



> The Hotel Irvine was put to the test in March, when a local transformer blew and left the busy property without power.

THE DAY THE POWER WENT OUT

How one hotel rose to the occasion in an emergency

By Allen J. Sheinman

Wednesday, March 1, 2017, began on a warm, overcast note in Irvine, Calif. At the 536-room Hotel Irvine, things were purring along. The big excitement on-site that morning was the start of the second day of the annual Quirk's Event—Orange County expo put on by Quirk's Marketing Research Media, with some 830 attendees and 90 exhibitors schmoozing, trading business cards and enjoying the instant camaraderie of folks with similar professional interests.

General manager Jeroen Quint was in his office, meeting with the property's engineering director, when suddenly — the lights went out. They didn't

know it yet, but the local energy provider had blown a transformer, turning the surrounding area into an eerie, power-free zone.

"We have standard operating procedures and extensive training for various contingencies," notes Quint, exactly the unflappable type of manager you'd want in such a situation, "so once we realized the power was completely off, we went to our various designated posts. For me, that's the main lobby. Our engineering director went to the notification panels, and all managers went directly to our public spaces to take care of and engage with the guests."

The staff, some 400 in all, immediately stepped up and began distributing battery-operated pillar candles throughout the property ("It helped create a calm ambiance," notes Quint). They also handed out glow sticks and complimentary snacks and beverages from the in-house Marketplace. By the afternoon, says Quint, "we built an outdoor satellite kitchen using our outdoor grills and mobile fryers to provide guests with lunch and dinner items, which included tacos, burgers and grilled chicken."

Meanwhile, an expo was taking place on the premises. "The power went out about 20 minutes into our first breakout sessions of the day," says Steve Quirk, president of the Minneapolis, Minn.-based Quirk's

Marketing Research Media. “Hotel staff, both management and A/V, showed up to deal with problems. I was amazed at how quickly they came.”

Once it was determined that the outage was outside of the hotel, “they had generators within an hour to run our breakout rooms, and they put up emergency lighting in the expo hall,” says Quirk. “Despite very limited power, the food-and-beverage service amazingly continued without issue.”

As an interesting sidelight, Quirk notes that “the feedback was really fascinating. Attendee comments indicate that the sessions that lost power were actually better because it forced the speakers to engage the audience, not just follow a PowerPoint. Also, attendees got to see potential vendors, the ex-



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hibitors, under a stressful situation. The vast majority rolled with it and passed the stress test, but a few did not fare as well, and attendees noticed.”

All in all, Quirk believes that what could well have been a severe blow to the expo ultimately was mitigated. “It was the hotel’s quick response and ability to quickly adapt that saved the event,” he says.

By day’s end the power came back on, and the Hotel Irvine celebrated with complimentary appetizers and champagne. “We were not improvising,” emphasizes Quint. “Having a formal crisis plan in place is an essential part of being prepared. And for us, our first thought is always to take care of our guests to make sure everyone is safe and has what they need.” ■