

Case Study: Conference/Exhibition Organiser - Gill

What do you do?

I am a conference and exhibition organiser. I manage a conference venue. I make sales and bring clients to the conference centre, and I help them plan and organise their events.

I work with them to produce an event that meets their requirements.

As well as other business issues, like the financial and promotional side of things, quite a lot of my work is involved with the management of the centre.

There's also an important role with meeting and greeting clients and building up good relationships with them so they come back and use us again, and feel at home here.



What is your background?

I have a grammar school background which was science-based, and I enjoyed science, but I was also quite a practical person and enjoyed creative activities as well. When I was searching for a career, I was keen to find something that would provide each of those elements.

I found that in the field of scientific research photography, which was scientific but also creative. After A levels, I went on to college and obtained several diplomas in technical and scientific photography. I worked in that field for some years. The photographic department in the company I worked for closed, and I went on to help with publications and graphic design while developing my management skills.

I became a team leader, then a supervisor, then a manager. An opportunity arose in the company when I was asked to create a commercial business by organising events for other companies at our conference centre.

Four years later, we are still growing, and being a success for the company.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

You need to have a bright personality and an interest in working with people, your clients as well as your colleagues.

It is very important that you can identify in yourself good organisational ability and high energy levels because the work involved is quite complex and can get quite stressful at times. So if you have a high energy level, that certainly helps.

You need to have a feel for customer focus, a feel for wanting to help your customer achieve a good result, and the ability to be able to find out from your client what their requirements are so that you can translate that into a successful event for them.

It's helpful to be able to think on your feet, because clients often come to you with all sorts of requests that need to be sorted out very quickly, and the ability to think laterally is very helpful.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

The basic skills of good organisation, time management, a focus on customer needs and quality assurance are all developed in this job.

You can apply these skills in many other areas, such as project management. Once you have the skills to put together a big conference, you could apply them to managing any other project.

You could run your own small business, or you could pass on your skills to other people who are developing the industry by providing consultancy or training services. You could help other event organisers with their recruitment.

What changes will there be in the future?

This is a growing industry and there are rapid technological advances and new requirements being demanded of us by our customers.

If there are changes to be made, we must employ people to keep up with the new technology and make it available to our clients. They come to us with higher expectations, month by month, of the facilities that will be available to them in the centre during their conference or exhibition. It's up to us to be there, trained and ready for them rather than be running behind them.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

Helping a client put together a large conference or exhibition does have a lot of challenge within it. There are just so many aspects of any one event.

You have to think about the hospitality, the signage, the badging and registration activities, how they want the area set out and whether they need support with their audio-visual requirements.

If it's a very big event or it has high-level attendees like government officials or a member of the royal family, you have to think about security and it's often put together at the last moment because information is difficult to get, and so keeping all those things up to date is a multi-task situation.

This can be quite a challenge and quite stressful and I would say for me that's one of the most difficult, but enjoyable when you get it done there's a feeling of job satisfaction. In one respect it's a challenge, but on the other hand it's one of the most fulfilling parts of the job.

Accommodation is another important aspect, and quite often they might be spread through different hotels and require transport. So there's a whole host of different tasks that bring together one event, and that's quite a challenge.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

There are plenty of opportunities. It's a rapidly growing business.

Getting into the hotel and leisure industry, you could go on to specialise in conference and exhibition organisation.

Opportunities will be there for years to come, it's growing all the time.

What do you like about your job?

The thing I like most about it is the interaction that I have with my clients and the personal relationships that you build up; you get to know them as friends. That's very nice.

I like the creative element of it. Putting together a big event is quite creative - you're working with the client to produce the end result.

I like providing a good service. There is a nice feeling when you've done something good for your customer and they thank you and they're really pleased with what you've done for them.

What do you dislike about your job?

To be quite honest, I can't think of anything I seriously dislike about the business.

If I had to pick out one or two things, then having to work long hours occasionally can be tiring. There's a commitment there to meet the customer's requirements - you have to be constantly there for them, they are always needing support. Your days can be rushed and quite busy.

I can't think of any serious dislike, it's a good industry.

What are your ambitions?

My ambitions in this role are to meet the targets that were set two or three years ago in the five-year business plan for the centre.

I would like to see that plan come to fruition so that we achieve our goals.

Perhaps to take up another business challenge within the company - I'd be happy to take that challenge.

What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

The first thing I would suggest is to find out as much as you can about the activities that are involved. Ask people, talk to people and mention it all the time, do a little research on your own.

Then you will have the opportunity to concentrate on those things that you will need, school studies, keyboard skills, possibly work experience in a conference centre.

Find out as much as you can about the industry, and opportunities will open up quite naturally for you to progress into it.

A day in the life

7:30 am - 8:30 am

Occasional early start to meet client needs.

8:30 am - 9:30 am

Meet and greet clients.

9:30 am - 10:30 am

Discuss requirements of the day with colleagues.

10:30 am - 11:30 am

Take customer enquiries and plan events.

11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Meeting with clients to discuss details.

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm

Lunch (usually taken at desk or with a client).

1:30 pm - 3:30 pm

Marketing and sales activities.

3:30 pm - 4:30 pm

Discuss and authorise expenditure.

4:30 pm - 5:30 pm

Discuss plans for the next day's event with colleagues.

5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Occasional evening activity with clients.