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Flooring

How to choose the right flooring inventory.

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Intents Idea book

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hello



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From idea to reality

The *InTents* IDEA Book is your go-to for inspiration.

“The best way to get a good idea is to get a lot of ideas.” While I can’t claim this quote as my own (it belongs to Linus Pauling, a double Nobel Prize-winning American chemist), I can appreciate the quote’s simple underlying message: When it comes to ideas, the more the merrier.

The *InTents* IDEA Book is a special digital publication that contains all of the information and inspiration you need to keep your business at the forefront of the tent and event rental industry. The issue is divided into four distinct tent and event rental product categories: chairs, floors, equipment and luxury restroom trailers.

“Sitting Pretty” (page 4) highlights the significant contributions that chairs can have on a business’s bottom line and offers storage and transportation solutions. On page 12, our feature “What’s Underfoot” explores the ins and outs of how to choose the right flooring inventory for your rental business. Our third feature, “Something Old, Something New” (page 18), includes expert advice on the best tools and equipment that help the tent industry work efficiently, and our final feature, “Going Upscale with Portable Restrooms” (page 22), explores the very best in luxury restroom trailers.

At *InTents* magazine, our goal is to be your number one source for the latest information pertaining to the tent and event rental industry, and this special digital publication serves as another resource to help you expand your business’s reach. From the best in business practices and strategies, to inventory management tips and the latest in rental innovations, this IDEA Book is where insight and vision intersect with creativity and ingenuity. Enjoy!

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for events in tents*

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Sitting pretty

Chairs can contribute significantly to an event rental business's bottom line, so proper inventory management is crucial.

by Pamela Mills-Senn

RIGHT: Event Central's black metal bistro chairs add an elegant and unusual touch to events, whether indoors or outdoors. Here, they mesh perfectly with a country/farmhouse-style table. Photographer: Philter Photography; photo courtesy of Event Central.

BELOW: There are good reasons why ghost chairs have become a hot trend for weddings and other events. They fit virtually any decor—rustic, modern, traditional, eclectic—without obscuring the theme. Photographer: Dan Thorson Photography; photo courtesy of Ideal Tent & Event Rentals.



While chairs comprise a sizable portion of many tent and event rental inventories, they represent a substantial investment as well. Therefore, it is important for every rental company to get a firm handle on this aspect of operations. But where should a company begin?

For Blake Dede, president of Ideal Tent & Event Rentals, a full-service event rental company in Tea, S.D., it starts with evaluating the market and listening to three key groups: the sales force and what it feels is missing from the inventory; the planners who serve the company's markets and what they're requesting; and the customers, who provide "a lot of helpful feedback," says Dede, adding that the company sometimes displays sample chairs in its showroom to solicit customer opinions.

"Once we've made a decision to purchase, we look at our average wedding size and purchase enough to accommodate," he says. "We don't always win with this process, but it gets us 80 percent of the way to a sound decision. The other 20 percent is from the gut."

Dede also considers storage, transport and upkeep requirements—the latter played a key role in moving from wood to resin Chiavari chairs. Although style is important, Ideal Tent & Event Rentals approaches trendy chairs with caution. "If you're not on the front end of that trend, it's tough to get your ROI," Dede says.

Ideal Tent & Event Rentals' chair inventory numbers just under 4,000 and is comprised of Chiavari chairs in black, gold and silver; ghost chairs; bamboo folding; white resins; black Samsonite folding; and (soon) diamond wood dining chairs.

For Event Central in Avondale, Pa., a division of Collective Event Group, customer input carries a lot of weight.

"We listen closely to our customers," says Andy Mat-trick, general manager. "Measuring our missed rentals and online requests for a specific type of chair we didn't own or were overbooked on is all collected so we can make future purchasing decisions.







ABOVE: Designed by Rain or Shine Tent and Events Company, the proprietary Vermont chair has proven a popular choice for country-themed weddings and events, with up to 500 of the chairs rented out per week. The company currently has 1,500 of these chairs in its inventory and expects to add more.

RIGHT: Although bamboo folding chairs make up a smaller portion of Rain or Shine's inventory, these chairs are finding a receptive audience, especially among those wanting more sustainable options or throwing more casual events. Photos courtesy of Rain or Shine Tent and Events Company.

"We strive to be the one-stop shop that has enough options for brides and our corporate customers," he says, "but we also have to invest in what we know will rent each weekend and not gather dust on the shelves."

Sizable inventories

Event Central, which shares inventory and labor between three Collective Event Group locations, has more than 32,000 chairs, 20,000 of which are white or brown folding. Its inventory also includes more than 5,000 white and black resins; natural wood folding; fruitwood folding; cross-backs; padded meeting chairs; Chiavari in six colors; and various barstool options.

Different customers look for different things, says Mattrick. For some, functionality and sturdiness are primary. For others, style and a high-end appeal matter most. Overall, because of durability and rental cost, the basic folding chair is Event Central's most popular.

"We grade our chair inventory each year by colored tape so we understand which chairs are 'wedding' and which are 'corporate' and keep them separated within the warehouse," he says. "The





majority of our wedding chairs are one to three years old; the corporate can be anywhere from five to 15 years old depending on rotation and upkeep.”

Perry Armstrong, president of Rain or Shine Tent and Events Company, a full-service tent and party rental company in Randolph, Vt., says that while his company’s poly folding chairs are most frequently rented, the specialty chairs bring in the most money.

Armstrong owns more than 6,000 poly folding chairs; nearly 4,000 folding garden chairs in white, black and four different wood colors; approximately 3,000 Chiavaris in seven colors; nearly 3,000 cross-backs in seven colors; 1,500 of the company’s proprietary Vermont Country chairs; and 800 bamboo folding.

Because the chairs fit the popular country decor mode, Rain or Shine rents a lot of Vermont Country, from 200 to 500 weekly, says Armstrong, adding these can go for as much as \$15 apiece. Other chairs frequently invited to high-end weddings include the cross-back and natural wood folding.

TOP: Ideal Tent & Event Rentals stocks six colors of Chiavari chairs including gold, silver and black, shown here. The chairs are popular for their elegant look. Photographer: The Waldron Photograph Co; photo courtesy of Ideal Tent & Event Rentals.

BOTTOM: Whitewashed resin folding chairs are among the most popular rentals for Ideal Tent & Event Rentals. Their large footprint makes them a good choice for placement on uneven ground or soft soil. Photographer: Liz Banfield Photography; photo courtesy of Ideal Tent & Event Rentals.





This uneven site, with obstacles such as trees and other landscaping in the way, posed unique challenges for this commencement install. Still, Event Central managed to fit in 5,500 metal folding chairs for the ceremony. Photo courtesy of Event Central.

In Dede's market, white resin or Samsonite chairs have been the perennial favorites. "The white resins have a large footprint and work the best for uneven ground or on soft soil," he explains. "The metal-frame Samsonite chairs have a great price point, making them popular for large gatherings like concerts or graduation ceremonies."

The chair inventory for Special Events Virginia, an event equipment rental business in Portsmouth, includes 15,000 white fanback plastic folding; 5,500 black fanbacks; 1,000 padded white resins; 200 padded redwood resins; 500 Chiavaris in gold and silver; and 150 X-backs, says Michael Fitzwater, president. The company replaces approximately 10 percent of its folding chairs annually to keep the average age low.

"We purchased the large quantities in 2010 when we moved to our



76,000-square-foot facility," Fitzwater says. "This was to target the graduations each year at local colleges. It's just been in the past two years that we added the Chiavaris and the X-back chairs. We've had great success in adding higher-dollar options. [But] the basic chair rents most often."

On the road again

When it comes to transportation logistics, Fitzwater says that Special Events Virginia's folding chairs are transported on individual pallets containing three stacks of 50, with the stacks strapped and wrapped. Resin chairs are stacked 25 high on individual pallets; Chiavaris and X-backs are stacked six to seven, each wrapped before stacking. Chiavari chair carts are used for transporting them.

Armstrong transports Rain or Shine's poly folding chairs in stacks of 50, although he's devising a new pallet that



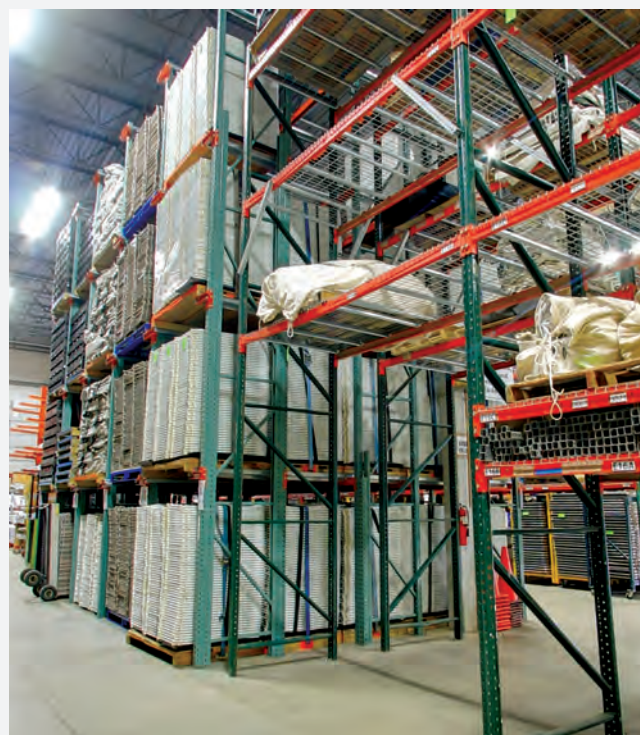
LEFT: The chairs installed for this 2021 graduation reflect social distancing as required by the pandemic, with the university holding two ceremonies. A total of 1,800 white metal folding chairs were used.

BELOW: Event Central has found “drive-in” racking or “chair cubes” to be a good solution for storing chairs in its warehouse space. Folding chairs are stacked three rows across and are 50 high (150 chairs to a pallet) back-to-back (five pallets deep, four rows high). With 28-foot ceilings, the company needs to utilize every inch vertically to store all chairs inside. Photos courtesy of Event Central.

STORAGE TIPS

Properly storing chairs is critical to reducing wear, tear and damage. Here are a few storage tips to consider:

- During its high-volume months of May and June when movement is constant, Event Central, Avondale, Pa., stores much of its chair inventory in trailers, breaking down in advance which chairs go to what school/university and in which trailer they’re stored, says Andy Mattrick, general manager. “The rest of the months we have drive-in racking within our warehouse where we can store over 15,000 chairs—three-wide pallets, 50 high, 150 total,” he says. “We call this ‘the cube’ and separate the drive-in rows by quality and what needs cleaning or is ready to rent.”
- Perry Armstrong, president of Rain or Shine Tent and Events Co., Randolph, Vt., stores his company’s entire chair inventory in containers (approximately 28) elevated to box-truck height, with each dedicated to a particular style and/or color.
- Michael Fitzwater, president of Special Events Virginia in Portsmouth, recommends storing chairs vertically. “Use forklifts. Any machinery you can use—forklifts in the warehouse and Tent OX™ on-site—helps reduce crew fatigue and saves money by reducing labor.”



RIGHT: Event Central transports large numbers of chairs via a flatbed tractor trailer. The racks hold 200 chairs (five stacks/40 high) and make it possible to move thousands at one time. Photo courtesy of Event Central.

BELOW: Wooden crossback chairs from Event Central lend a rustic but elegant touch to this outdoor wedding. The company grades its chair inventory annually by colored tape. Photographer: Madeline Isabella Photography; photo courtesy of Event Central.



will allow his company to stack 100 per pallet, transporting them from truck to the site using a Tent OX™. The Vermont chairs must be laid on their sides; about 160 can be transported in a 25-foot box truck. Armstrong says he is also experimenting with a rolling rack that would accommodate nearly 40 Chiavari chairs, forklifting them onto the truck, using the Tent OX from truck to site.

Event Central's folding chairs are moved by pallet, with large orders loaded by forklift. Smaller backyard-type rentals are typically stacked 50 high on a Mongo pallet for moving easily over grass. All wedding chairs are covered and moved by two-wheel dollies.

Dede says that Ideal Tent & Event Rentals stacks its white resins on half pallets, 25 to a stack, moving them with a four-wheel dolly. Higher-end chairs are stored in stacks of eight on pallet racking,

transported in stacks of seven or eight. According to Dede, his company is always looking for ways to reduce the wear and tear that transporting can inflict, adding that Ideal Tent zip-ties moving blankets on the top rail of its box trucks.

"This provides a cushion between the chair stacks and sharp edges of the e-track and box side," he explains. "Keeping everything as orderly as possible goes a long way to maximize profits and create efficiencies with loading and unloading." ●

Pamela Mills-Senn is a writer based in Seal Beach, Calif.



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What's underfoot

How to choose the right flooring inventory for your rental business.

by Maura Keller

The tent rental business is as varied and diverse as the potential markets that rental companies serve—the only constant factor is the customer's desire to create a distinctive event. And one rental area that has proven to be increasingly popular within the industry is flooring.

Like seating, tables and lighting, flooring has become an essential element for many tent rental customers. Not only does flooring provide an insurance policy against water drainage that may occur due to rain, but it also offers a rigid and uniform surface that allows for freedom of movement for guests, without having to worry about chair legs or heels getting caught in an unfloored surface.

In fact, the flooring underfoot can make a big impact on a tent's functionality, as solid, durable and long-standing flooring has become a “must have” item for today's events. And, thanks to today's technological advancements, the quality of tent flooring materials and ease of installation have improved dramatically.

Brant McWilliams, general manager of Traube Tents & Structures, a tent and structures rental company in St. Louis, Mo., says the popularity of flooring in general continues to grow. “Our clients want a finished product and having a flooring system becomes more and more of a must,” he says. “We've seen a growing trend for wood-like finished coverings lately.”

Partners in progress

When selecting the ideal flooring options for your company and your clients, it helps to partner with a team of flooring professionals who can identify the best solutions for a tent rental company's specific needs.

Traube selected its flooring systems through a detailed review process. “After we settle on a solution, the next step is to field test the product. If the field test comes back positive, then the company is all in,” McWilliams says.

Traube's substructure products, which include laydown flooring and Layher® scaffolding, were chosen based on price, availability, durability and operating costs.

Ultimate Events has found that the durability of today's carpet flooring is ideal for high traffic applications such as the annual Twin Cities Auto Show held at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in St. Paul, Minn. Photos courtesy of Ultimate Events Inc.







The carpet flooring installed for an event at the University of Minnesota field house offered an easy-to-install option that complemented the sports facility's turf flooring. Photo courtesy of Ultimate Events Inc.

"The company looks for substructure flooring solutions that are installer-friendly and durable," McWilliams says. "When pursuing floor coverings, Traube follows the client's desires."

Any flooring manufacturers should understand what type of flooring is best suited to the types of environments your rental company most often works in, or the environments in which the flooring will most often be used.

"When selecting our flooring inventory, subflooring and floor covering are done differently," says Stephen Frost, president of Stamford Tent & Event Services, a tent and equipment rental company based in Stamford, Conn. "We presently stick build all our subfloors, so that's based on demand. Floor covering is also driven by customer demand."

During the purchasing stage, Frost and his team evaluate flooring trends, the type of flooring available, including laminate, color and patterning, as well as the maneuverability and flexibility of the

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This 18,000-square-foot canopy structure installed by Traube Tents & Structures features a beautiful Dura-Trac™ flooring system made from HDPE plastic. Photo courtesy of Traube Tents & Structures.

SHINY AND NEW

Flooring and substrates are bound to take a beating from furniture, footwear and overall traffic flow. Flooring, which suffers everything from dirt and debris to scratches and stains, requires a solid amount of care and cleaning to ensure longevity.

Industry experts recommend dedicating time to have the flooring properly reviewed. And while it can be labor intensive, a clean working system is beneficial during installation.

“The cleaning technique we use depends on the flooring surface,” says Stephen Frost, president of Stamford Tent & Event Services. “For our floors, we just damp mop with a mild soap and water.”

Ultimate Events cleans its dance floors after every rental. Carpet runners are thoroughly vacuumed and spot-treated as needed and then rolled back on a tube for storage.

“Most carpet and turf is usually a one-time use item, as we have found the expense of attempting to process it often exceeds the cost of purchasing new,” says Kevin Moore, chief operating officer at Ultimate Events. We still repurpose as much as possible, including utilizing it in custom boxes and crates to store and transport other inventory items.”

flooring. Weight, durability, cleanability and cost-effectiveness are also key considerations for Stamford Tent.

“We try to stay away from vinyl unless a customer demands a specific pattern or color. It needs to be durable and easy to install and remove as well as maintain,” Frost says. Stamford Tent currently offers pickled cedar, American chestnut and bluestone floor coverings, but provides other options upon request. And while these flooring choices typically don’t change from year to year, Stamford adds more patterns as needed or as trends dictate.

For Ultimate Events Inc., a complete party rental company in Plymouth, Minn., when it comes to purchasing flooring, the company follows industry trends. It also pays attention to customer requests as well as suggestions by event planners and the Ultimate Events sales team.

“We look for the best product suited to the practical installation of the job,” says Kevin Moore, chief operating officer at Ultimate Events. “With decades of experience, we often suggest to our customers options we feel would be best. Turf and carpet are our most popular options. Vinyl is becoming more popular and is also fairly easy to install.”

Moore notes that vinyl, in particular, offers many different pattern choices—from distressed wood to stone. “These are used on our laydown and level floors and are largely single use,” Moore says. “Dance floors can also provide a different look with many options in sizes and colors, and they offer flexibility indoors and outdoors. Dance floors are a multi-use product and still a popular option.”

Understanding challenges

Although installed flooring offers flexibility in configuration and allows events to take place practically anywhere, there are some limitations. Physical equipment and labor are the areas of the business where the greatest needs and potential for cost

control are present. With larger flooring structures, additional physical equipment such as semitrailer trucks and large storage facilities may be needed. In addition to the cost of the physical equipment, a rental operator needs to factor in depreciation, repairs, maintenance, cleaning and storage.

Traube stores its flooring inventory via stacked and racked configurations and uses company trucks in the transportation process. Likewise, Stamford uses company trucks for transportation and stores its flooring in the company's warehouse. And while Stamford doesn't provide flooring customization options to clients themselves, including decals and graphics, the company will subcontract it out as requested by customers.

Most of the carpet and turf that Ultimate Events uses is transported and

stored on 10-to-12-foot rolls wrapped in plastic from the company's suppliers and transported in box trucks. "Our dance floors have carts that we either purchase from the manufacturers or are custom made to store and transport," Moore says.

Labor costs involved in a chosen flooring are an additional challenge but are also trickier to control. When purchasing flooring, it is important to make sure that the components are engineered to reduce labor time. A business has much more control over its labor dollars when it starts with physical equipment that was designed to maximize its crew's efficiency. ●

Maura Keller is a freelance writer based in Plymouth, Minn.



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Something old, something new

Experts share their favorite tools and best equipment tips that help the tent industry work smarter and more efficiently.

by Sigrid Tornquist

RIGHT: For a prom at the Castleton Banquet and Conference Center in Windham, N.H., the Christian Party Rental flooring crew installs Dura-Trac™ flooring, the HDPE modular, plastic flooring system designed specifically for rapid deployment in stadiums, tents and special event venues.

BELOW: Tools and equipment that reduce labor time translate into dollars saved on installations such as this 80-by-90-foot twin pole tent that Christian Party Rental installed at MIT in Cambridge, Mass. Photos courtesy of Christian Party Rental.



Every expert knows that no matter how talented and seasoned you are, it's critical to have the right tools for the job. Here, three experts in the tent industry share equipment secrets that help them succeed—including their tried-and-true must-haves and groundbreaking game-changers. Tent experts who are committed to being the best understand that combining the old and the new is hands down, a winning strategy.

Products to notice

"I have been doing tents for 30 years and when I see a time-saving and safer idea, I know it immediately," says Kathy Schaefer, president of Glawe Awnings and Tents, Fairborn, Ohio. "Examples include Block and Roll forms, gadgets that pull up center poles, a tent washer and a wind alert system.

"IFAI Tent Expo is the one event that I never miss because everything that is available and new is displayed there," she continues. "Company owners and sales staff are available to discuss their product, which is helpful."

Perhaps among the most-mentioned pieces of equipment by the tent experts we talked to was Tent OX™—a fully integrated system that installs commercial tents at record speeds and drastically cuts labor requirements. Michael Gould, CEO of Christian Party Rental, Hollis, N.H., says, "Lately we have been spending a lot of money on items to make our crew more efficient—items like Tent OX, hand trucks, jack hammers and tent jacks."

For tent installers looking to save time on installation, Schaefer agrees that Tent OX is worth the investment. "I've seen the Tent OX for years but thought it wouldn't do much more than our forklift and Bobcat®," Schafer says. "This past year I was able to purchase one, and I have to say it's probably the best item I have ever purchased. It literally takes the place of two or three employees—and has been a lifesaver for our company."







Safety first

Yes, using the right equipment for the job is vital to preventing injuries for the crew. 24/7 Events lists the Tent OX, trucks with lift gates, packaging equipment such as crates, and wheeled carts as equipment that not only saves time, but also keeps the crew safe. “From the infancy stages of the company, we drew inspiration from live production companies and took note on how they quickly and effectively move product,” House says. “We look for options that include stackable, protective casing for our equipment with wheels for ease of transport for our team.”

Time to purchase

The reason to buy new equipment isn’t because it’s the latest and greatest, according to experts—it’s because it solves a problem. “I don’t usually go to a tent show with a specific purchase in mind,” Schaefer says. “When I see a new product that just makes total sense and solves a problem, I buy it.”

Additionally, recent technology, trends in the marketplace, product quality and pricing factor into purchasing decisions. “Manufacturer support is also key when purchasing equipment,” House says. “We want to be sure we have a support team behind us should our team have any



Not surprisingly, time-saving items often have to do with installation. “When looking at installation equipment, we look for items that are going to provide the best end result for our client in terms of aesthetics,” says Stacie House, director of business development for 24/7 Events headquartered in Los Angeles, Calif. “We also search for what can help efficiency on installation, ease of use for our team and of course, safety for our team and clients, which is paramount in every circumstance.”

TOP: Kathy Schaefer, president of Grawe Awnings and Tents, says the Tent OX™ may just be the best item she’s ever purchased. The system—seen in action here with her 90-year-old father and tent rental veteran Vern Schaefer, MFC, at the wheel—combines 10 tent-specific installation tools and a companion articulated loader to install commercial tents fast and with fewer crew members.

BOTTOM: Trade shows highlight the latest products, often at a discount. Grawe Awnings and Tents’ Kathy Schaefer purchased this structure and carpet after seeing them at IFAI’s Tent Expo. Photos courtesy of Grawe Awnings and Tents.

CLEAN ADVICE

We asked the sources interviewed for their best advice on how to keep installation equipment in pristine condition to extend its life. Here are their thoughts:

- **Kathy Schaefer:** “Be diligent about routine maintenance. My trucks are older; my Bobcat® is 27 years old; and the old stake pounders still work. Maintenance is absolutely the key to saving money in the long run.”
- **Stacie House:** “Be sure to train staff to properly handle equipment procedures set forth by the manufacturer and hold staff accountable for the tools provided to them. Also, empower and encourage staff to communicate any issues so that they can be fixed immediately.”
- **Michael Gould:** “Use a good inventory control system, tent tagging, tent cleaning—and a good warehouse manager!”

questions, concerns or need additional assistance to utilize the product at its full capabilities.”

Inventory updates

For equipment that falls into the “tried-and-true” category, no matter how well cared for it is, there comes a time when those pieces need to be replaced—or it becomes clear it’s time to expand inventory. But timing can be critical when making equipment purchases. Some tent renters, like Christian Party Rental, update the rental portion of their inventory yearly. “We spend more than \$150,000 per year on new rental items, including tents, chairs, tables, lighting and staging,” Gould says.

Others take a different approach. “I do not update inventory on a yearly basis,” Schaefer says. “I keep in mind what I may

need and I will wait until I get into the sales and discontinued season. The specials during the trade shows are well worth waiting for.

“I don’t feel like I need to stick with one vendor for smaller tent purchases,” she continues. “I look for the most value and functionality. But with larger tents it is important to stick with a brand. This means your fabric parts are interchangeable and can be added as needed.”

Gould advises purchasing the best quality brands possible, and agrees with Schaefer about sticking with a brand. “Stay consistent when buying tent models and styles,” he says. “Don’t mix and match!” ●

Sigrid Tornquist is a Minneapolis, Minn.-based writer and editor, and a former InTents editor.



Tools that save labor are hot commodities for tent rental companies, such as this chair cart at Glawe Awnings and Tents. “IFAI Tent Expo is the one event that I’ve never missed because everything that is available and new is displayed there,” says president Kathy Schaefer. Photo courtesy of Glawe Awnings and Tents.



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Going upscale with portable restrooms

As customer awareness and demand grows, luxury restroom trailers are a “must-have” inventory item for tent rental companies.

by Jeff Moravec

It may not be possible to determine exactly when the very first luxury restroom trailer was cobbled together, but based on conversations with manufacturers and the event companies that rent them out, it’s not hard to figure out why they were invented.

“I went to an event and needed to use the restroom,” says Meg Taaffe, secretary at AMS Global Inc., a longtime trailer manufacturer based in De Kalb, Texas. “There was nothing there but a plastic portalet. I wouldn’t use it, so we left. We went back to the office and started brainstorming—wouldn’t it be nice if we could offer something that was more upscale, where you could wash your hands?” The company introduced its first restroom trailer for sale in 2004.

About the same time, Brad Martin, president of Comforts of Home Services Inc., was building his company’s first restroom trailer in his driveway in Gurnee, Ill. Why? “My wife hates porta potties,” Martin says. “We’d left an event because she wouldn’t use a porta potty. I was an engineer, looking for something to do on the side, and saw the need for something better.”

Lang Specialty Trailers in Latrobe, Pa., grew out of its parent company, Windswept Entertainment and Event Rentals. Windswept acquired its first restroom trailer in 2007 and began manufacturing them two years later.

“In all my years, I’ve never met a bride who liked the idea of having an outdoor wedding and needing to go into a portajohn,” says Lang owner Steve Ghrist. “That’s what led us as a rental company to get into restroom trailers. I felt like we were losing the business from people who were interested in doing a tented wedding, but the bathroom was a holdup. Once we got a restroom trailer, that wasn’t an issue any longer.”

No matter what name you ascribe to portable plastic-sided chemical toilets, event attendees don’t like them, and the more upscale the event, the less appropriate they are. Fortunately, as with many innovations in the event rental sector,

This restroom from Rich Specialty Trailers, with a wrap by L&A Tent Rentals, Hamilton, N.J., shows how some manufacturers dress up trailer exteriors (right) as well as add touches such as fireplaces (below). Photos courtesy of Rich Specialty Trailers.







AMS Global Inc. started offering restroom trailers like these for a simple reason. Founder Meg Taaffe didn't like using portable chemical toilets—and figured she was not alone. Options include ramps compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Photos courtesy of AMS Global Inc.

the need for “something better” spurred the development of luxury restroom trailers.

“The desire for it was always there, I think,” adds Ghrist. “But the product wasn’t necessarily there until the 2000s. Even to this day, there are many brides and grooms who have no idea there is something like a restroom trailer.”

An attractive alternative

Fortunately, customer awareness is changing, Ghrist says. “When you get one of those out at a wedding, 300 people see it. It just

becomes more and more mainstream. A portajohn is not acceptable as people learn a restroom trailer is an option. It’s spacious, clean, climate-controlled and well-lit—everything a portajohn isn’t.”

In addition, manufacturers and event companies say restroom trailers are attractive simply because they offer running water and some form of flush toilet, eliminating the classic chemical toilet waste tank that so many find so unappealing.

“No one wants to look at waste in a hole,” Ghrist says.

Besides issues of sanitation, upscale restroom trailers enable homeowners to host tented events on their property without having to open up their residence to guests.

“If the wedding is outdoors at your house, you don’t want to be in your house policing it, checking to see who is taking an unguided tour,” says Kenny Puff, president of Party Line Rentals in Elmsford, N.Y., which offers luxury restroom trailers through a subcontractor. “You should be able to lock the door, give the caterer the garage if they need it, but [allow] no one in the house.”

NUMBER OF UNITS REQUIRED

	1 hr	2 hr	3 hr	4 hr	5 hr	6 hr	7 hr	8 hr	9 hr	10 hr
1-50	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
100	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3
250	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
500	2	4	4	5	6	7	9	9	10	12
1000	4	6	8	8	9	9	11	12	13	13

HOW MANY TOILETS DOES THIS EVENT NEED?

The Portable Sanitation Association International (PSAI) offers the following guide as the minimum number of units needed for special events.

According to the PSAI, under normal conditions, most people will use the facilities once every four hours. Weather conditions and food and beverage consumption will increase usage. Alcoholic beverages may increase usage by 15–20 percent. Be sure to include event staff in the total number of attendees, as they will need to use the facilities as well. These estimates assume a 50/50 mix of men and women.

“Right from the starting point, a lot of homeowners say, ‘I don’t want anybody in our house,’” adds David VanDenburgh, president of Adams Rental in Hamilton, N.J. “They’re okay with whatever gyrations are necessary so guests are handled without having to go into their residence.”

In addition, if a home uses a septic system instead of a sewer, a large number of guests using the bathrooms can cause problems. “It’s easy to flood your septic tank if there is overuse,” Puff says.

Even tented events at commercial locations with plenty of public toilets can benefit from restroom trailers, Puff adds, because they keep guests from having to walk long distances into a lobby of a building or hotel.

Logistics and numbers

But with all of their advantages, restroom trailers bring with them more logistical challenges than chemical toilets.

Water tanks need to be filled, either before the trailer is towed to the event site or after it has been set up—although a trailer with full tanks is much heavier to haul. Many trailers, but not all, have the option to use water from external sources such as garden hoses, which may be convenient when the wedding is in a backyard. Fresh water holding tanks can run up to 200 gallons for the largest models, and the waste tanks can also run hundreds of gallons.

“You need to have plans to dispose of the waste,” explains Sheldon Rheinheimer, owner of Rich Specialty Trailers in Topeka, Ind. “You either have to take it somewhere or have someone come and dump it for you.”

The trailers need electricity as well. While some restroom trailers will operate on 110-volt power provided by a house, others require multiple 20-amp circuits that may not be readily accessible at a residential property. In that case, power from generators needs to be available.



Luxury restroom trailers, like this one from Port A Bowl, make for a better guest experience. For events such as weddings at a residential property, they also reduce traffic through the house and septic system use, says David VanDenburgh of Adams Rental. Photo courtesy of Port A Bowl Restroom Co.

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Restroom trailers from Comforts of Home Services, Inc. feature luxury interiors because people have started expecting more from their rental bathrooms, says company president Brad Martin. Photo courtesy of Comforts of Home Services Inc.

Besides the logistics, Taaffe recommends that anyone considering buying or renting a restroom trailer pay close attention to the quality of the trailer they're considering.

"These trailers are moved a lot, so they have to be durable," she says. "Also, have you ever walked into a recreational vehicle and everything shook when you walked up the steps? Think about what happens when there's alcohol and everyone is rowdy and the event goes on for six hours. [The trailers] can't be delicate."

When investing in trailers for rental inventory, size matters—both the number of toilets per trailer and the physical size of the trailer itself. A trailer model that is neither too small nor too big for the most common sizes of events on a rental company's books will generate the best return on investment, so it's important to have a firm grasp on the local market. Which current and potential clients are likely to rent the trailers, and what are the typical sizes

of their events? (The sanitation industry publishes rules of thumb for numbers of toilets per person at an event—see the sidebar on the previous page.)

A single- or double-stall trailer model may be only 10 feet in length, but the biggest trailers, with 10 stalls, can run close to 30 feet in length. Some larger trailers offer fewer stalls in favor of more amenities. (Some manufacturers, such as Rich Specialty, do a lot of custom work and can build trailers with up to 15 stalls.)

"A five-station trailer is probably the most popular; that's what we sell most of," Ghrist says. "It's a 14½-foot box, which is easy to fit into almost any space—and in the special events world, space is always at a premium."

That size works well for events with up to 300 guests, he adds, "but at a wedding for 100 it doesn't look out of place. It's not some giant trailer."

While some tent rental companies invest in trailers, others find it easier to partner with a company that specializes in them. "Every time we talk about buying our own, I realize it would not be as profitable as using the subcontractor we've had for 25 years," Puff says. "His equipment is amazing, his service is second to none, his pricing is competitive, and I could call him right now and say I need bathrooms at 3 p.m. today and he would be there at 10 minutes to 3. I don't think we could do it as well as he does. You have to know your strengths and weaknesses."

Higher expectations

Not surprisingly, as the restroom trailer market has grown, so has the temptation to make them fancier and offer them with more amenities. Taaffe calls it the "Baskin-Robbins approach."

"You see so many different things, so much bling, and too many colors and choices, at the bridal shows," she says. "But that doesn't mean that's what the bride is looking for. Most of them choose to stay with simple and traditional, if for

no other reason than it may not go with the venue and takes attention away from the wedding. I don't think you usually need fireplaces or TVs in them."

At the same time, says Ghrist, "it used to be acceptable to just have air conditioning and running water. Now people want high-end floors, decorative mirrors and fancy lighting."

Accommodating the wedding party—especially the bride—can also be a selling point for some trailers. Rich Specialty Trailers recently began selling a trailer that has a changing room for the bride, Rheinheimer says.

With the growth in popularity of restroom trailers, "people have started to expect higher-end bathrooms at events," Martin says. "It used to be you'd take one to an event and people would say, 'Oh, I've never seen anything like that.'"

They couldn't believe this thing was even out there.

"Now," he says, "once they've seen it, they want that at their wedding or event; then more people see it and the word spreads that these are out there."

Martin says his first trailers were made for his own rental market, but he quickly began selling them instead, simply because "we ended up selling them faster than I was renting them."

"Back then," he adds, "I had no competition. Now I probably have 12 competitors, but even with that competition, I'm growing every year."

Proof positive, it seems, that as much as people love outdoor events, they love modern amenities even more. ●

*Jeff Moravec is a freelance writer
based in Minneapolis, Minn.*



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