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The incentive held
in a **cannabis field**

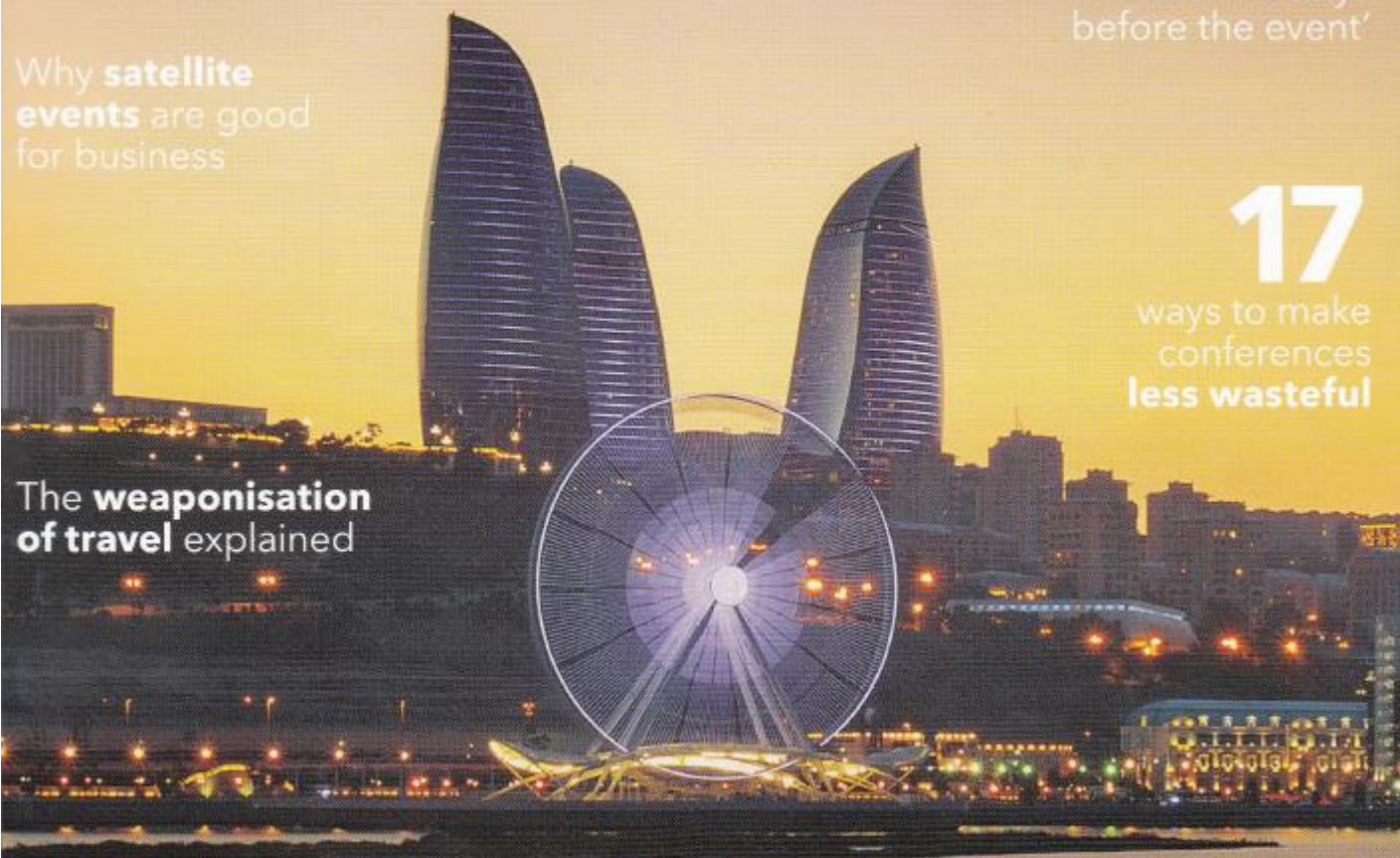
'Our ship **caught
fire** five days
before the event'

Why **satellite
events** are good
for business

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ways to make
conferences
less wasteful

The **weaponisation
of travel** explained



Undiscovered **Azerbaijan**

Exploring the emerging destination's
modern and medieval experiences



Tech for tech's sake?

There's a great temptation to splash out on lavish event technology just because you can, but will it add to or detract from the delegate experience?

With events getting bigger and better, event technology is getting bigger and better too. But do we need to continue blowing budgets on technology or focus on the human interaction aspect of events?

C&IT, in partnership with event production company Hawthorn, gathered planners from around the country to discuss the importance of big technology at events.

'THE CORE ELEMENT IS THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE'

Technology has changed the face of events. Sitting in a conference hall for hours on end is no longer the norm, but is it replacing the need for face-to-face contact? Our event planners said that nothing could replace that personal connection.

Charlie Hepburn, founder of live experience agency BE Vivid, said: "An event is a physical energy point where people connect and whatever comes from that is good. As planners we are responsible for creating that moment."



Talking heads (above, L-R) Andrew McCorkell, Lee Harris; (inset) Jolene Price (BDM Hawthorn)

Dave Greaves, MD of creative event production agency Make Happen, agreed, saying: "There is a danger that we might get so distracted by technical elements we lose the fundamental core element, which is the human experience."

How will venues keep up with this need for experiences rather than the more traditional style of conferences?

Adrian Evans, assistant director at venue ACC Liverpool, asked whether the venue stock in the UK will be fit for purpose in 20 years. "Are you all talking about needing huge outdoor spaces, warehouses, a move away from the conference venues?" he asked.

"It's not the job of the venue, it is our job. Good planners will use the space on offer and make something fantastic," responded Angie Mason, chairman of Absolute Corporate Events.

"Venues provide the four walls and we do something fantastic within that," Hepburn agreed.

Peter Harding, group creative director at Hawthorn, is used to maximising the potential of venues. "Many... have increasingly recognised the need to not limit agencies and technical production companies," he said. "Our clients often want to be able to visit a venue and not have an immovable space set up in a prescriptive format. Recently we hid an entire orchestra under the floor!"

Mike Hamilton, client services director at marketing and events agency XSEM, noted:

"We don't use venues we know will say no or say that they can't do that – it's all about flexibility."

But sometimes you need to try new venues or locations, depending on a clients' requests. Lee Harris, chairman of creative events agency Fresh, explained that VR has helped with this. "With global events, in particular, it is fantastic. Everyone can look at the venue at the same time and discuss the plans. However, we had to create it. If venues had VR... it would not only help us but also help them, especially with overseas business."

Harding said it was also a great sales tool. "We have provided it for our clients for spaces such as the Natural History Museum. It's always so busy



Meeting of minds (centre, L-R) Peter Harding and Angie Mason



that it can be difficult to picture what the space will look like at the event. However, we find that while it's a great tool, nobody can really monetise it."

With buzz terms such as VR and personalisation flying around, how do you ensure you're improving people's experiences and not just following trends that don't add anything to your event?

"If the technology used is not going to blow your mind and make you remember it six months later, then is it worth the spend? Surely, a personal experience is more memorable," said Greaves.

Emma Powis, senior project manager at sport and music agency Ear to the Ground, explained that once it had to tell a client it could not produce what they wanted as it was going too far: "Sometimes clients want to use extravagant technology for no real reason – it's using tech for tech's sake."

IS IT ALL ABOUT LEGACY?

Are events all about using the most exciting new technology, the number of shares on social media and the ROI? Or is that focus now on legacy?

"People want to see how long their event lives on – the days of ROI have gone, it's all about legacy," said Evans, speaking from the point of view of Liverpool, which is keen to incorporate events into the city.

"Maybe it's more association-based, but we see more people looking to have an impact on where they do things. Why don't corporate events have an impact on the general public in the area where the event is being held? Vienna does that really well," he added.

Hepburn said: "Data is only useful when you have something to compare it to – you need it to relate back to impact."

Hamilton added: "It is like with sustainability, people are not stupid, they know when it's just a tick in the CSR box. It has to be a real intention from the start – [if not] people can see through it straight away."

NORTH VERSUS SOUTH

With the evening being hosted in Manchester, we discussed the age old north/south divide – and more specifically, whether London has a disproportionate slice of the events pie. However, there was no consensus, with some present saying that being based in the north and running northern events has never had a negative effect on business, and others saying the opposite.

Helen Brady, event manager at Events Northern said: "From personal experience, northern venues are much more open to southern agencies or events coming up north. But a northern event going south doesn't get the same enthusiasm.

Sometimes, I feel that we pitch against London agencies and it's a bit tokenistic, they want us to chip in but you know from the off that you're not really in with a shout."

However, Greaves disagreed. "It's never been an issue for us. It's all about perspective, but... I'm surprised it's still being talked about."

Harris agreed: "London is a magnet for everything, not just events. But Manchester is punching well above its weight for what it is as a city compared to London. There's a collaborative feel to it that you just don't get in London."

"What second and third cities are offering is walkable and more manageable than London, as well as the culture and collaboration of the city. With the lines between personal and professional lives blurring, these types of things are so important," Mason added.

Evans said: "We don't sell four walls, we sell an experience of the city – it's not just about the six hours spent in a building, it's everything around that. It's how you feel when you leave the place."



Deep in discussion (above, L-R) Lee Harris and Adrian Evans; (inset, L-R) Dave Greaves and Helen Brady