

As head of TAO Productions, Andy Cotton has worked on major projects both in the UK and abroad. In the first of a new column, he shares his experiences with The Main Event – starting with a look at working on international events.

# When in Rome, do as the Romans do but ...

THE international events industry is reportedly worth tens of billions of dollars, whether that is for conferences, festivals, concerts, marketing or promotional events. Consequently, UK companies are venturing more and more from the shores of 'Blighty'.

Overseas work for UK-based companies tends to be awarded by other UK-based companies, these can be large-scale corporate companies, experiential brand marketing companies, PR firms, UK promoters and specialist corporate event companies to name a few.

As recession 'ebbs and flows' in the United Kingdom the major part of working overseas is financial, together with increasing your company's market base; it's a big wide world out there after all.

With all pros unfortunately there has to be cons and the international event world does have some for UK based companies. One of the first that should be considered at the earliest stage is the financial implications that can come from monetary exchange; thanks to some amazing politicians in the UK there is always a chance that over the lifetime of an overseas project the pound will drop – this can leave in

some cases a large deficit in budgets. Another early issue to consider is a company's normal insurance, public liability, product and professional indemnity, which may not cover overseas work, especially in the USA.

Working with other cultures means adapting; 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do!' Yes or No? The answer has to be Yes, it is their country and their rules/legislation, but... and there is a big but...

The UK has a strong and professional events industry, which is covered by extensive legislation and good practice guides; some of which are so good they have been adapted for use in other parts of the world. The UK industry compared to some areas of the planet is 'old father time' as it has been running events for many decades, and many of the real industry professionals are old ... (sorry to all my colleagues over 40 ... you know who you are!) Other parts of the world have a young events market due to financial or political issues in those countries pasts and their personnel cannot be expected to have the experience that UK professionals may have.

Experience has shown that the



Andy with local crew on a project in Hong Kong

main changes between certain parts of the world and the UK in the events world can be structural safety, as some areas outside of Europe, the US and Australasia do not have tested purpose built structures; the main roof elements tend to be purpose built, however the stage base can be of various wooden components on a mix and match basis.

General health and safety elements are vastly different between countries and local legislation information should always be sought at an early stage.

If legislation is lacking then it appears that the safest bet is to

utilise UK legislation as if you were working at home, this should keep the standards high enough to avoid issues. Always remember that punishments for infractions overseas can be far higher in foreign lands than in the UK, it's always best to return home with all body parts intact.

Generally though, foreign events are run extremely well and can be a company's saving when marketplaces are falling foul of the recession in certain parts of the globe, and I advocate exploring this marketplace at every opportunity. Like Sir Francis Drake – explore the world!