

EXSA calls on exhibitors to be vigilant

On November 20, 2003, an email was received by both exhibitors and venue owner from the organizers of a first-time event – 'The Christmas Faire', scheduled to open 28 November for three days at The Dome @ Northgate informing them that 'due to lack of support from exhibitors' the event was cancelled. Any queries it was advised should be directed to the organisers' attorney:

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EXSA (Exhibition Association of South Africa), the 'watchdog' of the exhibition industry is at present vigorously campaigning to raise the level of awareness of the importance of such an association, by highlighting their continuous quest for higher standards and professionalism. "It is precisely scenarios like The Christmas Faire's last minute cancellation that give the industry a bad name", comments Carol Weaving, Chairman of EXSA. "Everyone takes a knock – especially the exhibitors, who commit funds to the event to create sales and brand their companies; the venue owner, who could have rebooked his premises if sufficient notice was received and, of course the visitors, who in this case turned up at the venue expecting to find The Christmas Faire. There needs to be more accountability within our industry. EXSA cannot protect events that happen outside of their membership body".

Echoing Weaving's comments, Grant Medcalf – The Dome @ Northgate's Sales & Marketing Manager comments: "The Dome @ Northgate's doors are always open to new business and always try make new initiatives work, but a last minute cancellation such as the Christmas Faire not only gives the venue and management a bad image, as disappointed visitors tend to lay blame at our door, but it affects our finance

While EXSA cannot force organizers to become members of the Association, they can implore exhibitors check that event organizers have safeguards in place. Weaving states that inexperienced or first-time organizers, while remaining outside the membership body can call on EXSA to assist and advise. "EXSA is available on an advisory basis and can assist exhibitors with guideline questions they should be asking organizers as it is in the industry's best interests to ensure that all events are organized in a professional manner. Members of EXSA have to adhere to strict guidelines when it comes to cancellations and refunding exhibitors", advises Weaving. Feasibility studies and market research are also considered imperative by EXSA before organisers embark on rolling out an event.

"Cancellations such as the above leave exhibitors and visitors extremely wary of getting involved the next time, and organiser members of the industry have to work twice as hard to reverse the negativity", concludes Weaving. Indeed for an industry that has experienced such rapid growth in a short period of time, putting safeguards in place will have to continue to top EXSA's action list, if the industry is to build on this growth.

Editorial contact

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