

Sustainable Events: Don't Worry, Be Green!

I'd have a guess that events of every shape and size are held every day in every city in the world. I don't have any hard facts on that, and they'd be pretty much impossible to gather, but if you think of every single gathering of people for a purpose, I reckon you can call that an event. A huge industry has grown around the creation of these events and armies of people are trained and turned out into the world from events courses to become headset wearing, clipboard holding, military style multi-taskers.



For the person on the street who has planned a dinner party for more than six people, or gone the whole hog and tried to organise their sister's wedding, they'll have had a taste of the professional life of an event manager. It takes a certain someone to be able to keep all those balls in the air, simultaneously delivering their events on time, on budget and to the expectations of clients, sponsors, talent and audience.

While these people have been head down bum up in logistical wrangling, something has slipped in from the side, to give them yet-another-thing-to-organise. The Greening.

Sponsors like it, clients want it, audiences expect it, and talent would like it too most probably.

So what events are we really talking about? My list of likely candidates for a big old green makeover include; community fairs, business functions, religious and cultural celebrations, local sporting competitions and school fairs, through to the world's largest festivals, stadium concerts, conferences, expos, and sporting events.



My observation is that music festivals seem to be taking the lead on cleaning up their environmental credentials. I think it's because there is a real emotional attachment by the audiences to these events, rather than say, a plumber's supply expo or a convention about the convention industry. Promoters have always been a bit cowboy in the way they've run their shows, and lots have taken the bit between the

teeth and had a really good crack at greening. In the US we have Coachella, Bonnaroo, Lollapalooza, Burning Man, all the ones you could reel off without thinking. But there are also so many others that are toeing the green line in a fantastic way.

And what are events and festivals doing that could be seen as un-green? These public parties use up resources, send out emissions, and generate mountain ranges of waste. People travel to them by the million and the impact of this travelling could be seen as the largest. Aside from people travelling to the event, the idea of creating a temporary city with power, toilets, waste, water, transport, is inherently unsustainable, consuming resources, producing masses of waste. It could be said the most environmental friendly event is no event at all, but that's no fun.

So what does running an event sustainably actually mean? Is recycling enough? What about biodegradable waste? What to do with that? Does being sustainable mean counting up all the emissions and then offsetting them? And if you offset what projects do you support and how do you know they're effective? If you use biodegradable plates and cups to serve your food and drink on, do you buy those made from genetically modified corn grown in your country or plates that have travelled half way across the world but made from fallen palm leaves and whose production helps support the sustainable development of India's rural poor?

What of the biofuel debate? You want to get away from relying on fossil fuels to power your event, but how can you justify using biodiesel which has been grown from crops which should really have been food? And what to do with all the sewage and waste water? Surely there's a better way to go than full flush loos with stinky toilet 'blue'?



Tackling the greening of an event, once the event manager understands the issues and has answered some of the questions above, really isn't that hard though (!) Like all industries, greening your supply chain means a lot of the work is done for you. So it is a good strategy for all event managers to turn to their contractors, product suppliers and crews and get them to present them the most environmentally preferable option. Once they have that sorted; buying the right timber, using the right cleaning products, having the right waste systems in place etc, their sights need to be turned elsewhere. And that elsewhere is the audience. You.

It is you, my friend, who causes the biggest hassle at these events. I have fantasized about chaining a personal bin to each festival goer as they enter the grounds. Or in fact, just setting the festival up and

enjoying myself and asking the audience not to come please, as then I'd have a really good greening result.

But alas, that one's not going to come true, so deal with you we must. Our tools are coercion, bribery, trickery, financial inducements, guilt placing and a little dose of peer group pressure.

If only you would fill up all the seats in your car, instead of zooming there solo in your Hummer. Take the bus! Please, oh please, don't bring instant noodles and a disposable bbq and then not use them. Take your camping gear home. Don't use your spare tent as a toilet. Put your food packaging in the compost bin, and no, please don't pour beer on my lovely green volunteers when they are trying to get you to recycle. Don't smoke. If you do, put your butt in the right place. Don't go to the toilet in the bushes, and no, the toilet paper isn't for decorating your campsite.

One thing you can do though, is have a good time.

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