

Events That Keep On Giving

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Contrary to the traditional – and vastly outdated – view, exhibitions and events today can offer so much more than they have in the past. Long gone are the days of stark exhibition halls and bored-looking sales representatives. Now, exhibition organisers, suppliers and venues are taking advantage of every opportunity that consumer and trade events present.

Today, goodwill is playing a more prominent role in the exhibition and event industry than ever before. Whether it's fund-raising events on the exhibition floor, sustainable programs aiming to help the environment or team-building initiatives behind the scenes, goodwill is fast becoming a prominent feature in the exhibition world.

"Increasingly, the exhibition industry is doing more than just bringing buyers and customers together. These days, the power, reach and influence of exhibitions is being harnessed to do good outside the show floor, for the environment, safety, sustainable living and the Australian economy," said Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia (EEAA) general manager Margaret Crichton.

Spice Magazine spoke with an exhibition organiser, supplier and venue to investigate goodwill and the role it plays on the floor, off the floor and behind the scenes.

The Expo Organiser: Diversified Exhibitions Australia

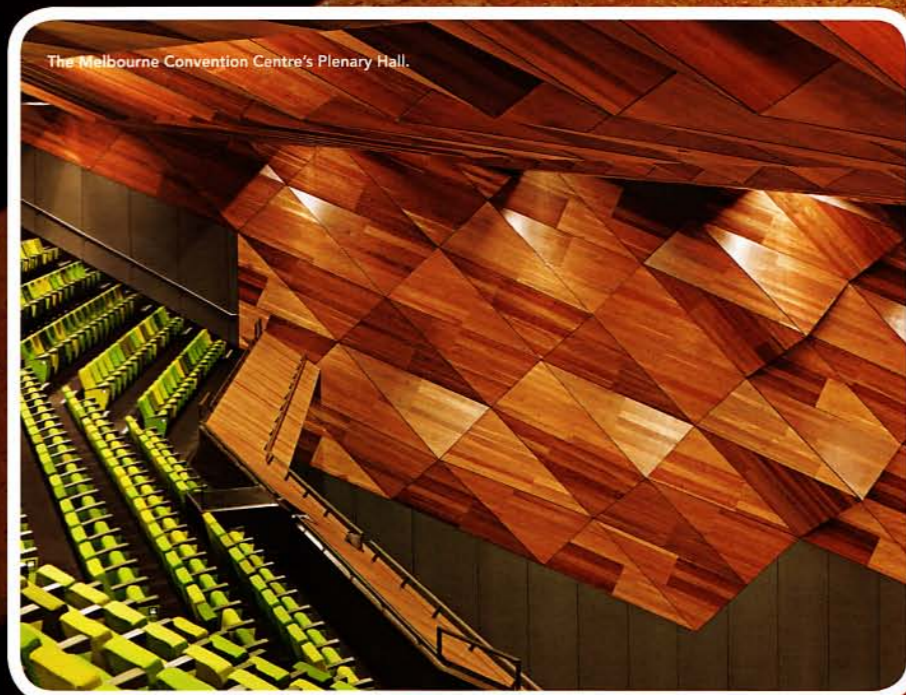
Diversified Exhibitions Australia is a vibrant events company, committed to creating exceptional events and giving people the opportunity to do business face to face. Considered leaders in the events industry, Diversified own and run more than 30 of the biggest industry-specific trade and consumer events in Australia each year.

Recently, the company was entered into BRW's 50 Great Place to Work competition by staff member Rochelle Loney, who insisted on spreading the good word about life at Diversified. After suggesting the idea to the company's senior managers, it was quickly agreed that Diversified could be a hot contender.

After a lengthy and rigorous application process, Diversified Exhibitions Australia was announced the 30th best place to work Australia-wide, coming 9th in Melbourne and 11th amongst multi-nationals around the country. Needless to say, their placing was a great achievement.

"Believing you operate a great culture for your staff is one thing. Having your own staff independently reinforce that belief is tremendously inspiring," said Diversified Exhibitions Australia's managing director, Matthew Pearce.

So what makes Diversified such a great place to work?



The Melbourne Convention Centre's Plenary Hall.

According to Julie Fitzgerald, PA to the managing director, it's the many team-building initiatives implemented into everyday company life. In addition to the usual training opportunities, Diversified holds a number of annual events, all designed to encourage a team mentality company-wide, recognise staff efforts as well as allow time for connecting with and learning from fellow staff members, and ensuring a strong structure for future business.

According to Fitzgerald, an internal Olympic themed team-building event Diversified ran in 2008 was a prime example of the inventive spirit of the company – it was fun, relaxed and thoroughly enjoyed by all who participated. However, the event wasn't just aimed at being fun; it provided staff the opportunity to build rapport with staff members they might not interact with on a regular basis. It was designed to help break down barriers and encourage a sense of team-building across departments.

"There is an underlying camaraderie between workmates at Diversified. The informal environment promotes the development of colleague interaction that is conducive to not only contentment amongst employees but also a successful business," she said.

So what's the upside of fostering goodwill in

a company which organises exhibitions? And does it translate onto the show floor, ensuring each exhibition is more successful than the last? According to Julie, it's the staff behind the scenes and the relationship between them that ensure success.

"Friendships are part of everyday life at Diversified. The upshot of this for the company is that staff are always willing to go that extra mile for their peers, and in doing so, ultimately it's the company and our events that benefit."

The Supplier: The Alison Principle + Slow Food
A former chef, marketing strategist, stylist and event designer, Alison Drover and her company, The Alison Principle, offers companies a new way of thinking in the event space.

More than just a business, The Alison Principle assists businesses in becoming purposeful in their everyday practices. Specifically, The Alison Principle provides food and lifestyle consulting to caterers, restaurants and corporations and can assist with reducing a company's carbon footprint. Alison also designs events and consults on marketing strategy, as well as 'creating purposeful projects' which achieve corporate responsible outcomes.

Drover also plays an influential role in the Slow Food movement, an international group primarily

concerned with the disappearance of local food traditions and how our food choices affect people, communities and environments around the world.

The Slow Food movement was recently involved with the International Event Management Summit, an event hosted by The Australian Centre for Event Management (ACEM). The summit, held in early July this year, addressed strategies for events in meeting the challenge of sustainable development, and in particular, increasing public pressure on events to address environmental impacts.

To fit in with the summit's sustainable ambitions, Drover took on the challenge of using only local, seasonal produce from small scale farms, sourced from within 100 kilometres of the venue, with a slow food overlay. According to her, this enabled organisers to use produce specific to the Surfer's Paradise, the area where the summit took place.

"It was the freshest and best produced produce from farms such as Bauer Organic Vegetable Farms and Barambah Organics who were committed to sustainable practices. The proximity of the farms to the event meant that the food

didn't have to travel far. This ensured that the food was not only fresher, but also incurred relatively low costs," she said.

Alison believes the benefits of sourcing food locally are endless. Not only does it support Australian industry, it also encourages farmers to continue sustainable farming practices ensuring their product is nurtured from soil to plate.

Changing the status quo however, is never easy. Drover believes sourcing local producers takes knowledge, time and effort. Menus have to be redesigned in terms of simplicity and what produce is locally available, the existing structures for catering must be rethought in order to reinstate cooking in-house and consideration must be given to outsourcing, collaborating and incorporating local producers. And if this isn't enough, budgets must be stretched due to the higher cost of locally sourced produce.

"I think the future of the events industry will be determined by how quickly they respond to the need to change. Sustainability and the increasing legislation is an opportunity to address integrity in our lives and be challenged to do things bigger, better and more creatively," she said.



The Venue: Melbourne Convention Centre
Local industry played a huge part in the recent development of the Melbourne Convention Centre, which officially opened its doors for business in late June. One of the centre's main features is the Plenary; an amazing space that can either stand alone as a 5000 seat auditorium or, by activating three 18.6m high operable walls, be reconfigured into three self-contained, acoustically-separate auditoriums.

Leigh Harry, chief executive of the Melbourne Convention Centre believes the Plenary is the centrepiece of the Melbourne Convention Centre, offering the flexibility to hold three totally separate major conventions at the one time, each one with its own section of gala seating.

Inside the Plenary are two tiers of fixed seating, and a lower section of 42 independent reconfigurable seating rows, with approximately 1600 seats arranged in an arc. These rows can be raised in line with the rest of the seating, or lowered with the seats stowing directly underneath the floor. In one swift manoeuvre, the entire auditorium is transformed into an extraordinary floor space, suitable for everything from cabarets to banquets, sporting events to trade exhibitions.

"The Melbourne Convention Centre is the first venue in Australia to install a gala seating system like this. The fact that Victoria has local companies capable of creating projects like this is truly inspiring and a real boost for the Victorian economy," said Harry.

While it was originally proposed that the retractable seating system be imported from Canada, the Convention Centre decided to engage the Industry Capability Network (ICN) to locate local companies capable of handling the complex task of manufacturing and installing a completely unique seating system.

"Working closely with ICN, it was our mission to not only reduce imports, but more importantly, retain Australian wealth and job opportunities that would otherwise go off-shore," said the Centre's communications manager, Suzi O'Dell.

The result saw Victorian company Metaltec Precision Engineering supply the structural and mechanical elements of the gala seating system and integrate the patented lifting jacks into the design, an element that is purely unique to the lift-and-tilt-mechanism of the seating system.

For more information, please visit www.eeaa.com.au or www.gotapassion.com.au



Event guests dined on "Slow Food".