

Identifying Fees Early: A Tool for Smarter Negotiation

Prepared with AI assistance from a transcript of *The Truth About “Hidden Fees”* featuring **HEATHER REID** | CEO and Founder, Planner Protect Inc.

Event professionals are no strangers to “invoice shock.” Heather Reid, CEO and Founder of Planner Protect Inc., recently addressed this issue in a LinkedIn Live presentation, highlighting the prevalence of unexpected or poorly disclosed fees in contracts and final invoices.

Reid emphasized that hidden charges—whether attendee-facing or client-facing—are among the top concerns for meeting planners. Attendees often encounter charges such as early check-in fees, minibar restocking, or luggage handling fees. On the client side, planners may face administrative surcharges on meeting room rentals, HVAC fees for after-hours events, charges for additional power outlets, or even costs for basic necessities like water stations and umbrellas.

While some may suspect these fees are deliberately concealed, Reid stressed that most suppliers are not acting deceptively. Instead, she sees the challenge as an industry-wide communication gap.

“The term ‘hidden fees’ carries a negative connotation,” Reid explained. “Rather than assuming dishonesty, planners must take responsibility for identifying, negotiating, and contracting every possible charge.”

To change the conversation, Reid advocates replacing “hidden fees” with clearer terminology. She recommends distinguishing between defined fees—supplementary charges that are part of supplier revenue strategies—and undisclosed fees,

which are costs not revealed during negotiations. This shift allows planners to engage suppliers with precise language and reduce unnecessary disputes.

Practical steps are essential. Reid suggests planners:

- **Develop a Defined Fees Checklist.** Build a running list of potential charges from personal experience and peer networks. Include this document with every Request for Proposal (RFP).
- **Scrutinize Contracts.** Carefully review wording for ambiguity, such as “may incur additional charges,” and address it before signing.
- **Attach Exhibits.** Ask suppliers to include the completed fees checklist or current price lists as exhibits to the contract, referenced in the agreement itself.
- **Add Protective Clauses.** Incorporate language requiring suppliers to disclose all fees upfront and stipulating that any undisclosed fees identified after contract execution are invalid.



“The term ‘hidden fees’ carries a negative connotation,” Reid explained. “Rather than assuming dishonesty, planners must take responsibility for identifying, negotiating, and contracting every possible charge.”

Reid also encouraged planners to share examples of unexpected fees within their professional networks to build collective awareness and strengthen negotiating power. She pointed to recent regulatory changes, such as the U.S. Federal Trade Commission’s ban on buried “junk fees” in lodging and ticketing, as evidence that momentum for transparency is building.

Ultimately, Reid’s message is one of proactive responsibility. “We, as planners, need to make and move the needle,” she said. By demanding clarity, using precise terminology, and embedding transparency into contracts, planners can protect their budgets, foster trust with suppliers, and model best practices for the industry.

Would you like to learn more about best practices in event contracts? Contact Heather at info@plannerprotect.ca.



Meet Heather

In 2013, **HEATHER REID** founded Planner Protect Inc – which consults with event hosts and industry professionals to negotiate **BALANCED** event contracts. CEOs, professional planners, and venue representatives alike all recognize Heather as a trusted and knowledgeable expert in her field.

Expanded Checklist of Defined Fees

Use this list to guide negotiations and contract reviews. Not every fee will apply in every situation, but being aware of possibilities helps avoid surprises.

Attendee-Facing Fees

- Early check-in or late check-out charges
- Minibar restocking (even if items are returned)
- In-room safe or telephone fees
- Wi-Fi or wired internet access fees
- Resort or facility fees added to guest rooms
- Parking (self-park or valet)
- Room service delivery surcharges
- Luggage handling or delivery charges
- Newspaper delivery fees
- Fitness center or pool access fees

Client / Planner-Facing Fees

- Administrative or service charges on meeting room rentals
- HVAC surcharges for after-hours events
- Charges for electrical outlets or power strips
- Fees for accessing lighting panels or controls
- Water stations in meeting or banquet rooms
- Furniture, umbrella, or heater rentals for outdoor spaces
- Branding or signage placement surcharges (e.g., clings, elevator wraps)
- Audio-visual patch fees for connecting outside equipment
- Internet drop fees for meeting rooms
- Rigging charges for hanging banners or lighting
- Union labor requirements (minimum hours, overtime, mandatory staffing)
- Coat check staffing or rental
- Cleaning fees for meeting rooms or exhibit halls

Food & Beverage Fees

- Coffee or tea service add-ons (e.g., honey, flavored syrups, condiments)
- Additional charges for banquet table water service
- Bartender or carver labor fees (per hour, per station)
- Corkage fees for wine or alcohol brought in
- Cake-cutting fees for desserts supplied externally
- Penalties for not meeting food and beverage minimums
- Service charges on hosted bars or cash bars

Tip: Use this list to create your own customized “Defined Fees Checklist.” Require suppliers to confirm which fees apply and at what rate. Attach the checklist as an exhibit to the contract to protect against future disputes.