

## **Show grounds waking up to the need for connectivity**

As with any venue, show grounds have had to evolve to survive the ebb and flow of the economy over the last few years; the international recession coupled with increasing financial pressure on farming has meant that show grounds have had to diversify into a broader range of events and compete with indoor venues.

But while show grounds can compete in many areas, they have, until now been slow to adopt new forms of technology; that is providing the infrastructure for event directors and the attendees themselves to get connected.

Show grounds are more traditionally associated with large annual county shows and temporary events which come and go. Typically each event implements its own technology; ranging from phone lines and PA, through to CCTV and payment terminals. But as these venues are expanding and competing with the likes of Earl's Court and the NEC, a permanent technology infrastructure will become a 'must have' rather than a 'nice to have'.

Event Directors now expect to be able to access e-mail, communicate with their teams and take advantage of marketing opportunities such as interactive content; in fact Wi-Fi connectivity is now seen as a standard requirement.

Tom McInerney, Events Director at Etherlive offers a few pointers on how to get started.

### **Top tips for show grounds getting connected**

1. Whatever the event, the chances are you'll need to provide phone lines to the organisers – the number may vary from event to event. Be aware that it can take up to four weeks for your telecoms provider to install a line assuming they offer a temporary service. For a permanent installation, you can always opt for Voice over IP (VoIP) lines which can be easily deployed to meet demand with no added cost whilst delivering the same quality. Many also offer free national calls.
2. Your communications technologies are all reliant on the power supply – if your power source fails, you have a problem. So when you're planning your power requirements for organiser areas, opt for an uninterruptable supply, or arrange a back-up generator to ensure operations continue in emergencies.
3. An increasing number of show grounds are installing permanent Wi-Fi. But don't make the assumption that a small network installed within the main site office will be enough to provide everyone with the right connectivity and support. Check the

capacity of the network prior to each event and establish what would happen if you need technical support.

4. It sounds obvious, but check that each event organiser has laptops that are set up to use the latest standards (802.11n is the most modern), meaning they will be able to enjoy faster speeds and get better signal strength. Don't be afraid of using wire if you need to. Better that, than no internet access.
5. In our experience, the onsite teams at events get bombarded with questions which come up time and time again – opening times, parking details etc. If you have a telephone exchange on site, why not set up an automated attendant system for your client to reduce the volume of calls to key staff.
6. Ensure you have a method of secure one to one communication which doesn't rely on mobile phone networks (which may become too busy). Radio networks are great for most communications on site, but what if the organisers need to transfer private or sensitive information, like the description of a missing child, for example? It makes sense to have a secure line dedicated to staff in case of instances like this.
7. Make the most of the infrastructure you have to add value to services for event organisers. CCTV, for example, can now be used for far more than surveillance. Many cameras can automatically detect and track motion and combined with infrared lights which can 'see in the dark'. As well as pure security aspects, deployment of cameras can assist in monitoring crowd flow, entrance traffic management and even providing a more flexible webcam option for linking into websites!
8. Audience interaction is becoming more popular especially using mobile devices which can be used to view running orders, find your way around or purchase directly from exhibitors' websites. Consider supplying a Wi-Fi network where attendees will get the best experience.

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