

Industry PR guru and show organiser, Simon Burton, delivers another snappy sermon

Event effectiveness

"Our lives are signposted by events; christenings, weddings, birthdays, funerals, Arsenal beating Spurs in the FA Cup semi-final."



Simon Burton's exhibition industry career includes working with a leading organiser, contractor and PR agency. He established his own dedicated exhibition PR agency, Exposure Communications, in 2000 and launched The Exhibiting Show last year.

*What is your favourite way to spend a sunny August Sunday afternoon?
"Can't give you a printable answer to that question."*

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Exposure Communications

Three little letters sum up the debate about exhibitions in the modern media landscape. ROI. One of the challenges is how we measure this, but for my money the greater challenge is whether return on investment is even the thing we should be measuring in the first place.

However and wherever an exhibition stand appears in your marketing spend; PR, sales support, direct marketing, hey you might even have an "exhibitions" line on your budget; you'll have to concede that it is a live event, so it has at least as much in common with other live events as it does marketing.

Our lives are signposted by events; christenings, weddings, birthdays, funerals, Arsenal beating Spurs in the FA Cup semi-final. How do we measure the effectiveness of our participation in those, let alone their ROI? The average wedding costs approximately a stupid amount of money. Do the budget holders set key ROI investment criteria before the event? Do the parents and the happy couple count up the value of all the gifts and check that they're at least three times the wedding cost? "Wow what a successful day. The presents repaid the church, limo and dress even before the silverware from Auntie Gladys."

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Measurement of the effectiveness of any event needs to be able to analyse emotional impact (you'll notice the emotional resonance of all the signpost events in our lives), it needs to be able to analyse commitment and engagement and a sense of community. It needs to be able to consider opportunity, collateral and enjoyment.

Really effective events connect and communicate. And so do really effective exhibition stands. They touch, connect and move. Of course you can decide to reduce this to a simple calculation and if that's what you want to do then they are still incomparably powerful and when appropriately executed will deliver unmatched results. But for me, that almost entirely misses the point. Like a straight to video wedding guest, a music fan who's got the CD but has never been to a gig or an armchair football supporter who's never cheered his team on from the terraces – poor substitutes for being there.

And that my friends, is the secret of live events: being there. Being there in mind, heart, and body. And being there is a difficult thing to measure. Unless of course you benchmark it against not being there.