BEHIND THE NEW €˜OCEAN BUSINESS€™TM

Intelligent Exhibitions Ltd

Well known to Hydro International readers from 1996 to 2002, Versha Carter was show director and public face of Oceanology International (OI) under its previous owners, Spearhead Exhibitions Ltd. Meanwhile, Caroline Barraclough was project manager for Offshore Europe and key member of the most recent Oceanology International. Together they now head up Intelligent Exhibitions Ltd, the company behind the newly launched Ocean Business event, scheduled biennially to alternate with OI.

Intelligent Exhibitions™ team members along with key players from the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton who are assisting with Ocean Business. From left to right: Matt O’Shaughnessy (NOCS), Andrew Roberts (Head of School, School of Ocean and Earth Science, NOCS), Stephen Hayward (NOCS), Caroline Barraclough (Intelligent Exhibitions), Keith Birch (NOCS), Versha Carter (Intelligent Exhibitions), Graham Etheridge (NOCS), Gary Fisher (NOCS) and Nigel Eastwood (NOCS).

The launch of the company all happened rather quickly, according to Versha Carter, director of Intelligent Exhibitions Ltd. But that is the nature of the events business. She was involved in the Oceanology International event in London this year, having rejoined Spearhead to manage the Spill 06 event that was held alongside. This gave her an opportunity to witness how Oceanology had evolved from the days when it was held in Brighton, but also to renew contacts with old friends. Whilst Oceanology seemed to have developed and fully settled into its new location, there was a great deal of feedback for the addition to the calendar of a smaller, more hands-on, focused event that would provide ample time for social networking.

Training and Demo-led

By early April the new company Intelligent Exhibitions Ltd had identified the model for the new event. It was to be an exhibition providing delegates with opportunities for training and demonstrations. Some may call this approach unique, but Versha Carter readily admits that they took a proven format, previously established by the Massachusetts Ocean Technology Network (MOTN), and combined it with an international marketing programme aiming to attract more than 1,500 delegates. With over 65,000 brochures at the printers, adverts in all the leading industry journals and an email campaign supported by key business organisations and journals, Intelligent Exhibitions is confident of success.

A Full Month

By April 2006 the new company knew it had an event that needed to be held in years alternating with Oceanology, which meant that there was less than a year to organise it. In the first week discussions with the Association of Marine Scientific Industries and potential exhibitors confirmed the partner and the model for the event. The second week focused on researching venues, which initially ranged from Aberdeen to Brighton, but given the need for classrooms, vessels, test-tanks and dockside waters it did not take long to arrive at the obvious choice of the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton. The third and fourth weeks involved budgeting, brochures and websites and, of course, registering the new business. Within five weeks came the launch of a new biennial event organised by Intelligent Exhibitions Ltd in partnership with the Association of Marine Scientific Industries and hosted by the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton.

Industry Support

Twelve weeks later industry had confirmed its support, with 70% of the exhibition space sold. At the time of going to print this had increased to 95%. Ocean Business 2007 has attracted over a hundred ocean-technology manufacturers and systems suppliers and more than 150 individual training and demonstration hours to be held in the classrooms, vessels, dockside waters and test-tank of the National Oceanography Centre. What initially started out as a concept had become a reality and the company now has planned twelve parallel training sessions offering delegates the opportunity to actually test-drive the range of options available, thus ensuring that they make a sound investment. Alongside is a full-scale exhibition housed in a temporary structure on the dockside, with the world€™s leading manufacturers and service providers on hand to discuss the latest technological advances, explore opportunities for new applications and collaborate on design issues and options for the future. And, as momentum has grown, the event has attracted a parallel two-day technical conference focusing on technology and business issues in the offshore-survey market.

Networking Works

The new organisers having listened to feedback from exhibitors and delegates alike, the social aspect of Ocean Business has been a primary focus. The Intelligent Exhibitions team has been socialising with people in this industry for many years and so recognises the importance of those meetings that spontaneously happen when you stroll into a bar or restaurant and see fellow
colleagues and associates. To help spur on this process they have developed a social programme offering a variety of activities each evening to engage all sides of the audience. Exhibitors and delegates will be able to enjoy a wine-tasting evening, an icebreaker reception, a Gala Dinner and/or benefit from one of the many discounts that have been specially negotiated at local bars and restaurants. No longer is an exhibition and conference enough to tease key executives out from behind their computers!

**Experience Counts**
The business philosophy adopted by the new company is to be €"intelligent" about the events that the team organises: not to overreach, not to do things half-heartedly but to use the most efficient systems and to recruit only the best staff. Caroline Barraclough joined Intelligent Exhibitions Ltd from Spearhead in August and hit the ground running. Managing a successful event is ensuring that you have the right team behind it. As project manager for Offshore Europe and a key player in the most recent Oceanology event, Caroline’s level of expertise and professionalism is already known and respected by industry and she is confident of success for the new Ocean Business. In addition there is a part-time finance and administration team and a range of technical consultants to assist with the conference and training and demonstration programme.

**Partners**
Intelligent Exhibitions Ltd is confident of its credentials and experience in organising exhibitions in this marketplace, but it will readily admit that the key element is an ability to engage individuals and organisations to assist in fulfilling goals. According to Versha Carter relationships matter in this industry and the goodwill generated from the years when the two colleagues worked on OI have helped tremendously with this new event. Key associations, organisations, government agencies, magazines, contractors and individual people have really gone out of their way to help. Industry is getting behind the event, taking ownership of it and helping to shape its future.

**Future Expectations**
Versha Carter hopes that with Ocean Business 2007 the new company will re-establish its credentials and connections with the ocean-science and marine-technology markets. The strategy is to organise other €"hands-on" events in areas that relate to ocean technology, as well as specific exhibitions and conferences in other adjacent markets. Whilst two such events are in the pipeline at the moment, no formal announcement is yet forthcoming. Beyond these, with climate change and the green agenda at last engaging political minds there are bound to be some interesting opportunities opening up ahead. She hopes that such huge implications and opportunities will help focus the minds and ingenuity of the global ocean community that the company is in place to assist.

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