

How to Control Large Crowds at Holiday Events

By National Santa™, Tim Connaghan

Having appeared, directed or attended hundreds of dinners, shows and special events, I have picked up some industry secrets that I wish to offer to event planners, coordinators, and managers for special events that are projected to have large crowds and where Santa will be in attendance.

- **Make a Good First Impression.** It starts at the front door, or entrance to your event. Have adequate Staffing. You do not want any congestion or delays, that will put a damper on the moment. This is important for any size event. You must have the proper personnel. From the moment guests arrive at drop-off or parking, to check-in, to seating, etc. Every step of the way should be easy for the guests.
- **The key is how you treat people.** Making sure your staff treats guests with consideration will also quicken the process. Nothing puts a damper more on an event, than un-happy guests. Lost name badges missed reservations, just general dis-organization, etc., can create stressed and upset guests. And once your guests have problems, it promotes a snowball effect where the guests start picking or complaining about everything. at evening has problems.
- **Most company parties and events involve the actual employees and members of their family.** Staffing for this type of event is usually a bit easier. But, if your event involves customers and clients or guests from outside of your organization, you need to have good staffing. The same is true if it is a public event, or a multi-day event Staffers should be dressed professionally to garner respect and address guests in a way that encourages cooperation.
- **If you are hosting your event outside of your work place, you need to have a good working relationship with the venue staff and employees.** Having good liaisons can help support you and your team.
- **Planning to move guests through the front door rapidly, will get an event off to the right start.** Have brightly colored, easily recognizable invitations or credentials so you can quickly check them in. Larger events may often need a larger check-in area, staffed accordingly, organized, labeled, and alphabetized, to speed up check-in.
- **Remember the number of staffers is not only based in the number of guests, but also on the number of entrances, stations and activities you have planned.** A good rule is to have at least two or three people at each area. A rule of thumb is one to 1 ½ persons per one hundred guests at each area or station.
- **So, if you are having a company party with 200 guess, you would want to have two or three persons welcoming and checking them in.** And even though many of them may be employees, there should be appropriate staffing to ease check-in.
- **Bring in temporary help or staffing.** If you are coordinating your company party or dinner, for employees and family only, you may also want to enjoy the festivities and enjoy the dinner.

So, it is also true for any other company employees. Unless your event is like a pot-luck, with everyone sharing in the work, you may wish to consider hiring some temporary staffing to do the check-in, etc. This will relieve you and other employees so that you can enjoy attending the event.

- Going with the Flow. In addition to being prepared to welcome guests quickly, laying out your entrance properly, with ropes and stanchions, can alleviate clusters that look unprofessional and make guests uncomfortable. Having barriers creates a gauntlet that guest will automatically follow. If a line is created, the guests usually understand stanchions or barriers and will self-manage themselves.
- If the line is long, you should also have one or more staff to monitor it and be there to answer questions, give directions and sometimes pre-screen the guests. When people checking in start asking a million questions, “Where do I check my coat,” or “Where are the bathrooms,” it can hold things up.”
- Although not always necessary, for larger events, you may want to have an ‘Exit Plan. If someone is not on your list, or is un-invited, they can easily and courteously be asked to step out of line or leave.” “It only takes two to four people to block a door.” You may also consider creating a separate area off to the side for guest disputes, so they don't delay the line or upset other guests.
- If some guests require special treatment, invite them early, or if they must arrive with everyone else, possibly connect with them before the event so you can be discreet and avoid disruption in the check-in area. If you are expecting V.I.P.s, consider having a staffer designated to greet the and escort them in.
- For the Star of your event, “Santa,” you also need to ensure that guests visiting him will have an enjoyable time. His area should never be too congested or out of control.
- If you are planning to have Santa in a chair or throne, plan on a minimum one minute per person or couple. If children are involved it should be two minutes.
- However, if your event is for a very large group, and Santa is only there for a short period of time, you may want to consider the ‘stand-up’ photos. Do the math. If the size of the group cannot be handled by Santa with one minute per individual or couple, you cannot offer Santa sitting in a chair. In these cases, offering ‘stand-up’ photos with Santa will allow you to take two, three and sometimes four photos per minute and keep your guests happy.
- If your event is offering a hosted bar, chances are guests will quickly relax. Sometimes too much! In these cases, you should seriously consider having Santa at the entrance of your event welcoming guests and taking “stand-up” photos or selfies with them. Never put Santa in a chair at the entrance to an event. It’s a great way to create lots of congestion.
- If you are having dancing, or a DJ that promotes activities with your guests, you want to make sure all photos taken are when the guests look their best. The best photos are when the hair-

dos are perfect, the dresses and suits are sparkling, etc. You don't want photos of guests or employees in photos, after drinking and dancing, and when they might look disheveled or exhausted.

- Remember, selfies and personal photos, can show up immediately on Social Media. This is often not good for your organization and for the guests in attendance.
- If you are concerned that not everyone will have a chance to see Santa. Consider options. At some events, if guests are late or still in line as the event closes, consider having pre-signed photos of Santa, so when they cut off the line you can give them something," she says. "They will be disappointed, but at least they will walk away feeling they didn't waste their time."