



BECOMING A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

WHEN DID YOU START LOOKING AT SUSTAINABILITY AS A BUSINESS?

We all know that the event industry has traditionally been incredibly wasteful and we were especially concerned about sending waste to landfill. In 2009 we reviewed our waste management processes and started our partnership with Powerday. We achieved our 'zero to landfill' objective in 2011, with a 95% recycling rate and have since increased this to over 98%.



WHERE DID YOU BEGIN?

A sustainability advisor role was developed within the organisation about 15 years ago and in 2009 Olympia London gained certification to the British Standard for sustainable event management, BS 8901.

The venue then helped to develop the international standard, which was based on this British Standard, and has been compliant with ISO 20121 ever since its launch in 2012.

In 2017, we recognised that we needed to extend the reach of our sustainability programme, so that everyone in the business would understand the important part they had to play in improving sustainability within the organisation and encouraging greater collaboration in the industry.

Our consultant, the MICE Machine, undertook a sustainability assessment (or gap analysis) and facilitated a series of strategy workshops for us, where the 'Grand Plan' was created by a group of colleagues from all levels of the organisation. The Grand Planners are responsible for setting and achieving our objectives – we set objectives within our three focus areas: 'Community, Environment and Engage, Educate, Empower' and we meet quarterly to review progress.



THE GRAND PLAN

COMMUNITY • EDUCATION • ENVIRONMENT

olympia.london/sustainability

WAS THIS INFLUENCED BY THE CROSS ASSOCIATION SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENTS? WERE THESE A USEFUL GUIDE?

Olympia London sponsored a series of workshops, facilitated by the MICE Machine, for the Sustainability working group to create the organisers, venues and contractors Sustainability Commitments.

We then collaborated with representatives from other venues to refine the venues commitments.



IF YES - HOW DID YOU IMPLEMENT THEM?

Olympia London already had many of the initiatives outlined in the commitments in place, but they helped us to measure our success in each area and highlight areas for improvement.

Areas of strength that were highlighted included:

- Waste management
- Industry collaboration
- Support for our community
- Catering

Taking food waste management as an example, in 2019, we reduced food waste by 9% overall year-on-year. We did this firstly by measuring food waste at source, from production to plate waste and separating edible and non-edible waste. We then worked hard to reduce production waste and repurpose edible food waste by donating it to charities.

We recently installed a food waste dewatering station that can reduce the volume of waste by 80%, thereby reducing road journeys to the anaerobic digestion plant, where our food waste is converted into biofuel and fertiliser.

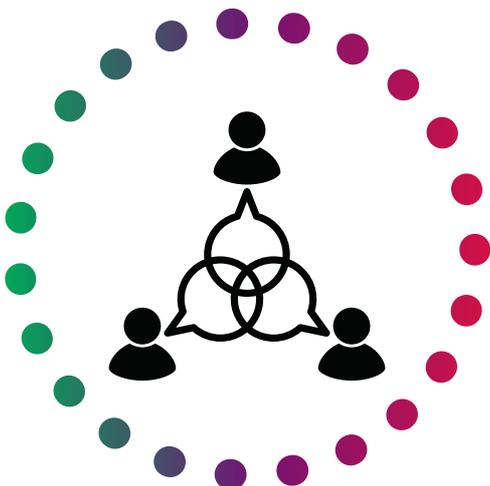
We also have a strong emphasis on sourcing local and sustainably produced food to reduce emissions and provide healthier choices for our customers, increasing our plant-based food range and decreasing our red meat offer. Our catering manager is an ambassador for [WRAP](#) and is helping to develop an emissions calculator for food production and waste, which will also help us towards our net zero goal.

Areas of the venue commitments where we felt we could make further improvements included energy efficiency, greater recognition of achievements to encourage further progress and promoting diversity. We have been working to address these areas with an extensive LED lighting programme, the installation of efficient H&V systems, a comprehensive communications plan and our recently formed Diversity & Inclusion working group, complemented by our active participation in the Cross Association D&I working group.



WHAT DID YOU UNCOVER?

The power of collaboration! By working together, pooling our knowledge and experience, we were able to produce a set of guidelines to help any organiser, contractor or venue improve their sustainability, no matter what stage they are at.



WHAT HAVE BEEN THE WINS/THE LOSSES?

The success of our waste management programme partly stems from our being able to control all aspects of the process. For example, there is no need to rely on visitors using the correct separation bins on the exhibition floor – they can use any waste bin and we do the rest behind the scenes.

Not having visible separation sometimes led to visitors thinking our venue was unsustainable/sending waste to landfill, so we have added clear messaging on to all our show-floor bins to explain our recycling rate and that we are a zero to landfill venue.



CAN YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF A SUCCESS STORY FROM THIS INITIATIVE? HOW WAS THIS MEASURED?

One item we do ask exhibitors and visitors to separate is hot drinks cups. We are members of the [Simply Cups](#) initiative, which fully recycles cups in a closed-loop process.

To help with separation, we need customers to put their cups, lids and any liquid into separate containers. The bins we initially introduced for this were not very successful, as we found that customers used them for incorrect items; it was too easy to dispose of a sandwich wrapper in the container designed for cups! We then sourced alternative bins, which are much easier to use and the number of cups we're able to recycle has increased.



WHAT WILL YOU DO NEXT? WHAT IMPROVEMENTS WILL YOU MAKE?

Olympia London was amongst the first to sign up to the [Net Zero Carbon Events](#) pledge and we are concentrating our efforts on measuring our footprint and identifying improvements with the help of consultant JRP Solutions. In the next few months, we aim to set out our roadmap to net zero.



HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PART OF THE CROSS ASSOCIATION

5 years!



DID BEING A MEMBER ENCOURAGE YOU TO SHINE A LIGHT ON YOUR INTERNAL PROCESSES?

Exchanging ideas and experiences with other members is incredibly valuable. We shan't succeed in reaching net zero unless we collaborate as an industry and membership of the Cross-Association Sustainability Working Group is an important part of this.

DO YOU HAVE TOP TIPS OR TOOLS TO FELLOW MEMBERS GOING THROUGH THIS PROCESS?

1 Focus on a few key areas where you have greatest control or influence

2 Set clear objectives and don't try to do everything at once

3 Use your connections within the industry (the Sustainability Working Group is a great place for this) to learn from others

4 Communicate your successes and use them to influence others