

M.E. PRODUCTIONS

AS PUBLISHED IN:

South Florida CEO
The Business Magazine of Miami, Dade, Broward & The Palm Beaches



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January 2004

Professional Services
Corporate Theater

Broward-based M.E. Productions is now among the leading event producers in the nation. The secret: Create memorable moments for corporate clients.

First, two secret service agents with sunglasses and suits slid into the sales meeting and watched the room, like a pair of gargoyles on either side of the front doors. Then "Hail to the Chief" started to play over the sound system and the audience of 200 began to look perplexed. They looked even more stunned when President Bush, followed by a cameraman, stepped into the room and strode to the podium, during what



was supposed to be an average sales meeting at a Naples hotel. But by the time the "President" asked the audience to remember the basic tenement of his candidacy – "Passionate Conservitude" the

audience knew something was up. This "presidential visit" by a George W. Bush look-alike was part of M.E. Productions' way of spicing up the sales meeting for client 2-10 Home Buyers Warranty company, which had just kicked off a new tag line, "America's Choice." The client wanted the sales team to get into the patriotic spirit of its new message.

M.E. Productions is a Pembroke Pines-based "event production" and destination management company, which means the firm both creates events for corporate meetings, and manages the logistics of moving people around during corporate conferences. M.E. owns a small, high-end slice of a corporate meetings and convention industry which accounts for \$102 billion in annual spending worldwide, according to trade group Meetings Professionals International. In their event-production niche, M.E. Productions is the biggest in Florida, and one of the top 20 in the US, according to Special Events Magazine.



"You don't want to spend \$200,000 to get your best people in the same room just to put them to sleep," says Jim Etkin, president of M.E. Productions. "You need to keep them engaged and excited. It's not enough to sit and look at a flip chart anymore."

The trend toward more dramatic corporate events helped M.E.'s revenue cross \$11 million in 2003, and should push it past \$13 million in 2004, says Jim's father Hal Etkin, M.E. Productions' CEO. High-tech presentations and special effects, says Hal, are ways to ensure a message is understood and retained. "For these meetings, we are a communication tool," he says.

Ellen Blum, a Westchester, NY, meeting planner and a former director of events for Lucent Technologies, recalls how M.E. Productions created an indoor ice rink to grab the attention of Lucent employees. "M.E. does truly creative things," says Blum, who is now the CEO of Apex Consulting. "And they find ways to really optimize your budget" – a critical factor in the wake of the recent recession.

That sort of feedback is music to the ears of Hal Etkin, who founded M.E. 25 years ago. Back then, he was booking bands in South Florida when he was asked to put on a Great Gatsby party. "I noticed something," he says. "There were places that could rent hats and props, but they weren't specialized and the quality was terrible. I decided I could do better."

Hal began building a one-stop event