



Dixon: *"The venue is bricks and mortar, but it is nothing without the event."*

they signed the contract.

This was the major cause for complaint. As inexperienced organisers, and therefore negotiators, they had signed the contract before they knew exactly what they wanted. This, coupled with a lack of flexibility at the venue and no SPOC in charge, meant the organiser felt it had been dropped into a pool of sharks.

So what can we learn from this? Well, the venue client on this project has changed how it does business. It has employed industry professionals to run the conference business. The venue has also introduced a SPOC account management system, and works more closely with its organiser clients to identify and understand their needs. Contracts are now flexible so clients do not fall into 'traps'.

I think venues should understand that even when an organiser of face-to-face events or conferences is experienced, they have small organising teams. I don't know of any organising team that has staff just sitting around waiting for something to do. This can give a venue the opportunity to provide an added value level of service to organisers, and in doing so become much closer to them. The venue team should be perceived as an extension to the organiser's team, somewhere you can get support.

In fact, it is imperative that venues adopt this kind of account management in dealing with organisers. Organisers themselves are increasingly recognising the value and benefits of key account management with exhibitor clients, and in turn are looking to venues to do the same for them.

A venue is not just an empty hall waiting to be filled. It is a

complex dynamic system contributing to the core of many industries, and in fact can contribute to the brand perceptions of an event. For example, the London Boat Show held at Excel is a different product to when it was held at Earls Court, and the same applies to World Travel Market and its change of venue.

If we accept that a venue is a complex dynamic system, should we not then expect the management systems and the customer relationship management policies in place to be those of a leading edge marketing company?

If we look at a bar of chocolate, the brand name on the wrapper is merely the visual representation of a complex branding development programme. This encompasses, yet goes far beyond, the physical or taste characteristics, shape or colour of the bar itself.

The venue is bricks and mortar, but it is nothing without the event. The successful venue in five year's time will be the one that recognises the complex business environment in which it lives, and recognises the business requirements of the organisers, and importantly, where the venue can provide added value beyond space.

This is no different to trade show organisers that are increasingly seeking to occupy a perceptual space, as far away from being an event estate agent as possible. The organisers are doing this by becoming a valuable and innovative element in the industry they serve. A successful venue must do the same.

Like organisers, venues must not be estate agents, but a vital component in the maintenance and development of the face-to-face medium, supporting organisers in delivering the best and most profitable visitor experience.

"A venue is not just an empty hall waiting to be filled. It is a complex dynamic system contributing to the core of many industries."