

ISES Breakfast Master–Class

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Paul Edwards has been working in the event industry for eighteen years. Between 1991 and 2003 Paul was instrumental in the development and growth of The Ultimate Experience and the Concerto Group. In 2003 Paul set up Oxygen Event Services Ltd, a design led event production company working exclusively for trade and private individuals. In the four years since its inception Oxygen has established a niche within the market for partnering caterers, venues and agencies in events of all scale and size. In May 2007 Oxygen Event Services launched **ec0event**, the first accredited ecologically responsible event policy. Designed and developed with the support of The Eden Project's Waste Neutral Programme, the **ec0event** policy intends to be a leading initiative that establishes an industry standard of Waste Neutral events produced with ecological due diligence to minimise the impact of the event industry on the environment.

“Let’s do Sustainable Business”

Introduction

Good morning and thank you all for attending the first ISES breakfast presentation.

Today I am going to look at what we, in this varied industry, can do to do our part to combat climate change. I'm not going to talk about global issue or large scale solutions to the potential catastrophe facing our planet – that, I believe, is the role of governments and multinationals. Instead, I would like to take the opportunity today, to look at what our industry can do to make our business processes more environmentally responsible.

I want to talk about ways in which we can get our own house in order in what has traditionally been a hugely wasteful business.

This is a difficult topic to address in a twenty minute presentation, not least of all because there are so many different levels of understanding and different ways of looking at environmental issues. So this talk is going to focus on what our industry can do and why we should be acting with ecological due diligence from now on, and into the future.

Action for the environment and climate change is sitting within the top five objectives of most big businesses in this country. To underline this point – the top five objectives. That means environmental issues are up there with corporate objectives such as profit. Action for the environment and climate change is no longer a marginal issue for large corporations – it is central for them.

Market forces are making this happen, as consumers become increasingly aware of, and demand more **ec0**logical and ethical practices from their suppliers.

So it makes good business sense. By offering **ec0**logically sound products and services to your clients, you will be giving them the opportunity to achieve their own **ec0**-objectives, and meet the **ec0**-ethical demands of their own consumers and shareholders.

“A long journey begins with a single step”

ec0event

ec0event is a policy developed by my colleague Ed Thurstan in conjunction with and supported by The Eden Project's Waste Neutral Programme. It gives our customers at Oxygen, the choice to deliver their events in a more **ec0**logically responsible fashion.

The **ec0event** policy works in such a way that when applied to the event planning process it reduces, and in some cases illuminates the negative impact of an event on the environment. At the very core of this policy is the means by which it is achieved – through careful planning, procurement and execution. So let's look at the specifics...

“A healthy comparison”

Health and Safety

In the last 15 years, businesses in the event industry have become increasingly active in delivering safe events, as encouraged by government policy and internal responsibility. As a standard rule, most events are now planned within set safety guidelines and procedures.

If I asked today which of you had carried out a risk assessment this morning, all of you would put your hand up – you got out of the shower onto a slippery surface; you crossed a road – we all assess such risks automatically, and this “safety without thinking” has now crossed over into our business environments. Fundamentally, Health and Safety is now a part of the planning process rather than an afterthought.

In a similar way, many of us make seemingly unconscious environmentally positive decisions every day. Most of you traveled here by train today; some of you will have already recycled something this morning.

Bringing environmentally positive decisions into our day-to-day business life and particularly the event planning process is therefore the next logical step.

A few months ago, I began, when opening the post every morning, to tear the plastic windows out of envelopes before putting the envelope into the recycling bin. This began as something I actively had to think about doing. Now it is simply habit – I do it without thinking.

I grant you, there are fewer guidelines and standard practices for sustainability than there are for Health and Safety, but rather than wait for these to be established by outside agencies, at **Oxygen** we decided to throw ourselves into the process of developing our own guidelines and standard practices for sustainability within our business.

Why? Well, if I could look into my (recycled glass) crystal ball, forward, fifteen years from now, I guarantee you I would see the majority of events being planned and executed with **ec0**logically ethical due diligence. Not just because this is what the market will demand in the future, but because by then, government policy will dictate it.

So in the same way that you insist on all your third party contractors producing the relevant Health and Safety documentation and insurance certification, the heart of an **ec0**-policy is ensuring that your contractors are behaving in an **ec0**-friendly manner. Placing this demand on your supply chain, can then be demonstrated to your clients and used as a sales tool to set you apart from your competitors.

Since we have been more Health and Safety conscious, how many accidents, injuries or deaths have been avoided? The answer is that we will never know. However, with **ec0**logically planned events it is possible to measure, albeit not with an exact science, the waste neutrality of each specific event. Post-event reporting and calculations are a vital part of any **ec0**-conscious event.

This process can not only ensure the documentation of your **ec0**-policy, it means you will constantly be able to learn from and develop your **ec0**-policy so that you operate in an increasingly **ec0**logically responsible manner.

The choices your organisation has are two fold: engage in external **ec0** consultancy, or focus on internal **ec0** development – much in the same way you have developed your own Health and Safety policies and working practices. In reality, it is most likely you will actually need to do both.

“Why do we need to get eco-ethical?”

Doom and Gloom

I'm afraid I couldn't do an **ec0** discussion without a bit of doom and gloom, or the bad news – as I like to see it, the reasons why we should all adopt a policy of change. All relevant scientists agree that global warming and climate change is no longer opinion, but fact:

- o The earth is hotter than it has been for at least 1,000 years.
- o Sea ice is melting at a radical rate – in our lifetime sea levels will rise and in some places land will be lost to the sea.
- o 80% of the world's rain forests (the world's lungs) have already been destroyed.
- o The UK produces about 220 million tonnes of controlled waste per year, but only re-uses or recycles approximately 17% of this.
- o In the UK, up to 60% of rubbish that ends up in a dustbin *could* be recycled – we are actively generating waste!
- o There is no space for waste. UK landfill sites are filling up fast. By 2010 it is expected that almost every UK landfill site will be full.

But we can make a difference!

- o For every tonne of paper that is recycled, approximately seventeen trees are saved. In addition to this, 70% less energy is required to recycle paper compared with making it from raw materials.
- o One recycled tin can saves enough energy to power a television for three hours.
- o One recycled plastic bottle saves enough energy to power a 60watt light bulb for three hours.
- o One recycled glass bottle can save enough energy to power a computer for twenty-five minutes.

To put this last example into to an event context, let's say there is a business out there that specialises in reasonably long runs of corporate Christmas parties. Let's say this company runs 170 parties each Christmas season for approximately 60,000 people. For arguments sake, let's also work on the basis that this company has about 20 computer terminals in their office.

By recycling all the glass bottles from their entire Christmas run, this company could save enough energy to run all their computers for a whole year. I can't necessarily think of a business that fits this description...but I am sure there is one!

So it is absolutely a matter of choice...it is easy to see how much of a difference we can all make. A real difference – a difference worth making!

“Explaining popular ec0 jargon”

Definitions

Before I go any further, it seems important to take a moment to tackle a few definitions of some of the more popular expressions that relate to this topic...

“Sustainability”

Sustainability is the ability to provide for the needs of the world's current population without damaging the ability of future generations to provide for themselves. When a process is sustainable, it can be carried out over and over without negative environmental effects or impossibly high costs to anyone involved.

“Carbon Footprint”

A carbon footprint is the total amount of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases that are emitted over the full life-cycle of a product or service etc.

“Carbon Neutral”

Carbon Neutrality is achieved by a combination of emissions reduction and offsetting which together appear to cancel out carbon dioxide emissions generated by a specific activity or product etc. Whilst the theory of this is easy to understand, which is why the concept is popular, in practice it is difficult to apply. This is mainly due to the problems in defining the carbon footprint of an event, and the difficulties in purchasing effective and credible carbon offsets.

At **Oxygen**, through the research we have done, our opinion is that carbon offsets are very much a last resort – they are rather like painting over the cracks. It's rather like sending a 'Get Well Soon' card to someone who has been injured whilst working on an event, when it would have been better to ensure the accident that hurt them had not happened in the first place.

“Waste Neutral”

At **Oxygen**, our firm belief is that this is the best way of measuring the impact of an event on the environment. Within our **ec0event** policy and strategy, waste neutral is the balance or cycle of what we call '**The Big Three**': **1: Reduce; 2: Re-use & Recycle; then 3: Reinvest.**

“Reduce”

Reducing the amount of waste generated and the carbon emissions produced by your event is fundamental to the intentions of waste neutrality. This requires forward planning to prevent waste, rather than afterthought attempts to make amends for waste generated and damage already done.

Reduction has to be managed through careful procurement from approved suppliers using sustainable sources. For example, it is possible to reduce the amount of energy used at an event by employing low powered lighting fixtures, which in turn means your event can run on less power, hence a smaller generator set, which burns less fuel and therefore creates fewer emissions. This environmental impact could be reduced further again if a bio-diesel generator were utilised instead of a standard red diesel generator.

In addition to the positive environmental impact, reducing generator size and fuel requirements also has a positive **ec0**nomical outcome. Being energy efficient through reduction very often results in less cost.

“Re-use & Recycle”

Re-use means very much what it implies – use items as many times as possible. For example, utilise existing furniture on an event rather than commissioning bespoke build items; hang stock linings in marquees rather than buying disposable ones, and so on. Of course this isn't always possible or suitable, in which case, you can use or commission items that are developed and built in line with the **ec0event** policy.

It is also vital to ensure that waste is reduced by recycling materials, wherever possible, when they cannot be re-used, and by composting food waste where applicable. Both of these actions continue the life-cycle and usefulness of materials instead of ending them through disposal.

“Reinvest”

To reinvest means to buy products made from recycled materials. At **Oxygen**, when we are producing an event in line with the **ec0event** policy, we buy as much as possible from recycled

sources. Essentially, when the amount of recycled materials brought in to an event, is equal to the amount of material sent away for recycling or disposal, your event will have achieved Waste Neutral.

“What is Oxygen already doing to minimise waste?”

ec0event products & tips

I have a number of examples of products and strategies that satisfy the **ec0event** ethos:

ec0bag

You will all have seen an **ec0event** bag on your seat. These bags are made from sustainable cotton and can be re-used time after time. So when you leave the office to get your sandwich, crisps and drink for lunch today, tomorrow and every day after, use this bag rather than accepting a plastic one.

Lighting

Modern LED lighting is now widely available. This form of low powered lighting is also beginning to be employed increasingly in our every day life. LED light fixtures can now be purchased for domestic interiors, all new traffic lights are now fitted with LED fixtures and many new cars and buses use LED brake lights.

These fixtures have a long life span. They don't need bulbs replacing regularly as they use Light Emitting Diodes and they offer almost infinite colour mixing possibilities, thus eliminating the need for coloured filters. Best of all LED lights use a fraction of the power of an equivalent standard event lighting fixture.

To demonstrate just how little power LED fixtures require, the **Oxygen** launch of **ec0event** at Christ Church Spitalfields in May this year ran the whole of the architectural lighting, which included some forty, low-voltage and LED fixtures, from one single, domestic 13amp socket.

I have here, a prototype for a rechargeable LED fixture (demonstrates prototype). As and when a lighting fixture like this is widely available, it will enable all fixtures to be charged in a warehouse, ideally on green tariff electricity. This will in turn negate the need for cable and coloured filters, resulting in a reduction of equipment, transport requirements and lower emissions.

Set and Furniture

There are many ways in which physical aspects of an event can adhere to an **ec0**-policy. Please pass round these products (samples distributed)...any of these could be used to make a bar counter or table top. All of these samples are products made from recycled materials. Two are examples of recycled yogurt pots; another two are of recycled plastic cups; the final sample is actually made from recycled glass. These sustainable products are not only hardwearing and practical they are also aesthetically quite beautiful. These are just one example of how standards of quality don't have to be impacted by the use of recycled materials.

The **ec0event** bar, which we at **Oxygen** designed and made, has a recyclable acrylic fascia, sustainable wooden panelling, a recycled Yoghurt pot counter top, and is backlit using LED fixtures. All aspects of this product are interchangeable and re-usable.

Oxygen also designed an **ec0**-exhibition earlier this year. The set was made purely from FSC (Forestry Stewardship Council) approved, sustainable timber and was lit with low voltage lighting.

This poseur table, another stock **Oxygen ec0** item, is made again from sustainable FSC timber and features a North Sea pebble column.

If your event can use recycled glass for bar and poseur table tops this would be an excellent example of continuing the life cycle of the glass bottles used during the event, which of course

should be sent for recycling rather than be disposed of. This would be one basic step towards achieving a waste neutral cycle.

Catering

The caterer is often the largest supplier on events. They often have the most staff, equipment and generally produce the most waste. It is therefore essential that the chosen caterer, or as a catering company yourself, adhere to as many of the following as possible:

- Use locally sourced and seasonal ingredients.
- Buy organically grown foods.
- Purchase free-range and humane/ethical animal products.
- Procure fair-trade only international goods where possible.
- Attempt to limit the air and/or road miles involved in the transport of resources.
- Reduce the number of electrical ovens and urns required.
- Employ local staff where possible.
- Do not use single serving sachets or disposables.
- Only allow recycled and recyclable packaging to be used (by suppliers & yourself).
- Use re-usable and/or compostable cutlery, crockery and glassware.

It is worth noting, that in addition to these guidelines being **ec0**logically responsible, using local produce and staff also helps local communities to become more financially sustainable too.

Transport

Transport size can be reduced by simplifying the amount of equipment used on an event site, as explained with the LED lighting example. By reducing basic equipment it is possible to reduce the size and scale of transport, replacing Heavy Goods Vehicles with vans where possible. Where this is not possible – and we have to be realistic, sometimes it may not be – HGV's with Euro5 engines and vehicles running on Bio diesel should be used, as these will have lower emission levels than standard engine units.

Venues

As with all suppliers, venues also have the opportunity to implement their own **ec0**-policy and support the waste neutral intentions of the event industry. This can be done by ensuring venues use a credible green tariff electricity supplier, employ an active recycling policy, and run their catering along the guidelines already discussed.

Suppliers

The point to note is that if minimising the waste generated by your event is, as it should be, an important objective, then you need to make demands on your suppliers to ensure the entire supply chain is working in line with your **ec0**-policy.

“Show me the money!”

ec0nomics

Now let's get down to business, because ultimately we are all in business. Indeed many of us, and I include **Oxygen** in this, are relatively small businesses. Whilst we believe that taking positive environmental action is absolutely vital, as equally vital to all of us, is staying in business.

So let me make this simple. Waste costs money. Typically, up to 4% of business turnover is spent on waste. Therefore, finding ways to reduce waste actually means your company could become more profitable.

A common comment about the production of **ec0**logically responsible events (as with environmentally friendly products from paper to washing powder) is that it is more expensive. Whilst this can be the case in some instances, with careful planning and procurement, it is possible to actually reduce waste and costs as well as minimise your environmental impact.

Effectively, striving to be **ec0**logically efficient means you will find waves to shave costs too. How many times have you had a delivery direct from a supplier to your event in a half empty van? Structuring equipment deliveries so that suppliers can share vehicles would cut down on the amount of delivery/collection vehicles, which would cut down emissions, and ultimately cost.

We have already seen how simply changing the type of lighting fixtures you use can reduce the size of generator required to run them. This can be extended to sound systems that can run on 12 volt batteries, better still batteries that are charged on green tariff power.

Most importantly, if you have something bespoke built for an event, firstly ensure that it is made from as much recycled and/or recyclable materials as possible, and secondly store it for future use. The next time the item goes out you will of course increase your margin.

If you're still not convinced that **ec0**-ethical events need not be bad for your bottom line, perhaps this will sway you. Most of us, at one time or other, will have shopped at Booker the cash and carry. This company achieved net savings of £33,050 in the first year and £106,700 the year, by installing simple, low-cost water saving devices. By anyone's standards, that's a lot of money on the bottom line.

"The way forward"

Taking Responsibility

So the opportunity exists for us to make a change. By following a very simple policy such as the one we have developed at **ec0event** we can all play our part in making events more sustainable.

We need to set ourselves high standards and goals within our own industry. **ec0**logy, like charity, begins at home, and by getting our own house in order we can be sure we are doing our bit for the global issue.

In summary, and to return to my Health and Safety comparison, we need to assess the environmental risks generated by our event activity and everyday business practice. And we need to state the means by which the goals of sustainability are to be achieved.

We need to have a long term policy which begins with a statement of intent, and details the methods employed to achieve regular waste neutrality and lower emissions in every element of our businesses.

In brief, we need to be more responsible – to each other, and to future generations of event professionals.

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