



OPENING OUR EYES TO THE WORLD AROUND US

The world is an evil place. There are people who want to cause others harm and more and more of them seem to be choosing to do so at events and locations where crowds gather.

I recently attended a week-long course in the UK entitled Event Counter-Terrorism Risk Management, which sought to equip attendees – event managers and people with responsibility for keeping crowds safe – with the skills to effectively risk assess attack / terrorism threats for their events.

It was an enjoyable course and one that I think holds great value for those of us running events the world over.

This column isn't an advertisement for the course itself, per se, but is more of an exercise in maybe opening some eyes to the world around us and the threats we need to be considering when planning our events.

The Context

Recent years have seen an increase in attacks on high-profile events in high-profile locations. It is this proliferation of attacks that has shone a light on our planning and management systems, asking whether we effectively mitigate against them in our work.

Consider the following:

- In June of 2015, a crowd in France celebrating Bastille Day was attacked by a man driving a rented cargo truck. He killed 86 people and wounded hundreds.
- In December 2016, 12 people were killed with almost 50 others injured when a truck ploughed into a crowd at a Christmas market in Berlin, Germany.
- In March and June of 2017, the United Kingdom saw vehicle and knife attacks perpetrated in London, seeing 13 people killed, including a police officer.
- In May of 2017, a suicide bomber killed 23 people and wounded 139 at an Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester Arena in the United Kingdom.
- In August of 2017, a man killed 14 people and injured over 100 when he drove a van along Las Ramblas, a heavily-touristed area in Barcelona, Spain.
- In October of 2017, a man opened fire on a crowd at Route 91 Harvest Music Festival in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, killing 58 people and injuring over 800.

There are more examples in the last few years too.

Can any of us as event managers / organisers really say that an attack on our event(s) wasn't foreseeable? In light of how many events ARE being attacked, are we remiss in our duties if we don't consider that ours may be the next one targeted?

Attack Methodologies

As is clear from the sample of incidents above, people can attack crowds in a variety of ways. Some require immediate proximity and an up-close-and-personal type of attack, while others can be perpetrated from further away.

Vehicles can be used as effective weapons. Suicide bombs can be carried into crowds. Bullets can be rained down on crowds from a relative safe distance. Water systems can be purposely polluted. Weapons can be used for close-quarter attacks. Chemicals can be used to devastating effect. IEDs can be planted on your event site in advance. Our ticketing and payment systems can be compromised through cyber / hacking attacks.

We (our events and our attendees) are vulnerable in a wide variety of ways.

A Different Mind-Set

There's no denying that those who perpetrate these types of attacks operate from a different mind-set to most 'normal' people. What the EvCTRM course reinforced for me though was that, to combat those would-be attackers, WE also need a different mind-set.

We need our events red-teamed and tested for vulnerabilities. This is different to our normal Risk Assessment process and should probably be done by someone experienced and qualified and who has NOT been involved in the planning of the event.

This type of exercise is one we now undertake for others running events. We bring in people to do it on ours too, rather than us doing it ourselves. While we have the skillset, having successfully completed the EvCTRM course, we agree with our instructors – this is best done from a neutral position.

The instructors on the EvCTRM course are recently retired Police Officers and are the same people that still train the UK Police CT SecCOs, who are those officers charged with liaising with event organisers to advise on counter-terrorism measures.

Their understanding of the attack methodologies and mitigation techniques is both extensive and current.

Real Risks V Topical Threats

I'd be accused of being inconsistent if I didn't include mention of my worry that our industry is in danger of focusing TOO much on 'topical threats' to the detriment of more 'real risks' that are far more likely to impact on our events.

Attacks should be considered but not at the expense of more 'real risks' arising out of potential fires or the usual interaction between vehicle and pedestrians or severe weather etc.

A measured approach is required.

Conclusion

When we DO consider attacks, then we need to do so effectively. The EvCTRM course, run by Storm 4 Events in the UK, is one way of helping us do so effectively.

I have found the techniques and insights gained on the course to be extremely helpful during the planning and management of our own events.

Whether the course is something you might consider or not, I suggest the likelihood of your event(s) being a target for an attack is definitely something you need to consider.

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He writes and speaks regularly on all things event-related, particularly event & crowd safety. He is a Graduate Member of the Marketing Institute of Ireland and holds a Postgraduate Diploma in PR & Event Management. He is currently among a small class pursuing the world's first MSc in Crowd Safety and Risk Analysis, and already has specialist qualifications in Spectator Safety Management and Crowd Science.

Mark and the Team at Safe Events and Cuckoo Events 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, @SafeEventsIE and @CuckooEvents. The multiple award-winning Cuckoo Events website can be found at cuckoo.ie and the Safe Events website is at safeevents.ie.