

# Maximum mutual benefit

*Vivid Interface's Geoffrey Dixon on why exhibitors must become business partners.*

**I HEARD A REPORT** the other day on Radio 4 about Google and a trade fair in Los Angeles. Google had made a number of announcements at the fair, which I assume was E3, the electronic entertainments show, and it was being broadcast into my home in Norfolk.

Google felt that E3 was an important enough event at which to make ground breaking announcements about the way it does business, and the way it sees the future.

What does this say about E3? And what does this say about the relationship E3 has with its business partners: not exhibitors or speakers, but business partners?

I have no knowledge of the relationship between E3 and Google. But I can imagine what it could be, and how close relationships between business partners and event organisers can, and should, be structured for maximum mutual benefit.

The events industry must change the relationship it has with its business partners (formerly known as exhibitors). It is not just about selling space on the shop floor: it must be about developing a symbiotic relationship where joint business and marketing actions by partners result in a new market position that is synergistic.

Organisers have to stop selling space and start selling business opportunities. Once we can show our business partners that we can achieve mutual benefit through working together, then the organisers become part of the industry and not just the renters of space, or event estate agents. There can be parallels between estate agents and some event organisers, but we want the industry to occupy a very different perceptual space. The problem with estate agents is that overall they are disliked, because they take and do not contribute.

So how do organisers occupy the right perceptual space? The starting point is that we must look at the relationship we



**Dixon: "exhibitors should be treated as business partners"**

have with our business partners. What do we know about their business and their business objectives? Do we have a clear view of how their business can benefit from having a business relationship with us?

What do we know about the industry that our event is part of? If we know little, then we will always be estate agents, and we do not want to occupy that space.

I firmly believe that as event organisers we need to know our industry, and we need to understand the business opportunities that our event can, and should, provide for our key business partners - the bell cows in other words. These