

BS 8901:2007 Specification for a sustainable event management system

BS 8901:2007 Specification for a sustainable event management system with guidance for use

sets out the requirements for planning and managing sustainable events of all sizes and types, supplemented by guidance on how to meet, and surpass, these requirements. BS 8901 encompasses the entire range of events ranging from large scale conferences and unique events such as the 2012 Olympics to music festivals and air shows. It is aimed at:

- Event organizers
- Venues
- Organizations and/or individuals in the supply chain

BS 8901 provides guidance in the form of easy to understand practical information designed to assist the user to implement the requirements and those in event management to manage their environmental, financial and social risks and impacts spanning all aspects of event management.

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- BS EN ISO 14001 for environmental management
- BS OHSAS 18001 for occupational health and safety management

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BS 8901 can help:

- Companies to improve sustainability performance within available budgets
- Reduce carbon emissions and waste, improving the resource efficiency of the entire event supply chain
- Present opportunities for more efficient planning and encourage the re-use of equipment and infrastructure
- Users take stock of the environmental impacts such as carbon footprint, waste management and effects on biodiversity; social impacts such as community involvement and fair employment; and economic impacts such as local investment and long-term viability.

To order your copy of BS 8901, please visit www.bsi-global.com/BS8901.

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BS 8901 Sustainable Events Management Case Study



Reeds Carpets

In business since 1984, Reeds Carpets handles around 3 million m² of carpet and vinyl every year on behalf of the events and exhibition industry, making it the leading company of its kind in Europe.

As market leader, Reeds Carpets recognized that the disposal of carpet in the events industry represented a major environmental issue. Industry calculations suggest around 12 million m² of carpet from major events alone go into landfill in the UK every year.

Indeed as Malcolm Hickin, a Non-Executive Director at Reeds, who was brought in to manage change, says: "It seemed illogical to us that all that carpet should go into landfill. We recognized that there must be another alternative. We felt that it was actually socially unacceptable and environmentally unacceptable to carry on and not to challenge it."



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Implementation

Given the timing of the trial of BS 8901, the standard was virtually implemented in relation to Reeds' work on an actual event-related activity: a major project to radically reduce the amount of carpet it sent to landfill.

The project began with Reeds Carpets concluding that there were four options. As Malcolm Hickin puts it: "There's the existing practice of throwing carpet away, but that's a dangerous concept. Where do you throw it away to? There is no away." The remaining options are to re-use existing carpet, which proved impractical; to down-cycle carpet after use to produce a product of lesser value, but that doesn't keep it out of landfill in the end; or finally, to recycle it, providing the correct end product could be found to keep it out of landfill.

Through working with Warwick University, Reeds Carpets was able to identify that event-standard carpet had a high plastic content. If a carpet could be manufactured with 100 per cent plastic content, at the end of the life of the carpet it could be melted down and converted back into plastic for the plastics industry. So the recycling option was feasible. Many high-profile companies, including car manufacturers, are now trying to use recycled plastic rather than virgin oil plastic, because it saves taking the oil out of the ground and the petrochemical conversion process. Recycled plastic is not of such a high-quality as virgin plastic, but it will do the job and can be continually recycled back into the plastics industry.

Reeds' next step was finding manufacturers who were prepared to entertain the idea of making carpet in a radically different way, and two European manufacturers were brought on board.

Reeds then had to find a market both for the new style recyclable carpet and for the recycled plastic. Says Malcolm Hickin: "We had to persuade customers to buy the carpet because it's different – specifically, it doesn't have a rubber backing because this is difficult to remove and couldn't go through the plastic recycling process."

Early tests indicated that customers felt the carpet was too thin. In response, Reeds improved the density and thickness, ending up with a carpet that was visually, and in terms of performance, indistinguishable from traditional carpets. That said, the new recyclable carpet has the advantage of being lighter than rubber-backed carpet. This makes it easier to transport, handle, cut, lay and lift. Also, because it is not sealed on the back, the carpet breathes, which is particularly helpful for carpet used in marquees. All in all the new carpet has several intrinsic advantages over conventional carpet and importantly, it does not cost any more money.

In parallel with identifying and developing the product, Reeds had to go back to continental Europe to look at recovery equipment and get help to develop the recycling technology. Working with three European partners Reeds has built a dedicated in-house facility which is now converting carpet into plastic pellets.

The final activity for Reeds was to 'close the loop'. Reeds returns all the carpet which it lays to its own reprocessing facility. However, the carpet which Reeds sells to its trade customers, of whom there are 1800, must be returned to the facility by those customers if it is to be recycled. Says Malcolm Hickin: "It's finding a mechanism to get them to return it to us, rather than drop it into a landfill site 30 miles down the road." A factor will be the relative cost of bringing it back, which depends on where customers are and how they work. "What we do", says Hickin, "is recycle the carpet free of charge. So they could build up a wagonload, and when they next order from us the old carpet can be delivered at the same time as the new carpet is collected. There will be a saving on landfill tax, so there should be a net cost saving to them, and they will feel better about what they've done."

With development costs of around £1m, Reeds is fully committed to the trademarked EVO-RIB carpet. Says Malcolm Hickin: "Because it is no more expensive, performs just as well and can be recycled, we are now recommending supplying from the EVO-RANGE as against the conventional carpet. Basically a lot of the people using it initially didn't even know that they were buying an alternative product that could be recycled."

As of September 2007, 70 per cent of all the carpet handled by Reeds is recyclable – that is everything except the high-end wool content carpets and vinyls which cannot be replaced from the EVO-RANGE.

Targets and impacts

Reeds was involved in some of the first discussions on sustainability within the event industry, which led to its involvement with BS 8901. For Reeds, the virtual implementation of the standard has been about implementing systematic procedures for record keeping and process improvement, and setting formal targets for continual improvement and feedback.

The first target is to increase the percentage success rate in recycling. A benchmark has been set by developing a dry-cleaning process to remove metal and other contaminants in returned carpet. This has raised the proportion it is possible to put through the recycling process up to

90 per cent. "We also monitor this as closely as we can, so that if any batch of plastic is rejected as inferior, we are able to identify the original source carpet of that batch and why it might be contaminated."

An outcome of this stringent monitoring is that Reeds is now able to issue certificates to its clients, confirming the volume of carpet sold, the volume collected and the percentage success rate of the recycling process. Moreover, Reeds can also be audited very accurately on the volume of carpet sold and the volume of carpet subsequently recycled.

Having looked at its most major impact, Reeds is now starting to look at other impacts, including transport. This has led it to invest in six trailers to be used for deliveries to major contract customers. Says Malcolm Hickin: "For these customers we can leave the trailer with them. As the carpet gets used they put it back into the trailer. When we deliver the next load of carpet we pick up the full trailer which reduces transport and handling costs."

Benefits of the standard

According to Reeds, the benefit of applying BS 8901 to any of its event related activity would lie in the way the standard provides a framework within which formal record keeping, procedures and objective setting can be put in place. As Malcolm Hickin says: "The standard gives you a structure. For us it formalized what we were actually doing already."

The standard also provides a robust way for people to demonstrate accountability. In Hickin's opinion, adoption of the standard will certainly be driven by clients. "Plc balance sheets will be including accountability on environmental and sustainability objectives more and more. Where organizations are certified to BS 8901 people will not have to waste time checking the sustainability credentials of their supply chain partners or scrabbling around for data on CO₂ emissions."

Moreover, the standard demonstrates that the events industry is serious about global issues and is taking practical action. BS 8901 gives this action momentum, a framework and a joint language to progress sustainability within the sector.

Finally, for Reeds, embracing sustainability has given them a distinct first-mover advantage in their industry and contributed to a 25 per cent growth in sales and turnover in the last financial year. In addition, Reeds' clients now have the advantage of supplying recyclable carpet to their clients at no extra cost, in turn conferring competitive advantage on them.

Conclusion

What Reeds Carpets is keen to underline is that its approach to sustainability makes a lot of commercial sense. Reeds will supply a carpet which is no more expensive than any other, recycle it, and issue a certificate to say this has been done environmentally and which calculates the CO₂ emissions saving, all of which adds tangible added value to its offering.

Malcolm Hickin's advice to others who are contemplating adopting BS 8901 is to work with like-minded people to achieve the best results, and to ignore the people who say it can't be done. "Remember, the events industry has traditionally made a hugely negative environmental impact, so the opportunities for us to improve are enormous."

Further information

www.reeds-carpets.co.uk

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Malcolm Hickin
Non Executive Director, Reeds Carpets