

ASK BIZBASH 07.09.08 9:00 AM

How Do You Welcome Out-of-Towners?

Whether it's a C.E.O. or hundreds of attendees coming to Chicago, a little local hospitality is always appreciated. Here are ways to thank people for coming, entertain them, or simply help them get oriented.



[Donna Iacobazzi from XA, the Experiential Agency](#) recently planned an event for a financial company that gave their guests Flip video cameras.

Photo: Courtesy of CommStrat

When Meghan Andalman was a marketing coordinator at local law firm Schwartz Cooper, she put together an international conference for more than 100 law professionals in Chicago. To welcome the attendees to town, Andalman (now an independent planner with [Lovebird Special Event Consulting](#)) and her team put a Chicago-specific spin on standard gift bags by filling them with Windy City treats such as Frango Mints and Garrett Popcorn, as well as copies of *Chicago* magazine, a map of the city, and a list of must-see attractions. “The bags were a huge hit with our guests,” Andalman says.

A local financial company recently hired [XA, the Experiential Agency](#), to produce an incentive program and conference in Chicago for the company’s top employees, many of whom traveled from across the country. Event producer Donna Iacobazzi created a welcome package for the attendees’ hotel rooms that contained a Flip video camera preloaded with a special message from the host, which the guests could then use to shoot video of their Chicago adventures. “When our client did a recap of the conference, attendees sent in their footage for use in a companywide video,” Iacobazzi says. She has also provided portable G.P.S. systems preloaded with walking tours of the city. “These are great ways to show off the beauty of Chicago, as well as give your guests a reusable gift,” says Iacobazzi.

Nothing says hospitality more than opening your own home to visitors. Shaun Wiley, communications

director for the Midwest affiliate of the American Heart Association, says the Chicago chapter of the charity organization cultivates new relationships from across the country by inviting potential donors to informal networking gatherings in the homes of local volunteers. “We put together salon parties hosted by existing volunteers in their homes with appetizers and a program that focuses on a different AHA topic or campaign,” Wiley says. “The personalized social gatherings serve as an introduction to our office’s work and will often feature a speaker, someone with a story of survival of heart disease.” — *Wendy Wollenberg*

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