

# PEOPLE

## William O'Toole, CFEE

I work with companies and governments to develop their events portfolio. This includes raising the competency of the teams through training, assessing event proposals, creating an events support strategy, coming up with ideas for events and testing the feasibility. It often starts with getting the industry together in a forum or conference with initial training. I have done this in Uganda, Kenya, Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Jordan and worked for a variety of organisations including the United Nations, European Commission and the Supreme Commission for Tourism in Saudi Arabia. My recent work ranged from advising Deloitte on process mapping the events for a Multilateral Development Bank to helping the local Goanna Pulling Festival increase their audience numbers and promotion.



### IN CONVERSATION

#### How did you get into events?

After completing a Mathematics degree, I decided to promote music concerts and dances. My only other choice was to become an accountant or statistician! The concert promotion led me to start an entertainment agency. From there it was a small step to festivals and events. I spent quite a bit of time coming up with ideas for events and pitching them to major companies. Such as a festival in Central Borneo to link the mining company with the local Dayaks. The background in maths and project management allowed me to spot the underlying processes at work in all events as well as work with engineers and accountants who make many of the company decisions. As a result I have written three event management books that are used as manuals and textbooks around the world.

#### What has been your biggest professional challenge?

I have had many challenges as I had to convince people, companies and governments that events are worthwhile. Possibly the most complex was an event I created in a swamp, the Macquarie Marshes. At the time the government wanted to drain the 1000 square mile wetlands and I proposed to the National Parks that if we gave it cultural value, the government would leave it alone. My idea was to have a suite of music composed about its beauty. It was a true Garden of Eden with untold birdlife and the wetland reeds cleansed the water of the river.

The music was to be premiered on the night and broadcast around the world from the swamp. Of course, I heard "it can't be done" on a daily basis. The place was a nine hour drive from any major city, no electricity, roads, accommodation or utilities of any kind. And there were snakes, ticks and wild pigs in the area.

I started with \$1000 and did it. I borrowed a huge satellite dish, silent generator and satellite time for the broadcast. The National Parks built a temporary road to a raised area and we all sold tickets on the basis that this will never be repeated and was an adventure. I found every company that had anything to do with the Marshes and got them involved. It was magic! They all loved the place and the sponsorship flowed in. An organic winery provided all the gifts I needed to get the press involved!

In the end the music was composed and the event took place over two days. The audience camped in tents and quite a few drove all day to get there. I even had two film crews and a helicopter to film it all. The night was a full moon which added to the experience and reflected in the water. A CD and Video of the

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### FACTS ON FILE

#### Years in the Business:

a long time

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#### Degree:

BSc (Mathematics)

MEng (Project Management)

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#### Family:

Married

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#### Last book read:

"American Gods" by Neil Gaiman

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#### Last business book read:

"The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire" by Edward Luttwak

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#### Last book published:

"Events Feasibility and Development"

(2011, Routledge, UK - [www.eventsfd.com](http://www.eventsfd.com))

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night and the wetlands, called the Wetland Suite, was released and sold around the world. The Macquarie Marshes are still there and are now protected wetlands.

#### **What do you do to relax?**

Ocean swim, walk, play the tin whistle or read. As I travel the world I find the only way to see a place and meet the people is to stroll the streets. Often I'll catch a cab a few miles and then find my way back to the hotel. I read all sorts of books, even mathematics!

#### **Other Background Experience**

I think the best experience for events has been organising and leading what we call in Australia "bushwalks." These are camping trips on foot carrying all your food for many days through the wilderness. You quickly learn how to develop the project, think of the risks, work in a team and get people moving. Also running music bands gives you endless patience and tolerance for people who give their absolute best on stage, but lack other skills!

#### **What's the best advice you've ever received?**

Everything my dad told me! Also Arnold Schwarzenegger in this lengthy tome on exercise sets and weightlifting said at the end - "Just do something!" When I look at a major project that appears too big, I just do something and it eventually turns into completing the project.

#### **What is your personal philosophy?**

If I go to a country or city I read about its history, music, culture, anything. Then it is so easy to talk to the locals. I am a great talker to cab drivers (mmm...is that a philosophy?). I find that if you like people and know about their culture, no matter what country, they will like you. Actually my random philosophy is on my blog <http://thickfingers.wordpress.com/>