

# BS 8901:2007 Specification for a sustainable event management system

**BS 8901:2007 Specification for a sustainable event management system with guidance for use** sets out the requirements for planning and managing sustainable events of all sizes and types, supplemented by guidance on how to meet, and surpass, these requirements. BS 8901 encompasses the entire range of events ranging from large scale conferences and unique events such as the 2012 Olympics to music festivals and air shows. It is aimed at:

- Event organizers
- Venues
- Organizations and/or individuals in the supply chain

BS 8901 provides guidance in the form of easy to understand practical information designed to assist the user to implement the requirements and those in event management to manage their environmental, financial and social risks and impacts spanning all aspects of event management.

BS 8901 can help:

- Companies to improve sustainability performance within available budgets
- Reduce carbon emissions and waste, improving the resource efficiency of the entire event supply chain
- Present opportunities for more efficient planning and encourage the re-use of equipment and infrastructure
- Users take stock of the environmental impacts such as carbon footprint, waste management and effects on biodiversity; social impacts such as community involvement and fair employment; and economic impacts such as local investment and long-term viability.

To order your copy of BS 8901, please visit [www.bsi-global.com/BS8901](http://www.bsi-global.com/BS8901).

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### BSI Group Headquarters

389 Chiswick High Road London W4 4AL UK

Tel +44 (0)20 8996 9001  
Fax +44 (0)20 8996 7001  
[www.bsi-global.com](http://www.bsi-global.com)



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# Seventeen Events



Seventeen Events is an event management company which specializes in delivering ethical and sustainable events. On the weekend of August 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> 2007, Seventeen Events ran The Guardian and Observer areas at the Innocent Village Fete in Regents Park, central London, having chosen this event for its trial implementation of BS 8901. The Innocent Village Fete is an annual two-day charity event run by the Innocent drinks company. Around 35,000 people attended on each of the two days.



# BS 8901 Sustainable Events Management Case Study

## Implementation

There were three phases to the implementation, starting with the largest, planning. This mainly consisted of thinking about and sourcing materials through conversations with the supply chain and with clients.

Of the planning, Andrew Williams, Managing Director of Seventeen Events, says: "It's about entering into dialogues with a range of stakeholders and finding the level that works and makes sense. For instance, the most sustainable way of doing things would have been to have glasses for everybody. But then we'd have to find a way to make sure they didn't break, a way to get the glasses returned and a way to wash thousands of them. So we have to tell the client that this could cost a fortune, and offer the next best thing we can do."

The second phase was the event itself, which consisted of the Guardian Forest and the Observer Food Monthly picnic. In the former, old copies of the Guardian newspaper, retrieved from a warehouse, were rolled up and cut into trees by children visiting the Fete, and more than a few adults. The 'trees' were painted and had messages hung on them. This created a striking recycled forest which provided fun for the participants as well as providing an opportunity to reflect on the use of natural resources, recycling and waste.

The Observer picnic area was adjacent to the Borough Market food stalls, and consisted of a marquee with a tea room serving English cream teas; a village fete area where traditional competitions were played, such as guessing how many sweets were in the jar, how many (organic) oranges were in the wheelbarrow and the weight of a big cake; and a picnic area where people could eat food bought at the Borough Market stalls. Visitors were given biodegradable picnic bags with paper plates, and cups and cutlery made from cornstarch. The picnic area had picnic tables, picnic blankets, parasols and bales of hay which found a home after the event at a grateful inner-city farm.

Phase three of the implementation was the post-event analysis and review. For Seventeen Events, working with the standard had not changed its thinking or approach very much, but the processes were tightened. Says Andrew Williams: "It wasn't so much what we were doing as how we were doing it. How we were thinking about it in terms of internally analysing the activity and systematically documenting it. A lot of it is about benchmarking which actually becomes really meaningful when we go forward to the next event."

Andrew Williams didn't find implementing the standard burdensome, although he does admit to putting a lot of resources into it because it was a trial from which he wanted to learn as much as possible. "The

key here is that when we move on to other events", says Williams, "the process will become a lot easier. We now have templates in place and we've got a working method that we can apply to anything we do going forward."

## Benefits of the standard

What did Seventeen Events and their clients get out of trialling the standard? Certainly, Seventeen was excited to be involved with the trial, seeing it as an excellent opportunity to benchmark itself against other people and to demonstrate its genuine sustainability credentials in a transparent process.

Indeed, for such experienced practitioners of sustainable events, the key single advantage of the standard is it means Seventeen can demonstrate it practises what it preaches, with the weight of a robust third-party verification behind it.

It's also worth noting that the standard delivered an event that the client was very satisfied with. The Guardian and Observer felt it achieved its marketing objectives of stand-out brand visibility in the context of a successful, fun event. Interestingly, the event was not branded as being sustainable, a conscious decision. Says Andrew Williams: "It's often important to avoid becoming too crass or sanctimonious, and to avoid pushing the sustainability agenda too much." For The Guardian and Observer, with its 'green' positioning, what was important was that the event was sustainable and was critic-proof.

Another benefit is that the standard enabled Seventeen Events to gauge more accurately what it is that it is actually doing. Notes Williams: "Any event organizer will have a lot of process documentation and planning in place anyway, because we need very detailed timelines of what's going to happen and when. We also need detailed lists of suppliers' contacts, risk assessments, health and safety assessments. We're quite used to collating all of that information, and this is a kind of extra layer on top of that. Though I can understand if you're starting from scratch, it would seem quite involved."

The standard encouraged Seventeen to be more systematic in recording its activity and to create internal systems of centralized information that can be accessed quickly and is capable of analysis. As Williams says: "We can now look at patterns and will not be seeing each event in isolation. So for instance, we might see we've been sourcing all our organic food from outside the M25 and think of reviewing that."



For Williams, the growth in sustainability in the event industry has been unequivocally client led, and mainly driven by the fact that in most organizations of any size, someone somewhere is now saying: 'Why don't we make it more sustainable?' – a force which didn't exist 10 years ago. Says Williams: "Increasingly more and more people will start to employ sustainability experts as part of what they do. It will become mainstream. The challenge for us is to keep ourselves one step ahead and keep that competitive advantage."

Furthermore he argues that introducing the standard to the industry now is very timely: "This gives us an opportunity to leverage this change in the culture and to ensure that people are seeing events as a way to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability, rather than being something that is an aberration in terms of sustainability."

## Learning

Another issue which Williams raises is that in sustainability, there are paradoxes everywhere. For instance, he notes, you can't get locally sourced coffee, and you don't need to get fair trade potatoes. Sustainability is not clear cut - for instance, is it worthwhile to get organic produce if you have to ship it a long way? He notes that buying tomatoes shipped from Spain actually has a lower impact than buying UK tomatoes because of the energy which goes into the hothouses. Ultimately Seventeen Events believes it's about offering people the choice and saying to the client in essence: "This is what you can have, these are the more sustainable solutions, and it's up to you which way you want to go."

Allied to this aspect is the development of the supply chain, which Williams believe is becoming more attuned to sustainability requirements as pressure from clients bears down more. He says: "I think that as time goes by, more and more suppliers will be able to help in terms of making things even more sustainable. People will be starting to look at materials more and more and being sustainable will become increasingly an accepted part of business in general. For instance the people making parasols will develop material that can be overprinted using vegetable inks. It's also important to make sure that the suppliers we work with have a genuine interest in what they are doing rather than just paying lip service to it."

He continues: "The challenge for events is not to say, 'It's back to sackcloth and ashes'. That way we wouldn't get any business. It's not at that stage where people are going to be like, 'Well, it was second-best, but we just had to bite the bullet because it was the right thing to do.' The industry is not like that and the client base is not like that."

## Conclusion

For Williams, the central benefit of the standard is that it will help organizations to make a contribution, but it is also pragmatic. "The thing to me is that even a small change is a step in the right direction. It's very easy to make an operation more sustainable by doing very small things although there will always be people who argue that's not good enough, you must do everything straightaway. In my view that's unrealistic and it can alienate people and turn them off. It risks creating a backlash."

Within the context of BS 8901, he believes: "You can have an event which is just as stylish, as glamorous, as glitzy as anyone else could organize but the key is, we'll show you how to manage it to be more sustainable than it would otherwise have been." Moreover Andrew Williams concludes: "It would be a mistake for people not to embrace the standard really because sustainability isn't going to be optional for much longer."

## Further information

[www.seventeenevents.co.uk](http://www.seventeenevents.co.uk)

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**Andrew Williams**  
Managing Director, Seventeen Events