

# The Sustainable Warriors

*Innovative, visionary, practical, optimistic are a few words that come to mind when you talk with the sustainable warriors of our industry. Determined to make a difference and a living at the same time, they offer real and accessible solutions to developing sustainable practice in the events industry.*

**Felicity Zadro**

Their inspiration is compelling – sourced from around the world and from their own children. Whilst they highlight the need for education and leadership, their firm focus is on doing things better – today.

Our sustainable warriors:

1. Alison Drover: Director, The Alison Principal
2. Jane Fullerton-Smith: Director, Sustainable Event Solutions (SEMS)
3. Crystal James: Founder, Sustainable Gifts
4. Joyce Di Mascio: Head of Business Events Australia, Tourism Australia

**W**hat does sustainability mean in business? The efficient and effective use of resources and making changes to our business practices are themes that you'd expect to hear, however for these warriors sustainability is much more than that.

For Alison Drover it is going beyond sustaining. It is about 'getting creative, improving, achieving outcomes. It's about developing win-win solutions for communities and the environment.'

To Jane-Fullerton Smith sustainable business is logical and simple. However she also believes it is about getting people over the fear of change. 'People are scared of sustainability because it means learning new things, they think it takes time and costs money. But it doesn't mean that at all.'

Crystal James sees sustainability as 'finding alternatives in order to develop products and services that help preserve natural resources and maintaining these choices at every step of the way.'

For Joyce Di Mascio it is about success on the triple bottom line. Sustainability is 'the principles and practices which underpin the way a business operates to ensure it can succeed in the long-term on an economic, social and environmental level.'

## Why them?

Diverse experiences and opportunities have inspired these warriors to take the plunge and dedicate their careers and efforts to sustainability.

Alison's international events, cooking and marketing experience allowed her to see

firsthand how the people of Tonga and France treated their food with respect and minimised waste. 'I saw the beauty around the process to developing food, how they used it and how it drives their life. I saw food as a beacon for sustainability in events.'

Jane's background in event and film production, writing and dance lead her to think that she had the story telling skills to communicate the importance of making a difference to or in the industry. 'Sustainability started as an exciting story to tell, but now it is a passion.'

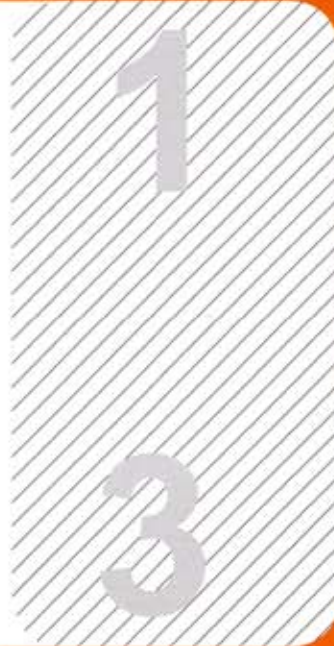
Through her experience as a tourism journalist, Crystal saw an opportunity to help promote Australia as a green destination. She believes the core of Australia's green identity lies in sustainable business practices so she created Sustainable Gifts. 'I wanted to make a cultural link between the custom of gift giving and products from all around Australia that tell a story of sustainability.'

For Joyce there is no other way forward, 'I come from a strong background of working to ensure environment and community are nurtured, protected and enriched by the organisations with which I have been involved, for me there is no other option.'

## What can their products or services provide the events industry?

Their tool box of sustainability is diverse, demonstrating the vastness of the opportunities at hand to support businesses develop sustainable practices.

Alison's sustainable practices with food offer creativity, connection and innovation to



events. 'I work with corporates, venues and event producers to redesign their events and the food. I focus on creating opportunities for people to enjoy the event by developing ways to engage and, connect them through food.'

SEMS, The Sustainable Event Management System is a tool for business and events that engages and educates the entire supplier chain. 'SEMS offers the chance to benchmark, track data and trends and to manage sustainability. Only 10% of the tool looks at waste and carbon, there is another 90% of sustainability issues involved,' says Jane.

Sustainable Gifts tailors products that promote or extend a company's message of corporate social responsibility. For example, they sourced a magnetic torch with no batteries that linked to the larger picture and story of one client's sustainability. 'We were able to educate our client on what is possible and then give them the chance to communicate a message of sustainability to their delegates,' says Crystal.

Business Events Australia uses its leadership to work with industry to embed sustainable business practices. 'Under the Tourism Act, we have a duty to work towards developing a sustainable industry in Australia. We have made "sustainability" a core pillar of our brand – and we honour this element in all that we do,' says Joyce.

## What is their vision for the future of the meetings and events industry?

All agree that events are the perfect medium to inspire people. Alison would like to see events designed for purposeful outcomes – creating meaningful experiences that have a strong human element. 'Why not have a regular event in a hospital foyer that feeds people in a communal way with nourishing delicious food? It would make people happy,' she says.

Jane envisages that 'sustainable best practice will become integral to all event delivery – major events, business events, festivals and even weddings!'

For Crystal, it would be the addition of green gifts to the meeting check list. 'I'd like to see events use items that reinforce the cultural connections between giving and the story of sustainable Australia.'

Joyce would like our industry to get behind the opportunity captured in their key message, 'meet in Australia: where environment and community matter'. We need all sectors of our industry to get their house in order and check how sustainable their business practices are.'

## The barriers to change

With the sentiments high, the logic strong, why is sustainability not under our skin and fingertips?

Alison says the barrier is conventional thinking and all the systems and frameworks that we've created. 'We need to undo the stitches and make things simpler. We need to go outside the usual list of

venues so people are open to doing things differently. We need to collaborate and listen to different professions to get fresh ideas and break out of the box.'

Jane believes not having adequate education; leadership and resources on the issue are major set-backs. 'We need people in the know and a passion to be accessible knowledge centres so that we can all learn the facts. For example, we need to break out of the thinking that if we offset it will be alright and learn that it is only one small part of being sustainable.'

Crystal agrees, 'It is a sharp learning curve for event and conference organisers – people need information and consultancy across all sectors of the industry.'

Joyce believes this complexity may be contributing to the hesitance of businesses. 'While we have outstanding pedigree in Australia with many of our operators leading with global best practices, there are many operators particularly the smaller ones that are confused about how to make a start.'

## What are the advantages of making changes now?

'Australia has a competitive advantage as the leader in event sustainability which we should leverage now. It is also good for the Australian economy as it encourages the use of locally produced supplies,' says Joyce.

'If we don't put our steak in the ground now as leaders in sustainability, what will Australia be known for across the internationally competitive events and conference industry?' asks Crystal. 'We need to be top of mind and memorable to remain competitive.'

For Jane, there are larger issues at stake. 'If we keep going on like we are, then our children won't have a better life that we have. They will have to live with more pollution, more traffic, more chemicals in their food and they will live shorter lives than us. We need a dramatic shift in thinking.'

## What is their message?

Alison firmly believes, 'You can have pleasure without compromising the planet and better still you can add purpose to your events. Support your environment by making choices about your food – but come from a place of taste and pleasure.'

Crystal sends a message of innovation; 'This is the time to be creative, rewrite the history books. Embrace this new way of being and be open to what it throws at us. The more we are prepared to invest in this industry now, the faster it will become competitive.'

Jane would like everyone to think of at least three things they can do to make a change to better your life and business.

And Joyce asks the industry to make sustainable practices a foundation of business. 'Reduce consumption and choose suppliers and partners that are committed to sustainability also. Start to measure the impact of change...and most importantly, report on it.'