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# Doing business in a socially responsible way

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The business world is giving more and more priority to Corporate social responsibility (CSR for short) and Socially Involved Business. Sustainability and being socially responsible in business have become part and parcel of business operations in many organisations including those in the events and entertainment world. In the October 2010 edition of the magazine, *Eventbranche.nl*, they addressed the question: What trends do you think have had the most impact on the organising of events? Dozens of firms and hundreds of event professionals responded to the magazine's survey. They came up with a top 5 for trends and Number 1 was 'corporate social responsibility'. CSR beat four other trends, namely 'social media' (2), 'sharing costs' (3), 'back to basics' (4) and 'measuring impact' (5).

## Sustainability enters the scene at the IDFA festival

A 'sustainable eco-day at the IDFA festival' wrote the *De Pers* newspaper on November 17<sup>th</sup> 2010. They were referring to the Green Screen Competition that was due to commence that day. They suggested parking the car and coming by public transport or by bike. Lunch was had at Cartine, a restaurant close to the Dam in Amsterdam: all the greens courtesy of the owner's own veggie garden. Visitors were also given discount vouchers for shops such as Marqt ([www.marqt.com](http://www.marqt.com)).

Box 1.1

In the afternoon, visitors were invited to watch a documentary, a film about the island of Nukutoa where there is no electricity and shops. The inhabitants catch fish, grow their own vegetables and live in isolation. Unfortunately, a small drama is unfolding: the rising sea level means that the once beautiful white beaches have disappeared ... this was just a short description of the programme during this famous documentary event.

## CSR

Corporate social responsibility means that, apart from the drive for profit, organisations must also take into account the impact that their activities will have on the environment (Planet) as well as on the human aspects within and outside the company (People). The idea is to find a balance between people, planet and profit. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the equilibrium between the three leads to better results for both the company and society.

Source: MVO Nederland

### Randstad and VSO

One of Randstad's social ambitions is to contribute tangibly to a better world. To this end, Randstad embarked on a collaboration with the international development organisation, Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO). VSO assigns specialists that exchange their knowledge and experience with colleagues in Africa, Asia and Eastern

Europe. Randstad use their knowledge and international network to help VSO recruit and dispatch specialists. Randstad's staff also play a role in this, for instance by spending six months abroad doing voluntary work in training, teaching, human resources related work and so on.

Box 1.2

Corporate social responsibility is here to stay. Nowadays non of the large (international) companies have failed to make corporate responsibility a part of their business operations. And as we have already pointed out, event organisers will have to do so too.

It is important that it is not merely greenwashing or window dressing either. It has to be genuine and not part of an effort to follow the latest fad. Organisations must ask themselves why they are doing it and for whom. Is it authentic and sincere? Or is it intended as a show, put on for the outside world? As a marketing tool, CSR does not work in the long run, Niels van Laatum claims in the magazine *EventView*. CSR is most effective when companies support

a charity that is close to their brand values or core business. Randstad shows how it is done with their CSR efforts in sponsored projects that focus on volunteer work through their support of VSO, and with their support of personal carriers and development of top sports people through their collaboration with NOC\*NSF.

#### Robin Good, the pioneer

One of the first firms to concern themselves with corporate responsibility is Robin Good. Since 1999, they have been organizing creative projects that are based on economic performance (Profit), respect for society (People), taking into account ecological

preconditions (Planet). They added another P: Pleasure. Over the years, clients have engaged several thousand enthusiastic volunteers (their own members of staff!) through Robin Good by actually working for social organisations and groups.

Box 1.3

### *Sustainability*

These days we see sustainability and sustainable solutions in various shapes and forms in the event management industry. The fact is that in the past, after nearly all events, an enormous amount of food was thrown away, many kilowatts of electricity was wasted thanks to power hungry show lighting and podium equipment. Caterers used environmentally unfriendly packaging and most of the visitors came to energy devouring event venues, using their own transport.

The sustainable and socially responsible to all this came quickly. Plenty of event firms, specialising in organising socially responsible and sustainable events, rose to the occasion. Anyone who Googles CSR and events, or sustainability and events, is presented with a long list of event organisers.

Other suppliers, too, are seeking out sustainable options, such as energy saving LED lighting, transport, sport events, waste management, and other environmentally related issues.

### Environmentally friendly, innovative, relaxing

The environment is a much discussed theme. Not only in politics, but also in business. Corporate social responsibility is high on the agenda. SOS Events offers you an exclusive product, the E-step, should you wish to focus on CSR during your company outing.

SOS supplies you with an MOT approved, electrically powered scooter (so no effort on your part!) to take you through the forests and over the heather in the Veluwe. So no pollution and on

the way there are various activities to keep you and your colleagues or friends occupied, either of a sporting or educational nature. On route, there's nothing to worry about: an SOS Events guide leads the way, taking you to all the best spots! SOS Events and Elektrische Step offer you a unique programme for outings. Visit an organic farm, the bird protection agency or book an event filled programme or meeting break.

<http://www.highprofile.nl/bedrijfsuitjes/spel/esteppen.html>

Box 1.4

Event caterers are turning more and more to supplying 100% organic and fresh ingredients. Event venues are making the effort to be socially responsible in their business practices by applying sustainable measures. One example is Van Nelle Ontwerfabriek who, together with Oseven and Fair Trade Original, took the first step by including Fair Trade Products in their range. In conjunction with their partners, Bourgonje sound and light services and Satisfaire, they have worked on producing a new lighting set up so that in the future all their venues will be equipped with LED lighting.

In 2008, the government passed a resolution that states that, from 2010 onwards, efforts must be made to ensure that all purchases and contracts must take sustainability criteria into account. Local government departments must ensure that 75% of their purchases adhere to sustainability criteria. For the central government and the provincial departments, 100% of all purchases must conform. Event organisers that work for the government – and there are many – will have to take this into account in their concepts, proposals and products. If they don't, they'll miss out and the work will go to rival organisations that do take sustainability into account.

*Event venues and festivals*

As noted, being conscious of the environment is playing an increasingly important role when setting up events and festivals. Lowlands 2010 came up with the 'Llowlab' concept: a special podium built for sustainability. Visitors to Lowlands could explore striking new technological developments. Comprising three islands, Lowlands had the Sustainable Playground, where visitors could experiment with 'nuclear fusion', for example, or nanosoap, or test how sustainable they themselves were. On the second island, the Green Stage, visitors could generate energy for Florian Wolff, a band that played there every day. And in the smallest of the three islands, The Cradle, visitors were invited, through sustainable chilling among other things, to come up with a vision of the future and how far we should go to achieve this vision.

**Sustainability at a music festival**

At Lowlands, sustainability has been a hot topic for many years. This year, concern for Mother Nature resulted in a truly sustainable podium: the Green Stage, with electricity supplied entirely by a hydrogen generator. On this stage, documentaries were shown and presentations and debates took place. On Sunday afternoon after three days of sustainability, a final debate was held on the Green Stage, around the main question: How can we make Lowlands 100% green? Gert-Jan de Werk, a researcher at the Technical University of Delft, started his research into finding

answers to this question on the first day of the festival. He discussed his preliminary findings on Sunday with festival manager, Eric van Eerdenburg, among others.

In the coming years, Gert-Jan de Werk in conjunction with festival organiser Mojo will be investigating how they can ensure that the popular music festival in Biddinghuizen becomes 100% sustainable. Van Eerdenburg, who gives his own event a 7 in terms of sustainability, believes in an entirely environmentally friendly festival.

## Continued

'We have already put in place a lot of energy saving measures. We use grey-water and a deposit system for our plastic cups. But visitors need to undergo a change in mentality. People just chuck things on the ground. It turns out that our efforts had a downside this year,' says Van Eerdenburg. A group of about sixty Poles had to be thrown out of the grounds because they were collecting cups aggressively for the deposit.

Van Eerdenburg was critical of the fact that clean technology, such as using

biodiesel, is often more expensive than dirty alternatives. 'If I were to charge €350 per ticket, then we could be completely sustainable within a couple of years. But then people would stop coming.' De Werk had a cheap solution for sustainability. 'Look at the portable toilets scattered over the grounds. You could sell the urine in there as bio-fuel.'

Source: <http://www.depers.nl/cultuur/503713/Duurzaam-Lowlands.html>

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by Cees Rosman

Box 1.5

Many venues would like to lead the way in terms of People, Planet & Profit. One of them is Van Nelle Ontwerfabriek, formerly Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam West. In 2000 it was turned into a striking and cutting-edge event venue. The venue is owned by Golden Green Key, an international hallmark for environmental protection in the recreation and event industry. Together with the World Forum in The Hague and the RAI in Amsterdam, these venues are the only large event locations that have been awarded the Golden Green Key. Together with their business partners, they give talks and lectures about CSR and social involvement in business.

## Van Nelle Ontwerfabriek awarded 'Environment Oscar'

Rotterdam, 11 November 2009 – Today the 'Environment Oscars', the Golden Green Key was awarded to the Rotterdam conference and event venue, Van Nelle Ontwerfabriek. This unique event location is one of the first conference centres in the Netherlands to be awarded the Golden Green Key, and the one and only building in Rotterdam to be honoured with this preeminent environmental hallmark. The Golden Green

Key will be officially presented on January 18<sup>th</sup> to Hans Baggerman and Henk van Maanen of the Van Nelle Ontwerfabriek.

Van Nelle Ontwerfabriek, a national monument, has been awarded the Golden Green Key because their track record in terms of environmental sustainability ranks the best in the world. To become eligible for this hallmark, several criteria regarding energy use,

Box 1.6

## Continued

waste removal and water need to be met. The Van Nelle Ontwerpfabriek has high scores for all these international criteria, criteria that are much stricter than those laid down by Dutch law. The criteria range from stimulating the use of public transport among visitors to the venue and water conservation to environmentally friendly paint and energy saving ventilation systems.

Here are a few examples of the measures that sets the Van Nelle Ontwerpfabriek apart:

- Water conservation measures: the toilet flushing system uses water from the nearby Schie River and the taps are controlled by an infrared system that limits the throughput of water.
- Energy savings: the Van Nelle Ontwerpfabriek has put in place several measures to reduce energy use. These measures range from motion detectors to operate the lighting system to energy saving equipment. Also, contracts stipulate that when replacing equipment, the most energy saving options must be given priority.

- Sustainable purchasing policy: agreements have been made with all suppliers about the ‘sustainability content’ of all products and services. For instance, disposable cups are no longer an option, only glass or biodegradable products will do.
- Good food: Van Nelle Ontwerpfabriek’s catering department uses a mix of fair trade and organic ingredients, and local produce.
- Separation of waste: waste is carefully separated and recycled. As a consequence, there are several waste disposal channels within Van Nelle Ontwerpfabriek, depending on the event.

*No coincidence*

It is no coincidence that Van Nelle Ontwerpfabriek was awarded the Golden Green Key. The European Commission awarded Van Nelle Ontwerpfabriek the Europa Nostra Award in 2008 for sustainable renovations, and recently the Ministry of Housing, Planning and the Environment granted them a Sustainability Label A.

Source: [www.highprofile.nl](http://www.highprofile.nl). Adapted by

Cees Rosman

Box 1.6

As mentioned, the World Forum also stands out in terms of corporate social responsibility. Their activities are grouped in their ‘Ethical Programme’. Meeting planners and organisers use the Green Events Checklist aimed making their events greener. In 2008, the World Forum received the Green Award. The prize was presented at the MICE & Business Travel Fair for the

best green initiative of 2008. The jury praised the World Forum Ethical Programme in which the conference centre encourages their clients to organise their events so that they are climate neutral.

### *The Green Key*

The international sustainability hallmark, Green Key, is one of five FEE (Foundation for Environmental Education) programmes. The mission of this global organisation is to promote as widely as possible awareness for nature and the environment. The Green Key is the hallmark for those in the tourism and leisure industry, including conference venues, who engage seriously in the business of sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility and regard for the environment in their company and its environs, using measures that can be monitored. The Green Key ensures that businesses voluntarily do more for the environment than is laid down in laws and regulations. The Green Key is a medium for communicating to guests, the government and clients that a business is serious about sustainability. To become eligible for the Green Key, organisations have to take measures towards CSR and protecting the environment. These measures are partly obligatory and partly optional.

Green Key the Netherlands has three classes: Bronze, Silver and Gold. In October 2010, the 300<sup>th</sup> recreational accommodation was certified. The Green Key is managed by the Hallmark for the Environment, Safety and Quality Foundation (Stichting Keurmerk Milieu, Veiligheid en Kwaliteit - KMKV). The Netherlands Automobile Association (ANWB), RECRON (the Association for Recreation Organisations) and HISWA (the Holland Yachting Group). Inspections are carried out by external inspectors.

Recreational accommodations with a Green Key have to meet strict standards in terms of sustainability, the environment and CSR. These norms involve internal and external communication, sustainability in management and business operations, energy use, gas and water, waste management, transport, food and beverages, ground maintenance, sustainability measures taken in the office, use of paper and consumables, printing, purchases and acquisitions and so on. There are various categories of Green Key standards for the various kinds of accommodation in the tourist sector and venues and conference centres in the business sector.

### *CSR is a matter for trade fairs*

Implementing CSR is in full swing. During the Festivak 2010, a CSR section was set up so that businesses could see how they can apply innovative solutions for socially responsible operations at the heart of the business processes. Last year, CSR was placed firmly on the agenda in many organisations. Notable examples from the event industry include show equipment, facilities, energy, waste management, catering and accommodation, and cleaning. At the exclusive Sustainable Business & Energy stand, various suppliers and government institutions promoted their sustainable products and solutions. Presentations and a debate were also held there.

Event2010 was also all about People, Planet & Profit, the main theme of this trade fair that is in its 10<sup>th</sup> year and held on an annual basis in the Jaarbeurs exhibition centre in Utrecht.

### *The Golden Giraffe*

Each year, High Profile Publishers presents the Golden Giraffe award for the best, most effective, creative CSR event (Charity) and the Personality of the Year. In 2010, the award in the category 'Charity' went to De Belevenis (Experience). Their mission is to create opportunities to get out and about for people with severe disabilities and for the elderly who are in the advanced stages of dementia. The jury report was as follows:

'A remarkably creative concept that is particularly complicated given all the modifications required to take into account hygiene, safety and climate control. The organisers, all of whom are involved in caring for the handicapped, developed this concept together with many care institutions, but also feel drawn to the world of culture and entertainment, hence their involvement with artists. Alongside their creativity and organisational talent, the jury was extremely impressed with the way this organisation achieved a combination of idealism and pragmatism in a project that took on a social problem in a positive and constructive way. The organisation's enthusiasm and idealism was truly inspiring. De Belevenis is truly beautiful to behold, and as a concept and project extremely innovative.'

### Tips and advices

Here are a few tips for organising events in a socially responsible and sustainable way:

#### *Venue*

When selecting the venue, check whether a sustainability management system is in place (Green Key, ISO 2600, BS 8901). Check whether the venue has an energy conservation plan, waste restriction and recycling, green electricity, and LED lighting. Check the proximity of public transport to the venue and check whether their catering is based on sustainability.

#### *Sustainable catering*

Are the ingredients healthy, seasonal, organic, fair trade and earthwater products? Do they reuse products (complying to health and safety standards obviously)? What kinds of packaging do they use?

#### *Transport*

Is the venue close to the public transport network? Are hotels within walking distance or easy to reach by public transport? Do they provide a shuttle or carpool service? Do they use 'green' vehicles?

#### *Marketing and communication*

Use electronic invitations and confirmations as much as possible. If printed material has to be used, use both sides, matt and FSC approved paper. Use recyclable cartridges for printers. Pack everything where possible in recyclable material, opt for paper bags. Do not use

plastic goody bags, use reusable ones instead (like those made out of organic cotton).

Use whiteboards instead of flip over charts. Send information, handouts, reading material, power points and so on through the Internet.

#### *Set design*

Use reusable set material and decorations as much as possible. Use LED-lighting and low-energy light bulbs, green energy, hydrogen generators and biodiesel. Give anything surplus to requirement to charity. Use eco-toilets (no chemicals, sparing with water), eco-cups made of maize-meal, a deposit system, separate waste and reuse wherever possible. Make sure you have a 'waste management' plan.

#### *Social aspects*

Take into account the handicapped, blind and deaf when it comes to access, safety and so on.

Respect the law when it comes to working hours and conditions, and facilities for staff. Try to create employment opportunities for the mentally and physically handicapped and long-term unemployed. Offer staff the opportunity to do volunteer work. Make sure your staff compliment is varied in terms of gender, age, social background etc. This is merely a short and limited list of tips, activities and measures that can be put in place. For a more detailed list of instructions and explanations, visit [www.greenkey.nl](http://www.greenkey.nl).

### Exercises

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1. Search the web for the latest developments sustainable event suppliers. What proves that they are making an effort to conserve the environment?
2. Analyse five sustainable event management firms. What do you like about their approach, and what don't you like?
3. Look in trade magazines and/or on the web for examples of three business events that have been organised for a business that claims to operate in a socially responsible way. How have they underscored this in their event concept?