

How Green is your venue?

Rob Davidson takes us on a green showround at Cavendish CC in London

Something that our students always enjoy a lot is when we take them on site visits to look around conference venues and meet members of their management teams. Venue Management is an important module in our MA Conference and Events Management course at Westminster University, and a key part of that module is our programme of educational visits to London venues: hotels, purpose-built convention centres and 'unusual' venues.

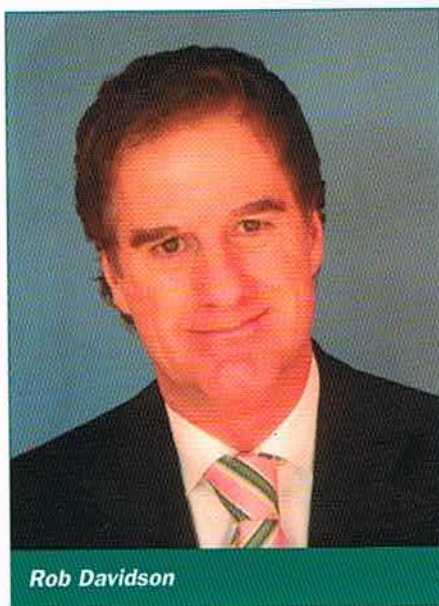
We're always grateful to the managers who not only welcome us with open arms into their venues but also give up some of their valuable time to show us around behind the scenes as well as front-of-house, while explaining the various challenges and joys of marketing and running a meetings facility.

One of the interesting aspects of these site visits is the type of questions that our students ask our hosts. You can always count on one of them asking something about the venue's 'green' practices, as this is something that consistently preoccupies the Generation Y that most of our students represent.

This question came up at one of our first site visits this year, to another near-neighbour of ours, the Cavendish Conference Centre, part of the Cavendish Conference Venues group of five central London venues.

Our show-round this venue has become something of an annual pilgrimage for our students, and the CEO, Dermot Waldron, always leads the tour in person, impressing everyone with his enthusiasm for our industry and his evident pride in his venue.

Dermot was right with his answer to



Rob Davidson

the question, 'How green is your venue?', and by the time he'd finished talking, the students have learned far more from him, about how to make a meetings facility sustainable, than they could possibly have read in the academic textbooks on this topic.

It appears that Cavendish Conference Venues began implementing green initiatives from the day the group was first established in 1995. Far from being a reaction to the relatively recent upsurge in demand for green venues, the Cavendish ethos has always been to develop the very best green credentials possible within all of their venues.

Dermot underlined the point that it is definitely not easy to take the green route. It's always initially very time-consuming, and in some cases costs more, but ultimately this attitude and approach to running venues is essential in this day and age.

The students learned that green practices and design have to be taken into account even before a venue opens its doors for business. That explains why market-leading environmental practices were integrated into the building programme of every venue in the Cavendish group, including the design and build of The

Hallam (W1), which opened in January 2009 and the America Square Conference Centre (EC3), which opened in September 2008.

Dermot then went on to say that on a day to day basis, the Cavendish team constantly looks for ways of reducing the impact on the environment of the events they host. It routinely offers delegates writing materials made from recycled plastic cups; all printed materials are printed on recycled paper using vegetable-based inks; and the group recycles everything from glass and plastic bottles to batteries and light bulbs.

Cavendish is also working with the Carbon Trust to introduce a carbon calculator which will calculate the environmental impact of the delegate's journey to the event, as well as the waste produced by the actual conferences.

But Dermot kept the most impressive point of all to the end: following the company's 2008 nomination for the Visit London Sustainable Tourism Award and its acquisition of a Green Tourism Silver Award last November 2008, in January of this year CCV became the first group of venues in central London to be landfill neutral.

A landfill neutral status was achieved across all five of Cavendish's venues through a variety of schemes including incentivising events organisers to responsibly dispose of waste and securing an efficient system of recycling food waste. The group has managed to cut their waste streams to the point where now the only significant non-recyclable items left are food waste.

And, on that issue, they are working with UK Food Waste to introduce an off-site composting system as soon as possible.

A long answer to a short, but vital question. And, judging by the copious notes the students were taking during Dermot's enthusiastic discourse, this is an issue that the future generation of conference planners are taking very seriously indeed. So: how green is your venue?