

SAFELY DOES IT

By Mark Breen

HOW CAN WE MAKE EVENTS SAFER?

The reality the world over is that a lot of events are run by voluntary committees who do not have the budget to hire professional event safety people. A further reality of the industry is that some people don't understand the need to have professional event safety people involved, irrespective of budget. This can see large events with big money spent on them also not having proper event safety expertise informing their planning.

These are realities and I prefer to operate in the real world rather than bemoan people not paying me and others who do what I do to work on their events for them.

With these realities and more in mind, I have been producing content for years with a view to helping event organisers make their events safer. I will now be extending those efforts to include this column and the infographics that will accompany the column in each issue in an effort to help some of us run safer events.

In future issues I'll be focusing on specific areas or types of events, but for this first issue we're going to look at events in general and how we can make them safer.

Duty of Care

Regulations, guidelines and even best practice are different all around the world. What is typical to see at an event here in Ireland may not be typical at an event in New York or in London.

What is the same the world over, however, is that, as festival and event organisers, we have a duty of care to those at our events.

It is this duty of care and the acknowledgement that it underpins our approach to planning events that form the foundation for this column and the topics we will discover in the upcoming issues.

Making Happy Happen

In ensuring that events are safe for everyone attending, the last thing we're looking to do is to take the joy out of the event. Too often the 'safety people' are seen as doing just that. While that may have had some truth to it in the past, in my experience event safety people love events and want them to happen. We'd be out of work if they didn't, in fairness.

Our goal when planning events is to make our audience happy. Keeping them happy naturally includes keeping them safe at the event. We have a Happiness Wheel that illustrates our approach to planning and running events. The Wheel has 3 distinct segments entitled:

- Happy Audience
- Happy Client
- Happy Cuckoo

A happy audience and successful event are inextricably linked to the audience being safe while at the event.

Different But the Same

Last year we worked on a show here in Ireland as part of a European 'City of Culture' programme of events. The initial email approach to us described the show as 'an audience-interaction aerial show'.



It's fair to say that an event described in those terms involved more time spent on event safety than a children's dance competition held in a hotel conference centre, for example.

That said, there are certain considerations, from an event safety perspective, that apply to both and, indeed, to all events.

We have outlined 13 of those considerations in the infographic accompanying

entitled '13 Event Safety Considerations for Events of All Sizes'.

Some Considerations

All events will have an entrance and exit. All events will have an audience, staff and a venue. It is these common elements that we're looking at in this column and the accompanying infographic.

With respect to the venue, for instance, we need to know if it's big enough for our expected audience. We need to know if it's a suitable venue for the type of event we're planning. When we consider the audience for our event we need to look at things like how they are likely to behave, how and when they are likely to arrive, etc.

Common in the planning of all events is also likely to be medical cover. Do you have medical cover booked? Do you NEED to book medical cover? How do you decide whether you need to or not?

These are all safety considerations and the impact of not considering them can range from an audience member having a less than satisfactory experience at your event through to your venue being dangerously overcrowded when an incident occurs.

The Bottom Line

By considering the points included in the infographic you can help ensure your event is as safe as it can be. It won't necessarily cost you money to do so, but it could make a big difference to your attendees and their experience at your event.

The result of you considering these points will vary greatly depending on the event and your own experience. There is definite value in considering them.

Think of it like this – if you're going to an event, wouldn't you like to think that those who are running it have considered these 13 points?

Mark is Co-Founder & Senior Partner of Cuckoo Events based in Dublin, Ireland. He is an award-winning event Safety Officer and one of the most experienced and qualified event safety practitioners in Ireland. He has worked at the London 2012 Olympics as well as on some of Ireland's largest outdoor events. He writes and speaks regularly on all things event-related, particularly event safety. He is a Graduate Member of the Marketing Institute of Ireland and holds a Postgraduate Diploma in PR & Events. He has specialist qualifications in Spectator Safety Management as well as Crowd Science. He is also soon to begin an MSc in Crowd Safety & Risk Analysis. Mark and the Team at Cuckoo are passionate about helping people run safer events and devote a lot of time to doing so. Mark is very active on Twitter @mark_breen and @Cuckoo-Events. The multiple award-winning Cuckoo Events website can be found at cuckoo.ie