

OPERATIONS IMPACT THE BOTTOM LINE, TOO

Venue Operations Summit will address how to make money from ops and engineering

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The inaugural Venue Operations Summit next month in Nashville will focus on how operations and engineering professionals can make a compelling case for their needs with higher ups.

“One of the biggest issues for operations and engineering professionals is they have a language or vernacular of their own and it doesn’t usually match up with the leadership of their organization, who might have more of a finance or sales and marketing background,” said Russ Simons, Venue Solutions Group, who is partnering with Venues Today in producing VOS April 12-14 at the Renaissance Hotel Nashville. “Both our opening and closing keynotes will be focused on this as well. Know your opponent, recognize how they receive information, and change the dynamic from emotions – hey, we need this – to why we need it in a language they understand so we aren’t frustrated because parts of our budget we think are important don’t get funded.”

And it behooves leadership to register the ops and engineering staff because, besides compensation and benefits, utilities are usually the single largest budget item in the operation of a venue. Whether it’s the quality of the field, the quality of the court, the air temperature or the ice, those components have to be absolutely perfect.

“All of that happens in the shadows,” Simons noted. “The customers don’t see it. The expectation is that it’s going to be great every single time. When a goal breaks, someone has to run out there in front of 12-18,000 people and change it in a public environment.”

While it costs money to earn new revenue, every dollar saved because of smart operating policies, procedures and systems “is about \$5 that doesn’t have to be earned in new revenue,” Simons said, drawing from his own experience as a venue manager. “Every dollar saved on the operations and engineering side is a real dollar to the bottom line of the budget.”

The VOS agenda has been fashioned to bring actionable items to the forefront. The entire program can be seen at www.venueoperationssummit.com.

One of the speakers, Mike Rogers, Smith Seckman Reid, Inc., will discuss building control strategies to reduce energy consumption and not compromise the event-specific environment.

“Most facility control systems are out of calibration within months of startup,” Rogers noted. “Retro Commissioning can benefit facilities by identifying areas not functioning efficiently or correctly, and by providing control solutions and strategies to maximize operational efficiency.”

In the process, building systems operate at a higher level, nuisance tripping is reduced, and lower costs are experienced, he added. He will also talk about energy incentive monies available for many upgrades.

Operations at an arena, theater or stadium are not unlike those at a commercial real estate building, Simons noted, just higher profile. But while commercial real estate developers are on the line to make money 365 days a year, “in public assembly facilities, all too often, someone picks up the difference if we’re not successful on an annual basis. The successful commercial real estate organizations invest a lot of money on white papers, research and development, about all of the same systems we use in public assembly facilities, but I get a sense we really ignore that as a resource,” Simons said.

That was the impetus for Venue Operations Summit. “There are lots of conferences – security, guest experience, sales and marketing, CRM and all that – but rarely if ever is there a subject that focuses on the needs of operations and engineering professionals. And the truth of the matter is none of the other things work if our engineering and operations people aren’t doing their jobs. I sort of got tired of it,” he added.

Venue operations personnel come from two basic tracks. Either they grow up in the building, most often starting as part-timers, or they are recruited from the commercial real estate side, which happens less often.

Venue Operations Summit, which will be an annual event, is founded on the principle that whoever is in charge of operations has a significant impact on the success of a venue, just as significant as marketing, ticketing and booking.

“This operations and engineering environment has to work seamlessly with the overall guest experience,” Simons said. “By reputation, people know me as someone who takes things seriously. I’ve organized this summit in a way that maximizes [attendees’] use of time, maximizes the information and, when they get home, they will arrive with information that will improve their operations immediately.”

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