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It's Not Easy Being Green

Green events offer some serious challenges (and expenses) for publishers.

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"Green issues" printed on recycled paper and devoted to environmental themes run the gamut from *Plenty* to *Vanity Fair* (although only about 100 magazines have converted to recycled paper full time, according to the Magazine Paper Project). Now publishers are starting to explore green or eco-friendly live events.

Many are simple one-offs to complement that special green issue. However, publishers interested in going green with more events face steep challenges that require every partner to be on the same page. "Make sure all your vendors—the florist, the caterer, the designer—are on board with your mission," says Danielle Venokur, founder of New York City-based eco-friendly event agency *dvgreen*. "Planning an event is always a headache but planning a green event is like a migraine. If you're serious, make sure you have people around you who understand what they're getting into and are willing to put in the extra effort."



Many green-themed events aren't so green on the back-end, due to the difficult logistics (waste disposal, catering) and higher costs (organic food). "Many times clients want attendees to know it's a green event but since so many of the factors are in the back-of-the-house and won't effect the look of the party, that's the first thing to go away when things get expensive," says Venokur.

Domino went eco-friendly for its Green Party hosted in March 2007 in honor of its green issue. Staff, including editor Deborah Needleman, wore eco-friendly clothing. The party featured a green market where guests could shop for green basics such as eco-friendly paper towels and washing detergent. All décor elements were borrowed, rented and repurposed. Party invitations were printed on recycled newspaper and the extras were used as ceiling décor. Rooms featured eco-bulbs for lighting and paper curtains, and all elements, except some hemp curtains sent from California, were sourced locally and were donated or recycled after the party. Local, organic caterers handled food and beverages, while guests were transported to and from the party in a Prius hybrid. "Our aim was to do the homework for readers in order to make it as easy as possible to incorporate these values and practices into the way we live," says Needleman.

Be Prepared to Pay More

The pricing for green events tends to be 15 to 20 percent higher overall than a regular event, according to Venokur. Factors like organic food and waste disposal drive up the costs. However, reducing signage and hand-out materials in favor of digital alternatives can save on printing.

Better Homes & Gardens last month kicked off a seven month, 15-city road tour dubbed the Living Green Tour and Exhibit, which promotes everyday environmental practices. Event agency Lead Dog Marketing built an exhibit that would normally require two tractor-trailers to fit in one trailer using bio-diesel fuel. "It's more expensive and complicated than other tours-we did a mall show for a long time and we did a Wal-Mart truck tour-but we think it's worth it," says associate publisher Alain Begun.

The Green Checklist

Reduce Collateral. Digital invitations and flash drives can replace print invites and handouts. Avoid signage materials using foam core. For Plenty Magazine's Plenty 20 event, which recognized 20 companies that will make a difference for the environment, prizes were made from sustainable materials, including cork backing and a recycled aluminum front.

Local Food Versus Organic Food. The ideal green menu features food that is both organic and locally grown. However, the two are often at odds with each other. "Organic speaks to environmental, while local speaks to the social," says Venokur. "Transparency is the goal but you often need to choose between local and organic. I'll pick local, which means less shipping and packaging of the food, and more community support."

Event Gifts. Sustainability and environmental responsibility should also be considered when choosing guest gifts or bags at meetings/conventions-where are they from, what are they made of, who made them, etc. Swagologie.com is a Web site that sells eco-friendly business gifts.

Snack Breaks. At meetings/conventions, avoid single-serving items like condiments and snacks to reduce waste; avoid bottled water-either use filtered tap water in pitchers or, if that's not an option, then bring in a couple of water coolers to fill pitchers/glasses. Avoid disposables, but if you must use them, then make sure they are recyclable or compostable.

Waste-Management. It's the ultimate back-of-the-house green service and often the biggest headache. If you can get the venue to separate the garbage, that eliminates much of the waste that goes to the landfill. You can have multiple trash cans arranged throughout an event but that often requires staffers to tell guests where to throw their trash. "It's critical you're working with vendors who want to be on board," says Venokur. "If you're working with a caterer and they just want to get their work done, you're going to have a major battle in front of you." If you're doing huge festival, you may need to rent a separate compost bin, which may run a few thousand dollars.
