

Comment on the increased activity of UK events and personnel overseas

Exporting Events Excellence

It is ironic, perhaps, that the UK's most senior marketing medium is arguably its most advanced today. Then again, such irony is hardly surprising. For 100 years, the UK events scene has evolved with the times, continuously reinventing itself and consistently delivering on the live stage. Flagship events such as the Ideal Home Show or London Boat Show collectively attract annual attendances of 1/2 million visitors and create effective forums where buyers and sellers interact face-to-face, within a unique multi-sensory marketing environment. UK events create industry communities, where exhibitors and visitors converge to uncover the latest innovations, new products and trends. Event organisers and suppliers must develop their own techniques at a simultaneous, or faster pace than their customers, in order to provide inspiring industry platforms that attract the active (and for that read *spending*) visitor; a crowd that exhibiting brands are very happy to follow!

The UK events sector is mature, diverse and successful. For every interest or passion, there is an event; over 1,800 UK exhibitions alone take place each year. Far from simply addressing the big consumer fads of the moment, a plethora of live events cover an ever-increasing array of niche activities. This bustling market place breeds competition; for every industrial sector, a healthy battle ensues between companies seeking to produce *'the industry event'*. UK event organisers and suppliers are used to being 'on their toes', anticipating and addressing the latest issues and methods that will give them the edge. Indeed, they are very good at it... in fact, they lead the world.

Exporting events expertise across the globe is a true 'invisible', but nonetheless significant contributor to UK plc's balance of trade, like much else in the sector. After 48 years, the industry has only just won recognition by the Office of National Statistics via a specific SIC code, just in time for the Olympics! In October 2005, KPMG undertook the first ever economic impact study of the UK exhibitions industry. Its headline findings were that the exhibitions sector (which equates to just one element of the UK events scene) annually contributes £9.3 billion to the UK economy and generates 137,000 full time jobs. The £22 billion¹ UK events sector is significant, it is growing and it is increasingly global.

Overseas venue operators in particular have been quick to recognise the expertise of the UK events sector. The Association of Event Venues (AEV) has seen the number of international members increase in recent years, with new members like Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC), AsiaWorld-Expo in Hong Kong, Dubai World Trade Centre and Messe Bremen, joining existing member venues from countries such a

¹ The British Tourism Partnership (www.business tourismpartnership.com) estimates the UK events industry to be worth £22 billion in direct visitor expenditures.

Bahrain, Australia and from all across Europe. All are keen to entice UK brands to their markets. "Reed Exhibitions, CMP Information, IIR (Middle East) and dmg world media have already committed to a combined 30 shows at ADNEC," comments chief executive, Simon Horgan. ***"Through our innovative 'Foundation Partner' initiative, the venue and organisers have made a mutual commitment to develop new shows. Consumer events here have become very sophisticated, very quickly and in the main, it's the British organisers that have led the way bringing their successful events to this huge market."***

UK-based event organiser Montgomery's International Food Exhibition (IFE) brand is a case in point. The biennial showcase, which took place in March at ExCeL London, was established in 1979 and is now one of *the* leading events on a global scale, attracting more than 26,000 professionals from 101 countries. In 2001 organisers identified the low hanging fruit in emerging markets, and have gone on to clone the event in India, Poland and other countries. A challenge? ***"Taking a successful event to new overseas markets is not all plain sailing"*** comments Christopher Newton, managing director and brand guardian at Montgomery, ***"we bring with us a global brand and business plan, but rely a great deal on local partners to ensure that the new event meets the needs of the new audience."***

In the case of IFE Poland, Montgomery works in partnership with Expomedia Events (EME); both are members of the UK's Association of Event Organisers (AEO). Ex-pat David Ashdown, managing director of the Warsaw based EME operation, testifies to the importance of imported expertise and recognises the benefits of working with UK partners. ***"I have a strong team that are able to deliver great events, but the history of the country means that the business mentality still lags the west a little, though things are changing quickly! In the three years I have been here I have seen a terrific growth in openness with more adventurous UK inspired strategies and tactics now much more readily accepted. The UK leads the world in events, so many ideas are too advanced technologically or in the mindset of the audience, but that does mean that ideas that do get to run, mark us out as leaders in the field. Without question, our adoption of the UK modus operandi has elevated us to market leaders."***

It not just the emerging markets that recognise the UK industry's prowess and penchant to export. ***"We see the UK exhibition and conference organiser community as an energetic environment that is continually exploring new and existing market opportunities"*** comments Andreas Marquardt of German venue/organiser, Messe Bremen which has recently established a UK office to build on its positioned as the host for the European rollout of UK event brands.

The UK's influential power in live events, coupled with the Olympic factor, means that more people than ever are interested in working in this dynamic sector, a phenomena not expected to change for the next 5 years. With the industry's first vocational A-Level qualification arriving in 2008 and both Under and Post Graduate courses now available in the UK, the experience and professionalism within the industry's current and future workforce should only increase; another factor not lost on overseas practitioners.

The recruitment sections of the event trade magazines are full of exciting opportunities, enticing 'experienced professionals' to ply their trade around the world. Bill Pretty, managing director of specialist recruiters Dragonfly has seen a 29% growth in business in the last 12 months. ***"With big, new facilities popping up especially in the UAE, venue operator/organisers need seasoned professionals to fill the increased capacity. The new Dubai World Trade Center, planned alongside the new airport, will be the biggest in the world so you can understand the need to have people that 'make it happen' in position,"*** he says. ***"From Exhibition Directors, Sales Managers and Marketing Executives, we are filling roles at all levels. Confrontation is not in the Arabian business culture, so part of the reasoning behind employing hard-nosed UK pros, is that they bring an added dimension to an organisation whether it is used or not! After the Indian presence, the British contingent is probably the next most significant although there are a good number of Germans, Americans and Australians too."***

Pretty's is a view confirmed by Rebecca Wilson Director at esp recruitment ***"We are doing more and more overseas recruitment in Dubai especially, where the market is growing rapidly. Our clients recruit largely from the UK, the events hub of the world, tapping into the rich pool of home-grown talent. Candidates are keen to go to Dubai to work in this fast paced purpose-built event destination, offering attractive tax-free salaries, and it can only serve to further strengthen their careers."*** Bahrain Exhibition & Convention Authority's Director of MICE, Destination Marketing & P.R, Debbie Stanford-Kristiansen concludes, ***"one of the main reasons I was headhunted to set up this new department was that I have over 19 years experience in the industry."***

Today's individually minded, global citizen is more likely to reject junk mail and object to mass scattergun advertising intruding upon their lives. True permission-led marketing, to increasingly focused target groups will gain even greater prominence. Permission marketing is event territory! To stay relevant, and to be around for another 100 years, UK event organisers and suppliers must ensure that they remain at the very top of their game in order to maintain and build upon their respected international status. The industry has a great chance... it has certainly had the practice!

===ENDS, EIA DETAILS BELOW===

The EIA is supported by marketing partners Dubai World Trade Centre, IELA and getmemedia.com

---NOTES TO EDITORS---

[About the EIA: www.eventsindustryalliance.com](http://www.eventsindustryalliance.com)

The EIA seeks to communicate the huge opportunities for business growth via the medium of live event marketing, to place live events at the heart of modern marketing, and increase the medium's market share. EIA will deliver its vision via:

1. Promotion - influencing key target groups (see below)
2. Measurement - conveying effectiveness of live events / improving industry evaluation
3. Participation - broadening EIA involvement among all live sectors and client companies
4. Expertise - promoting greater skills among users by sharing knowledge and best practice

EIA target groups:

- a) Client organisations and their marketing/brand managers
- b) Agencies
- c) National and marketing media
- d) Government lobbying and support
- e) Academia

For more information, visit the website at www.eventsindustryalliance.com

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