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Floor Plan Solutions for Event Planning Case Study

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Event planners around the world face similar challenges: they need to maximize the use of their spaces, visualize how an event will work, and accommodate last-minute changes. In Sydney, Australia, event planners have replaced pencil and paper drawings with floor plans created using Visio[®] drawing and diagramming software to ensure that functions—such as those associated with the Summer 2000 Olympic games—run smoothly.

Situation

During the Summer 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, more than 2 million meals were served at Stadium Australia—and more than half of them were catered functions that Sodexho Australia, the venue's caterer, was responsible for coordinating. Events ranged from sponsor dinners for 20 to banquets that served thousands. Managing such a huge volume meant that the Sodexho staff had to work at maximum efficiency. Because floor plans are used by everyone involved in the process—from clients and sales managers to chefs and the crews that set up tables—making sure the plans were quick to produce, accurate, and up-to-date was essential.

Traditionally, event planners have used floor plans that were hand-drawn to scale when planning functions. Arrangements for tables, chairs, and other furniture elements had to be laboriously measured by hand and then integrated into the floor plan. This inefficient process frustrated Meg Foster, function sales manager at Sodexho. "Creating plans by hand was time

consuming, and the results were often inaccurate. We still had to set a room up to be confident that everything would fit, and the drawings were too informal to share with clients."

Solution

Stadium Australia and other venues in Australia managed by Sodexho, such as the Sydney Opera House, have started using Visio's drag-and-drop interface and predefined SmartShapes® symbols to create floor plans and event layout diagrams. "The time I save with Visio is incredible," said Foster. "I can prepare plans in minutes and then distribute them to everyone on the team quickly and easily."

Once a space has been measured, a base diagram or outline is created using Visio's intuitive diagramming tools; base plans may also be imported from a CAD program. Then, event planners like Foster can simply drag SmartShapes for tables, chairs, stages, and other elements onto the floor plan to create accurate event diagrams. Plan preparation times can be cut from days to minutes, the resulting diagrams are completely accurate, and communication with clients and suppliers is easier.

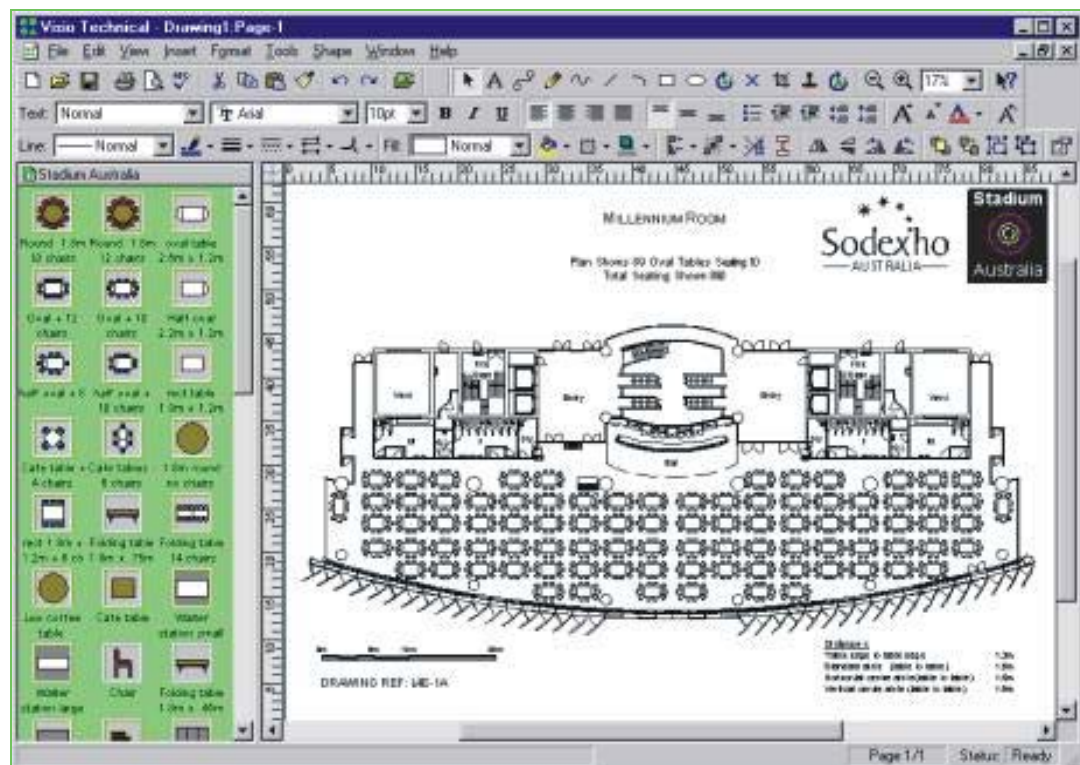


Figure 1 Using Visio software to plan events

Creating an event floor plan is as simple as dragging shapes from a stencil onto an existing floor plan.

The improved accuracy of the plans helps event staff work more efficiently. Because the elements in a Visio diagram are always drawn to scale, furniture can be placed in the room exactly as drawn on the plan. Suppliers and clients alike can be confident that the information in the diagram is reliable. Plus, shapes in a Visio diagram can be exported to a database, so they can be used to create equipment lists and inventory reports, ensuring that the right furniture is on hand for every event.

Foster and others at Sodexho work with a version of Visio software that's been customized for them by a company called CADplanners. CADplanners explain that Visio's customizable interface has helped his company tailor solutions specifically for the hospitality industry in Australia. "We've started quite a little revolution here, . . . The companies we work with find the low cost of the software to be a pleasant surprise. Instead of working with expensive specialized systems, they can introduce an effective solution that's customized for their needs for under \$1000."

Key features of Visio software

- **Intuitive drag-and-drop interface** Diagrams are easy to create, and the results are as accurate as those produced by more expensive and difficult to use CAD systems. Once a space has been measured and a base diagram created, users simply drag and drop shapes that represent tables, chairs, and other elements onto the plan. Elstub produces Visio solutions customized for the hospitality industry, and explains that Visio is perfect for his clients who don't have drawing experience: "All they need to know in order to produce accurate diagrams is how to use a mouse. It usually takes less than an hour for a new user to get up to speed and start producing drawings."
- **Rich selection of pre-drawn shapes** Visio includes hundreds of standard pre-drawn shapes for tables, chairs, stages, podiums, and other furniture and elements that event planners use regularly; event planners add these shapes to diagrams simply by dragging them from a stencil. Shapes can be customized so they can be associated with additional layers of information. For example, names can be attached as custom properties to chairs in order to create detailed seating plans, or costs can be associated with tables. For venues that require specialized equipment, planners can work with authorized third-party developers such as CADplanners to create new shapes tailored to their requirements.

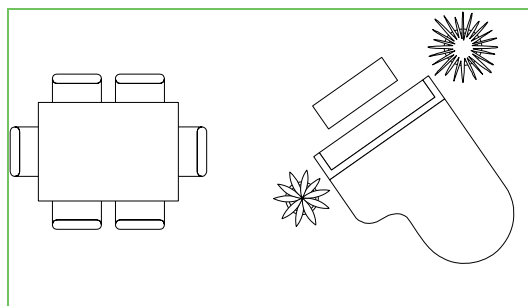


Figure 2 Drag-and-drop interface

These SmartShapes symbols representing a dining table, grand piano, and large and small plants are included on Visio stencils.

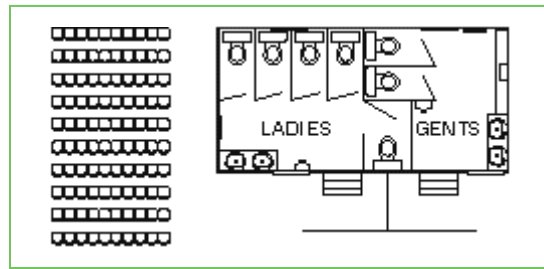


Figure 3 Customizing Visio solutions

This theatre seating shape and portable outdoor toilet shape were custom-made by CADplanners.

- **Easily shared diagrams** Diagrams created with Visio software add a professional touch to catered events, and the product's flexible output options make it easy to share them with everyone involved in the planning process. At Stadium Australia, a hard copy of the plan gets distributed to every department. Other users post plans on Web sites or e-mail plans to clients so they can mark up revisions. Whether they're printed, faxed, distributed via e-mail, posted on a Web site, or copied and pasted into a Word document or PowerPoint® presentation, floor plans created in Visio can be shared with clients and event staff using almost any communication medium.
- **Layers** Each diagram can contain multiple layers of information, so event planners can use the same base diagram to easily create plans that focus on different aspects of an event. For example, layers that contain information about the location of electrical outlets would be used for plans that get handed off to the setup crew, while plans that are intended for the client might show layers that provide detailed cost information.

Benefits

- **Streamlined processes** Visio software makes creating floor plans for events fast and easy. Instant results mean that planners and clients can begin to visualize events at preliminary meetings; subsequent revisions and refinements take a fraction of the time that working with paper-based plans would require. Visio's drag-and-drop approach to diagramming means that event planners get great-looking results that are as accurate as a CAD drawing.

Accurate floor plans also help reduce event setup times. "The plans we create in Visio make it possible for us to turn a room around in a couple of hours—which is really important when back-to-back events are scheduled," notes Meg Foster of Sodexo. Foster has even found that the cost savings are quantifiable: the use of Visio diagrams reduced setup time for an average banquet seating 500 from 16 labor hours to 9—with resulting cost savings of \$140 per event, or 28¢ per person. "We served over a million banquet-style meals during the Olympics, and reducing setup times alone saved us over \$280,000 during a single six-week period." In addition to reducing costs, the diagrams they created in Visio helped make the daunting logistics of staging so many important events in a short time more manageable.

- **Improved communication** Using Visio software can also improve communication with clients and event staff, as it has at Stadium Australia. "When we meet with potential clients, we can create a detailed drawing

that helps them to visualize their event. Handing them a customized plan with their name and logo at the end of a meeting gives us a real competitive edge." Sodexho's event planning team manages 15 different function rooms at the stadium; Foster notes that often a client can't decide which one would be best for their event. "With Visio, I can draw plans for two different rooms and the client can compare them. This really helps them to make a sound decision." Accurate plans also help to ensure that client expectations are realistic and make it easy to experiment with different room setups or unique requests. Because the plans are able to capture quite detailed information, Foster and others at Sodexho now use Visio diagrams as part of the contract they sign with clients. "Once a client has signed off on a final floor plan, we can track last-minute changes and charge appropriately for them."

- **Increased business opportunities** Floor plans created in Visio help event planners to optimize the use of their spaces by experimenting with different table sizes and layouts in a diagram (rather than going through the process of physically setting up a space), so venues can operate at maximum capacity without compromising guest comfort. Because accurate diagrams help clients to visualize how their event will work in a particular space, they can be an invaluable aid when marketing a venue.

Event planners require accurate, up-to-date floor plans in order to communicate with clients and event staff. Visio 2000 software provides an easy-to-use, cost-effective way to create event plans that are more detailed and accurate than hand-drawn plans. This has made event planners in Australia more successful at marketing event venues and services, streamlined the planning process, and reduced costs for staging events.

For more information: www.microsoft.com/office/visio



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