



EVENT MANAGEMENT



The 2013 World Championships in Athletics - Getty Images Sport

FRESH CHALLENGE, NEW APPROACH

Kevin Roberts looks at why running a sports event is just about the most complex job as you can get - with the conflicting aspirations of different stakeholders and inevitable issues around budgets and unmovable final deadlines some of the many challenging parts of the job.

ACCORDING TO WILL GLENDINNING, founder of event management specialists Allium, putting on a major event is a simple business. In fact, his company markets itself on the basis of its ability to *make live easy*.

However, there is a massive caveat, and that caveat is sport.

"Sports events are unique beasts. You are constantly dealing with all manner of people and issues that are trying to derail you, the goalposts are constantly changing and there's nowhere to hide," he told *SportBusiness International*.

"If you have the right structure, a clear understanding of the division between the content of the event and the context, the right people in place to provide leadership in each area, short of negligence, it is more or less impossible to fail."

Glendinning has worked on a raft of sporting and non-sporting live events over the past 20 years or so. In essence, he is in the simplification business and has a keen sense of the issues that traditionally disrupt simplicity.

"Major sports events are different for a number of reasons," he adds. "Wherever public money is invested in an event, committees have to be formed to look after it, and committees create complications. Then there is a view that people who know about sport - often ex-athletes

- are the best people to run events. They are not - their understanding is all about the content and not the context, and any confusion between the two is dangerous.

"On really big events, there are occasionally vested interests that come into play when it comes to the provision of facilities and infrastructure. That can lead to less sustainable ways of working, while sport inevitably has its fair share of egos to deal with."

So while the process is in theory straightforward, the reality is that sports event management is about as complex as it gets.

You may remember the old description of planning and managing a major sports event that likened it to spending years setting up a Fortune 500 company, operating it for a few months and then shutting the whole operation down again. And while that's an example that can be only really be applied to mega events like the Olympic Games, the principles largely remain the same right along the events continuum.

Visionary Thinking

It was an understanding of the realities of planning and delivering major sports events that led industry veteran Nigel Rushman to look beyond the sports sector for new ways of working and new ways of thinking.

In fact, both come in the same package in the form of structured visual thinking (SVT), described by its creator John Caswell as "more of a philosophy than a process".

Caswell and Rushman have used SVT to great acclaim on projects with sports bodies including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the organising committees of the 2012 London Olympic Games and 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Equally important, it has been used by many of the world's leading corporations to address and find solutions to some of their most complex planning issues.

So what exactly is SVT?

"Sport and the wider business world are full of companies and people tackling the wrong problem really well," says Caswell. "That's because they are looking at parts of projects without the context of an overall structure.

"SVT is a way of looking at every element of a project and creating a visual roadmap to which all stakeholders have contributed parts of the process. Using visual techniques - in this case wall-sized illustrations - is important because words can be misleading and misunderstood. But this is not just about drawing pictures; it is about creating an x-ray that looks inside a project from every angle.

"People today are so busy getting stuff done that they just aren't thinking. SVT changes the paradigm of behaviour, drawing people in to become collaborators and co-creators. The entire process is inclusive, liberating and cathartic but also a very practical and implementable tool."

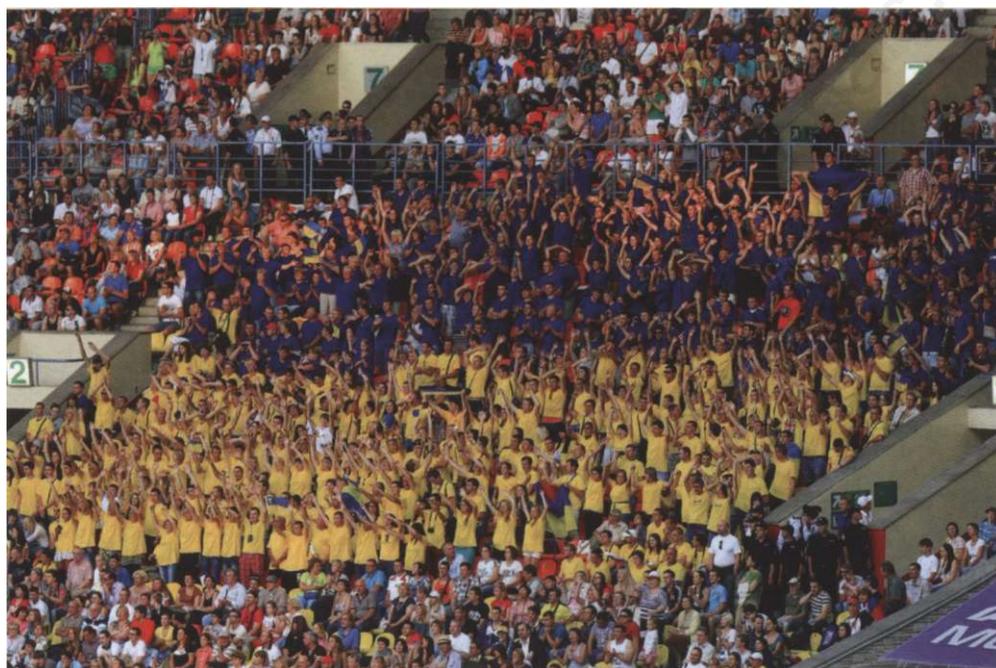
SVT is used to plan projects from start to finish, using the power of collaboration to identify and suggest solutions to the hurdles along the way. The idea of co-creation means that 'silo mentalities' - that tend to be the Achilles' heel of so much event management - have to be left at the door, and the buy-in achieved as a result of the collaboration produces a more positive spirit and unified approach to getting the job done."

Multiple Objectives

In many respects, SVT is itself about simplification because it challenges all stakeholders to examine their own thought processes to contribute positively to solutions. However, it is not only finding new ways of thinking and developing strategy that is challenging the sports event management sector right now.

Caroline Anderson, a director at TSE Consulting based in Lausanne, looks at events through the prism of a host's bidding rationale, and says that event planning and management must remain firmly aligned to the 'bigger picture'.

That will certainly be true in relation to the 2019 Pan American Games which will be hosted by the Peruvian capital Lima. According to Anderson, the Games will be used as a catalyst for major change in everything from the city's



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public transport system to its fight against crime.

"This is something that London 2012 did well," she says. "It is about making sure that the structure of the event organisation is designed to ensure that broader objectives are achieved. If you want more than an event taking place you need an overarching body that can ensure the bigger objectives are achieved and that investment of public money is justified."

Anderson is also concerned that major governing bodies do not become over-proscriptive in their requirements on local organising committees.

"While everybody recognises the need to ensure local organising committees aren't constantly reinventing the wheel, and welcome the sharing of knowledge from event-to-event," she says. "It is essential that events don't lose their local identity and connection with local culture."

Getting Creative

For Rushman, the challenges facing event management also go well beyond simply ensuring the event is delivered on time and to budget.

"Today, it is about getting much closer to the spectator, making closer connections and

extending the duration of the event in a range of ways that includes a more creative use of digital and social media," he says.

"TV today offers amazing coverage of events, but there is still something about the collective experience of being there that is important for fans. That said, we have to work hard to ensure we deliver a fantastic live event experience more or less from the moment spectators leave their home."

Glenninning is on much the same page, and adds that those managing major sports events need to make "a quantum leap" in terms of customer service.

"That means listening to what they, spectators, actually want," he adds. "I feel that events have to become more involved in content and publishing to provide the kind of engagement and service levels that an increasingly savvy audience demands."

So while live sport, and in particular major events, retain their place at the heart of a unique spectator experience, it is becoming clearer that the task of event managers is changing. It is no longer enough to provide the infrastructure and facilities to present content that works both live and for TV. The challenge today is to create new ways of connecting with the audience to create a high-value experience both within and outside the stadium.

That's at the same time as dealing with staffing, architecture, accountancy, volunteers, temporary facilities, power and water supplies, ticketing, promotion, media, broadcast operations, logistics, public transport, security... the list goes on.

Simple isn't it?