Learning Objectives

By reading this chapter students should be able to:

- Comprehend the various aspects of developing an event theme in view of the principles involved in theme design
- Recognize key theme elements associated with event design by focusing on venue, catering, entertainment and décor
- Identify international design trends and current trends in event design for consideration in the events management process
- Appreciate the importance of events design in the context of theming in the events management process.

Introduction

This chapter demonstrates the key principles of event design, which include theme development and creativity. The basic elements of theme development are described and the process by which these elements are integrated to build a unified event concept is analysed. The chapter also builds upon earlier chapters to illustrate how event managers should keep up with global social, technological, economic and political trends when considering event design. The chapter includes case studies that highlight the importance of selective event design for international events management.
Events Management

Events Design and Events Management

Design features as a key activity component in the planning, development and management of events (Berridge, 2010a; Goldblatt and Nelson, 2001; O’Toole, 2011; Silvers, 2007a). In the event management process, Goldblatt and Nelson (2001) note design as a main activity, in addition to research, planning, coordinating and evaluating events. Silvers (2007a) conceptualizes design as a core ‘domain’ or function within events management, which consists of seven facets: (i) catering; (ii) content; (iii) entertainment; (iv) environment; (v) production; (vi) programme; and (vii) theme. These seven facets should not be considered as singular entities or in isolation, but rather interrelated and interdependent domains which drive events design. In terms of definition, event design according to Adema and Roehl (2010) is a two-fold concept which focuses on: (i) aesthetics of the look and feel of an event; and (ii) functional qualities associated with event success. O’Toole defines event design as ‘a purposeful arrangement of elements of an event to maximize the positive impression on the attendees and other key stakeholders’ (2011: 183).

Event design as a stimulus activates the five senses of hearing, sight, smell, touch and taste embedded in the event experience. The design of an event is both an experience-maker and experience-enhancer, which provides ample opportunity for the attendee to engage in sensory and emotional interaction with the event. As such, experiences are at the heart of event design. Thus, event design is not simply a matter of production but participation to create memorable and unique happenings. In today’s experience economy, events design management should move beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary. Understanding the event’s stakeholders is vital for designing an experience that both engages and excites them. According to Brown and James (2004: 53) the design of an event is ‘the very heart and soul, the *raison d’être* of any truly great event’. However, despite the central role of design in events ‘the job description for the typical event manager fails to include the “design” component’ (Brown and James, 2004: 54). Thus it is imperative for international events teams to link theory (knowledge of design) with practice (professional conduct) to ‘design management in events’ (Berridge, 2010a) or ‘theme design management’ (Silvers, 2007b), the latter being of relevance to this chapter.

Developing an Event Theme

The emergence of themes in event design has added a dynamic and innovative dimension to events management. Today, theming is playing a critical role in the staging and marketing of events. Event management companies (EMCs) are involved in generating themes for their customers and specializing in theming for special occasions (for example, birthday, Christmas and wedding parties). Bowdin et al. (2011: 507) observe
that themed parties are a significant part of the event industry. In the United Kingdom, EMCs such as Office Christmas (2011) are involved in theming and event production for Christmas Parties. Office Christmas has hosted the themed event ‘The Chocolate Factory’ – a design inspired by the British children’s author Roald Dahl’s book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, The Chocolate Factory theme is reflective of Silvers’ (2007a) seven facets of design. On a more individual level, private or personal events are organized with themes reflected in, for example, colour, costumes, menu selection and music genres.

**Principles**

As theming is a characteristic of design, principles of design are applied to developing event themes. There is no consensus amongst event management practitioners about principles of theme design. Brown and James (2004) identify five principles which can be applied to event theme design management: (i) scale – size of event utilizing venue space; (ii) shape – layout of event; (iii) focus – directing attendee gaze to physical elements such as colour or movement; (iv) timing – the event programme/schedule/agenda; and (v) build – ebbs and peaks in an event. Principles of design according to Monroe (2006) ‘should have a focus’, ‘must consider the use of space’, and ‘must consider and reflect the flow of movement’ (cited in Berridge, 2007: 97; and Berridge, 2010a: 190).
Events Management

Theme Ideas

It is difficult to capture and present the kaleidoscopic array of theme ideas. The aim here is to identify theme ideas that are an embodiment of international diversity and which are a reflection of globalized event product and service. Many EMCs specialize in event theme management, and their event themes, as presented in Table 3.1, are inspired by cultural/national identity, dance, food and drink, film, literature, music, nature, the past, sport, or travel, to mention but a few categories. There are also companies selling event ‘theme kits’, such as the American-based supplier Stumps selling to event planners and individuals wanting to host a theme party. Popular event themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Areas</th>
<th>Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/national identity</td>
<td>African theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Egyptian theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moroccan theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>Line dance theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barn dance theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salsa theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and drink</td>
<td>British pub theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boston Tea Party theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cadillac diner theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Film legends theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bollywood theme</td>
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<td></td>
<td>James Bond theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>Ali Baba theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narnia theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harry Potter theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Jazz and blues theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rock ‘n’ roll theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boogie Nights theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Fire and ice theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fire theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tropical theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The past</td>
<td>Legends of the 20th century theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medieval theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Titanic theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Cricket theme</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rugby theme</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sporting heroes theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Orient Express theme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out of Africa theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Around the World theme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Amazing Party (2011)
identified by Stumps are Arabian, Casino, City, Hollywood and Tropical (Stumps Party, 2011). Themes create what Bowdin et al. (2011: 493) refer to as ‘unique and unforgettable events’. This is essential in terms of creating an experience, generating the ‘wow’ factor, and marketing an event to ensure it is successful in terms of the transition from the intangible to tangible.

### Creativity

Developing an event theme is an act of creativity – a skill – and being creative is a prerequisite for a memorable and successful event. Moreover, event design and creativity are inseparable, in view of themes, because together they ‘give something a visual identity and recognition’ (Berridge, 2010b: 210). This visual communicative role of creativity is reinforced by another statement by Berridge: ‘creativity is the one thing that really can make an event stand out from others of a similar kind’ (2010a: 192).

The act of creativity in event theme design management should, according to Silvers (2007b):

- Use a broad spectrum of stimuli
- Conduct brainstorming and other idea-generating exercises
- Remove restrictions of assumptions and traditions; and
- Combine ideas in new ways and make connections between unrelated ideas.

For creative inventions in event theme design it is vital that conceptions are unique, original and authentic. The uniqueness, originality and authenticity of a theme adds value to the ‘wow’ factor, but also presents a means of escapism to an imaginary or dream-like world. The notion of escapism is well developed in the context of travel and tourism, whereby tourism frees the tourist from her/his daily alienated life (Cohen, 1979; Cohen and Taylor; 1976; Wearing, 2002). Thus, event themes are articulated to represent a form of temporary escapism; they are beyond the reality of the everyday and produce a new experience from a previous or similar event. Therefore, event theme design requires the event planner and her/his team to adopt a ‘blank canvas’ approach to creativity. Berridge (2010a) advises against the use of past event design templates as these prohibit creative thinking. He urges event teams to forget about past events when crafting the next memorable experience. However, it may prove difficult to fully implement the ‘blank canvas’ technique as theme design may be constrained by attendees’ desire to ‘re-live’ or ‘re-visit’ various elements of previous events. Therefore, to avoid compromising customer loyalty and retention, the ‘blank canvas’ approach can be applied to various operative areas of a themed event, rather than the entire theme. For example, with reference to Berridge’s (2010a: 196–7) work, the following functional parts of a themed event, which can be creatively adjusted, are seen in Box 3.1.
Events Management

Functional Parts of a Themed Event

- Sound
- Decorations
- Timeline
- Edible displays
- Interactive décor
- Parades and float design

Cultural Sensitivity in Theme Design

Events are international in form and content, which brings people and populations of different cultures together. As the global and local cultures meet it is important that cultural sensitivity is shown in terms of catering, content, entertainment, environment, production, programming and theming, because what is acceptable in one culture may not be the case in another culture. Despite culture being a significant theme in events design and considering the international reach of the events industry, cultural sensitivity is not well documented or researched in events management. Cultural sensitivity is defined as 'a matter of understanding the international customers, the context and how the international customers will respond to the context' (Clarke and Chen, 2007: 164).

Although event themes can be transferred from one place to another, the way they are staged will differ depending upon the international customers for whom the event is hosted and the country in which the event is taking place. Event planners should be aware of culturally sensitive matters such as attitudes and values within one society, use of body language, religious beliefs, and legal requirements relating to observance of cultural or religious laws. Krugman and Wright (2007), for example, highlight a number of considerations for event managers working in the Middle East:

- Key religious observances (for example, the month of Ramadan which involves fasting – an important pillar of Islam)
- The high value placed on reputation and personal connections – as opposed to contracts
- The need to have name badges which refrain from using nicknames and that don't make holes in the garments of female attendees (for example, by wearing them with a lanyard)
- Many parts of the Middle East use SECAM video systems, which are incompatible with the NTSC and PAL systems (used in the United States of America and Europe respectively).
Allen (2009) also draws attention to the problems that arise when a female event planner goes to an Islamic country, some which do not allow women on business to be unescorted.

Event planners should not shy away from cultural diversity and differences, but rather understand and address the cultural sensitivities they encounter. There are many benefits in accommodating, responding to and valuing cultural diversity and difference in view of theme design in the events management process. The advantage of having knowledge of international cultures gives an event theme a positive image and a competitive and creative edge in the global events market. As Reisinger states:

The ability to utilize cultural differences and manage cultural diversity can provide the company with competitive advantage. Cultural diversity stimulates greater innovation, creativity, and responsiveness to customer demands and changing environments. (2009: 35)

Diary of an Event Manager – Anonymous, Event Manager, Brazil

This event manager works for an engineering-based firm which sells complex, customized equipment to the oil and gas sector in the Caribbean. Whilst the employees attend a lot of industry events, they do not host them very often. However, the company expanded to Brazil in 2010 and needed to find a way to introduce both the company and its products to Brazil.

The event manager remembers: ‘While most multi-national companies are familiar with our products, the largest potential customers in Brazil are not. After examining existing marketing channels, we found that there were very few ways of reaching a geographically distributed audience in our industry. We decided on an event as a way of introducing the company and providing interaction with its products.’

It was crucial to find the right theme for the event. The event manager spoke to the local staff since she didn’t want the company to be seen as foreign, noting that Brazilian culture is fiercely nationalistic. The staff suggested a ‘home grown’ idea in which the company was presented as a local company, using foreign technology and expertise. This theme was critical in selecting the location and it was decided to hold the event in the company’s factory, so that customers could see its local staff. Since the venue was critical to making the theme work, the event manager had a big challenge, as production facilities are designed for technical workers and not for executives in suits.

(Continued)
The event manager also recalls: 'To make sure that visitors had a good experience, we stopped production for the day, but kept staff around to talk to visitors. This was a bit risky since our members of staff have differing educational levels, but we felt it was important to show that our products were made in Brazil, by Brazilians. We needed to train the staff to ensure that they would be able to answer questions or direct visitors to where the information could be found. In the middle of the factory we placed a locally made unit, painted in the colours of the Brazil national flag.'

Paying attention to Brazilian nationalism served this company very well and the event was very successful in introducing the company as a new local provider in the Brazilian market.

## Theme Elements

Theme elements (for example, venue, catering, entertainment and décor) must be aligned with the event taking place (Bowdin et al., 2011). However, the importance of theme elements, in addition to creation of experiences, should consider the creation of emotional connections with an event (Nelson, 2009). After all, being 'wowed' and constantly reminded of the unforgettable is an emotional response to a significant occurrence in one's life. There are several ways that event theme design elements can be exploited to bridge experiences and emotions for both host and guests. It is achieved through drama, atmosphere and service delivery. Nelson (2009) – using Goffman's (1959) theory of dramaturgy, Kotler's (1973) conceptualizations of atmospherics, and Bitner's (1992) practices of servicescapes – presents a framework for studying theme elements as stimulants of experience and emotional connections in the context of design. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy links to emotional connections formed through experiences with the event settings; Kotler's (1973) atmospherics draws upon emotions active through sensory experiences; and Bitner's (1992) servicescapes emotionally attach the attendee to a themed event through interactive experiences.

## Venue

A venue is an essential ingredient in the management of planned event environments and is noted by Bowdin et al. (2011: 495) as an 'obvious part of the theme of the event’. Furthermore, O'Toole (2011: 193) states that venue location and layout are
‘essential elements in event success’. When designing international events, agencies can assist with venue-sourcing arrangements. Organizations like the Hogg Robinson Group manage business travel and also venue arrangements for international brands such as Vodafone. The venue, selected provides the scaffolding around and within which to stage the themed event, consequently dictating the spatial layout. Venue layout has a bearing on the social interactions that take place between the hosts and guests (Nelson, 2009). The objective is to match the scale of the themed event to the venue, which subsequently influences the design principles by ordering the movement, experiences and emotions of audiences once they are encapsulated in the theme (Brown and James, 2004). There are many search techniques available to the event planners to ensure the right venue is selected, because location is core to event design and experience. Lindsey (2009) identifies five key avenues to explore during the pre-production stage when venue selection takes place:

- Trade books/CD-ROMs
- Tourist boards
- The internet
- Word of mouth
- Head/Sales offices.

Venues can be transformed or used in their original form to complement an event theme. The Ice Hotel (Quebec, Canada) is a venue which is built entirely from ice and is a perfect backdrop for a fairytale themed wedding. There is a wedding package put together by the Ice Hotel for potential customers wishing to stage a unique experience, such as a ‘magical’ fairytale wedding which consists of, for example, the use of the ice chapel and a stay in the Ice Hotel’s theme suite with a fireplace (Hôtel de Glace, n.d.). Many EMCs plan Christmas parties for corporate clientele, requiring a link between venue and theme, which often requires considerable transformation. The Ultimate Experience event-organizers transform The Pavilion at the Tower of London to host the ‘Bejewelled’ theme (Ultimate Experience, 2007).

**Catering**

Bowdin et al. (2011: 507) recognize catering as a ‘major element in staging, depending on the theme and nature of an event’. The choice of catering is as important as venue selection because the quality of food and beverages is a vital ingredient in visitor experience (Shone and Parry, 2010). Thus, as a sensory stimulator, the aromas and flavours of cuisine are critical in enhancing the thematic design and experience of an event. Catering design consists of such facets as menu selection, service style, alcohol management and catering operations (Silvers, 2007a). Food and drink provisions and functions in an event could be directed by a given theme, which interrelates with
other aspects of design such as content, entertainment, environment, production and programme. The catering design may be unconsciously and/or consciously driven by whether the character of an event theme is the sacred or profane. A Bollywood-themed celebration could consist of servings of Asian-inspired gastronomy such as vegetable samosa for starters, curry and rice for main course and a selection of sweetmeats for dessert.

Catering design influenced by a certain event theme is evident in the following examples:

- Arabian-Nights/harem-themed party: filled vine leaves, Matbuha (Moroccan cooked salad with grilled peppers and tomatoes), couscous with chicken and vegetables, and sahlab for dessert (Harem Nights, n.d.).
- Retro-themed party: ‘retro crisps’ (Space Invaders, Wotsits and Monster Munch), pots of baked beans and toasted fingers, tea cups of prawn and salmon cocktail, mini iced fairy cakes, pots of candyfloss, and jelly and cream (Purple Grape Catering, 2011).
- Medieval-themed event: duck liver and wild mushroom pâté with spiced fruit chutney and Melba toast, luxury game pie (venison, pheasant, rabbit and pork), cabbage sautéed with apple and cider, steamed morello cherry pudding with fresh custard and hot mulled wine spiced with cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves and ginger (Bonafide Food Company, n.d.).

**Entertainment**

Another prerequisite, in addition to venue and catering choice, is entertainment for a themed event. Many events, whether themed or not, would not be complete without some form of entertainment for attendees. When used, entertainment is a communicative device in an event which captivates the feelings and emotions of a guest, and cultivates the memories of the attendee (Matthews, 2008). The entertainment domain can be formal/informal, have appearances by celebrity look-a-likes or roving street entertainers, and performances by magicians or stand-up comedians (Berridge, 2010a). Entertainment in events, according to Matthews (2008), has evolved around four genres: (i) singing or music; (ii) storytelling/theatre; (iii) dance; and (iv) athletes or athletic pursuits. The reasons for entertainment in an event are wide and varied, but fall into eight distinct categories: (i) education; (ii) physically moving people; (iii) emotionally moving people; (iv) motivating and inspiring people; (v) decorations; (vi) announcing, introducing or advertising; (vii) creating ambience; and (viii) rewarding performance and for image purposes (Matthews, 2008). In the context of atmospherics and service-scapes, entertainment can be utilized to manipulate emotions and memories as a means of creating experiences at a themed event (Nelson, 2009). In Table 3.2 are presented some themed events where entertainment plays a central role.
**Décor**

When staging a themed event, décor, as an act of creativity and ambience maker, has a bearing on the success of an event environment. Décor is reflective of theming because it involves transforming ordinary mundane spaces into innovatively 'wowing' settings. Types of décor available to an event planner are vast, and these can be utilized to construct an event theme. Some examples of décor are backdrops, themed sets, props, fabrics and soft goods, banners and signs, tension fabric structures, people or creatures, floral displays, inflatable materials, and elements of nature (Matthews, 2008). Matthews also draws attention to the 'escape' characteristic of décor in any event:

> People attend events to be transported into an environment that is different from their everyday life, whether it is a concert, a championship football game, or a formal dinner. (2008: 59)

The escapist or imaginary function of themed events in the context of décor requires both the host and guest to enter the world of make-believe. At a themed event, for example a Wild West setting, audiences may be requested to dress-up as cowboys or sheriffs to reflect the design of the event and to play an integral part of the entertainment (Bowdin et al., 2011).

Décor can be inspired by many thematic preferences, such as the traditional or modern, classic or chic styles, choice of flowers and floral arrangements, plain or patterned drapes and backdrops, special effects and sculptures. For an Asian wedding some main decorative areas are table centre-pieces, chair decorations, and table décor. Asian wedding planners Exclusive Events, based in the United Kingdom, Dubai, India and the United States of America, provide such decorations and props as stage sets, swings, sofas and stools; mandap backdrops and stage drapes; red carpet and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2 Themed events featuring entertainment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>African event</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bollywood event</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Medieval event</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Las Vegas event</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Theme My Party (2010)*
aisle runners; LED and uplighting; mandap stage pillars and pedestals; aisle arches; pillars and pedestals; and aisle/foyer decoration and props (Exclusive Events, 2009/2010). The following images, in Figure 3.2, taken at an Asian wedding, are designed with the colour theme of pink, which is reflected in one of the table centre-pieces, chair decorations, table décor and stage drapes. Pink (according to Colour Wheel Pro, a colour scheme software tool) ‘signifies romance, love and friendship’ (cited in Matthews, 2008: 64).

**Figure 3.2** Theming with a pink colour scheme
Case Study 3.1 – When ‘CEE’ Spells ‘Team’:
Meeting Nike Europe’s Teambuilding Design Challenge by Chillisauce Limited

About Chillisauce Limited
Chillisauce Limited is an event production company that offers a variety of events which range from adventure weekends to corporate events. Established in 2002, Chillisauce aims to be more interesting, more creative, more resourceful and less predictable in everything it does. This dedication to continuous improvement has been rewarded, both in terms of customer growth and retention (Chillisauce boasts over 140,000 customers and organizes over 700 corporate events annually) and in terms of recognition by the UK events industry. In 2010 Chillisauce was the proud recipient of an Eventia Gold Award and the Event Management Grand Prix prize from the UK Event Awards. Well-known sports apparel brand Nike is one of many organizations that have approached Chillisauce with a request for a bespoke event which could achieve a variety of corporate as well as social objectives.

The Client Brief
Nike required an event to bring their European Head Quarters (EHQ) Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) team together in a relaxed, social environment, whilst promoting cross-department introductions and interaction. They also wanted to introduce the CEE leadership team in an informal setting and style whilst delivering a young, fun, interactive and artistic event. They required an afternoon event to take place in a unique urban venue located close to Hilversum in the Netherlands. The event would be for 100 Nike employees aged between 26 and 46 years of age.

Chillisauce’s Response
Chillisauce recommended and provided the following:

- Venue and all facilities
- Team-building activity including all staff and equipment
- Catering

(Continued)
Events Management

(Continued)

- DJ
- Creative introduction for leadership team
- Full event management (pre-, on-site and post-event)
- Evaluation and debrief.

Chillisauce suggested two creative solutions:

1. ‘Masterpiece Challenge’, which required the whole group to create an oversized, replica of a bespoke design specifically for Nike. The group would be broken down into smaller teams and each team would work on their own segment of the design before the finale when all the pieces would be collated to create the final image.

2. ‘3D Letters’, which would require the whole group to work together to design and craft 6ft 3D letters, spelling out CEE. The format would be similar to the Masterpiece Challenge, splitting the teams and collating each team’s artwork into one for the finale. These letters would then be sealed with resin and displayed on the Nike campus.

Chillisauce suggested a venue in Westerpark, Amsterdam. This venue is also used for music gigs and has a very unique interior: industrial, urban décor.

Figure 3.3  Event venue in Westerpark, Amsterdam
graffiti art, tinted windows and the raw touch that Nike was looking for to echo their brand and image.

For an alternative way of introducing the leadership team, Chillisauce suggested that a DJ, comedian, rap artist or interactive screens could be used.

The Event

The 3D Letters option was chosen as the afternoon activity as it is unique, creative and incorporates a number of business benefits that tie in with Nike's requirements:

- Allowing staff to be aware of the bigger picture rather than focusing on individual tasks.
- Helping them to build trust between people that work together.
- Demonstrating issues related to team dynamics, problem solving, time management, organization, and leadership under time constraints.
- Creating a tangible statement that CEE (the smallest team on the Nike campus) are present and ready to grow.

![Figure 3.4 Team members working together](Image)

![Figure 3.5 Completed giant CEE letters](Image)

The comedian was the selected means of presenting the leadership team, offering a comedic and entertaining edge. This enabled the CEE staff to get to know the leadership team in a relaxed and informal environment. A local comedian interviewed the seven members of the leadership team on stage, allowing guests to learn a little bit more about each individual. Once the interviews were completed, guests enjoyed food (including local favourites) and

(Continued)
Events Management

(Continued)

drink, and were entertained by a local DJ. The event took place in Westerpark, Amsterdam, as suggested by Chillisauce and the venue was transformed specifically for the event.

Feedback on the Event

‘The pre-event work you did was fantastic. The venue was perfect. Timelines and budget were clear. You were very responsive to many changes and requests regarding the creative. It was all very well-handled.’

‘As for the event itself, I have heard it was a fantastic success. The letters look absolutely fantastic.’

Design Trends

The operations of the events industry stretch beyond the local to the global, and thus the sector is affected by international happenings and developments. As event theme design indicates, it does not matter where in the world an event is taking place: it can be created to reflect people, places and populations elsewhere. Thus, the events industry is a globalized product and service, which requires the events sector to keep up with international trends and current developments in event design in order to continue to create unforgettable and unique experiences (see also Ferdinand et al., Chapter 2 of this volume). The global trends examined in this section are based upon an external environmental scan, which consists of an analysis of political, economic, social and technological trends, as described in Chapter 2. The environmental scanning of future event design conducted by Adema and Roehl (2010) informs event design management with a view to keeping up with global trends. Current trends in event design focus upon issues of sustainability in the context of natural environments. As a consequence of climate change and the need to reduce the negative environmental impacts of events, it has been necessary, as part of the events management process, to respond to such environmental concerns.

Keeping Up with Global Trends

Events design will need to keep up with global trends in view of political, economic, social and technological changes. Moreover, these developments will have
an impact upon the choice, design and management of future themed events. The environmental scan conducted by Adema and Roehl (2010) to study the future of event design offers an insight into the global trends that the events sector has to take note of. Adema and Roehl (2010) conducted interviews with eight event industry leaders who held influential positions in event production, event professional associations, and event education. Table 3.3 presents selected responses of these interviewees.

### Table 3.3 Global trends in events design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>Events Industry Perspective</th>
<th>Influence on Theming of Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>'The actual world system will move so we’re watching an evolution and I think events encapsulate that. They [events] are the opportunity where large groups of people come together to exchange emotions and feelings; that is, after all, what drives the world.'</td>
<td>To keep up with global happenings, which are of importance to different people and populations, and expose these in themed event settings. This will entail focusing on the 'non-business' element of the events industry as core in delivering the themed service encounter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological</td>
<td>'I think you are going to see a huge integration of digital media online. You have already seen the capabilities of systems like Vivien design; the next step would be to take Vivien and if you could project it on the walls ... creating an event design backdrop in the room by either rear projection or front projection so that it creates a dimensional feel as well in the room but it is all produced by visual media.'</td>
<td>To keep up with the ever-evolving technological advancements at both national and international levels. Technology can be utilized to create virtual themed event settings inside (and outside) of venues and, with the power of 3D, transport attendees to different themed worlds. Also, theme elements such as décor can be easily created and adjusted to suit the needs of customers through the use of digital media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>'I think controlling costs and finding more value for less money is going to be the link to a lot of people's success.'</td>
<td>To keep up with design trends with limited budgets is a challenge. Cost can be controlled by sourcing local suppliers and forming EMC partnerships on both a national and international scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>'What I think we are seeing right now is that there is a change in government as there has been here [US] and a change in government in the UK, and I think we are moving into an area where there is going to be more caring in the world at a higher social agenda, and we are going to use all our resources and skills to try to make the world a better place than just turn a profit.'</td>
<td>To keep up with current political affairs, especially those promoting corporate socio-political responsibility. As national and international government agendas are driven by the concept of ‘change’, this needs to be embedded in the event theme design. Themed events could take on a political value and ask themselves – How, after this event, is the world a better or ‘changed’ place?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Adema and Roehl (2010: 202)*
Current Trends in Event Design

The critical current trend identified to have an impact upon event design is environmental sustainability, which extends the analysis of external factors discussed in the previous section. Sustainable event management has emerged as a response to climate change and reducing the carbon footprint of global citizens. The BS 8901 – the British Standard for Sustainable Event Management – is used in Britain to ensure that planning, development and management of events do not compromise environmental resources (see also Cavagnaro et al., Chapter 12 this volume). Although no separate guidelines for ‘greener’ themed events can be found, the principles and checklists for events in general can be applied to ensure BS 8901 Sustainable Event Management is implemented. Many leading organizations and venues in the United Kingdom have sought to be compliant with BS 8901, for example Lords Cricket Ground, Seventeen Events, Live Nation, and London 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games sites. Evidence suggests that the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 prompted the creation of BS 8901:

It’s no secret that the creation of BS 8901 was promoted by the Olympic Games coming to London in 2012. Yet for every community, social, sporting or business event, the implications of using the standard reach far beyond a specific date in the calendar. At its heart, BS 8901 is a whole new way of doing business, building communities and managing enduring meaningful legacies. No matter how hard the present circumstances might seem, it offers a completely new way of planning a practical sustainable future by realising direct benefits in the present. (Sustainable Events Group, 2010, emphasis in original)

For event theme design management much can be learnt and put into practice in the theme elements of venue, catering, entertainment and décor. With reference to various guidelines and publications, event theme design can be sustainable, without compromising the uniqueness and ‘wow’ factor associated with experience, in the following ways:

- **Venue:** Use venues with environmental certification to a national or international standard, such as ISO 14001, ISO 201121, BS 8901 or BS 8555; or provide well-advertised and clearly-labelled recycling facilities (DEFRA, 2007).
- **Catering:** Serve Fairtrade products, such as coffee, tea and chocolate, or fresh food rather than prepared desserts (DEFRA, 2007).
- **Entertainment:** Supply sustainable lighting and audiovisual equipment (Seventeen Events, 2011); or use a venue which provides in-house audio equipment, as this reduces the need for transportation (DEFRA, 2007).
- **Décor:** Hire rather than purchase equipment or materials; or use reusable display materials and present materials in reusable format (Government Office for the South-West, 2010).
Case Study 3.2 – Turning Old into New York: The International Student Fusion Fashion Show

Overview
The Fusion Fashion Show hosted at Bournemouth University (BU) in the South of England was a concept developed by five of its MSc Events Management students. The group of students, who went by the name LATL Event Solutions, wanted to host an event which would interest BU’s students and also members of the public who lived and worked within the vicinity of the university. They needed to attract not only attendees but also volunteers and stakeholders, such as sponsors to provide them with the required expertise and resources to make their event a success. None of the students possessed skills in fashion design; some had virtually no experience organizing events of any kind; and they had just eight weeks to take their Fusion Fashion Show from concept to reality. One of the key reasons that LATL was successful is the thought and attention the group members gave to the design elements of the fashion show.

Theme
LATL knew that they had to choose a theme that would translate well to BU’s students and especially its master’s students. In the academic year that the Fusion Fashion Show took place, there were 2,610 international students from 125 countries enrolled at BU, which was just under 15% of the university’s total student population (Bournemouth University, 2015). However, on many of the university’s master’s courses the percentage of international students is close to 100%. For example, among the group of students which comprised LATL there was only one British student; the other four international students came from three different countries. There were also very few British students taking the course. The group settled on New York as their central theme because it is a city that is well known throughout the world and it is associated with fashion. The second aspect of their theme was turning old into new, which reflected LATL’s collaboration with a charity clothing shop run by the People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), which is the UK’s leading veterinary charity (PDSA, n.d.). This charity supplied LATL with all the clothing that was shown at the fashion show. LATL in return donated all the proceeds from the fashion show to the charity. See Figures 3.6 and 3.7.

(Continued)
Events Management

(Continued)

**Figure 3.6**  Stylist and model in front of New York-themed backdrop

**Figure 3.7**  PDSA charity shop
Catering
The catering for the fashion show was limited to providing non-alcoholic beverages to attendees.

Content
Much of the content of the fashion show was focused on communicating the event’s theme, ‘Turning Old into New York’. The fashion show was divided into five segments representing the five boroughs of New York – the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island (Borangno, 2015). The models for the fashion show represented the diversity of not only New York’s fashion scene but also the masters students at BU. There was a mix of ethnic groups, nationalities and body types represented in the fashion show. The fashions featured were styled with used clothing from the PDSA’s charity shop but put together in a new way by students from BU’s Fashion Network. There was also a photo booth for attendees with a backdrop featuring black and white images of New York. See Figure 3.6 above. Additionally, before and after the fashion show the PDSA ran a clothing stall and there was a raffle. These activities were to provide the PDSA with additional avenues for fund raising.

Entertainment
The focus of the entertainment was the fashion show. However, before and after the fashion show, attendees were treated to music played by the fashion show’s DJ.

Environment
LATL had a considerable challenge in converting the venue they had chosen – the university’s teaching restaurant – into a fashion show runway. This was achieved by rearranging the restaurant’s seating into a U-shape and using red carpet as a runway. Lighting illuminated the ceiling above the runway. One of the restaurant’s semi-enclosed areas was used as a clothing stall. Throughout the venue there were also black and white images of New York.

(Continued)
(Continued)

Production and Programme

The main production elements in the fashion show were the music and lighting, which was red, white and blue – colours found in the flag of the United States of America and also associated with New York (for example, red, white and blue are the team colours of the New York Yankees). See Figure 3.8. The programme was limited to two hours, running from 5:30pm to 7:30pm. The fashion show was just half-an-hour, leaving attendees with about an hour of shopping time in the PDSA’s clothing stall. See Figure 3.9.

**Figure 3.8**  Red carpet runway illuminated with red, white and blue lighting
Event Design

**Fusion Fashion Show**

**Turning Old into New**

17:30 DOORS OPEN
Get ready to mingle, enter the tombola prize draw and enjoy our photo booth, whilst sipping on a refreshing drink

18:00 FASHION SHOW
We proudly present five themed fashion segments brought to you by PDSA and styled by the BU Fashion Network.

18:30 SHOP AND MINGLE
Enjoy a refreshing beverage whilst browsing our selection of handpicked pieces and runway items. All funds raised will go directly to PDSA.

18:45 PRIZE DRAW AND SURPRISE
Did you enter the tombola prize draw? Good for you. We will be announcing a winner ... and a surprise.

19:30 PARTY CONTINUES
... elsewhere.

We really hope you will have a great time with us tonight.

**Figure 3.9** Fusion Fashion programme

**Event Results**

BU students and also members of the public came out in their numbers to support a good cause. All 80 tickets for the fashion show were sold out and LATL raised a total of £322 for the PDSA (Chipperfield, 2015).

**Case Study Questions**

1. Which principles of design are evident in the case study? Describe how LATL executed these principles.
2. How did LATL address the cultural diversity of attendees at their event? What additional steps might they have taken?
3. LATL did not want to spend too much of their budget on décor because they wanted to make as large a donation as possible to charity. With this (Continued)
in mind suggest some low-cost ideas which could have added to the event’s décor.

4. Go to the Fusion Fashion Show website: http://t-r-a-v-e-l-e-r.wix.com/fusion-fashion-show. List some ways in which LATL used the website to communicate the event’s theme.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter on event design has considered matters relevant to theming of events in view of developing an event theme, theme elements and design trends. A variety of case examples have been included to highlight the international reach of event theme design management in staging various celebrations. Although much of the practice of theming events is skewed towards North America and Europe, the development and professional aspects can be applied to international events management. Event educators, planners and students should embrace global diversity and difference in their teaching, management and study of theming in events. There is an opportunity for intercultural dialogue through theming, which can contribute to alleviating cultural misunderstandings. This intercultural communication and recognition of culturally sensitive issues can enhance an event’s design and experience, and continue to create unique, unforgettable and memorable encounters through theming. Theming compels the international events management educator, planner and student to consider the two worlds of events – the business (experience economy) and non-business (emotion-making) dimensions – when reaching out to event audiences.

**Review Questions**

1. What are the opportunities and challenges facing event managers in developing event themes for culturally diverse attendees?
2. Why do you think it is important to include the ‘design’ component in job descriptions for event managers?
3. How will global social, technological, economic, political and environmental changes affect event design in the future?
4. You have been asked to design a theme for an event entitled *Fast-Forward – Life in the Year 2112*. Consider the following theme elements: the venue, catering, entertainment and décor.
Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank Mr William Bicknell, Director, Chillisauce, for giving permission for the reproduction of Case Study 3.1, which has been taken from www.addchillisauce.co.uk/work/nike

The authors also wish to thank LATL and Andrew Clements for the images used in Case Study 3.2. For more on the event, please go to the event’s web page: http://t-r-a-v-e-l-e-r.wix.com/fusion-fashion-show

Additional Resources

Books / Book Chapters / Journal Articles


Bowdin, G., Allen, J., O’Toole, W., Harris, R. and McDonnell, I. (2011). Events Management (3rd edn). Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann. This text includes chapters which focus on several of the key areas of event design, such as event conceptualization and staging.

Nelson, K. B. (2009). Enhancing the attendee’s experience through creative design of the event environment: Applying Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective. Journal of Convention and Event Tourism, 10: 120–33. This article demonstrates that theatrical principles can be applied in event design.


Useful Websites

www.aeme.org – A resource for event management educators which includes articles on the latest developments in the subject area.

www.juliasilvers.com – A website which features articles on the core areas of the EMBOK, including a specific focus on event design.

www.thesustainableeeventsgroup.com – Features resources to help the public and private sector design, develop and implement sustainable event management systems.

References


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