

Serious About

By Barbara Wichmann

SUSTAINABILITY

Trade show tips for the environmentally-conscious.

I recently attended the 2014 **Women's Business Enterprise National Council's** Summit and Salute event, which was held in New Orleans this year. Once again, the conference proved to be an invigorating and enlightening few days and provided a great many opportunities to share ideas and insights with fellow women entrepreneurs from across the country.

My agency, **ARTÉMIA Communications Inc.**, maintains a presence at several conferences and expos all year long. More often than not, the locations are a plane-ride away and, as always with business travel for me, the decision whether to attend or not is about balancing the business potential of a trip and being mindful of our commitment to sustainability and environmentally friendly practices.

After being totally immersed at a conference for a couple of days, it can sometimes feel like the event is a world of its own. And it really is just that. For the few days that the event is in session it becomes a microcosm of society—with its own ecosystem designed to support the sudden influx of attendees. The point of most conferences is to showcase the latest ideas and innovations. It makes a lot of sense that organizers and exhibitors are putting increased emphasis on exploring opportunities to make their planning and participation more sustainable.

While video conferencing and other technological solutions provide viable alternatives to long-distance travel that meet some needs, there are a growing number of ways to implement green solutions into live event management.

From the point of view of conference organizers, the challenge to produce more eco-friendly events is enormous. From selecting a sustainable host location,

or sustainable site for development to ensuring easy access to public transport and/or low-emissions transport systems, there are many big-picture options for creating a green event.

Next year's international **Universal Exposition**—the modern name for the World's Fair—Expo 2015 (<http://en.expo2015.org>) is being hosted by the city of Milan, Italy and has a theme of "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life." It is no surprise that sustainability is a central tenet—thematically as well as logistically. The Expo 2015 organizers have made their intent clear by promising that sustainability is "not just an objective, but part of the event itself, an element for the involvement of all participants," and further, that they will work to "prevent, mitigate or compensate any possible negative impact on the environment or on local communities" caused by the event.

One step towards this has been to provide guidelines for participants to encourage adoption of green procedures as early in the planning process as possible. If successful, Expo 2015 could play a powerful role in increasing awareness and standards for sustainability in trade shows, and in business practices in general, on a global scale.

From the perspective of exhibitors, many ideas which support sustainability also speak to the lean, cost-reducing mentality of most small businesses. With that in mind, here is my checklist for both budget-conscious and environmentally sound event planning:

- Ensure all staff members are trained on the concepts of sustainability and, as much as possible, that there has been an internalization of green practices. This will help inform all planning and procurement decisions and

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underline each individual's commitment to green thinking.

- Check out the event's green credentials before you commit to attending—if the exhibition has less than ideal green credentials, advocate for more sustainable practices or try finding conferences that embrace

sustainability.

- Avoid the tchotchke trap! We've come away from conferences with bags full of all kinds of shiny branded items that rarely make it into the suitcase for the plane ride home. As well as often not being eco-friendly, they can be a simple

waste of money. Instead, consider getting creative with technology. Use iPads for easy data collection, or think about getting creative with QR codes. Many companies use them on business cards now, so why not have one that links to a video or your mobile site?

- Invest in eco-friendly booths that will stay the course. Unless your company re-brands very frequently, your trade show equipment should see you through a number of years. There are many companies now that offer innovative, lightweight and easy-to-assemble booths that will help you minimize waste.

- Ensure all publicity materials are printed on recycled paper and limit the number you produce. Think about using videos to engage with people—a useful and non-intrusive way of attracting attendees before speaking with them personally.

- Make recycling bins available at your booth—the simplest way to encourage green behavior is always by making it easy.

Finally, let people know how your business is taking sustainability serious by highlighting the green elements in your display. It's a great talking point for your business and, depending on how creative you get, a smart way to stay front of mind.

For more tips and insights on effective trade show and event planning, please visit <http://www.ARTEMIA.com> and download our free Trade Show Tip Sheet. ♦

Barbara Wichmann is the founder and CEO of ARTEMIA Communications and a recipient of the 2014 WBENC Star Award.



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