

How to Run Sustainable Events

17 Top Hacks

By the Global Good Awards founder, Karen Sutton

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The events, conference and exhibition industry is among the largest producers of waste. All those unread brochures and useless plastic promotional ‘gifts’ together with the countless modular systems that get left behind destined for landfill really add up... After five years of running the [Global Good Awards](#), we have learned how to run a truly sustainable awards programme. We not only walk the talk but [wear and eat it too!](#)

The Global Good Awards exist to reward sustainable best practice – in all its forms – believing that by rewarding best practice, responsible business will become the norm, rather than the exception. As part of that belief, we’re keen to share the sustainable event running knowledge we’ve built up. Hence, our new ‘How to’ top sustainability hacks’ guide.



So, when you start to plan your next event, will social and environmental sustainability be on the meeting agenda?

- How much thought will you give to your venue selection?
- Where will the food and drink be sourced?
- How much plastic waste will it generate?
- Do you know how responsible or ethical your suppliers are? Do they match your ethos?
- Is there potential for your event to have a positive impact on the local community?
- And last but not least, what impression will it give to your delegates in an age that is so much more attuned to the issues of environmental impact?

If you're not sure whether you can answer some or all of these questions, then we can help!

Here are our top sustainability hacks when it comes running a truly sustainable event...

1

Are your sustainability and marketing departments in tune with each other?

However large or small your organisation, these two critical departments or personnel responsible for them, must discuss all the elements of any event to ensure they are on the same page.

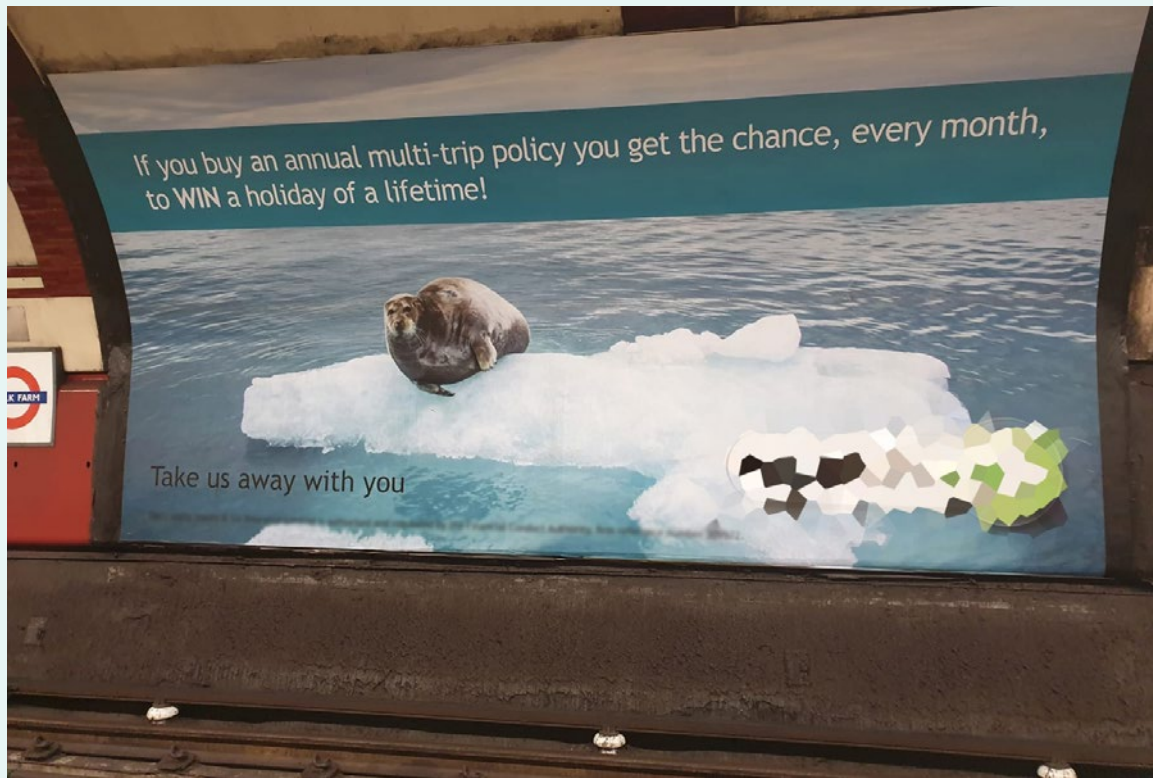
DO ensure your sponsors and partners share the same ethos as you. For example: If you are aiming for an event which is plastic-free, make sure whoever is managing your marketing knows that (before they get a goodie bag sponsor that supplies a load of single-use plastic items). Similarly, you wouldn't want to support a charity that funds the conservation of orangutan rainforests and then accept a sponsor who uses unsustainable palm oil in their products.

Can you imagine your sustainability department running an internal conference on how the company is going to meet its carbon emission targets and in the same event, HR and Marketing decide to use the event to recognise an employee of the year and give them a weekend 4x4 driving experience as a prize?

These may all be hypothetical examples, but trust me, these things **DO** happen! Here are two real examples!

EXAMPLE 1

I'm sure this insurance company didn't mean for the advert to inadvertently say "Fly more, and make my home get smaller!"



EXAMPLE 2

Even the best get it wrong sometimes.

WWF Australia were encouraging people to pledge to #Connect2Earth by switching off their lights as a demonstration against climate change but were promoting a one-week holiday to the Great Barrier Reef as a prize draw to sign up (which would require flights to get there).

www.earthhour.org.au/register

2

Think resources

There will be lots of water, energy and natural resources used to run your event. But how can you reduce them without negatively impacting the event experience?

If you're running an exhibition or conference, **DO** encourage your stand holders to only hire LED lighting for their stands, and reduce the use of other high electricity usage items such as lightboxes, etc if it's not LED. LEDs typically offer a whopping 85% savings on energy consumption compared to incandescent and halogen light bulbs, and surprisingly they are far more efficient than even 'energy efficient' light bulbs!

Water is another, often hidden, resource that is massively overused, but easily reduced and can lead to massive savings for you or your venue.

EXAMPLE

The Global Good Awards have been carbon balancing delegate travel since 2017 and in 2019 we extended that to becoming water neutral too. Thames Water offered a free Business Assessment of our venue, checking all taps, toilets, urinals and kitchen facilities. Even though an assessment had only been done 18 months before, they managed to reduce the amount of water being used on-site by a massive 15,000 litres a day! So not only did we reduce our water use for a single day, we helped our venue too!

See Hack #3 for more on Carbon Footprint

3

How's your footprint?

The location of your venue compared to where the majority of your delegates are travelling from is key. Not only because of the time spent travelling (and possible stress), but the carbon emissions to get there.

DO consider the public transport links - if your event isn't in London, how will delegates get there? **DON'T** assume that delegates will work out what transport will be the least damaging to the environment; most of them won't. **DO** make it easy for them. If the venue is five miles from the nearest rail link, why not partner with an electric car manufacturer or EV taxi company to do runs back and forth from the station. Otherwise people will all be taking individual taxis or driving.

If there is a lot of travelling, especially flying, **DO** consider carbon balancing all your delegate travel. There are several free online carbon calculators out there or you can speak to a company that can manage it all for you, for a fee. Doing the calculating yourself online and making a donation is not as expensive as you might think. [Here's an example](#) of how we estimated our delegate emissions.

If it's a global conference, and you have the technology to enable it, **DO** consider live streaming the event for overseas delegates... you can still charge for them to connect to the stream.



If you'd like to receive the rest of these sustainable event hacks you can get your hands on them for just £99 +VAT.

Email karen@GlobalGoodAwards.co.uk

You can also access further help and advice, bespoke to your organisation, through our consultancy services, which range from a one-off conference call or a single day of instruction through to an ongoing 'hand-holding' service which can take you through the entire time-line of the event, right up to the event day itself!



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