

Collaboration is good and necessary

The Main Event met JAMES COBB for what turned into a very candid chat about the level of professionalism in event production and management.

PART of the trouble with the events industry has been that too many people keep secrets – people with experience don't pass it on in the fear that they're giving away their competitive edge.

I think some production managers would like their role to be seen as a black art. But it's not, and for the benefit and future of the industry we need to share information. Industry practice will not be best practice if we don't start sharing more information.

At the end of the day I think that knowledge is valuable to clients but it's only of use when you know how to apply it.

I'm happy passing on knowledge in the hope that it helps people produce better events – clients will still choose us based on the way we operate, not the trade secrets we own. I try to up my game year on year, show by show, having learned from previous events. We can get a little better on our own. Or we can get a lot better together.

New organisers need to know just how much is really involved in putting on an event. There's a huge chasm between having the concept of an event to understanding the practicality of making it happen.

For many events there is no production manager or site manager employed. Maybe the organiser feels that this is part of their role, and subcontracting somehow admits their incapability; or perhaps it's simply the cost that's hard to swallow.

But good production and site management is more likely to end up saving money. It also leaves the organiser free to do what they do best: having the vision to create a unique event; and selling the vision to clients, media and the public.

Sometimes the organiser manages to fulfil a basic coordination role – simply gathering information from suppliers, and recirculating it. This is better than nothing.

If 14 other trucks trying to unload are going to prevent the tent company accessing the site for eight hours after their arrival, it's useful that they know this in advance. But it would have been better to manage the site so this situation never arose.

In my experience, organisers get away with failing to manage the production through the professional pride and skill of their suppliers. Sound company talks to lighting company, they both talk to the caterers, the truck arrivals are rescheduled, the catering numbers circulated and the stage height reconfigured.

This is not only unfair on the suppliers - it's a time-bomb. Suppliers can, and should, go so far in thinking beyond their specialty to the impact their work is having on the event as a whole, so collaboration is good and necessary.

But to create a professionally run event with a robust infrastructure, there needs to be effective production management to coordinate the various components of the event.



James Cobb

■ A director of Sound Advice, James Cobb has amassed a wealth of experience managing concert tours, corporate events and music festivals over the past 12 years.