

# Interview: Organising an Event during Tough Times

## MKG Tips & Hints

1. Thorough planning and brainstorming
2. Choose the right venue and timing
3. Extensive Marketing & Promotions
4. Organisational & PR initiatives on the day
5. Post-event evaluation – measure success

More than ever, achievements and good work needs to be praised and rewarded, lifting employee morale and boosting their motivation to continue performing during this period of economic decline.

At the moment, times are difficult. The global financial crisis has been one of those major occurrences that has affected everyone, and in so many ways. It has driven economies around the world downwards, and forced many institutions to cut back on 'unnecessary' expenses. No doubt, many companies would deem participation at an industry event as somewhat unnecessary, especially when budgets are scarce and the near future is still very much an uphill road.

Tourism and hospitality industries have certainly not been an exception. New developments have slowed down, postponed or cancelled altogether, whilst performances have progressively diminished.



Organising an event, of course depending on its magnitude, is a huge task even at the best of times. Immense planning and preparations, organisation, marketing, relations, logistics, contacts, follow-ups...the list goes on. Although many events might seem as though they are perfect, the reality is exhaustive amounts of work is required.

The original challenge is to make an event interesting and beneficial; to provide value for participants – guests, sponsors and speakers. However now, during this economic crisis, event organisers must battle much harder to convince their audience and markets that this added expense is worthwhile.

Beyond this, an industry event specialised in the tourism and hospitality industry, welcomes international guests who are themselves event organisers, or at least regular visitors to other similar events.

### **Worldwide Hospitality Awards**

Organised by the MKG Group, the Worldwide Hospitality Awards were created 10 years ago to serve as a benchmark platform for the industry and in every aspect of hotel operations. The Hospitality Awards pay tribute to new initiatives and experiences, awarding the finest achievements, in not just major hotel groups, but also independent properties. It is indeed a channel or medium to expose excellence, but also an opportunity for the industry to unite, network and learn from each other. The 2009 Worldwide Hospitality Awards will take place at InterContinental Paris Le Grand on November 25th.

MKG Group's **Bruno Courtin** tells us more about what other challenges are involved in organising events, as well as some advice on what to focus on. MKG has been organising both the Worldwide Hospitality Awards and Global Lodging Forum for over ten years.

#### **How many people are you expecting at each event?**

The Hospitality Awards gather over 700 top level executives from France and abroad, whilst Global Lodging Forum used to be limited to 300 participants, mainly due to venue size. The change of venue now will increase participation. Despite the current state of the economy, this is an actual increase from previous years, as we have managed to prove to the industry that such events are even more important now.



#### **How far in advance must you start planning to organise each event?**

As soon as the latest one is over. The first advisory board for the Hospitality Awards is programmed after the last session of the Global Forum. And the sessions for the Global Lodging Forum are finalised by October the year before.

### **What is involved in the planning stages of the event?**

A lot of work actually! Plenty of sweat, anxiety, stress, imagination, and of course contact with industry leaders, as well as with actual and potential sponsors. For such events, you must create a real buzz, especially when working with the hospitality industry. It is crucial that each event attracts leading figures and personalities, as this will then have a domino-effect and draw other participants. Thus, exposure is fundamental – marketing and promotions – to make sure the industry is aware of what's happening. This year's event has been more challenging, and we've had to work very hard to make people commit. We knew this was going to happen, so we put in the extra effort and tried new strategies. At the same time, due to a slowdown in performance, it has been slightly easier to negotiate deals with suppliers.

### **What challenges do you regularly face in organising these events and how do you normally overcome them?**

To stage a bigger and more impressive event each year, as the event's prestige is at stake, as is our company's reputation. There are also many competitors always trying to mimic what you do, so you must stand-out above the rest and clearly communicate your position as the number one. The secret to successes is no doubt a lot of hard work, efficient planning and creativity, as well as of course regular participation of highly acclaimed guests, which we always achieve.

### **What happens at the event; are you still running around organising bits and pieces, and are there any new challenges?**

We must make sure presentations are accurate and debates relevant to topics. We have up to 60 different panel members with six different moderators for the parallel sessions. As you can imagine, this alone is a major challenge, requiring focus, attention to detail and spontaneity. We must also make sure that all participants feel comfortable and are enjoying the experience. It must be educational and informative in a friendly atmosphere.

### **What usually happens after the event; as in what follow-ups you must do?**

The main problem we face, considering the size of the team is to capitalise on the success of these events. We do follow up on contacts, relations with candidates and all guests, but we could do a lot better. This part is much underrated when organising an event, but in my opinion, something that will drive a long-lasting successful event.

## **Global Lodging Forum**

For over a decade, the Global Lodging Forum has been the only international platform staged in France to facilitate a close encounter between the various business areas of the hospitality industry, i.e. operators, financial institutions, real estate and developers. Over 400 leading decisions makers gather to

exchange information and strategies on European and global issues. The event was previously held at the Press Club de France in Paris and also the acclaimed Four Seasons George V. However, in order to host a larger audience, the 2010 Global Lodging Forum will be at Le Pullman Tour Eiffel in early March.

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