

# Exhibition World

## Unsung heroes

**EW** looks at the vital and changing role of the event logistics teams in getting our shows on the road. *p17-21*



# Logistics: facing up to the challenges

The International Exhibition Logistics Association (IELA) discusses some of the key issues facing a sector of the industry that is often overlooked, yet plays a vital part in making exhibitions successful

## Supply chain disruptions

In our post-Covid 'new normal' world, costs have begun to reduce but remain higher than pre-Covid and we are all evolving with the requirements and processes of this new atmosphere.

The geopolitical influences in certain areas of the world are having an effect on our business. Disruptions in the Suez Canal and the re-routing of vessels via the Cape of Good Hope is making sea shipping to and through the Middle East a challenge. This has caused our industry to pivot and adapt to provide the services our clients require. Longer shipping times and higher costs have resulted from the situation.

In Eastern Europe, the climate has stabilised somewhat as, sadly, the environment there has become 'normal'. The adjustments made two years ago have become standard operating procedure.

The equipment and driver shortage in the European arena have settled down. Airlines and ocean operators have increased their frequency and schedules, but we are still not back to the levels experienced in 2020 and earlier.

## Regional challenges

Sustainability and net carbon zero are a major challenge to our industry. There are so many players and aspects to the service we provide. To complicate that, our association is comprised of multi-national and small to medium sized businesses. Resources to meet this demand are a big challenge for some. Political support for sustainable projects in some countries is minimal and the resources to become sustainable can be a heavy burden for some in our sector.

IELA's involvement in the UFI/JMIC Net Carbon Zero Events initiative is something we are very

proud of and consider to be a critical project for our industry. Our focus is on assisting and guiding our members in the process.

Mergers and acquisitions have recently played a large part in our world. Larger entities have acquired smaller enterprises, reducing competition in some parts of the globe, although the long-term effects remain to be seen.

## Talent

The acquisition and retention of qualified, competent staff is still a struggle for many. Most attempts to lure back pre-Covid staff were unsuccessful as there is still a slight perception that our industry is unstable in terms of job security. Various solutions to remedy this situation are to provide good work life balance to which our business is not always conducive. Education and training are a vital component to staff retention and growth and advancement opportunities.

In this vein, IELA's new education programme for members – the 'IELA Academy' is launching its first session in May in Gothenburg, Sweden. The Academy's in-person curriculum provides core knowledge of all aspects of our business. Transport and Logistics, Industry Stakeholders, as well as Management and Personal skills development are all topics to be examined in depth.

The goal is to have the graduates of the IELA Academy emerge with a more comprehensive understanding of the industry.

Equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace are paramount. Openness to diversity widens access to the best talent. Inclusion allows engagement with talent effectively. Equality enables delivery of fair outcomes. ►



*IELA chair,  
Sandi Trotter*

*Continued on p19*



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# Insiders' view

We asked some leading events logistics professionals for their thoughts on the challenges to their sector and in particular the key points raised by IELA on p17

**Sudhir Dhavan, board member of IELA and CEO RE Rogers India:**

## Supply chain disruptions

The factors contributing to supply chain disruptions in the exhibitions and events industry include:

1. Carrier issues such as changes in transit times, alterations to sailing/flying schedules, sudden shifts in climatic conditions, and geopolitical challenges.
2. Instances of war, where geopolitical issues are paramount. For example, the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Gaza. This has significantly affected carrier routes and led to embargoes on certain connections.
3. Supply chain disruptions can also be caused by inefficiencies at port and airport handling agencies, particularly when affected by labour union-related issues. This can result in congestion at ports/airports, thus impacting supply chain operations.
4. Efficient customs clearance processes at ports/airports are essential, encompassing timely assessment, examination, and delivery procedures to minimise disruptions in the supply chain.

## Sustainability and environmental impact

The sector's direct impact on the



Sudhir Dhavan

environment is a serious concern and must be treated with great care worldwide.

To adhere to proper sustainability standards, there are various options available, such as ISO standards or other means that provide awareness and guidelines for best practices.

From the perspective of the event logistics industry, we have developed a structured strategy paper, which has been shared with JMIC, focusing on the following four scopes:

- On-site Logistics (site operations, zone-wise hall possessions, and stand specifics)
- Traffic Management & Smart Cities (city perimeters, software-based traffic systems)
- Remote & Last Mile Logistics (optimisation of loading, storage for diverted logistics, semi-trailer solutions, etc., outside city areas)
- Sustainable Logistics (from exhibitors to venues and back).

In order to address the specific goals while considering the climatic conditions and their consequences, it is necessary to transform our working processes. The exhibitions sector is a significant contributor to CO2 emissions and waste creation. Therefore, the industry as a whole

must find ways to operate more sustainably.

## Talent

Our industry is currently facing a talent crunch and hence it is important to address the same via resources, networking opportunities and educational programmes to develop skills that include adequate knowledge on transportation, customs clearance, on-site logistics and sustainability practices.

**Ravinder Sethi, former chair of IELA, and chairman of RE Rogers India**

## Talent

Talent, or rather lack thereof, is a subject which has gained prominence not just for the logistics industry but across the board for the exhibition fraternity.

We find a normalcy returning in shows across the world, many returning to pre-Covid levels. The irony is, however, that normalcy returns but still with a talent shortfall. The talent exodus in numbers during Covid has not seen a related influx to date. This numbers trend remains much more prominent in the West as compared to other parts of the world. One prominent reason is more lucrative alternate opportunities available for the higher talent strata. At lower levels continuing high government unemployment subsidies is only encouraging many to just stay home, rather than go to work.

Moving from the numbers to the quality aspect of talent, there is no doubt that IELA, under the aegis of its active Board, is in the forefront of talent enhancement within our industry at all levels. Post-Covid, a highly successful Winter Seminar for junior personnel and an amazing Operations Summit for mid-level management are testament to IELA's commitment on this.

And, the best is yet to come. The recently announced IELA Academy will be highly beneficial for the senior strata and set to become a game changer for talent enhancement in our industry.

**Regional challenges**

The world is one but very diverse for our exhibition industry and major global organisers are operating simultaneously in different continents – each region having its own distinct challenges.

Most of these challenges at the macro level are the same across the board for the industry, the logistics sector being no different. Let's dwell into some of the main ones.

The most common, and prominent, are the differing laws and practices of the land. Handling at ports/airports, custom processes, etc. differ across the many countries our global customers are operating in. At the end of the day, our customer looks for the same service in each destination – thus the challenge for us to overcome the hurdles to ensure the end result is same.

Sustainability and zero carbon targets are now a must for our industry. Here also, as in the case of operations, our customers expect the same levels of results for all the countries they operate in. This is still a huge challenge in many developing countries. The additional costs can be exorbitant, which many among us cannot bear but, nevertheless, have no choice.

Differing social and religious practices in countries become challenges on occasion. Religious holidays are the most common obstacle where some countries close down more than others in those days. We've all experienced this when receiving critical late shipments and nothing can move.

IELA has done a phenomenal job in addressing the above challenges by sharing relevant information



*Ravinder Sethi*



*Guido Fornelli*

about countries through its various platforms and programmes.

The IELA Customs Manual gives its members every relevant information about the processes around the world, so we're prepared in advance of the challenges.

And our one-to-one interaction with members from around the world at our Winter Seminar, Operations Summit, Congress and Partnering Event gives us first hand insight of the sustainability and socio/cultural practices around the world. Here also, we have information in advance to address the impending challenges.

**Guido Fornelli,  
MD Expotrans, Italy:**

Today, almost two years after the end of pandemic, most of the focus of the exhibition industry is related

on the human resources factor both for suppliers, organisers and the venues, at least here in Italy.

Attracting new people and talent in an industry that is still largely based on a face to face experiences, and which has working hours that are often overtime (for example during weekends), is the great challenge of our industry, particularly in the logistics and forwarding area. This has a direct impact on Health & Safety issues: having a higher turnover or having to rebuild the staff with young and unskilled manpower requires a very high level of training on the risks related to our job.

The setting-up and dismantling time of an exhibition and the ever-increasing overlap of events whereby the setting-up of one overlaps with the dismantling of the previous one, make the safety picture at the exhibition ground even more complex than in previous years.

In terms of sustainability, here in Italy the investments of the small and large venues is progressing even if the bar in terms of requests to suppliers has not been raised significantly. We expect more pressure to modernise the equipment fleets by replacing diesel/gas elements with electric ones; still the blocking factor is that the venues must ensure first a larger energy supply (obviously coming from green sources). Indeed, they are investing in that right now.

**Garcia Newell, member of the Industry Partners working group at UFI, and regional BD director for DSV Solutions Ltd, an IELA founding member:**

It is really important to raise the profile of exhibition logistics within the events industry, because

normally we seem to be last rung on the ladder. After all, if there were no logistics companies how would you get your products and exhibits to the show on time?

IELA is truly a global association, bringing together the world of specialist logistics companies who can arrange the shipping to any event worldwide. Wherever you have an event you can be sure an IELA member can assist.

General contractors can arrange shipping from point A to point B, but IELA members can do from A to B to C, and back again, and even more complex requirements, depending on the brief

#### **Challenge of recruitment**

The pandemic was a big blow for our industry. A key number of people who had been in the industry for many years, for one reason or another during the pandemic either stopped doing exhibitions altogether or took jobs with general transport companies and never came back. This has created a huge void in our sector. Replacing those who have departed has been very hard for many, and it has been especially trying to find experienced people to fill the void.

We need, like many other sectors of the industry, to invest in bringing young talent to our industry, and when we get them, invest in training and education.

IELA has recently released the IELA Academy and has for a number of years run our Winter seminar, that supports the education of our members.

I would really like for our sector of the industry to connect with universities in order to let younger people know much more about having a career as an event logistics contractor.

You can build a good career in event logistics. I started as a 17-year-



*Garcia Newell*

old and although it can be hard work, I would not change that career choice.

I started my career handling shows in the UK and Europe, then progressed to other global locations; but I never forgot the grounding and education I had from these earlier events. There is a lot to learn; however, there are also a lot of perks, including travelling and experiencing other countries and cultures.

This business can lead you to understand more about trade and the nuances of different forms of shipping.

And, of course, it is face to face and brings you into direct and close contact with your customer.

I would never consider going back to general logistics. The exciting thing in events is the mix. One minute you could be at your desk doing quotes, the next working overseas at an event.

#### **Sustainability**

The logistics industry does absolutely recognise that it needs to do more in reducing the carbon emissions created by vehicle transport and forklift handling onsite.

IELA has been a major contributor to the Net Zero Carbon Events logistics workstream. Also we have

a focused sustainability working group.

In December 2023 our Associations Day focused on celebrating sustainable practices within the events industry.

Our customers are now expecting their logistics contractors to provide sustainable methods and work with them as stakeholders.

ESG and sustainability must be more than just a buzzword or seen as way of winning new business; I truly believe you have to care about our planet.

Many in our business are investing in environmentally friendly vehicles, such as HVO or electric.

Sustainability is not a race but about doing what you can, however little.

#### **Technology**

The event logistics industry has made great advances in operational and customer facing technology, this enables a greater level of service deliverability and smoother site operation.

#### **Hopes for the future?**

I believe IELA and our membership will grow even stronger and will no longer be perceived as a non-important contractor. I always see logistics as the key emergency service to enable exhibitions and events to work.

#### **Best thing about working in event logistics?**

It has to be listening to a customer's requirement and delivering the very best service according to their wishes.

Making our customers happy, has been a key reason for my staying in the industry.

**EW**



UFI – The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry promotes, represents and serves the interests of the world's leading show organisers, fairground owners and operators, major national and international associations of the exhibition industry and industry partners. As a non-political and non-profit organisation, UFI's main goal is to serve the exhibition industry worldwide and to emphasise its unique marketing characteristics for the development of world trade.

Present on six continents, in 84 countries, UFI is a unique and neutral forum for dialogue dedicated to all professionals involved in the trade fair business. Serving the exhibition industry since 1925, UFI applies its professional experience and renown to providing its members and the industry with the extensive know-how required to meet the challenges of ever-changing needs.

Being a member of UFI is a proof of quality and international recognition. Over 4,500 trade fairs and exhibitions are organised by its members. More than 900 of these are international exhibitions, approved by UFI, based upon strict and exacting quality criteria, assuring excellent services for the benefit of exhibitors and visitors.

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