

Smooth operations

Should event creation be led by logistical strategy? **Stand Out** talks to suppliers and organisers and asks whether the need to easily transport event infrastructure is more important than location?



Customs formalities in play. However, we have our mavericks that place events in obscure regions and ridiculous venues and are not prepared to listen to the pitfalls of local peculiarities and the issue of Customs guarantees for temporary importations.

“They [customers] often forget lead in time for Customs clearance in a given country, which is critical. This is resultant in a company sending a machine to an event in “Mozambique” for example too late to be Customs cleared. It then seems to be the fault of the freight forwarder! On the spot miracles just do not happen. If we were consulted and listened to from project initiation such events and roadshows would be almost flawless.”

Phil Powell, managing director of CEVA Showfreight, agrees, yet only to a certain point: “Some events need to take place in certain countries and locations for a variety of reasons and it is our job as a logistics provider to meet the brief and deliver a fast, safe and efficient service – regardless of the challenges the particular scenario presents! There may be sound economic reasons for an organiser to run an event in a particular country with no option to go elsewhere, so detailed planning meetings at a very early stage can help ensure that any potential issues on the ground can be overcome before they become a problem further down the line.

“The pressure is on when timing is tight and shipments need to be loaded on particular flights in order to meet event

Chris Hughes, chief executive of Brand Events gave a keynote presentation at the International Exhibition Logistics Associates (IELA) Congress in London in June. Declan Gane, an executive director of IELA, told *Stand Out*. Hughes spoke about his new-found admiration for the events logistics sector. With just 24 hours to go until doors at Top Gear Live Sydney, some of the show’s freight remained on a boat. Despite such a nail-biting encounter, Hughes lived to tell the tale and now happily confesses to being a believer.

“Having had a near death experience down-under, he was at the IELA Congress to tell the record number of delegates from 46 countries, that he was now a convert,” explains Gane. “The Sydney Docks incident set him thinking some radical thoughts, including the idea that logistics partners might just become more important to his company than venues. His vision of developing itineraries with

logistics partners prior to going to market with his global touring events and shipping equipment from a few strategic global hubs, puts logistics considerations at the heart of event creation.”

This very conversation with Gane led *Stand Out* to think. Should event creation be led by logistical strategy? Will organisers ever regard freight forwarders and logistics specialists as more important than venues? Because for those who have touring shows the need to easily move kit and not be stuck at Customs is of significant importance.

Comments Steve Turner, managing director of Exhibition Freighting – Global Show Management (EF-GSM): “Most of us with any experience in this business have been pushing this theory for years. Organisers that have listened to us when embarking on new territory with new ideas have benefited in facilitating well-run and repeat events. It’s fine organising events in stable countries with numerous contractual services available – purpose built venues and lenient and flexible

EMS’ client
services director,
Justin Isles



schedules. There is no time for error and ignorance of a law is no get out.

“Staging events is a balancing act – you can’t say that one aspect of the mix is more important than the other; however you need to get the balance right. There is absolutely no point in running an event at a venue because access and logistics facilities are excellent but the venue is in completely the wrong location for your target audience. Having said that, a thought for logistics issues and addressing those issues at the outset should be an automatic part of the event planning process. As with most things common sense must prevail.”

Planning, planning, planning

A good trucking and logistics company can handle any enquiry but life can be made easier when an organisation is asked to get involved early in the planning stages. For the majority of exhibitions and concerts, venues are designed to facilitate logistics although those selected for conferences and parties tend to be more unusual and in many cases special care needs to be taken to ensure everything is considered well in advance, so says Liz Madden, sales and marketing director, ES Group.

“When the Chanel Mobile Art Pavilion was touring, EST arranged the sea freighting of 77 40-foot containers, carefully scheduled using express and slow vessels from Japan to New York. This avoided storage costs in Tokyo and New York ports and the scheduling allowed the containers to leap frog each other so they were received on-site as per the build schedule.”

But when it comes to European events, organisers can come up against a plethora of issues. Jeff Broom, exhibition services manager of Europa Show Freight, explains that he is sometimes surprised at the order of venues on the touring schedule, as issues such as driving bans, distances, public holidays, weight limits and other local restrictions have a bearing on timeframes.

“To be fair, as long as your logistics provider knows what they are doing, most countries are quite accessible,” adds Michael Hunter, managing director of GBH Exhibition Forwarding. “The countries to avoid are those with bureaucratic Customs systems. We always ensure that when faced with working at an unknown venue we visit the venue to run a

risk assessment and see what measures we need to take to ensure a smooth build and break down.”

Saving time and money

Event organisers, production companies and tour managers plan tours and events around the world based on a wide range of factors but they rarely consider logistics – from a practical or financial perspective at the early planning/booking stages, Lisa Ryan, regional director at EFM Management, suggests.

“Aside from this, when designing set items and creative concepts for events, shows etc, these kinds of items often tend to be designed and built without consideration of the logistical issues and related costs of moving them around,” she continues. “When the time finally comes for actually carrying out a touring show or event the challenges and logistical costs can become a problem.

“At EFM we do actually now have a number of clients who come to us for guidance and information for their planning purposes. They have found that this assists to save them money and time, which in the current economic climate is vital to any business.”

Justin Isles, client services director at Event Marketing Solutions (EMS), suggests that the choice of country and venue must always be led by a strategic decision from the client on the size of the market opportunity versus the cost of the campaign. And David Ball, a director of Emboss Events, also agrees that cost is a factor, yet does not agree that event creation should be led by logistics.

“Generally clients have a pretty good idea where they want to host their event and accessibility for delegates or guests is more important to them than the potential logistical issues and cost of transporting the kit. Whilst getting the equipment to the venue is a major factor, it’s the concern for the logistics agency/organiser and not the client. The agency should always offer best advice, which in some cases would be to hire locally, but any location is accessible; it all depends on whether the client is prepared to pay for shipping. Should the freight costs prove to be excessive once we’d chosen locations, then we’d look either to hire locally or look at alternatives.”

Josh Bentley, director of Cash on the Move, appreciates the importance of logistical strategy, and James Wicks, owner



*Phil Powell,
managing
director of CEVA
Showfreight*

of Buster Cases, also argues that the purpose of a show is defeated if location is not given the consideration it deserves.

“From my own experience of trade shows, the logistics and the organisation of the event are as important as the choice of venue. An easy get in and out is one thing for the exhibitor but if you do not get any custom because of a poor venue then it defeats the purpose of a show. It will always be a balancing act. Allowing enough time to plan and ensure the correct expert is used will always be more important.”

Addressing all the angles

According to Ben Atherton, global events manager, Nortel, a clear brief is key.

“Any corporate event planner that is using an event agency needs to demand that they understand the full event service provision; and that means creative, logistics, delegate management etc and would naturally include ‘softer/hidden’ nuances such as foreign exchange, taxes, TOMS, freight and Customs. I would never expect to receive a proposal that did not address every angle if asking for responses to a multi-country or international event brief. Personally speaking, this speaks to a broader issue of corporates now wanting the smallest agencies to be heroes; this ‘outsourced thinking’ is a natural result of corporate pressures on headcount and budget.

“Without solid and signed off event objectives then logistics do begin to dominate event creation because with a woolly brief you sign up the ‘wrong’ location/venue and then as objectives firm up you are constantly attempting to retro-fit them into that venue framework. You end up saying ‘no’ an awful lot, which leads to frustration and lack of ownership and pride in the event execution.”