

Crisis Management and Recovery for Events: Impacts and Strategies

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Practice Insights



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Practice Insight 1:

Interview with Steven Wood Schmader, CFEA President & CEO International Festivals & Events Association (IFEA World)

Steve Schmader, with 40+ years' experience in the festivals & events industry, including 20 years as the President & CEO of the IFEA, was asked several questions about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global festivals and events sector, as he is in a unique position of being able to relate to events and their many stakeholders all over the world.

Q: Can you tell us a little about the IFEA, as a professional organization?

A: The best way to do that is to provide a brief organizational overview:

Founded in 1956 as the Festival Manager's Association, the International Festivals & Events Association (IFEA World) today is 'The Premier Association Supporting and Enabling Festival & Event Professionals Worldwide.' In partnership with global affiliates under the umbrellas of IFEA Africa, IFEA Asia, IFEA Australia / New Zealand, IFEA Europe, IFEA Latin America, IFEA Middle East, and IFEA North America, the organization's common vision is for "A Globally United Industry that Touches Lives in a Positive Way through Celebration." Toward that end, we now also count "IFEA Academia," providing a common home for students, faculty and institutions around the world who share a festival and event management focus and a common goal of preparing future industry leaders; a forum for important industry-related research and discussions; and an effective junction of the academic and professional pathways of our industry.

With a target audience that includes all those who produce and support quality celebrations for the benefit of their respective "communities", the IFEA's primary focus is identifying and providing access to the professional resources and networks that will, as stated in our mission, inspire and enable those in our industry to realize their dreams, build community and sustain success through celebration.

The IFEA exists to serve the needs of our entire industry, all those who share our core values of excellence & quality; the sharing of experience, knowledge, creativity and best practices; and the importance of "community" building both locally and globally. Our success lies in the success of those we serve through professional education, programming, products and resources, networking and representation.

The IFEA enjoys the active support of over 3000 Premier Members, a self-selected group of industry leading professionals and organizations who continue to set and raise the bar for themselves and everyone in our industry with

regard to creativity, quality, professionalism, experience, and success. These members (including all event categories, budget and attendance levels), while representing only a part of the festivals and events industry as a whole, have learned the value of active and continued involvement with their professional peers at the highest levels and have set themselves apart from the pack. They represent the very best of our industry brand and through their involvement the IFEA is able to build a stronger foundation for our common industry.

Q: From your unique vantage point, what have been the primary impacts of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic on the global festivals and events sector?

A: The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything we have ever faced before – as an industry and as the world. As a result, that has also changed the resulting impact and our approaches to managing and responding to it. The pandemic is unlike past challenges, such as the attacks of 9/11, where events were used as part of the broader national response in the United States – bringing communities and the country together to show that life would go on, paying tribute to lives lost, and bonding people together, as no other industry can; or following a mass shooting/vehicular attack on an event, anywhere in the world, where the response is a more natural progression of shock and empathy, followed by a focused effort and determination to learn from what happened, being thankful it wasn't our own event(s), learning from what occurred, and then creating a new set of 'best practices' as a professional industry, to ensure that we reduce the likelihood of the same thing being allowed to happen at any other event(s) moving forward.

The Coronavirus pandemic hit fast – closing down our entire industry of 'mass gatherings' in a matter of weeks following our first knowledge of the virus; it affected everyone, everywhere – including all of our stakeholder groups; and presented us with the worst set of considerations possible. The global festivals and events industry is made up, primarily, of driven, optimistic, creative leaders, who specialize in coming up with creative, lemonade-from-lemons, solutions to any problem, when given the parameters they must work within; but the global COVID-19 pandemic gave us no parameters, no end-date, no past examples to compare to, and no 'best practices' to follow. With our well-planned processes and well-oiled event machines looking forward to our annual preparations for a normal year as we celebrated the start of the 2020 New Year, little did we recognize that we were all about to be enrolled in a Masters Degree program that none of us asked for.

While it could rightfully be presented as a 'shock and awe' impact on us all, I think it can more accurately be compared to an impact more like the five stages of grief: