

Independent organiser

*Emap, CMP, Reed et al hit the headlines on a regular basis, but what about the independent organisers that aren't so high profile but, nonetheless, turn out important shows for their sector? In our regular series profiling these perfectly formed operators, we talk to **Simon Tilley** of Volume Exhibitions.*

Volume Exhibitions was set up in late 2005 by Simon Tilley and Ian Allchild. The company launched the Promotional Marketing Exhibition in March 2006, which concentrates on the promotions, incentive and motivation industry. The next show is to take place 24-26 March 2009 at the Royal Horticultural Halls.

What is the concept behind your company?

When we first started Volume Exhibitions we were adamant that the Promotional Marketing Exhibition should become the number one show for the promotions, incentive and motivation market.

To achieve this prominent status we knew we had to showcase this vibrant and growing market in a way that would highlight new ideas, products, themes and schemes in an exciting and invigorating manner.

We know and understand that in business today everyone has busy work schedules and we were determined to offer value for money and a show to maximise time spent out of the office. We were and are keen to offer a 'one stop shop' for end users with valuable seminars, workshops and industry networking opportunities.

New budgets are normally released in spring and the show's timing fits in perfectly with buyers who need to get in front of suppliers for the next purchasing period.

Do you have any associate partners?

The Promotional Marketing Exhibition, since its conception, has been supported by the industry's key trade bodies including The British Promotional Merchandise Association and The Institute of Sales Promotion and The VA, the trade body representing the UK's £3.2 billion voucher, gift card and stored value

solutions industry.

What are the advantages of being an independent organiser?

Being an independent organiser allows us to be more flexible, to listen to our exhibitors and to work closely with each one individually. It provides exhibitors with that all important personal touch and the assurance that they will be dealing with the same person on a regular basis from the time they decide to book a stand until the show closes on the last day.

What challenges do you face as an independent organiser?

Having worked in the events and exhibition industry for many years, I don't believe that we necessarily face any more challenges as an independent organiser than a larger sized organisation.

Rather, we all tend to face the same challenges but on varying levels.

Over the last few years in the exhibition industry there has been an ongoing challenge to convince visitors that it would be more worthwhile and beneficial in attending an exhibition and conducting business on a stand rather than finding a supplier online.

Anyone can use the internet to source merchandise for a promotion but what the buyer misses is a major factor – they want to be able to touch, feel and see the quality of the product to ensure that it 'fits their brand'.

In addition, buyers have the opportunity to speak face-to-face with suppliers who have vast experience in the incentive and motivation market and who can offer substantial advice and ideas on how their products can be used successfully in the market.

This face-to-face consultancy is invaluable and can't be achieved with a mere click of the mouse.

The M&A Files

Steve Monnington of Mayfield Media Strategies presents a step by step guide to selling your business.

Part Two: Effective management tools and sensible agreements

Effective management tools should be part of any exhibition company regardless of whether



or not the business is for sale. However, they do demonstrate to a potential purchaser that you have a well-run business and it makes it easier for them to review the likelihood of meeting the forecast revenue for the next show.

Sales graphs should track cumulative contracted sales revenue on a week by week basis and should show the current year and at least two historic years. If you don't have these graphs in place when you decide to sell your business, it is worth going back through the records to recreate them; as the graphs provide an immediate visual overview of the year on year growth.

Exhibitor retention rate analysis should track the same years as the sales graphs and in particular should analyse the trend in the stand size and revenue spend of the top 20 exhibitors. It is always advisable to have the key exhibitors contracted for the following year before you approach potential purchasers.

It is vital that agreements provide security for the next show but have flexibility beyond this. Venue contracts should be firm for the next show but with provisional dates for future years. It is important not to sign a multi-year contract as the purchaser may wish to move the show, for example to co-locate it with one of their own events. Supplier contracts must also be short-term, as the purchaser will want to use his own suppliers if he can gain some economies of scale.

Association support is the one exception to this rule as barriers to entry for competitive events are low and exclusive long-term association support is the most effective way of raising the bar.