

The

Maillot événement

AIR *High flyers*

~ Interviews CLAIRE SCOBIE Photography TIM BAUER ~





ROLL UP, ROLL UP
Greg Bowman spruiks
another Great Big Event at
ANZ Stadium, Homebush



Exploding dry-ice machines, relationship counselling and freak floods are all in a day's work for an events organiser.

Whether it's the Olympic Games or a banking conference, a private performance at the Opera House or a VIP dinner, events organisers must steer a cool, calm course between the competing demands of athletes and IT technicians, celebrities and chefs.

Greg Bowman is a pioneer in sports presentation. **Mark Wallage** and **Susannah Hazell** are corporate leaders. **David Grant** specialises in fashion, lifestyle and luxury.

They reveal the secrets of giving clients "the biggest bang for their buck".





Greg Bowman

Role **CREATIVE DIRECTOR** Company **GREAT BIG EVENTS**

What do you specialise in?

Sports. We started working with [Australian rules football team] the Sydney Swans in 1996 and then teamed up with Cricket Australia, also diversifying into basketball and triathlon events. We were then well-positioned to do the Sydney Olympics in 2000. This put sports presentation on the world stage. Since then, we've done the 2004 Athens Olympics, [last year's] Beijing Olympics and the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

What does an events organiser do?

In sports it is about communicating with the audience in a stadium: dealing with vision boards, deciding on music, how the athletes enter the stadium and are given trophies. It's like a piece of theatre – the athletes are the actors, the arena is the stage.

The kinds of people you hire for an event?

A huge range – from high-profile performers and MCs to stage managers, cameramen and pyrotechnicians.

Best three events?

Sydney Olympic Games. The 2007 Rugby World Cup in France, Scotland and Wales. The Corroboree 2000 bridge walk – one million people walked across the Harbour Bridge in support of reconciliation.

What kind of budgets do you work with?

From a few thousand dollars to upward of \$20 million.

Most challenging event?

The Beijing Olympics was challenging to deliver to all the

stakeholders – the Olympic Committee, the athletes and the host nation. We are the face of every sporting event, so we have to have an intimate understanding of the culture. In Beijing, there were cultural implications in everything we did, and there was the added pressure of being in the international media spotlight.

Strangest request?

One high-profile performer stipulated in her contract that no broccoli be anywhere on the premises or else she would walk out.

Any disasters?

At a gala awards dinner in Melbourne, which was being televised live, a female performer sang her song. When Ray Martin, the MC, went to thank her, she went on to sing three more songs. Despite all Ray's best diplomatic efforts, he couldn't get her off the stage.

Do clients expect the impossible?

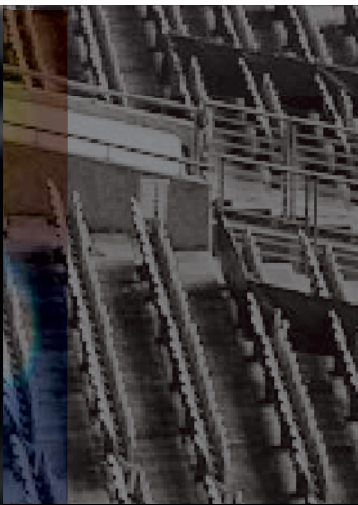
Clients have four catchphrases: "unique", "innovative", "the biggest bang for our buck" and "a wow factor". The ones who use these will then say they don't have much money – and ask for a performer to do an event free because "the event is high-profile".

The measure of success?

The reaction of spectators for honest and instant feedback, how athletes feel about the atmosphere, and whether the clients or key stakeholders are happy.

Your dream commission?

To keep doing the Olympics – the pinnacle of sporting events. ➤



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David Grant

Role **DIRECTOR/PRODUCER**

Company **DAVID GRANT SPECIAL EVENTS**

What do you specialise in?

Bespoke. Custom-designed, one-off events that celebrate a brand, a person or an occasion. We made our name producing, for [public relations legend] Deeta Colvin, the nine Cointreau Balls – once considered Sydney's hottest and most outrageous annual social soiree. Our client list has included Christian Dior, Giorgio Armani and Bentley. Recently we've organised the Prix de Marie Claire Awards and, in 2008, the launch of *Grazia* magazine. We produce the VIP sponsor events at the summer and winter Olympics.

What does an events organiser do?

On a practical level, we take the client's brief and interpret it to design the event. But our real job is to make it beyond the expected or ordinary, so that in years to come, guests will never forget that event, client or brand.

The kinds of people you hire for an event?

Designers, artists, performers, florists, caterers, waiters, cleaners, musicians, stuntmen, models – and everyone in between.

Best three events you have produced?

The next three. Every event is better than the last because we're always improving.

What kind of budgets do you work with?

Mid to high – budgets are confidential.

Most challenging event?

Olympic events usually take two years to organise. A month before the opening

ceremony at Beijing, the City of London engaged us to organise a huge corporate entertaining event over the 17-day Games. We built a 5000sq m bar and restaurant in an ancient Chinese courtyard, flew in chefs from around the world and entertained more than 20,000 guests, including David Beckham and a host of UK celebrities. It was a mammoth task in a short time in a strange land.

Strangest request?

We had to find somewhere private for two guests – a 50-year-old woman and her 30-something husband – to try to conceive a child because the planets were in alignment and her body temperature was perfect. We then stood guard outside the crew dressing room.

Any disasters?

The venue for an event on Goat Island in Sydney Harbour flooded. We had to transfer the entire set-up by barge to a new location and redesign it in five hours. That was traumatic.

Do clients expect the impossible?

We can do anything, anywhere, but it's impossible to have Kylie Minogue sing if you don't have the money for her.

What's your measure of success?

A delighted client, a happy guest and when we know we've done the best we can do.

Your dream commission?

An imaginative client with an unlimited budget and an event that has never been done before. >



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relationship counselling**
– all with a smile on your face
and on two hours' sleep.

Mark Wallage



Role **DIRECTORS** Company **CONCEPT EVENT MANAGEMENT**

What do you specialise in?

SH: I specialise in conference and event management while Mark specialises in video production, opening ceremonies, product launches and awards nights.

What does an events organiser do?

SH: Everything, from marketing and communications to stage management and production. We write scripts, organise audiovisual and IT, and coordinate food and beverages.

MW: Sometimes even a bit of relationship counselling – all with a smile on your face and on two hours' sleep.

The kinds of people you hire?

SH: For a conference, a team for the management of delegates; those involved in the development and delivery of the business program; technicians for the event itself.

MW: These often cross over into the delivery of the social events, although with larger conferences this may be a separate crew under an event producer.

Best three events you have produced?

MW: The Ernst & Young Oceania Partners' Conference at Coolool [for which Concept Events won a NSW Meetings and Events Industry Award last February]. The World Congress on IT in 2002, with Bill Clinton as keynote speaker.

SH: The International Congress on Thrombosis and Haemostasis held in Sydney in 2005. We took over the Opera House for a private performance.

What budgets do you work with?

\$10,000 to \$10 million.

Most challenging event?

SH: At the end of 2008 we produced a major conference in Darwin: 900 delegates, a five-day program, a brand-new convention centre, the onset of the wet season... and a crumbling world economy.

MW: To top it off, the foundations of an over-water marquee used for a dinner were eroded by a king tide.

Strangest request?

MW: At a Gold Coast conference event, the client wanted to stage a fake rescue of a shark-attack victim – at 9pm. We achieved it with helicopters and searchlights.

Any disasters?

MW: Minutes before Bill Clinton was due on stage at the World Congress on IT, a dry-ice machine exploded under the stage, spraying hot water and sparks everywhere.

Do clients expect the impossible?

MW: I once managed to tell the story of the history of ophthalmology – starting in ancient Babylon, through to modern times – in a 10-minute song-and-dance sequence.

What's your measure of success?

SH: Client satisfaction is paramount. At the end of the day, repeat business is our greatest reward.

Your dream commission?

MW: International delegates always say Australian conferences are the best. It would be great to do one with 20,000-plus delegates to prove it. ❖