

A time for change and adaptation

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MAUGIE LYONS, DIRECTOR OF ROYAL HORTICULTURAL HALLS, SAYS THERE IS A SILVER LINING AROUND A CLOUD OF DOOM AND GLOOM

It seems that every week the economic outlook gets worse. From being the worst downturn for 20 years, it is now reported to be the worst for 60 years. By the time you read this, who knows?

One thing is for sure: we've survived before and we'll survive again. Corporate events will be smaller, with tighter budgets, but they will still exist. Exhibitions may have fewer stands but, although some may not see 2010, the majority will make it through to the next upturn. Life will go on, but not exactly as we knew it.

When times are hard, it is not just the fittest that survive, but the most flexible, those that can adapt to change. Businesses still need to promote themselves more than ever, through the networking opportunities that come with both corporate events and exhibitions. It is the events themselves that will change. The companies that previously put on big, lavish parties will now be looking to spend their money more wisely, moving from venues that accommodated 2,000 to those that are

more in keeping with the times. Exhibitions, large and small, will continue to offer a good return on investment, for exhibitors and visitors alike. For small companies without a showroom or smart offices, exhibitions offer the opportunity to show their products at their best, while buyers, without the distraction of their office, are more focused on the products or services on offer.

How you respond to change, no matter whether you are the client or the event organiser, can make or break the event. The first thing is to be positive: don't regard the need to downsize as losing face – regard it as an opportunity to demonstrate how creative you can be.

If you've already decided upon a venue, but are having to downsize, the first thing to do is talk to your venue team. They may be able to adapt the room for a smaller event, or even have another, smaller, space available. Tell them that you have a smaller budget – they should be able to help in all sorts of ways. Look at the menu – seasonal produce from

the UK will be cheaper than air freighted fruit and vegetables, and the same will also be true of any floral decorations.

There are cheaper alternatives to most things – it just needs a bit of lateral thinking. For example, do you really need to spend a lot on display material – projection using gobos (or patterns) may be cheaper and much more effective.

Think also about how you can help others at the same time: charities, and public organisations that rely on corporate sponsorship such as museums and art galleries, tend to be among the first to suffer in a recession.

Be benevolent – book a venue that also supports such a cause, and give something back to the community. It doesn't cost any extra and it makes you feel good. ■

