

Chapter 1

Why Put on An Event?

In This Chapter

- ▶ What an event is
 - ▶ Changes in the industry in recent years
 - ▶ How being organised isn't the only skill an event manager needs
 - ▶ Establishing why to put on an event
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Everyone has a different idea of what event management is and what an event is. There's no real need to agree; this range of opinions makes the events industry what it is today – diverse.

Whether you're a wedding planner, fundraiser, secretary, brand manager or even an actual event manager, you can discover a huge amount in this book and from people doing the same things you are. Look around you, see what other people do and try to do it better.

To be successful in the event industry, you need far more than just organisation skills; passion and teamwork are vital, too. This chapter talks you through the skills you need and explores one of the first steps in managing events.

Introducing Events

According to my dictionary, an event is something that takes place – a significant occurrence or happening. I like to think of an event as any particular time when a group of people are brought together.

Many people in the industry don't consider events to be marketing; they focus on production and creating theatre. I believe, however, that trying to communicate a message to a group of people is a form of marketing. If you think of an event as a marketing tool, what people experience and feel becomes a driving force in your decision making.

The benefits of an event are:

- ✓ It can be much more personal than other forms of communication.
- ✓ A real occasion stands out in a cluttered world of digital and above the line marketing (for example, advertising).
- ✓ People enjoy human interaction and face-to-face conversations.
- ✓ They generate a high level of word-of-mouth response, which is one of the best forms of endorsement?

Many people consider themselves to be event managers, and many types of event exist. (I cover types of events in more detail in Chapter 3.) As events become more popular, the disparity between what one event manager does and what another does can be huge.

This book focuses on corporate events, while leaving weddings and community events to the more experienced. However, the skills and knowledge are transferrable, and once you've mastered how to manage an event, you'll have the confidence and understanding to manage most events that people can throw at you.

Event Management As an Industry

The UK event industry is now worth more than £36.1 billion, according to the 2010 *Britain For Events* report – online at www.aceinternational.org/phocadownload/reports/Britain%20for%20Events%20Report%20final.pdf, if you want to take a look. The main event industry sectors are:

- ✓ Conferences and meetings (£18.8 billion)
- ✓ Exhibitions and trade shows (£9.3 billion)
- ✓ Sporting events (£2.3 billion)
- ✓ Music events (£1.4 billion)
- ✓ Incentive travel (£1.2 billion)
- ✓ Festivals and cultural events (£1.1 billion)
- ✓ Outdoor events (£1 billion)
- ✓ Corporate hospitality (£1 billion).

That's a lot of money.

Event industry body Eventia published the 2012 *UK Events Market Trends Survey (UKEMTS)* in June 2012. This major research project, undertaken annually since 1993, provides volume and key trends data for the UK conference and business events market from a supply-side or venue perspective.

An estimated 103 million delegates attended events in 2011. (An average of 80 people attended each of an estimated 1.3 million events in 2011, slightly more than the average 76 delegates in 2010.)

Eventia reports that a resurgence in corporate sector events accounted for 57 per cent of all events staged (51 per cent in 2010, and just 47 per cent in 2009). The number of association events was stable (21 per cent, the same as in 2010), and public sector events showed a substantial fall, down from 37 per cent in 2009 and 28 per cent in 2010 to 23 per cent in 2011. This industry is growing and growing.

Fifteen years ago, some of the biggest names in the academic marketing industry published *Principles of Marketing* (by Kotler, Armstrong, Wong and Saunders; Financial Times/Prentice Hall). That book had over 1,000 pages, and one page mentioned events. Now, an Internet search for 'event management' generates over 30 million results. This shows how much the marketing industry has changed.

The event management industry has grown hugely in the last five years, in part because of the recession, but also because face-to-face marketing and communications are seen as much more impactful and successful methods than previously. The changes are that:

- ✔ Production companies that provide kit such as lighting and sound have started to take the extra step of helping to organise other elements of the event too.
- ✔ PR agencies that were hosting basic press launches and press-worthy stunts have started to try their hand at larger events.
- ✔ In-house teams have been growing as businesses try to save on costs by not paying other companies to run their events for them.

The London 2012 Olympics was a huge boost for the events industry in the UK and Europe. Many companies jumped on the bandwagon and gave events a go to capture the spirit of the nation. Events ranged from speaking to consumers in the street to hosting hospitality-focused events around the Olympics rather than sending out purely written communication. I now see businesses that tried their hand at using events in their marketing plans in the summer of 2012 including events in their budgets for 2013 and beyond.

The events industry is growing. As the amount of communication received daily from companies, increasingly through digital channels, becomes a little overwhelming, there's comfort in speaking to real people at events.

The types of events in the industry have changed dramatically, with more focus on large, interactive experiences rather than smaller meetings. The biggest change, however, is that digital is now an essential part of an event rather than just an add-on, as in times gone by.

Essential Skills for Would-be Event Managers

The event industry is intense and is hard work. Even for those who have been in the industry for many years, something else that you have never seen before always comes along in the next event.

You need common sense in the events industry, although it isn't a skill as such. I have yet to find a way to develop common sense; from what I can see, you either have it or you don't – but it's very useful.

To be the best event manager possible, you need to have or to develop these qualities:

- ✔ **Passion:** Being an event manager is incredibly rewarding, but can be tiring as you get closer to show day and your to-do list is never ending. With the constant demands on your time, you often think 'Why am I doing this?' Only those that are passionate about events and about event management as a job feel the true satisfaction and reward that producing a successful event offers. If you are keen to get into the events industry as your career, see Chapter 19 for some ideas.
- ✔ **People skills:** Event management is a people business, more so than any other form of communication or channel of marketing. Every part of the process of planning an event involves speaking to and thinking about people, see Chapter 4 to see who some of those key people involved in planning an event. Enjoying spending time with people and understanding what makes people tick helps you think like your target market.
- ✔ **Communication skills:** Events are a communication tool. Not only is one of your main objectives likely to be to communicate to your attendees (See Chapter 8 to find out how to make sure people know about your event), but you need to communicate with many people before the event. Whilst contacting people by email is often easier, I'm a big

believer in picking up the phone (events is a people not computer business, after all). Knowing how to get the information you need out of people and then being able to cascade that information down to other people such as your client or suppliers makes your life much easier. See Chapter 11 for information on how to communicate with your team on-site at your event.

- ✔ **Problem solving skills:** The event industry has a saying that there are no problems, only solutions. One of the most rewarding parts of event management is coming up with solutions to what often feel like impossible requests. Sitting with your team and brainstorming ideas on how you want the event to run or how you can get around the fact that your deliveries are all delayed by a road traffic accident on the main motorway into your event site takes skill. Being the kind of person who gets a thrill out of finding solutions helps make you a good event manager. It also helps when trying to think of all the potential problems before they occur, a role we called contingency planning. This is covered in chapter 13.
- ✔ **Attention to detail:** When I started my career in event management, I had a sticky note on my computer screen saying ATD. It stood for Attention To Detail. This note reminded me constantly to triple-check everything and to think about all the small things. Maybe you have no choice over the big things such as what venue to use, and you have to make the best of a bad option. Small things and attention to detail can transform a mediocre venue into the perfect venue for your event. It's easy to skim over small things when you're busy in the run-up to an event, but take your time to pay attention to the detail, and everyone notices the difference. Designing an experience that will be truly memorable is an art and I cover this in Chapter 7.
- ✔ **Time management:** Any potential event manager who turns up to an interview late is probably not in the right industry. Time management is a crucial element of events, not simply on your show day when you have to make sure it all runs to time. When planning your event, you need to work around the fixed deadline of the show day; you can't change the day to fit your planning. Not being ready on show day is not an option. See Chapter 9 for some ideas on how to manage your time.
- ✔ **Resourcefulness:** For those who remember *Challenge Anneka*, imagine that being an event manager is like being on one of these shows all the time. You need to be able to think on your feet and source yellow and green stripy table cloths with only two days to go. Resourcefulness is closely linked to problem solving but, in events, even when you've worked out the solution, you still need to put it into action. Resourcefulness, if you can hone this skill, is a lifesaver for you, your clients and your suppliers.

- ✔ **Organisation:** Often in interviews, I ask candidates why they want to get involved in events, and I regularly hear the answer 'Because I'm organised.' Don't join the industry just because you're organised, but organisational ability is definitely a good skill to have (although not the most important). Knowing what tasks you need to complete and how is a very good stepping stone to a successful event. Documents such as status reports and timing plans help with this immensely; see Chapter 4 for more information.
- ✔ **Negotiation skills:** Budgets can always be bigger. Things always cost more than you'd like, so being able to get the most for your client's money is an important skill. Many people are natural negotiators. Negotiation is an art, but one that you can develop. See Chapter 5 for the steps to creating a good negotiation plan.
- ✔ **Responsibility:** Taking a client's budget and spending it is a big responsibility in any industry. Events tend to have so many costs involved that it can be easy to lose track of what you've spent. A responsible approach to budget management helps you keep stress levels to a minimum, Chapter 5 will show you what costs you may need to consider but also how to potentially make money.

As an event manager, you're also responsible for lots of people. You may not have a big team to manage, but you're responsible for the guests at your event. See Chapter 12 for more information on health and safety.

I also believe that you have a responsibility to the environment around you when planning events. Thinking about what impact your event will have on local tourism, on the local residents and also on local facilities makes you a more considerate event manager.

- ✔ **Respectfulness:** One of the great things about events is that there's rarely a right or wrong way of doing things. If you have lots of people in a team, you often have many different ideas. Respecting other people's ideas and the support you receive from team members helps create good long-term relationships, see Chapter 4 for ideas on who to include in this key team of people during the planning stage.

You also need to respect your client. You may not agree with what clients want for their events, but remember that they are paying. Making sure that clients are happy is just as important as the event being planned to perfection. That isn't to say that you can't make suggestions for improvements, but remember who's boss.

- ✔ **Delegation:** There are no supermen or women in the event industry, as far as I know, so it's important to acknowledge that you can't always do everything. Think about who in your team can help you, and don't be afraid to ask for that help. See Chapters 4 and 11 for more information on team management, before and during the event.

- ✔ **Flexibility:** Event managers are often control freaks; to want to organise everything and be in control of all the different influences on the success of the event is in their nature. Being a control freak is no bad thing, but you need to be flexible and not let your controlling nature stop you from seeing and taking good opportunities. For example, you may have planned for all your table cloths to be white, but a supplier may offer the right number of black table cloths for free. Is the money saving worth the change in colour? Quite often it is, with just a slight tweaking of perception.
- ✔ **Efficiency:** This is a skill that I think you must be born with. It is the art of understanding in what order it is best to do things and doing them as quickly as possible. You could be organised and know what needs to be done, but still not get all the jobs done as quickly as someone who is efficient. Some people are efficient, and others aren't. Efficiency helps in event management, because you're often very busy and have only limited time in the day to complete all your tasks. It's not a case of multi-tasking but of doing what's required in the quickest way in the long term, not just the short term.

For example, you may have a huge list of things to do in the office, but you need to visit your supplier, who is two hours away. There are a couple of things you can do here. The first is to travel by train whenever possible, to give you the maximum time in which to work on your laptop and make phone calls. Second, see what other meetings you can fit into your day. If you're out for part of the day, you may as well be out for all of it and save another half day in the future.
- ✔ **Endurance:** The event industry can be tough, because the more passionate you are, the more you strive for perfection in all areas of your event. This often means very late nights and long days, with little sleep. I always make sure that I have bags of sweets on hand for the team if it's going to be a late night – I know that the combination of determination and sugar will get us to a successful event. See Chapter 18 for a list of 10 key things to have in your event kit.

Getting Started: Figuring Out Your Event's Objectives

Having reasons for doing something is always a good first step. The event industry refers to these reasons as *objectives*.

You're most likely going to be organising an event for someone else, whether that's your boss or someone from another company. The person who asks you to put on the event is *the client*.

Organising an event can be quite daunting, but the task is a lot easier if you have a clear brief to identify what you're doing and why. Make sure your brief is SMART: The acronym SMART is often used in the business world to help people write clear objectives and goals. It stands for:

- ✔ **Specific:** Often your client will have a very clear idea of what they want you to achieve, try to coax this out of your client through the briefing process because you may find however perfect your solution or answer is, if it doesn't match up to what they want, your client won't be happy. The clearer the initial brief, the better response you will be able to provide.
- ✔ **Measurable:** Ensure that your objectives in what you are trying to achieve are clear. Ask your client to tell you exactly what they want to achieve and discuss how you can measure this: For example, it is simply a certain number of people attending that is going to be classed as a success?
- ✔ **Attainable:** You have two areas to consider here: One, that the client's brief is achievable within the budget parameters they have set (see Chapter 5 for advice on budget management), and two, that it is the type of event that your audience will want to attend, and in which you are able to spark their interest through a basic marketing campaign. See Chapter 8 for information on how to get people to attend your event.
- ✔ **Relevant:** See Chapter 2 for information on knowing your target audience. You and your client may think a particular style event would be great fun but are you a good representation of your target audience? Will what you think is appealing, be appealing and relevant to those that you want to attend?
- ✔ **Timely:** (When working with your client on the initial brief, make sure it will work in terms of time in a couple of different areas. First, is it physically possible to do in the lead time they have provided you? Second, is the time that your client proposes for the event appropriate for the customer or delegate that you're trying to attract? See Chapter 9 for advice on how to decide when your event should be.

By ensuring that your client's objectives are written against these criteria, you have a clear checklist against which to make all your future decisions. If your Client provides you with a brief that doesn't match this, go back and ask as many questions as you can to extract the information you require. 'We ask a lot of questions' is one of the things I tell our clients up front, but I explain to them that I'm doing it so that I can provide the best possible solution, and not to annoy them!

The quality of briefs varies dramatically. Often, one of the first steps to guide your client through is writing the brief. It sounds back to front – and it kind of is – but a clear brief helps you going forward.

When you've received the brief from your client, first decide whether an event can actually meet all the client's objectives and requirements. It's not a question of trying to do yourself out of a job; it's important to decide whether you can do right by your client and the client's brief.

Figure 1-1 and 1-2 show two very different briefs, one that's incredibly thorough and explains clearly what the client is trying to achieve, and one that's much more open and doesn't provide you with all the information you would need. In the case of Figure 1-1, I would push the client to provide me with much more information to make it a SMART brief. Everyone prefers a particular type of brief: some people prefer more direction, whilst others like the space to decide on their own route.

Dear Laura,

Thanks so much for your time just now. As promised, I'm just sending over a bit more information about the idea we are looking at.

We want to set up a two-day 'pop-up' branded workspace, outdoors at Canary Wharf, at some point during this summer. Ideally we would provide areas to work, sunshades and lunch to office workers from the local area. We would also need an area to run iPad-driven demos.

Just wondered if you were able to give a rough figure of how much an event like this would cost to execute,

Many thanks,

Figure 1-1:
A simple
event brief.

Experiential Brief	
Key Business objective:	To increase penetration of Product A by 500,000 people by focusing on recruitment of our new target market (details to be provided separately).
Brief Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop an experiential sampling campaign that creates cut through to continue to drive reappraisal by the new target market of Product A and specifically drives trial of Product A. The communication should reinforce the over-arching brand message and also highlight Product A as a sub-brand that is desirable and relevant for our target market's needs. The campaign should feel consistent with the above the line communication. The activity must communicate the key campaign message of XXX. The campaign should recognise that although primarily an adult consumed product, it does also appeal to the whole family The campaign should build brand engagement-it must link the deliciousness of our products to our sustainability credentials and the values at the heart of the brand. Drive data capture through sign up to our e-newsletter/promotion of the new website. <p>Prompted awareness of our brand is high, but saliency and conversion to purchase are low. To drive penetration, this campaign must reposition the brand in our target market's mind as a more desirable and relevant brand for them. In order to do this most effectively, the communications idea should be campaignable and provide a consistent and rich creative territory that is rooted in the brand consumer insight & brand position.</p>

Total budget	<p>£200,000 including product and coupon costs.</p> <p>Production cost of Product A variant B:</p> <p>Production costs of Product A variant C:</p> <p>We would like to include a 20p M0NP coupon with each sample. Redemption costs @ 20p + handling charges will need to be accounted for in the budget.</p>
Timings	Campaign to run from late March through April 2014.
Actions	<p>Client to send brief: w/c Jan 6th 2014</p> <p>Event Manager to present proposal w/c Jan 20th 2014</p> <p>Client to confirm next steps w/c Jan 27th 2014</p>

Figure 1-2:
A more complex event brief.