

# Sustainability simplified

Organisers should be embracing BS 8901, so says Sam Wilson, director of EcoEvents

**I**n my experience there is as much confusion as to how to implement sustainability within a business as there is on the actual definition of the word. Misnomers abound, such as the belief that the stereotypically labelled “green” event will be more expensive, or that being eco is a fad that will just go away in time. Or indeed that sustainability is a luxury that has to be put “on the back burner” until we can all resurface from the recession.

But whatever we feel about the subject, the fact is environmental issues are here to stay. This is evident in the growing amount of environmental legislation, the mandatory cap and trade Carbon Reduction Commitment, and the increasingly prominent focus on environmental performance in the marketplace. Synonymous with the economic climate, it is without doubt, the other global challenge that businesses today face. My advice is to get in the water with it now – so that you are swimming when others are waiting for legislation to get them wet!

## Driving benefits

Sustainability is about better business practice first and foremost; measuring your performance and managing your impacts to drive benefits to your business. It is

about doing what you do in the knowledge you are doing it better – economically, socially and environmentally. It is about securing significant savings through the smarter use of energy, water and materials and using the current surge of interest in environmental issues to your advantage. Why wouldn't a company want to adopt policies that help them to save money in a recession, secure a market advantage and increase client and stakeholder confidence?

Perceptions of environmental management are also changing. Recent evidence suggests that the quality of environmental management within a company is now seen as one of biggest indicators of the quality of the management in general. Rather than being an optional area of concern, managing environmental and social impact is rapidly becoming an essential component of effective event management. This is a point that was brought into stark focus when I was asked to review a recent environmental incident report that resulted in a diesel spill of 450 litres during an outside event. Clean up costs topped £50,000 on top of a similar figure for cancelled shows and all parties are now in the midst of dispute and litigation. Had the organisation considered and implemented emergency procedures and were aware of legal requirements this incident could have been prevented.

## Tailor your approach

The meaningful challenge we all face is not whether to, but how to progress

**Sustainability** – an enduring, balanced approach to economic activity, environmental responsibility and social progress

**BS 8901:2009** – British Standard for a specification for a sustainability management system for events

**ISO 14001** – International Standard for Environmental Management first published as a British Standard in 1992 and now a robust and globally recognised standard that applies to all businesses in all sectors

**Note** – if you are considering meeting BS8901, it makes sense, both in terms of cost and function, to establish an integrated system that incorporates the ISO 14001 as there are several requirements that overlap

**Accreditation** – the term given to a Certification Body that complies with the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) requirements for Certification

**Certification** – not interchangeable with accreditation, is a term given to organisations that have been assessed and awarded Certification by an accredited Certification Body (be aware that there are organisations that offer Certification that have no form of accreditation and therefore do not comply with international requirements for their operations)

**First, second and third party Certification** – first party is self-declaration of compliance; second party is where a client/interested party confirms compliance; and third party is independent verification by an independent organisation such as an accredited Certification Body

## Explanation of terms



Brighton and Hove City Council is committed to becoming the first local authority to achieve both ISO 14001 and BS 8901 for its events and venues management and is well en route to meeting its goal.

“Working on the two environmental standards in combination for both our venues and events will ensure that we are taking a comprehensive approach to environmental management in this service. As the City council faces tough economic years ahead it is essential that it remains ahead of the game as a venue for both conferences and outdoor events and is able to confidently meet the increasing sustainability demands clients so often request, and expect Brighton and Hove to offer. Achieving these standards means performing well in all areas – environmental, social and economic – and will certainly help to ensure we are meeting this level right across the organisation,” says Councillor Ayas Fallon-Khan, Deputy Leader, Brighton & Hove City Council.



*Pictured above: Brighton is making a conscious effort to achieve BS 8901 status. The beach is the scene of many a vibrant event*

product or service, the scale of the project, the budget available and what you need to achieve.

In many sectors, companies cannot be on a tender list if they do not have accredited certification or are able to produce impartial and independent evidence on how they are managing their environmental impacts. Many clients in the events industry are also demanding hard evidence to back up environmental claims. Being able to provide such evidence will no doubt lead to increased tender opportunities with new clients and stronger relationships with current clients which, in turn, will be able to communicate with confidence that the environmental impacts of their events are being reduced – proving that sustainability is not just a convenient publicity exercise, but rather sound business practice which delivers tangible results to a business.

confidently towards sustainability. The evidence strongly suggests that this is best achieved through the installation of a pragmatic management system using the requirements of ISO14001 and/or BS 8901 as a road map, making sure that the standards fit the business rather than the business fit the standards. In its simplest form, a management system is a mechanism for transferring information within your organisation so that you are in a position to make strategic business decisions based on instructive analysis. This enables you to be pro-active, tailoring your approach to specific requirements and managing your communications through all stages from planning to delivery to debrief. This does not mean you have to achieve accredited certification, but you do need to measure, manage and control your activities in respect of sustainability issues to be ahead of the game.

The first step in the process is to get a clear idea of the aspects and associated impacts of your activities, products or services. Remember that you are aiming to manage the aspects so you control the impacts, not the other way round. This is known as benchmarking your “base line” through an initial review. From this it will be possible to identify the use of resources and wastage (involving your financial department), write a meaningful policy, develop objectives, targets and key performance indicators so that progress can be measured and benefits realised as part of a continuous model of improvement. Your policy needs to match the results of your initial review, which

in turn needs to be congruent with your objectives, internal training procedures and data-capturing techniques. Any omissions could lead to faulty decision-making and will be flagged up by an external assessor should you be applying for BS 8901 or ISO 14001 accredited certification.

**Sound business**

Whether you are a venue, event client, event management company or supplier, there are a few options available should you want to improve your sustainability performance. The first and most cost effective would be to assign a member of your team to be responsible for overseeing the project and seeking outside specialist support as necessary. The second is to hire the services of a consultant who can work as an integral part of your team and manage the implementation and progress of the system. The third would be to ensure that any event you are involved in considers sustainability practices as part of the lifecycle of the event. What route you decide will depend upon your particular

drpgroup is an integrated full-service communications agency, designing and producing communications solutions globally. In January 2010 it became the first communication and events agency in the world to achieve accredited certification against the combined ISO 14001 and BS 8901. Achieving these certifications will ensure measurable bottom line benefits for the group.

Dale Parmenter, drpgroup managing director, commented: “As the recession comes to an end and businesses begin to focus on the bigger picture again, sustainability will not only start to become as important as health and safety is, but it will get to the stage where businesses will need to account for their environmental impacts in much the same way as they are required to meet their fiscal responsibilities.”