

Calm before the summer season

By James Cobb

A RELAXING sunny Bank Holiday over Easter turned out to be the calm before the proverbial storm, and with the ensuing hurricane of activity, it seems as if only now event promoters have realised that we're only weeks away from their summer events.

The outdoor events business in the UK has to accept that, whilst being stretched every year, the season is short, and so the vast majority of our work is necessarily crammed into a few busy months each year.

Making this work something we can be proud of is hindered by last-minute decision-making. Part of this is down to uncertainty: in ticket sales, in the weather etc.

And part of it may simply be cultural. But whatever the reason, it's a fact that decisions are often left until the eleventh hour, and this seems to have got worse rather than better.

In the face of this, what's the best approach?

One method is to leave all planning until after the decisions are made, orders placed and the parameters are set. What's the point in

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making plans if we have to rewrite them when the parameters change? It's like lifting boxes twice; so don't prepare your schedules until the last minute, don't circulate any plans in advance . . . they'll only change. Ensure you have the resources (staff, equipment, budget) to cover any eventuality, then turn up and make it up as you go along.



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But whilst that seems to be an approach adopted by many, it strikes me as a disaster waiting to happen. This is why the approach at CA is to retain flexibility by adapting to chang-

ing situations through effective management systems and thorough planning, not no planning.

Many other professions have to cope with fluid situations, for example the military, or sports teams, and we can apply their approach to outdoor events. A few areas to consider:

- Make a communications plan for your event. Think about what information each stakeholder needs, and how they're going to get it. Everything from ensuring that the production team are aware of the latest ticket sales, to getting updated load in times to the venue.

- Make sure the management structure is clear, and know how you're going to respond to change, rather than pre-planning what the outcome is going to be for each eventuality.

- Give people a goal to achieve, and make sure they understand why it needs to be achieved. Leave them the freedom to find better ways to get there.

Solid planning frees you up to respond to change. It's never a waste of time and is what allows us to deal with the unexpected. Bring on the changes.