

## 'Tis the season to be frugal: Christmas parties cutting costs

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AUSTERITY measures have made their presence felt at staff Christmas parties around the capital this year, with many employers choosing to bring the traditional end of year celebrations back inside the office to save money.

ACT Chamber of Commerce chief executive Christopher Peters said bosses had to be careful about the messages their parties sent to both staff and clients.

"They don't want to be seen to be overly lavish at a time when people are being careful with their own finances," he said.

"However, they are being careful to make sure people are using the opportunity to celebrate Christmas and not being Scrooge at all.

"They want to maintain the merriment of the season and the sense of community, but not waste money in doing so."

Mr Peters said this was leading many bosses to seek the middle ground - namely the middle of the office.

"We are seeing more in-house events, rather than taking staff off site to a third party venue, which may be expensive," he said.

"They may be providing some alcohol, entertainment, food in the workplace ... so it makes it cheap."

However, the trend flies in the face of advice from the Fair Work Ombudsman who has recommended against holding celebrations in the office in its list of top tips for employers holding Christmas parties.

"A Christmas party is a great opportunity to celebrate all the great work that's been done over the last year," the Ombudsman's website says.

"However, you should be aware that employers are generally responsible for the health and safety of their staff at Christmas parties or events just as they are when employees are carrying out their normal workplace activities."

In its list of handy hints it recommends setting firm start and finish times and helping employees get home with cab fares or buses.

"Holding the party away from the place of work," is tip No4 on the list.

Human resources specialists at People and Culture Strategies have recommended that bosses be mindful of the social media trap.

Managing principal Joydeep Hor said employees were often unaware of the extent to which their interactions on social media could damage a business's brand especially after a staff Christmas event or even in their own time such as at after-parties.

"Twitter, for example, offers significant reputational risk for employers as anything you post can be retweeted by another user allowing things to become widely known and to get out of hand very quickly," Mr Hor said.

"Essentially, the ramifications of what happens [at] Christmas parties are not limited to who is attending."