Design Management of Events

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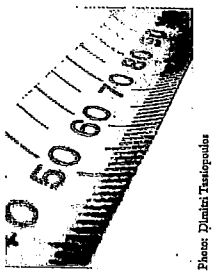

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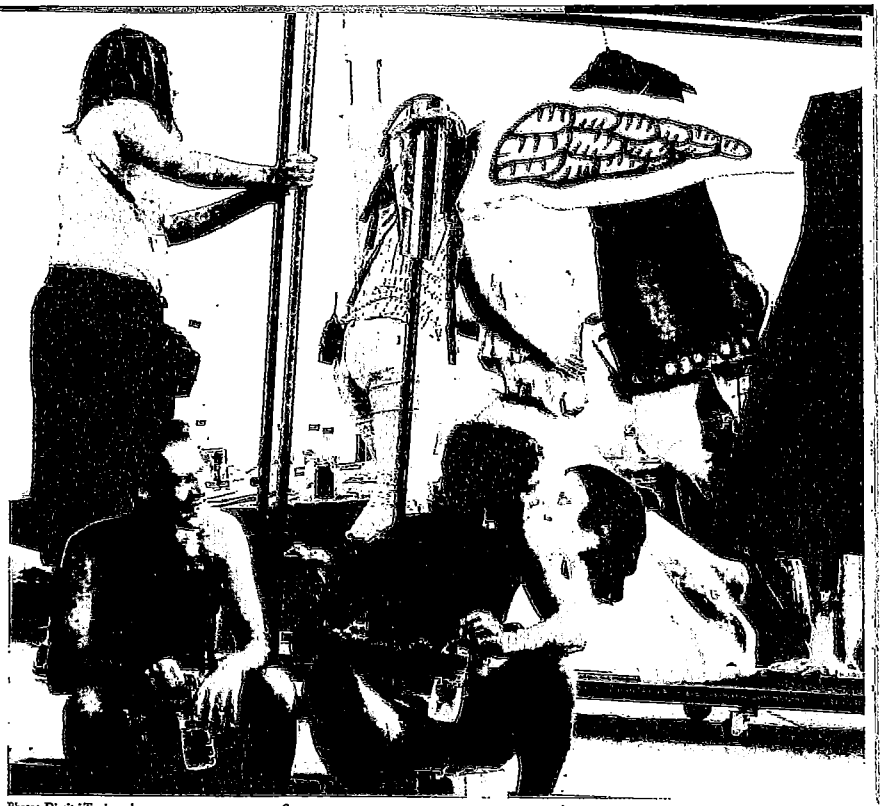

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10 *Design management of events*

Graham Berridge

Abstract

Design plays an integral part in all planned event experiences. It ranges from initial concept and pitch through to programme and content design and onto theatrical and staging design. All elements within an event are infused or enhanced by design to create memorable event experiences. This chapter looks at what design is, the different stages of design input required for different event types and the creation of event experiences.

Chapter objectives

After you have read this chapter you should be able to:

- define and explain design;
- understand the nature, processes and activities involved in event design and creativity;
- familiarise yourself with the creative process for event design;
- see how design fits into the events framework;
- understand the planned event experience;
- understand the relationship between design and the event experience; and
- appreciate the value of experiential foresight

10.1 Understanding and defining design

Design is one of the key knowledge domains of events management and it is the key area that enables one event experience to be different from another. The design domain consists of seven specific classes where design is said to typically occur in an event. These classes are as follows:

- ***Catering design.*** Food and beverages are nearly always present at events, and the production and service of food allows for creativity. Examples where design can be a prominent feature include food stations, edible centrepieces, menus, dessert shapes, drink mixes.
- ***Content design.*** Creativity can challenge preconceptions. Designing an event with content that differs from the norm can be risky but also gives the opportunity for surprise. A wedding, for example, can include the bride and groom's preferences on format and structure, and include special content such as poetry, musical performance and ceremony.
- ***Entertainment design.*** This can be formal or informal, and can be linked to 'surprise guests'. Such things as look-alikes have become popular as have roving street entertainers or magicians. Reference to popular culture and television shows appeals to many people as does the inclusion of musical acts, comedians or extravagant shows.
- ***Environment design.*** A key element in the creation of experiences, designed environments can surprise or reassure a guest or audience. Environment design is the purposeful use of a specific space that enables the event experience to take place.
- ***Production design.*** This is an area where the event borrows from theatre and performance, where design produces spectacle and show, for example the production of multiple settings within an event environment, or a stage design such as the U2 heart-shaped stage used during their half-time performance at the US Super Bowl. One international conference presenter used to insist on using two separately managed screens.
- ***Programme design.*** Events often have an order of occurrences or a format. This is sometimes based on written rules or guidelines, at other times on past referenees that have now become a standard format. For example, many academic conferences do not have designed interactions beyond food and wine gatherings. Inserting something like a speed dating research session into the programme creates a new experience.

- ***Theme design.*** This is where a visual spectacle is created by symbols and artefacts that imaginatively reinforce a special theme. Themes themselves can be inspirational, and opportunities arise to be creative both in reference to a theme and to its interpretation. A venue and its service staff would be decorated to reflect a main theme such as *Cabaret, Star Wars, Art Deco, Casino Night,* and so on.

Events cannot exist in and of themselves; simply put they have to be designed and created, whether it be for education, escapism, absorption, aesthetic appeal, an exhibition, a conference, for entertainment, a meeting, a sporting event, etc. Events management is the business of designing planned occasions, and such planning is done purposefully with the intention of meeting and creating event experiences for a variety of stakeholders.

Designing special events requires creativity so that those attending them feel they have experienced a special moment. Design is mostly seen, therefore, as a skilled action or an act of creativity that gives something a visual identity or recognition: 'event design is the creation, conceptual development and design of an event to maximise the positive and meaningful impact for the event's audience and/or participants' (Brown, 2005).

What most sources on the study of events agree on is that designing an event requires a conceptualisation of an idea. This can then be linked throughout the event by a specific theme, such as a casino night, and then the event space itself requires decoration, the craft of producing the idea physically, to give a tangible existence to the design and concept ideas. As Monroe (2006:4) explains, 'event design is the conception of a structure for an event, the

Case study 10.1 Production design: Hugo Boss fashion show, Berlin

The client, Hugo Boss, asked for an 'outstanding and surprising show' to be produced by agency *villa eugenie*. Situated on the 'Buhne' of the German Opera House, 1 000 people were treated to a show that combined fashion and opera. The entrance to the event held a surprise in itself as guests were ushered in through the back door and not the main foyer entrance. This was further enhanced by the seating arrangement which rather than use the house seating was in fact set out on the empty opera stage facing the invisible audience. The producers also chose to twist tradition in other ways by separating the audience from the performance space with a black velour curtain and omitting any sign of a catwalk. Instead there was just a glistening black floor. In an effort to create the tension, suspense and drama associated with opera, the fashion show was split into several acts. With scenery changes between each act, guests were plunged into darkness at each set changeover before the next group of models emerged.

Structures were used to infuse each act with a special element. Act 1 started with a lowering of a 14m-high steel staircase for the models to enter the stage, while Act 2 saw an 82m glistening white walkway emerge that then folded into nine tiers to create a suspended catwalk operated by hydraulic lifts for perfect timing and safety. The finale, Act 3, featured 25 000 gem-like components reflecting a dazzling light that created a tunnel for models to walk through. The aim was to produce a show that was 'illusion', creating surprise, appearance and disappearance.

Source: Happening Design for Events, Birkhauser

expression of that concept verbally and visually, and, finally, the execution of the concept'. He concludes that events that combine design and decoration successfully produce synergy and result in a practical, successful event.

A person can be designing something – say a ticket entry system to an event – but, they may not necessarily be creative about it. However, for most people in events management, designing an event, especially one for entertainment or celebration, results in acts of creativity. This is because

> *design is viewed as a skilled, creative endeavour that produces some element of artistic interpretation for anything from clothes to cars. Understanding and interpreting the meaning of design is, for most of us, not always the easiest of tasks since the difficulty lies in analysing or extracting meaning from the design. When we talk about design though we can usually describe something that has been designed and mostly we can refer to design as being creative (Berridge, 2007: 36).*

Design can be associated with a host of different activities and different contexts, for example graphic design, software design, interior design, engineering design, industrial design (Bayley, 1985). Writing on the need for education on understanding design, Archer (1973) explains that design should be regarded as skill and knowledge that is concerned with a person's ability to create an environment that would meet certain spiritual and material needs. This suggests a link with the more commonly held understanding for design today that it is a purposeful activity that is intended, planned and conceived to meet a particular purpose or solve a particular problem (Markus, 2002). Berridge (2007), citing research work undertaken at Princeton University, has suggested that the following list indicates the central and recurring explanations and activities for design:

- The act of working out the form of something;
- A plan – making or working out a plan for; devising;
- Designing something for a specific role or purpose or effect;
- An arrangement scheme;
- A blueprint – something intended as a guide for making something else;
- Creating the design for; creating or executing in an artistic or highly skilled manner;
- A decorative or artistic work;
- Making a design of; planning out in a systematic, often graphic form;
- A purpose – an anticipated outcome that is intended or that guides your planned actions;
- Answering immediate needs;
- Creating designs;
- Conceiving or fashioning in the mind; inventing; and
- A preliminary sketch indicating the plan for something.

Therefore, what now becomes apparent is that the activity of design embraces actions that are purposeful, systematic and creative. By being purposeful, design is providing for both functional and aesthetic needs; by being systematic it is analysing problems and finding usable solutions to them; by being creative it is using expertise to give visual form to those ideas and solutions. So when a client expresses a desire to have an event that is 'fantastic, enchanting and memorable', the event management team will start to put together one or more conceptual ideas that they hope will meet the client's expectations.

Case study 10.2 Event ConneQion Expo 2008, Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre (BCEC)

BCEC basic facts:

- The Great Hall has a plenary capacity of 3 958 persons;
- There are four exhibition halls with a combined space of 20 000 m² ; and
- It has 24 multifunction rooms.

There is some irony in this case study since it involves an event developed as a showcase for industry practitioners. Pre-event promotional literature read as follows:

> *When you come to the 2008 show, there will be no doubt about what's hot in the event and incentives industry this year! So, whether you are a professional event planner or are responsible for just one major show a year, Event ConneQion will provide you with- creative concepts – inspired solutions – ingenious idea.*

As a research exercise, 65 students were asked to visit the event and make observations and comments on the design. A summary of their views reads as follows:

The expo was sited in one of the four main halls. Unfortunately little or no design concepts had been applied or utilised in the entrance, reception or exhibition areas. While it was functional it was not especially captivating for a guest. In fact it was truly uninspiring and boring. Inside the hall the layout of the exhibition space seemed to have been given little thought other than a basic grid approach to stalls and stands. While individual exhibitors demonstrated some creativity with their own display areas, the overall concept of the event was very flat and uninspiring. There were not enough exhibitors to fill the hall floor space, and as a result a lot of empty space was evident. No attempt had been made to reduce the space down to fit the exhibitors and so in turn create a more vibrant setting. So the emptiness detracted from any sense of ambience or community as it was easy for the visitor to meander aimlessly. Minimal attempts had been made to theme the exhibitors and create hubs of similar interest or expertise. Some effort had been made to create a performance space and this did act as a central point at times, but it was sectioned off from other areas by a few basic service features. No sense of expectation or 'happening' was created around the space and most visitors largely wandered past it without interest.

Conclusion

This approach to exhibiting is, sadly, not uncommon, where space is simply sold and little or no design is applied to the environment itself. Hence many such events are lifeless, listing along hour by hour with visitors trudging around hoping for some inspiration rather than having it created and presented to them.

10.2 Reflecting on design's role in event management

Based on the understanding of design put forward above, it can now be seen that when discussing events, design should be regarded as a fundamental part of the process since the very nature and practice of event management is 'purposeful, systematic and creative'. For design to work effectively in an event, it should follow some basic guidelines. There are now several excellent sources on various aspects of the event design process that identify the principles and elements of design, and the resources and creative ideas that can be used to create events (Goldblatt, 2008;

Malouf, 1999; Monroe, 2006; Matthews, 2007). In general these principles can be characterised as follows:

- That design should have a focus;
- That design must consider the use of space; and
- That design must consider and reflect the flow of movement (Monroe, 2006).

With these principles in place, Berridge (2007) suggests that the aesthetics of design advocated by Malouf, Monroe and Matthews can then be further addressed and that consideration should then be given to technical awareness and application and, importantly, the tangible expression of ideas that gives rise to the event experience.

Therefore the elements of design should include the following:

- ***Space*** – three-dimensional space and how to fill and use it so that décor fits in with it;
- ***Colour*** – often provides meaning since it affects us psychologically, and choice of colour combinations is important;
- ***Line*** – often used to reinforce a message or draw attention to some point of a setting, or to use objects to separate one area from another;
- ***Composition*** – the placement and arrangement of artefacts (décor) that tend to give a view of the whole concept;
- ***Form*** – the shape (e.g. curved, square) of decorative props and objects that show the importance of the design and theme;
- ***Texture*** – the feel of materials used in the décor: lush or basic furnishings designed to evoke feelings or moods;
- ***Pattern*** – using triangular, oval, circular, rectangular and diagonal patterns with the event space to create settings;
- ***Scale*** – size and shape: the proportion of a prop, usually related to a dominant theme or sub-theme within the event;

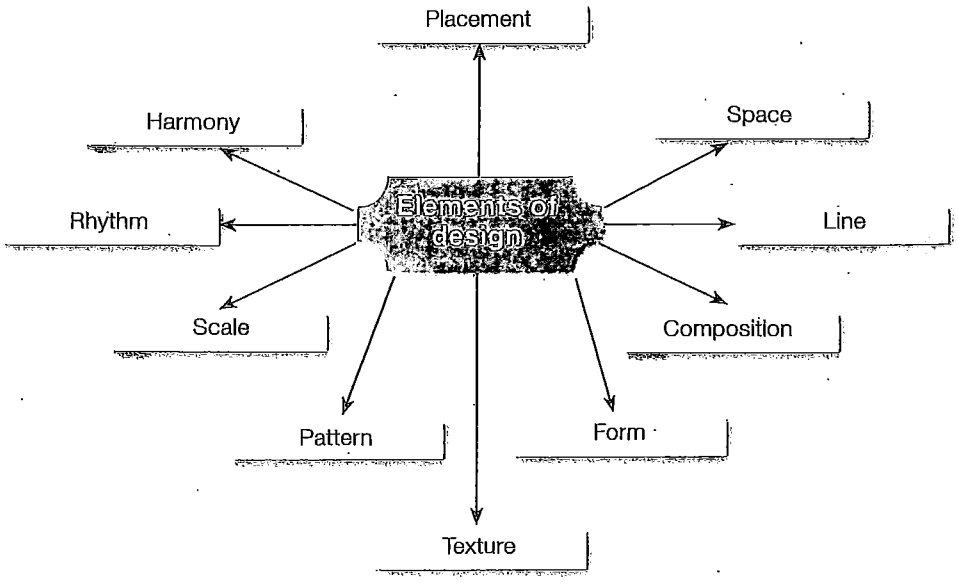

Figure 10.1 Design elements

- ***Rhythm*** – movement of words or music, or arrangements such as flowers to create a rhythmic impact gradually or suddenly;
- ***Harmony*** – creating unity within a setting, reinforcing the message or the ambience; and
- ***Placement*** – décor in the right place and context, as a focal point or as a subtle message.

Using such approaches will give the basis of a blueprint for designing and creating event environments. In fact it has been suggested that the very basis of events management itself is, simply, the 'design management' of an event and that to ignore or marginalise design is to neglect the very heart and soul of an event (Brown, 2005). In this view, design should then be considered as a critical tool for events management as it relates directly to developing the event concept and the event experience. Furthermore it enables the event manager to envision and implement the event. Event managers should therefore see themselves as not simply logistical and organisational problem solvers but as 'experiential engineers' who are able to piece together the overall picture of the event. Remember event environments are produced on the basis that the majority of those attending will receive a fulfilling experience, no matter what type of event it is or what purpose it serves, therefore event managers should regard themselves as 'packaging and managing an experience' from start to finish and imagine all aspects and details of that experience (Silvers, 2004).

An important part of many events is guest interactions, and these need to be carefully designed and not just left to chance. Interactions can be designed to introduce people to one another, to engage with a product or service, to sample a food or beverages, to participate in an activity, or to contribute in some way or other to the experience. Interaction can also be used to 'animate' an event in order to help create an atmosphere or ambience. In such cases 'plants' within the environment, such as look-alikes of celebrities, are designed to encourage communication between and with guests. Such design interventions help ensure an event works effectively. Equally, some of the rituals and symbolic features associated with an event (a winner's podium, for example) should be part of an integrated designed experience. These aspects are created in just the same way as the more observable and recognised features of an event such as the thematic framework, the props and décor, the lighting, the food design or the flower arrangements. What is also apparent is that the level of design input varies enormously from event to event, and that variation is a by-product of the event type and concept. Consequently, events that have a more celebratory or entertainment remit tend to be the ones that attract the most attention and where the 'design' element is more visibly seen as the added ingredient that takes the event onto another dimension and gives it that something special. Here design is apparent in the themed elements and message of the event, and is inextricably linked with, for example, audiovisual production, entertainment and music (Sonder, 2004).

To summarise, (Goldblatt, 2004) stresses the importance of design in events by advocating a design blueprint as one of the keys for success and stresses at the outset the importance of creating the environment.

When creating the environment the special events professional must again return to the basic needs of the guests.

The final design must satisfy these needs to become successful. Lighting, space, movement, décor, acoustics and even the seemingly mundane concerns such as rest rooms all affect the comfort of the guest and so play vital roles on creating a successful environment

Goldblatt (2004:5)

10.3 Design and pitching for the event

Event bidding is dealt with in chapter 5, but it is important to note that many event contracts are won by the company pitching directly to the client. Pitching is a presentation whereby the concept and ideas for the event are mapped out for the client. At this stage the pitching company needs to verbally and visually convey the experience they intend to create. Hence strong design ideas, visual themes, clear messages and mock-ups of the environment and some of the features to be incorporated may all be required to convince the client that the concept will be a good one. Many events management companies use design software to produce a computerised image of how they see the event. In addition, storyboards might be used to show different components within the event, such as stage settings or food-service areas. As well as these mock-ups, samples of colour swatches, say for service uniforms or for table decoration, may be required. Images of food design, light design and backdrops could also be shown. While clients clearly want to hear what the company has to say, they also want to see how the company visualises the event, and here design ideas have to come across in a strong, clear manner. For events with a strong promotional message, the client will want to see how the event will express the experience associated with the product or service. For entertainment the theme associated with the event will need to be carefully researched to ensure that the right images, symbols and artefacts are portrayed so that the client is left with a clear impression of what will happen on the night.

10.4 Creativity and event planning and production

Creativity is the one thing that really can make an event stand out from others of a similar kind.

But what is creativity? In the previous sections, discussion of design has taken place, but the process of creativity also requires some attention. Matthews (2007) suggests that there are key attributes to being creative, namely intelligence and personality. The former is now less pre-occupied with IQ than with the influence of parents and the belief that intelligence manifests itself in many ways – in other words not just through academic tests. Personality is regarded as dispositional where people have a behavioural and cognitive flexibility that helps in risk taking. These are in turn affected by lifespan development and the different influences we encounter as we go through our personal life cycle and the social environment we operate in. Matthews concludes that the more exposure someone has to creative concepts in a socially relaxed environment, the better chance they will have of coming up with creative thoughts.

Welded to this are the cognitive process and the act of knowing, perceiving and conceiving (Matthews, 2007). Factors that now influence creativity are based around perception and how individuals respond to problems. The precepts used help

Table 10.1 External environment

Quantity equals quality	Think, repeat, think again, and consider the widest range of possibilities, not just the first thing that comes to mind
Suspend judgement	We've always done it this way! Creativity is about new ideas, so judgement on an idea is a creative killer. Allow ideas to flourish and see where they lead to
Relax and have fun	Stream of consciousness while doing other things, e.g. riding a bike, swimming, listening to music. Ideas can pop into the mind at any time. Think about recording them on a cellphone or in a notebook for later use
Continue to learn	Stay in tune with new developments, and exposure to new concepts; keep a note of initiatives and ideas elsewhere that may influence in the future. Some creative people keep records of things they encounter
Practice	Like a musician, learn to be creative, maintain ideas for all things and always consider how they can be changed

Source: Matthews (2007)

make sense of things acting as a constant reference for them, but they can alter and change as new information is acquired. In a wide-ranging chapter on creative thought, Matthews considers the different ways of seeing things as providing crucial armoury for its emergence. He reflects on the way people organise any stimulus, how they view familiar sites in a constant frame, the level of depth perception they have and the awareness of motion in relation to objects. Underpinning such responses is the experience and context that the recipient has been exposed to. As a logical stage in this creative awareness, the external environment can play a major part in shaping creativity. Table 10.1 draws attention to Matthews' (2007) key points to consider when creating an environment.

A way to start thinking about design and creativity is to take an event right back to the very basics and ignore all previous iterations of it. So, thinking of an event as starting out with four bare walls or a blank canvas encourages scope for creativity since it is not anchored by what went on in the past. This is especially helpful if the event is outdoors but it applies equally to large multipurpose venues where there is a need to create an environment. In stark contrast are the historical or unique venues that are uniquely different due to their architecture and interior design, in which case the question is whether to use or complement the interior or to mask it from view. From this starting point it is possible to begin to envisage how this 'empty space' will be filled and with what. What types of decisions have to be made in order to create an event? What are the actions that need to be undertaken in order to fill the space or transform the bare walls into the created event experience?

A number of design or creative actions have been identified that establish a blueprint of the sorts of things to be done to produce an event. Not all of them occur equally at every event, and so their application is dependent upon the type of event to take place. A common way

of thinking about an event at this stage is to develop the event concept or to conceptualise what the event will be for and about, and begin to develop a blueprint (Goldblatt, 2008). The factors that need to be addressed include the range of elements that need to be considered when an event concept is first being developed. This should begin with the purpose of the event, and move on to the event theme, the venue, the needs of the audience, the available resources to make it happen, the timing of the event, and the skills of the team (Van der Wagen & Carlos, 2005). Using design ideas and practices will then enable each of these aspects of the event to be fully developed. Once this has been established and agreed, it needs translating into physical reality. So it is appropriate to begin to think about the physical elements needed to fulfil the concept. A popular approach to achieving this successfully is to give the event a 'theme' where design of the environment revolves around a common thread. The theme then requires a series of decorative elements to characterise the message (Monroe, 2006) and with that, a series of props and artefacts that embody and reinforce it (Malouf, 1999). These can be extravagant and sensational, using the aforementioned design tools to piece together the whole ensemble. This, in turn, should help to begin to create an appropriate ambience that reflects the theme (Shone & Parry, 2004) and this might mean consideration of the entertainment experience to be provided for the guest (Silvers, 2004). Ultimately, the whole package needs to be produced and staged (Matthews, 2007).

Within the above considerations, design is regarded as an implicit aspect of the event planning since it enables the event manager to understand and envisage the characteristics of things like ambience, service and personal interactions. By designing these features carefully, the right environment for the specific event can be produced. An 'event with the right ambience can be a huge success. An event with the wrong ambience can be a huge failure' (Shone & Parry, 2004: 15). The question of how the right ambience is designed and created may not seem so straightforward to answer, but there are signposts that can be used in order to understand and design ambience. The practicalities of creating ambient settings is discussed by authors such as Sonder (2004), Monroe (2006) and Matthews (2007b), all of whom offer design specific approaches or, as in the case of Silvers (2004), place it as the central core of event management practice.

As all planned events run to some kind of programme, ensuring that the programming also fits into the environment can be the key to an event having a successful outcome. This can be seen in the way sports podium presentations are designed, combining the different elements of the event to ensure a successful finale. In most cases there is a programme that enables the event to follow a specific path, and this programme directs various stakeholders at the event towards a culmination moment where the winner's presentation is made. Spectators, media, participants, organisers, team personnel, etc. are purposefully moved into position. The Tour de France is a good example of this where the podium is visually designed to reflect the iconic yellow jersey of the race leader and some of the key sponsors (Credit Lyonnais, Michelin). The ambience of celebration and euphoria on success is created as a direct result of the path the event programme takes to get to this point, and where the event focus moves from the uncertain outcome of the competition to

Case study 10.3 Red Nose Day, charitable fundraising event, UK

Event: A charity event for a major UK supermarket's suppliers. This case uses a heritage building as a venue; however, design ideas within it are applicable internationally

This event had a two-fold aim – to raise money for a charity (Red Nose) and to provide an entertaining evening for the guests. There were 300 guests invited from the different regions throughout the UK. The event company managing the event made a bold and creative decision to use a National Trust property that had not previously held large-scale entertainment events. As a heritage-listed property this created some restrictions on the use of the main building, so this required some creativity to ensure the event design worked effectively. However, the venue had lavish gardens and so rather than base everything indoors the event team decided to use the main building as a 'stage and backdrop' and created the main event environment within the landscaped grounds

Originally the concept had been to create a Moulin Rouge spectacle as an obvious reference to the Red Nose charity. However, once it became known that the venue had some links to Queen Elizabeth 1, they decided to develop their design concept around the work of William Shakespeare. Drawing on references to the works and writing of Shakespeare, the team was able to pool together a wide array of performers and actors to augment the entertainment. On entrance to the main gate, guests were escorted by carriage around the side of the main building and into a huge marquee situated behind it. Inside the marquee various characters from the plays of Shakespeare served drinks and, later, food. Throughout the grounds and in the marquee, lighting was provided by flames set on 2m-high columns and as the event started in twilight the impact of the flames increased as darkness descended. The marquee had a stage in the centre of it, an interpretation of the famous Globe Theatre where Shakespeare's work was originally performed and where it is recreated today since the theatre's lavish period refurbishment. At various junctures in the evening, actors would perform selected extracts from different plays. Decoration inside was period furniture and props. Interactive elements were created by having several characters from the plays appear as guests at the event. For example the character of Puck was to be found roaming a part of the grounds where drinks where served, while a moody and slightly mad Macbeth could be seen wandering around the ground muttering and mumbling to imaginary foes.

A series of images were projected against the side of the building and facing the marquee was another stage-like setting, set about 3m off the ground. As the evening wore on, Queen Elizabeth 1, plus aides, made an appearance and mingled with guests, passing comment on their attire and preparing them for a charity auction. At 10pm a band of trumpeters appeared, unannounced, and this was the signal for the fake Queen to climb the stairs to the stage and announce, in imperious fashion, the start of the charity auction. Then, at her side appeared Shakespeare who acted as auctioneer, and a 'prosecutor' who looked not dissimilar to a hangman. His job was to liaise with the Queen and identify people who were not bidding and contributing to charity. The Queen would occasionally stop the auction and make a comment or two at specific members of the audience, threatening them with 'consequences' if they did not submit a bid.

the plaudits for the winner. The podium is designed to engender celebratory ambience by its location at the finish, its visual characteristics and its physical size and shape that allows all spectators to gaze upon it and share in the winner's joy. Such an outcome does not happen by chance – it is designed and planned purposefully and it gives closure to the event. The alternative is to allow the end of the event to stumble to a vague conclusion when the winner crosses the line, and simply hand them a trophy/cheque while they are changing or when they go back to their hotel. It is this act of designing and creating the environment that is the central point that makes events so different from other activities, and is a central component of any attempt to understand them.

Therefore the decisions that are made about how to fill an event space and how to create an active space for guests, attendees or participants are crucial in determining how the event environment will appear and how the event experience itself will occur. This suggests an emphasis is mostly placed on event guests as the recipients of the active event rather than on those who are contributing to its delivery or administering it. Creating this environment requires an awareness of guest requirements and therefore events managers have to consider mind mapping, flow, tempo and even psychographics in order to perceive what those requirements might be (Goldblatt, 2008). Some of the considerations that design and creativity might address in pursuit of this include the following:

- ***Soundscaping.*** This is the use and distribution of sound at an event. Sound can be central to the event (speech or music) but it can also affect ambience by creating suspense, attention, excitement or even distraction.
- ***Visual cues.*** These are references to a theme or other identifying element in an event. For example, a themed event would use specific artefacts and imagery to create a visual spectacle. An *Alice in Wonderland* theme would perhaps have waiters dressed as large playing cards, or staff dressed like the Mad Hatter serving drinks, and it might have fake-looking glasses as display items.
- ***Smell.*** This refers to the olfactory sensations that can enhance an experience.
- ***Taste.*** This may take the form of a creative blend of food or drink that surprises, e.g. lavender wine and ice cream.
- ***Blending.*** This is the combination of different elements that make up a whole event – mostly they complement each other to create a theme.
- ***Amenities.*** The experience should be re-affirmed in all areas, such as the toilets.
- ***Reception areas.*** The first impression is important, and greetings for guests can be a moment to set the standard for the remainder of the event.
- ***Function areas.*** These can include rest areas, games areas or hospitality areas designed to be 'functional' or have a twist to them.
- ***Innovative sites.*** This can be venue based or be a special section with an overall site.
- ***Edible displays.*** This is where culinary skills come to the fore, and flower arrangements, table centrepieces and even napkins or invitations can be made from edible ingredients that allow guests to consume the display.
- ***Decoration.*** This refers to the use of props, backdrops, colours, materials to create overall settings.
- ***Interactive décor.*** This can be clever and

Case study 10.4 BlackOut Dining Experience, UK

This case study draws on an example from a UK events and catering company but is applicable to international audiences.

In this case the event client was looking for a totally different dining experience and gave carte blanche to the company to be as creative as possible. Taking up the challenge, the company decided to go with a concept based on a single unifying idea and came up with a theme based on the colour black. They had considered some of the more obvious themes of dining such as a specific food type and décor (Indian) or using popular culture references (the film Casablanca) but felt they really needed to give the event a unique 'edge'.

In order to create the required impact meant the total dining experience had to embrace the colour black in the food and beverages, utensils and drinking vessels, décor and props, and clothing for staff. Everything as much as was practicably and safely possible had to be in black. The only exception to the black theme was the need to have some lighting as a blacked-out room would be unusable. So LED lighting in purple, deep green and deep blue was used to create mood, layout and lines for movement. While crockery, napkins, utensils and glasses could be easily made, food was a more problematic issue. Creating a balanced menu seemed a problem simply because so very few foods are black in colour or appearance. However, research produced a range of international foods that could be made in black using either food colourants or black/dark ingredients such as chocolate, squid ink, soy or blackseed. Food that could be made black included spaghetti, pizza along with interesting variants such as chocolate ravioli, chocolate-hazelnut spread, tortillas and caviar rolls. Black pudding also made an appearance, as did Schwarzbrot bread. Drink was a slightly easier option to offer in the shape of tea and coffee but also included Guinness, black root beer and Coca-Cola, which provided the perfect mixer for clear spirits. Staff wore black trousers, long-sleeved black T- shirts, black socks and shoes and, as an added touch, black gloves.

witty, designed to be non-static and so perhaps surprise guests.

- ***Parades and float design.*** These are usually for outdoor events but some larger exhibitions allow for creative approaches. A typical example would be the Tour de France sponsors' procession that precedes the race.
- ***Theme.*** This is a unifying concept, perhaps drawn from history or some recognisable aspect of culture such as cabaret.
- ***Environmental sensitivity.*** A hugely prescient element is to avoid the waste associated with many events. A simple example is to use re-usable materials where possible (such as water jugs and glasses) rather than disposable plastic articles.
- ***Timeline.*** This refers to a running order for activities to occur, often to build suspense at an event or to lead to an unveiling of something.
- ***Security.*** It is preferable to adopt a discreet almost invisible security policy rather than one that is highly visible.

Several design and creative solutions are linked to food and beverage operations, a feature of the vast majority of events and in many cases the main attraction for guests. Food and beverages can be highly visible (e.g. a chocolate fountain) and can clearly create an aroma and obviously produce a

sense of taste when consumed. They can be used to provide decoration in the form of props and can be a centrepiece of a display, edible or not. Culinary arts skills are always in demand as clients and guests seek new and interesting ways of being wined and dined. It is not so long ago that the presence of a Smoothie bar at an indoor event was something of a novelty and there is a cyclical factor that sees the use of cocktail bars go in and out of fashion. Themed banquets offer a real sense of identity to events and invariably borrow ideas from restaurants and bars. Replacing standard Western chairs and tables with half-height tables and assorted cushions enables Asian cuisine to be offered in a much more relaxed and informal way. Indeed, in taking up this theme some UK entrepreneurs have begun to deconstruct the traditional curry and replace ingredients.

10.5 Designing communication

A part of any event is the ability to communicate to the guest or audience beforehand through a marketing communication strategy. Event marketing relies heavily on communication by trying to establish shared meanings with the event's target stakeholders (Masterman & Wood, 2006). Designing the message to be conveyed is crucial at this stage as it is the key representation of how the event will appear. This pre-experience phase is about communicating the prospect of the event to an external audience and enticing them to the event with the promise of something special. To a large extent it is about creating the anticipation and a sense of excitement, therefore the theme and 'look' associated with the impending event will act as a powerful attraction. Strategically designed communication will convey this to a likely audience and instil in them an inner need to want to attend.

10.6 Understanding the planned-event experience

Planned-event experiences are then what events management is all about. People attend or participate in an event often seeking something specific from the experience and this is, initially, based on what pre-event communication they have had. They might be looking for something extraordinary, unique or special, or they might be seeking something educational or transformational. The idea that they are looking for an 'experience', though, is central to their decision to attend, and that applies not only to public, private and business events but equally to conferences, festivals and fundraising events. Therefore, argues Getz (2008), experiences and the meanings attached to them should be identified as the core phenomena of events and consequently 'if we cannot clearly articulate what the events experience is, then how it can be planned or designed? If we do not understand what it means to people, then how can it be important?' (Getz, 2008: 170). Getz is arguing that if event practitioners do not themselves understand the significance and importance of experiences then their capability in creating the right ones for guests has to be questioned.

This idea that we are seeking experiences has become prominent in the last 20 years largely because the corporate sector has adopted the concept of experience as a tool to make their businesses more competitive. In marketing, the old 4Ps have been replaced by a more psychographic approach to the consumer with 'experiential marketing' taking over and the emergence

of more complex approaches to marketing (Schmitt, 1999; Shukla & Nuntsu, 2005). In explaining what an experience is, Schmitt indicates that they are private events, the result of stimulation prompting a response, and they affect the entire living being. Furthermore, they are a result of direct observation or participation in events, and are not self-generated but induced. He argues that there are five types of customer experience that form an experiential marketing framework, namely sense, feel, think, act and relate. Experience providers then tap into these via 'implementation components' including spatial environments, communications and people.

Adopting a similar view but with a different approach, O'Sullivan and Spangler (1999) suggest that experiences are infused with special or novel qualities, that they are enhanced via personal and individual care, and that ultimately they are made by providers (or event managers) who are looking to immerse people in the experience that has been created. For them, experiences involve participation and involvement; a state of being physically, mentally, socially, spiritually or emotionally involved; a change in knowledge, skill, memory or emotion; a conscious perception of having intentionally encountered, gone to or lived through an activity or event; and an effort that addresses a psychological or inner need. They promote the idea that for something to be called an experience it must consist of the following five components or parameters of experience (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1999: 23)

1 The stages of the experience – events or feelings that occur prior, during and after the experience;
2 The actual experience – factors or variables within the experience that influence participation and shape outcomes;
3 The needs being addressed through the experience – the inner or psychic needs that give rise to the need or desire to participate in an experience;
4 The role of the participant and other people involved in the experience – the impact that the personal qualities, behaviour and expectations of both the participant and other people involved within the experience play in the overall outcome;
5 The role and relationship with the provider of the experience – the ability and willingness of the provider to customise, control and coordinate aspects of the experience.

A further approach to planning and understanding experiences is the notion of the 'experience realm' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) which suggests that experiences are either passively or actively consumed and consequently offer a level of immersion or absorption. Within these dimensions an individual will more than likely seek and receive an experience realm that is then either educational, escapist, aesthetic or entertaining. It is possible that all four dimensions and realms can be designed within a single experience; however, such events are infrequent and highly complex. Thus it is argued that 'staging experience is not about entertaining customers; it's about engaging them. An experience may engage guests on any number of dimensions' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999: 30). By utilising the framework of the experience realm, events can be subsequently designed to purposefully engage guests in the dimensions appropriate for the event. This enables the event manager to develop a rationale for designing certain event elements. For different events, each

of the 'realms' or 'parameters' will have a different emphasis placed upon them, dictated by the event concept. So where the event is more participatory than active, the focus for designing the experience will be stronger in that aspect, and the event manager will need to address how and in what way that should occur.

10.7 Further tools for experience design

Designing event environments to engage guests in an experience requires foresight as to what type of experience is required and how it can be created. Designing and creating environments is a predictive skill based on the concept of the event. By anticipating the experience, design is able to predict the future (Morello, 2000). The previous section offered some suggestions about how an experience could be framed but perhaps more specific tools are needed. Failure to understand or appreciate these central concerns of experience will lead to a poorly designed event. Events thrive on promise since, unlike products or even services, guests cannot try them out before making a commitment to attend. The first and usually the only time an event is experienced is when it takes place. So the promise that the event will live up to its billing is paramount, and therefore what is called experience foresight is needed to ensure that the promise is kept. Designing experiences involves foresight and interpretation on the part of the designer to reflect the aims of the event and those of the client/organiser, and to try to ensure that guests interpret the experience as it was intended. There is no doubt it is a challenge to do this and design successful event experiences but equally there is no doubt that events management requires that deliberately designed experiences are created. Events must be designed to provide meaningful experiences that people value from their engagement. There are 15 recurring types of experience valued mostly by participants and guest that have been identified (Diller et al., 2008). The list includes a sense of freedom and of wonder, a sense of validation, 'an understanding of enlightenment, a pleasurable feeling inspired by beauty and a sense of oneness and compatibility with everything around and associated with the event. Consideration of these value experiences and their relationship to a specific event can therefore give designers some basic and meaningful ideas to work with when they are creating the event.

Other existing tools for experience design have emerged out of the digital media field, and there are obvious synergies with models for understanding experiences. Berridge (2007), referring to the 'experience matrix' developed by Zoels and Gabrielli (2003), argues that adopting a clear human-based strategy for events management will enable event experiences to become ever more predictable. The experience matrix (see table 10.2) suggests therefore that foresight of experience can be also designed when consideration is given to the following human centric concerns:

Table 10.2 The experience matrix

1 Sensory
2 Tactile
3 Visual
4 Photographic
5 Auditory impact
6 Intellectual
7 Emotional
8 Functional
9 Informative
10 Cultural
11 Core

To further illustrate the application of this foresight of experience design, the following examples have been used in conjunction with some of the seven design classes, previously referred to in section 10.1, that make up the design domain. These examples show how some of ideas of experience design can be specifically applied in practice to event design:

- ***Accomplishment through programme design.*** Many events offer guests the opportunity to achieve goals and gain a sense of satisfaction, such as sports events where participants can try out a range of sports, conferences, network events, and outdoor adventure and challenge events. How do guests leave an event with this feeling? One way to create such an experience is to design a varied programme of achievement, perhaps based on levels of ability or age, as is often done for sports events. Academic conferences often include 'new blood' presentations or works-in-progress or poster displays. At one teaching conference, for example, there was a 30-minute speed dating research session designed to get colleagues to discuss one another's research aims and ambitions, and to develop collaborative work.
- ***Community through catering design.*** These are events that require a sense of connection with others such as those that are network, charity, educational or issues based. Creative network sessions need deliberate design interventions and interactions. If left to chance there is likelihood that a portion of the guests will feel excluded or disenfranchised. A network experience designed by one UK catering company was to serve food at four stations in a room where no single station had a complete menu, so guests had to visit another station. To add to the flow of movement and the connection with people, no tables and minimal rest zones were provided for guests to place their plates. The idea was to encourage assistance from other guests to find space or look after each other's food while someone else went for drinks, etc. This arrangement made it virtually impossible for individuals to acquire their food and drink without assistance.
- ***Wonder through production design.*** This refers to a feeling of being in the presence of great creation, more commonly referred to in events as the 'wow' factor. Many events are supposed to have this large element of surprise (Allen et al., 2005). Here again, this is not an easy element to quantify or describe. At many events and festivals, the right 'wow' can be the difference between success and failure. Traditional project management depends on the asset or deliverable being defined during the initiation phase. The surprise aspect of the event is often difficult, if not impossible, to describe. For some events, describing the 'wow' or surprise may lessen its value. It would be similar to describing the plot of a 'whodunit' mystery before reading the book. This means designing something that the guests can marvel at and look on, literally, in wonderment. Memorably, the opening to mega-events like the Olympics provides this. In Sydney 2000, Cathy Freeman, wearing a NASA all-in-one heat-protective suit stepped into a pedestal bowl high above the stadium seating to light the Olympic flame, seemingly setting herself alight as well. In 2008 in Beijing a performer appeared to be literally floating as he ran round

the upper tier of the stadium to deliver the final phase of performance before the flame was lit. An international knitwear company once presented their catwalk show at the London Fashion Show by building an ice-rink on a large cylindrical pedestal at the end of the traditional catwalk and dropping ice-skaters onto it who then modelled their new clothing range.

- ***Sensory, visual, cultural and auditory impact through content and entertainment design.*** In the week prior to the start of the 2009 Tour de France, the German techno-pop band Kraftwerk performed a concert at an unusual venue, the velodrome in Manchester, England. The velodrome is the base for Great Britain's indoor cycling track team and was an interesting venue for the hypnotic and metronomic rhythms associated with the music and also with track cycling itself, which creates a low reverberation as the bikes go round the banked ends. A more than usually momentous event was enhanced by the appearance of a quartet of Team GB Olympic cyclists racing around the banked track in tandem with Kraftwerk's performance of its stellar composition, *Tour de France.*

10.8 Event meanings and memorable experiences

As has been explored, event design is concerned with creating experiences that, by and large, should be memorable. Inevitably this raises the question of whether or not that has been achieved and the process for evaluating that achievement. Events are given meaning by the experiences encountered at them and by the images associated with them. Guest and participant experiences are a result of having emotionally encountered interactions at the event. Images, conveyed through the media or other communication platforms, act as a message to an external audience (non-attendees, business, tourists).

What the images say is dependent on the event, and its size and scope, but both the corporate sector and municipal authorities have found that hosting events with strong imagery presents an opportunity to develop a destination image and also to enhance the life cycle of a city. An example of how carefully designed event experiences can transform the image of not just a city but a nation was witnessed at the 2006 World Cup in Germany. In an attempt to create a festival-type environment for all nations competing and all the various nationalities visiting Germany, the government, football authorities and city councils created a series of festival environments in and around the venues and cities staging the tournament matches. Using nearby parks and open space, including town squares, Germany offered a celebratory environment to visitors in an effort to combat its perceived image among overseas tourists as a dull, uninspiring destination. Employing carefully designed uses of technology, space, culture and entertainment, a series of festival events was created to supplement the football matches in an attempt to create a celebratory environment to offset the often tense environment that surrounds international football and the teams' respective fans. Consequently there were far fewer incidents of hooliganism compared to past events, and further research by the German tourist agency revealed that the perception of Germany among tourists was far more positive than before the World Cup.

Case study 10.5 Designing experiences and animation

Resorts, museums, heritage sites, markets, stadia and shopping centres, for example, are all developing programmes of events. Attractions and facilities are increasingly realising the advantages of 'animation' – the process of programming interpretative features and/or events that may make a venue come alive with sensory stimulation and an appealing atmosphere (Getz, 1997). Animation describes a role played by people within a providing organisation that expands the range of provision. Animation is concerned with the experience of motion from a single purpose to a multifaceted one whereby guests and visitors are offered 'extra' activities or programmes. Rossman & Schlatter (2003) explain that in designing 'leisure services' the role of the animator can help extend visitors' experience dimensions. Typically, animators have become a feature of the hotel or tourist experience, providing additional guest experiences through a programme of activities and events. The aim of tourism animation is to satisfy the contemporary visitor's needs, desires and expectations considering active holidays. Nowadays, it has become a demand of the visitors that the holiday destination should offer extra advantages for the money they paid. Emphasis is placed on harnessing local creativity in developing new and engaging experiences for tourists which are characteristic of the destination in order to diversify the tourism product (Fernandes & Brysch, 2009).

Ski resort and travel operator engagements – generic

Ski holidays are a popular tourist activity where the supply of animation (or fun and entertainment) in the form of 'après-ski' activities is regarded as essential to the experience, and ski travellers are frequently exposed to boredom or unfulfilled promise by both resort and travel operator (Muller et al., 1997). Therefore two aspects to animation experiences emerge. On the one hand are the travel operators who have representatives in resorts dedicated to looking after clients who have booked their holiday with the operators. On the other hand are the resort representatives – people employed by the resort or region and who help provide services for all visitors to the resort.

Example A: Travel operator animation

A typical ski holiday package could be said to consist of two parts:

- Part 1 includes travel, accommodation, equipment hire, ski lift passes, ski tuition and the skiing itself;
- Part 2 includes food, beverages and entertainment – the so-called 'après-ski' experience.

Part 1 is largely functional and is seen as the core product of the holiday. Part 2 is a variable and is reliant on the ski experience becoming animated through a series of extended engagements. Such animated extras can include general après-ski activities that are non-specific to a resort, whilst others can be more specialised and based around specific resort characteristics. Travel representatives act as a fulcrum for the transmission and delivery of such opportunities which are exclusive to their clients. Such activities and events include:

- ***Catering animation.*** This refers to afternoon specials, often offered in hotels and larger chalets as a relaxational and social networking session after a day's ski. These invariably feature local pastries and desserts, plus drinks including locally mulled wine. Hotels and chalets also offer a 'themed evening meal' once a week – for example local or ethnic cuisine. Sometimes this is accompanied by music or similar entertainment.

- ***Programme animation.*** This is for skiers who wish to explore the parameters of their resort. Travel company mountain guides take clients to quieter or remote sections of the resort ski area, often introducing them to undiscovered routes and trails. In a similar vein, they also organise day trips to nearby resorts. For example, skiers at La Plagne, France, may visit nearby Courcheval or Tignes.
- ***Entertainment animation.*** This includes guided tours of local pubs, as well as evening games sessions such as outdoor/indoor curling, quiz nights and group night rides on snowmobiles. In family-based accommodation, activities for children are arranged almost daily and include things like pool or table tennis events (for adults as well).
- ***Content animation.*** Chalet groups or hotel client groups may be invited to take part in special ski events. A common offer here is a timed and filmed slalom run that is then screened back at the hotel in the evening.

Example B: Resort animation

This can be a feature of a 'lively' resort such as Verbier in Switzerland or Val d'Isère in France where the range and level of built amenities provide plentiful opportunity for extended attraction. Many ski resorts seek to expand the range of visitor services they now offer, and this is apparent in the style and type of recent new developments in the French resorts of Arc at 1950 and Flaine at Monsoleil, where premium-style accommodation has been built along with shops, fitness centres and other amenities to create a mini-resort village within a larger resort complex. These and similar resorts offer visitor engagements designed to enhance their image as winter ski towns. There is often a range of provisions available to all visitors to the resort, such as ice-rinks, outdoor pools and tubs, cinemas, leisure centres, bowling alleys, shopping malls, paragliding, ski bikes, snowmobiles and so on.

- ***Programme and entertainment animation.*** Ski resorts now offer a calendar of events and activities that all visitors can attend. Obvious celebration events based around public, local and national holidays abound, with many providing, for example, firework displays to celebrate New Year. Some resorts where the ski area is only accessible by gondola (Mayerhofen, Austria) provide special evening 'stargazing' for guests, as well as a catering element. In other resorts (Plagne Bellecote), the main retail area is lit in the evening and offers 'donut' sledge riding and ice-car rally racing. Furthermore, many resorts act as host to winter sports events such as winter car rally championships and international ski competitions. In the latest trend, winter music festivals are becoming popular attractions for visitors with the Snowbombing Festival in Mayrhofen, Austria, the market leader.
- ***Content animation.*** Resorts such as Davos (Switzerland) position themselves as world-class conference and events centres as well as ski resorts, and offer a glittering array of services to attract delegates. They also promote themselves to the corporate event market, offering bespoke ski services and events to companies. For example, Whistler, Canada, has hosted a medical conference during its ski season while others are happy to lay on competition events and team-building challenges for larger clients.
- ***Themed animation.*** It is obvious that snow-themed activities proliferate. Almost every resort includes at least one end-of-season snow festival when ski guides and instructors perform a series of shows and tricks, as well as racing and jumping competitions. These are very much appreciated by resort guests who turn out in numbers to watch a showpiece event that is a combination of skill and pantomime.

Frameworks that can be used to explore the meaning of designed experiences include research with participants recording their feelings and thoughts at a different moment throughout an event. Using ethnography enables an understanding of what is taking place by direct observation, and recording participant interactions with each other and with the event objects. Interpretation of these actions is made in order to understand them, and interviews are usually conducted with various stakeholders to see if the experiences match the interpretation. This, though, is not a quick method for extracting meaning and while valuable, it is often impractical. Latterly, some experiential event companies such as Jack Morton Worldwide have developed their own analytical tools to measure 'experience' at events. Naturally enough, these tools are not freely available but they have lead to much discussion about the nature of experiential events in the industry so that most 'industry' conferences in the past few years have included forums or panel debates on event experiences. As buzzwords go, in a developing industry, combining 'design and experience' is currently in favour and so it is paramount that events managers understand the relationship between the two and, importantly, how this translates into an actual event experience.

Questions for research

1 Using the seven categories of design discussed in 10.1, consider each in turn and design the event experience for that category based on one of the following suggested event themes. You can repeat the process again and again for the different themes, and compare and contrast the creative ideas you come up with:

Suggested themes

Art deco	Classic film or film genre
Classical music	Architecture
Brand experience	Fashion
Active adventure	Transport
Religion	Theatre
Gothic	Historical incident or event
Royalty	Music (any style, e.g. 1970's glam/heavy/punk)
Literature	Dance (any style, e.g. tango)
Sport (any)	Art (any period or idea, e.g. cubism)
Television (any programme)	

2 Pick a colour: red, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown, white, etc. Now design an event entirely around that colour. It does not have to be a dining experience and it does not have to be a total colour concept like the example in the chapter, but try to incorporate the colour as the overwhelmingly dominant theme. Alternatively you can attach the colour to known objects or symbols that are normally seen in that colour and incorporate those into your design.

3 Imagine you were asked to produce a 'design experience' survey to obtain guests' response and reaction to the event that could be quickly and relatively easily completed at an event. What types of things would you want include in it? Would you make the survey applicable to all events, or would you make it adaptable for different event types?
4 Visit a selection of, say, three public venues of a similar size. Where possible take photographs of the main space and make notes on the interior design. Now, drawing on the list of event types below, develop (a) a creative concept for the event at each venue, and (b) clear design ideas for creating the experience in that specific venue:
   - ❒ A themed product launch
   - ❒ A wedding celebration
   - ❒ A sports-award dinner
   - ❒ A 'taste of' event based on a specific country, e.g. Spain, France

Recommended websites

Browse the following internet sites for interesting and informative information:

This site has lots of archive discussion on experiential marketing, podcasts and industry interviews:

Event Design Research Network – this is a new site and under development. It is a useful link to academics interested in research events and design: http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/research_groups/edrn/edrn.html

EVENTS: review: http://eventsreview.com/

Experience design – a very useful and regularly updated website from Nathan Shedroff. Nathan explores a series of theories and thoughts on experience and design: http://www.nathan.com/ed/

International Special Events Society (ISES) – mainly in the UK/Europe and the US, ISES often includes presentations from its conferences and has a list of industry members, many of whom work on creative events: http://www.isesuk.org/

Jack Morton Experiential Marketing Agency has published a number of *White Papers* on experiences, available to download by request: http://www.jackmorton.com

Suggested reading

Berridge, G. 2007. *Events Design and Experience.* Oxford: Elsevier.

Getz, D. 2008. *Event Studies.* Oxford: Elsevier.

Pine, J & Gilmore, BH. 1999. *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage.* Boston: Harvard Business School.