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Holiday Office Parties Expected to Be Lamer Than Usual

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For those who are fortunate enough to work for an employer throwing a holiday shindig, don't expect a big blowout like last year.

If you enjoyed a live band, don't be surprised by a DJ this year. If you got a little too tipsy, have no fear of a repeat performance — many open bars will now be coming with time limits, or done away with completely.

You might even be able to cancel the babysitter as many of this year's parties will be occurring during the workday or will be for employees only.

Companies are slashing the budget for the holiday soiree, or doing away with the event all together.

Mario Stewart, founder and co-owner of EMRG Media, a New York City event planning and marketing firm says he has definitely noticed a difference from 2007. There have not been many outright cancellations, but party budgets have been significantly reduced, especially among his clients in the financial sector.

The number of companies planning to hold holiday parties this year dropped to 77 percent from 90 percent in 2007, according to a survey by outplacement-services firm Challenger, Gray and Christmas.

Of those celebrating, 13 percent said they've trimmed their budgets by an average of 53 percent, and 65 percent have limited their parties to employees only.

Stewart said he's noticed that venues are now more willing to negotiate the per-person rate for a holiday party in an attempt to accommodate tight budgets and keep the business.

"Even companies spending the same as last year will have to settle for less extravagant parties, thanks to higher costs for food, alcohol, and venues," said John Challenger, CEO of Challenger, Gray and Christmas.

Still, Challenger said, "many companies will find that holding a more low-key or low-budget party is better than canceling the party entirely. These year-end celebrations are an effective way of boosting employee morale — especially in tough economic times."

— Lesley Sideck