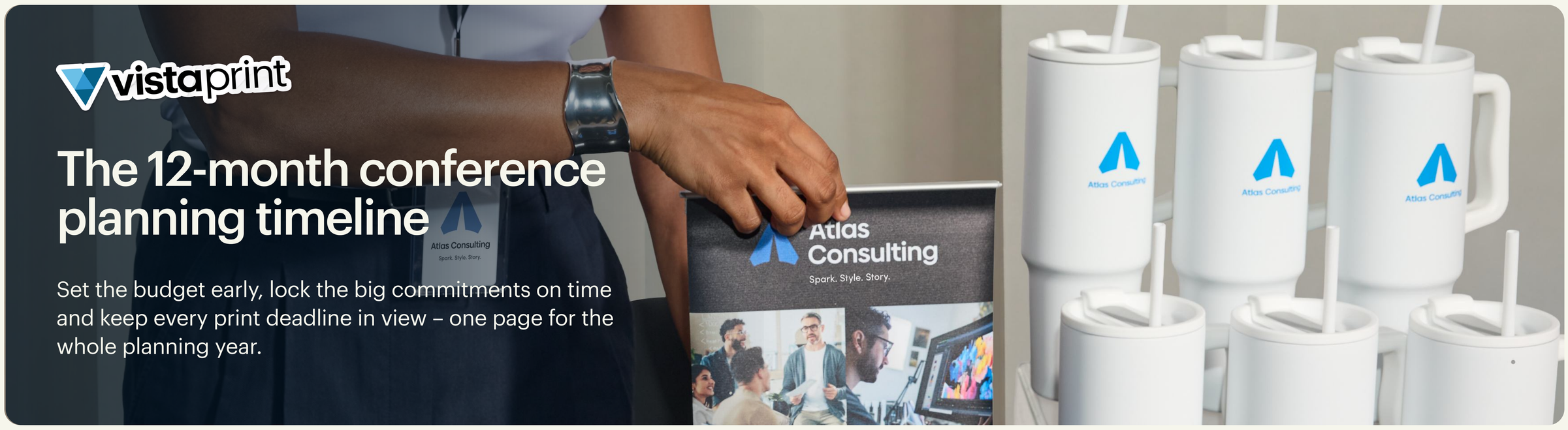

The 12-month conference planning timeline

Set the budget early, lock the big commitments on time and keep every print deadline in view – one page for the whole planning year.

10–12 MONTHS OUT

Strategic approval and venue

Lock in the objective, the headcount and the budget before anyone books a room.

- [ ] **Set the objective and headcount** – every later cost follows from these two numbers
- [ ] **Shortlist venues and read the contract** – check attrition, deposits and room-block terms
- [ ] **Book the date and the deposit** – supplier quotes move once the date is locked

9–7 MONTHS OUT

Speakers and sponsorship

Early registration data tells you whether the attendance forecast is holding.

- [ ] **Confirm speakers and program costs** – fees, travel and any AV requirements
- [ ] **Price the sponsorship packages** – keep confirmed income separate from pipeline
- [ ] **Open registration and watch the trend** – revise forecasts before print quantities

4–6 MONTHS OUT

Marketing and print proofing

Quantities get real here – and print deadlines start to matter.

- [ ] **Refine print quantities** – add a small buffer for late registrations
- [ ] **Proof artwork and order samples** – check material, finish and color first
- [ ] **Confirm signage, folders and badges** – then check production and delivery windows

0–3 MONTHS OUT

Production lock and delivery

Numbers stop moving and logistics take over. Buffer everything.

- [ ] **Place final print orders** – start 8–12 weeks out and keep a shipping buffer
- [ ] **Finalize catering and banquet orders** – lock numbers against the guarantees
- [ ] **Confirm access and load-in** – staging, AV and wayfinding ready to use

AFTER THE EVENT

Reconcile and reset

Close the numbers while the details are still fresh.

- [ ] **Compare forecast with final invoices** – note every variance while it is fresh
- [ ] **Record cost per attendee** – and the reason behind each big gap
- [ ] **Carry the lessons forward** – next year's budget starts from this data

Key numbers

HOW A STARTING BUDGET SPLITS

Venue and catering	50%
AV and production	20%
Marketing and print	15%
On-site staffing	10%
Administration	5%

GUARDRAILS TO SET NOW

Contingency – add 10–15% above contracted costs
Print – start final procurement 8–12 weeks out
Break-even – (fixed costs – income) ÷ (ticket price – variable cost)