

## Is There a Recipe for Event Sustainability I Can Follow?

Sustainability for your event is like cooking up a curry, but not strictly following a recipe. You know the essential ingredients but you have to mix and match those spices to get it just right. Cooking times vary. You may need to spice it up a bit, or bring it back if you've gone in a little heavy-handed.

Unfortunately there is no one-size-fits-all recipe book or shopping checklist for events sustainability. You need to weigh up your combination of ingredients for each decision to get the best outcome. A follow by numbers recipe won't get it right for everyone every time.

Keeping with analogies, think of the event industry as a supermarket, and all the products on the shelves are the different events. You have categories of things like frozen goods, fruit & veg, bakery, cleaning, etc. And in each of those you have individual products. Even within the same category every single product on the shelf has a different story. It has different raw materials, it has a different manufacturing process, different energy intensity, water use, distance to transport, labelling, marketing etc. The sustainability recipe for a bottle of shampoo will be different than for a can of beans.

There are common things to consider like sourcing of materials and supplies, transport, waste, water, energy, societal aspects, toxicity, etc. But each has to balance the various aspects to come up with the final recipe of considerations that make the product the most sustainable it can be.

The same goes for the event industry. There needs to be some menu planning for each and every event. You need to pick and choose your ingredients depending on what is applicable to your circumstances, and importantly, to your beliefs and principles and those of your stakeholders.

Take purchasing of fresh produce for example. You need to make a decision between sourcing locally, sourcing organically, sourcing seasonally, and for some products sourcing fair trade. You need to think of the support of local communities economically, the transport miles of produce that is out of season locally, or if in fact the produce is even grown near where you are holding the event. You need to weigh up health aspects, the amount of chemicals used, and the working conditions of the labour on the farm.

If I was looking at coffee sourcing for example, and the event was in a country or region that grows coffee, then local sourcing (rather than organic or fair trade) would be upmost for me. Of course if local and organic, or local, organic and fair trade is available, the decision is made for me. If all coffee needs to be imported, I would choose fair trade. If it's grown on the other side of the country, then I would have a more difficult choice between supporting fair trade and supporting the country's growers. Other things might come into play, like whether the company the fair trade coffee comes from is 100% committed to sustainable sourcing, or if this range is a 'token' gesture when you look at its entire

product range. I would choose to support a boutique company that is 100% committed to sustainable development opposed to a company that has just put a fair trade product in amongst its others product lines. That's like buying free-range eggs from a company that mainly has caged hen eggs. A few chooks running around free doesn't make that company ethical.

An example within sustainable energy sourcing has occurred for me recently which I will share with you. The optimal for me is to use 100% reclaimed vegetable oil biodiesel in mobile power generators. However I had a situation where the cost of biodiesel was considerably more than mineral diesel, the genset supplier had proven that biodiesel uses one and a half times more fuel for the same power output, and (this was the big turn off for me) the biodiesel was cropped from soy imported from half way around the world. This event is in Australia and in that country there is GreenPower (RECs) available to be purchased against kWh used in mobile generators. This means that the equivalent amount of renewable energy is placed on the mains grid as the kWh used by the event's diesel generators.

It was a difficult decision to make because in my heart I don't want mineral diesel used in any generators. But I REALLY don't want to use cropped biodiesel imported from half way around the world. And the client didn't want to pay almost 10 times the amount for this biodiesel than it would cost to purchase GreenPower. So in this situation we have opted with mineral diesel and GreenPower RECs.

If the biodiesel used by the generator company was not cropped but made from locally sourced reclaimed vegetable oil, along with the event's waste oil going back to that company for processing into biodiesel, then the money would have become less of an issue and the support of a fantastic initiative in closing the loop would have.

Another aspect to this decision was that the generator supplier is not committed to using biodiesel all of the time in all of their kit. I like it when a company has converted fully. The gensets don't have to change filters, the techs know what they're working with, and the company has demonstrated its commitment to sustainability.

There is a combination of considerations and the answer will come to light after you include your event situation and your organisation or personal viewpoint on various issues. It may be that your event is in a location where biodiesel is cropped and you know it is not detrimental to food crop production, to pulling down forests and it supports the community economi-

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cally. In that case you may not look at importing reclaimed vegetable oil biodiesel from across the country if cropped biodiesel is on your doorstep. It is up to your situation and the principles of sustainable development you embrace. You may be completely opposed to grown fuel while there are people with not enough to eat. This would be another part of the combination of factors used to form your decision.

To get to the most sustainable sourcing or logistical decisions, event producers must understand the issues, know what questions to ask of their supply chain and have the skills and tools they need to make the best decision.

It is a massive new territory for many and it is definitely bamboozling. Don't be put off by the breadth and depths of issues. This is something we all have to address, and together we can make a massive change. At the end of this journey, our supply chain will be only offering us sustainable products and services and our events will be produced sustainably without us having to even think about it. Well, that is at least what I hope!

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