

UFI Sustainable Development Focus Meeting

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Greener Exhibition Industry: Why? And How? A Service Provider's Experience

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Recently it has been quite fashionable to be green but I do remember that environmentally conscious movement has started long time ago. During my preparation for today I wondered whom from and when did I hear first environment and sustainability. Actually these words didn't exist at that time because it was in the late 60's when a sergeant from American Forces Network AFN told his listeners: „ If you enter a dark room you switch on the light. - Why don't you switch it off when you leave“. All these years this simple sentence has stuck in my mind.

This is simple but that is where everything starts. And this was 40 years ago.

From our employees to clients we are encouraging everyone to take part in more environmentally conscious decision-making.

So the question is „What can we do as an exhibition constructor?“. We have to take ecological responsibility for all our materials. We are responsible for everything we produce and for all materials we move.

We see ourselves as an agency, a studio for architecture and design, as craftsman of wood metal and paint. As we are providing a wide range of services endless possibilities arise to act environmentally conscious in every single division of our company.

Green has been our company colour for 30 years. And it is not just our company colour but also our company attitude.

Planning Green

When you look at the massive amount of rubbish that is been generated after every trade show you start to think about how rubbish can be reduced to a minimum.

That is why we have always two questions in mind when planning a stand.

1. Is there a way that stand building material can be reused for several years?
2. How often can they be applied?

From the beginning of our design process we keep in mind to avoid as much as possible waste causing products and materials. In addition we offer high quality finishes so that the material has a longer lifetime.

We believe it is important to let the client know that a lot of waste is created every time a booth is being build. We encourage our clients whenever possible to work with stand building material more than once. One of our actual clients will try to apply its stand material for a 150 times. Which will be a record. And this is only possible because the material has been planned to last for the whole duration of its usage.

Whenever we see the possibility that stand building material can be applied for a different client from a different business field we look for ways to alter it and adjust it to the needs of this specific client.

In addition we avoid unnecessary packaging material. Customized client materials such as furniture are provided with special transportation and storage cases. It might seem like a big investment at the beginning. We reduce packaging material and can also guarantee a smooth transportation.

Whenever possible we try to incorporate existing furniture and building components such as intelligent wall systems in our designs, so additional waste can be avoided.

Green components

We avoid the use of composite material such as Alucobond. We use water based paint and lacquer and we try to avoid to glue two different materials together ... to make recycling easier.

Since the introduction of our own computer controlled paint mixing machine it is no longer required to produce large quantity of paint in reserve.

We always try to encourage our clients to go for reusable wooden flooring and carpet. There are of course still some stands with carpet.

Carpets, which can no longer be used will be taken as packaging material for bulky stand building material or will be delivered to the heat and power station to the City of Munich or are donated to charitable foundations.

Green logistics

Trade shows and events of course are held everywhere in the world. Can you imagine that approximately 30% of trucks on the highway are regularly empty? Of course we always look for the right size of truck or transport vehicles. All our guys have to pay for their own speeding tickets- Normally! In recent years we have mostly switched to external freight forwarding companies, which supports full utilization of capacity.

Disposal and recycling

Wooden wall panels, which no longer can be used as wall panels, will serve for the sub construction of the flooring. Only after that it comes – added to the sawdust of the carpenter's workshop - into our own wood pellet-making machine. Those pellets do heat the complete company building.

Many trade show components remain still in good condition after several shows but are not good enough for our clients. So a couple of years ago we introduced our once a half a year open door day where people from the neighbourhood are welcomed to purchase anything from screws to wooden panels to carpets for prices ranging from 0,50 cents to 50 Euros. Surprisingly the first time it didn't work as it was free of charge. It must be sold.

A bonus payment, which is paid to our builder's girlfriends or wives every time material returns undamaged, has also encouraged our builders to carefully handle material. This system helps to reduce costs and time, which would otherwise be applied to replace damaged material.

Encouraging environmentally conscious behaviour to our employees

We remind our employees that environmentally conscious behaviour is not only a company obligation but also for each individual.

Once a year we devote one afternoon to get together and talk about opportunities and possibilities of environmentally conscious behaviour and how each individual can contribute to that.

Employees are also regularly notified about company investments such as the installation of a 400 Mega Watt solar panel on the roof or the purchase of a hybrid company car.

Our company's building has also been designed with ecological criteria in mind.

The shed roof was designed to let sunlight in from the north side, which not only saves electricity but also has positive effects on the ambiance of our warehouse.

The rainwater from the warehouse roof is collected in a grey water tank. This water is used for the cleaning of our trucks as well as for the watering of plants and grassed areas.

As a small contribution to the general improvement of the environment a water biotope was formed on company premises that offers a plant and animal habitat.

Car sharing has been one of the things we encouraged our employees from the beginning.

It has become a habit to our employees to leave their cars behind whenever time schedule allows employees to share a car. The management has also been part of this and employees appreciate the common efforts.

Most of our memos and papers are printed as two pages layout. The announcement of monthly paper and ink usage helps to bring more awareness to the consequences of seemingly little things of daily routine.

Apart of making our employees and clients more aware of green behaviour we have taken some arrangements on our booths as well.

Our electricity distribution boxes are equipped with a timer, which automatically switches off the electricity at a certain time at the end of each show day. Everything that requires power during the night such as refrigerators is connected separately.

The water boiler is set to heat water only up to a temperature of 40 degree Celsius.

Challenges

In recent years trade show stands have increasingly become a showcase of design trends including anything from design carpets to furnishing. The problems we have been facing are rapid changes in trends. Encouraging our clients to use its stand components for several years not only require intelligent design and planning but also requires timeless design.

But what is a timeless design?

Stand components that are planned for some time need to be quickly adaptable to new trends such as surfaces changes for example.

Encouraging green behaviour while coping with tight budgets and increasing competition from budget conscious segment are great challenges.