

25 years of coverage

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HOSPITALITY QUARTERLY

Picture this: Interactive catering with CD-ROM

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Eighteen years ago, Eydie Koonin planned her wedding reception by hashing out the details face-to-face with Affairs to Remember caterers. If she was planning the event today, she'd simply click through a multimedia CD-ROM to view a selection of venues, menus and decor.

These CD-ROMs, also known as digital business cards, are **Affairs to Remember's** cost-effective way of bringing its 25-year-old company into the 21st century with a technologically rich event-planning experience customers can't get through referrals or on the World Wide Web, company officials say.

"We felt the digital business card was the next step for us," said Patrick Cuccaro, Affairs to Remember's director of sales and marketing. "For example, some people come to us from out of town and want to plan events that are a distinct Atlanta experience. The only resource they have is the Internet, and that isn't always the most reliable source of information."

The digital business card, which Affairs to Remember started using in January, allows users to look at video, pictures and statistics about Atlanta's top venues and scan menus, table design options and other event props. Users can link directly to the company's Web site for more information or to contact the company for bookings.

Digital business cards allow companies to offer heavy video presentations they can't show on their Web sites because bandwidth restrictions make it hard to view a presentation, said Justin Witt of **Syzygy Productions LLC**, the multimedia company that produced the cards.

Customers are more likely to look at a digital business card than a printed brochure, which is more expensive to produce, Witt said. Average presentations cost as little as \$10,000 to produce and disks cost 98 cents each, Witt said, so "it's a good use of your money to put all that in a client's



High-tech planning: Users can look at video and pictures of Atlanta venues and scan menus, table design options and other event props using Affairs to Remember's CD-ROM, or digital business card.

hand."

Affairs to Remember is using the discs to market itself to more destination management companies that plan events for conventioners, brides who haven't made up their minds about where they want to hold their receptions and executive secretaries who plan major corporate meetings, Cuccaro said.

"Increasingly we're finding that event planning is falling to executive secretaries that haven't been trained in the area and don't have access to the event planning process," Cuccaro said. "This card walks her through all that without preaching and gives her the instant tools to sharpen her skills even if she doesn't use Affairs to Remember."

When Ron Lazarus and Scott Ardolino began running Affairs to Remember out of their home 25 years ago, they never imagined their tiny catering business would become this high-tech.

Both had backgrounds in food service, and did parties in their spare time.

"We were doing all these parties and all of a sudden we were discovered," Lazarus said. "So this part-time thing became a full-time thing and before we knew it, we were caterers. There weren't a lot of catering options back then. People liked the idea that you could find a small caterer to do parties at a fair price. And back then we were both the cooks and the bottle washers. So between that word-of-mouth and some media attention, that brought us a lot of notoriety."

The company has 70 full-time employees and hundreds of part-time waiters, bartenders and other help, Lazarus said.

"To think about our humble beginnings and then to see how we've been able to use some of this wonderful technology over the years, it has been very satisfying to see the evolution of our very small business," Lazarus said.