbury,

Hitchin, Herts, SG5 1BB, UK

Web: www.eventmanagementsystems.co.uk

Appendix 3: Forms
 Patron/Sponsor "Sit With Requests" Form

Logo

DO NO WRITE IN THIS AREA	
Initial of L.N.	
Entered	

Senior Executive
 "Sit-With" Request Worksheet

Instructions:
 Please complete this form with the names of other attendees who you wish to have assigned to your table.
 The form should be faxed to M. _____ at (____) ____-____.
PLEASE SUBMIT BY COB MARCH __, 200__.

Date of Request:

Executive Name:

Executive Organization/Location:

Telephone Number:

Corporate E-mail address:

Request for:	Organization/Location:	Request Priority (1 to 6):
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Request for:	Organization/Location:	Request Priority (1 to 6):
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Request for:	Organization/Location:	Request Priority (1 to 6):
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About the Author

Duncan A. Fisher is a graduate of California State Polytechnic University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Aerospace Engineering who has served in the US Army and with a number of major national aerospace and computer firms. During the early 80's he was relocated to Colorado Springs where he worked in the technical community supporting the developing US Air Force Space Command and then the US Space Command. As an active member of the community, he became involved in a local event put on the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the National Security Industrial Association, called the Salute to Space Command Ball. For several years running, Duncan chaired the seating committee for the ball and in 1990 began developing some computer-based tools to assist with the seating. Over some time, the tools evolved sufficiently to be copyrighted.

With the end of the cold war, his office was closed and he elected to pursue the development of software for seating large groups of people. Eventually, one of these clients asked him to assist in running an event, which lead to a decision to specialize in running events and to stop selling the software. Since then a major effort has been made to both understand the seating process and to further extend the range of products for assigned seat events.

As of this writing, he has been involved in over 100 large events including several outside the United States.