



Golden opportunity

Thanks to good international links, the organisers of the 2012 London Olympics stand to gain from the experience of 2000's host city, Sydney and from advances in technology – the FM profession will also be a winner

There is a ring of inevitability about the issues being reported in UK media over the London Olympics in 2012. Predictable issues of funding, budgets, timescales, planning, location, what happens to the sites after the event and, of course, the logo are all (understandably) in the public spotlight.

Doubtless there's more to come. As we've seen on more than one occasion recently, any large scale UK project such as this has a tendency to attract a great deal of media attention.

So, speaking as an FM professional who has experience of working on large projects in both countries, and especially as somebody who was directly involved with the Sydney Games in the build up to 2000, it's interesting to make comparisons between the experience in Oz and what is happening in the build up to the London Games.

The exchange of ideas typifies the relationship between the two countries, along with the third of the great global facilities management triumvirate, the United States. The market for FM services in each of the countries has its own unique characteristics, but each contributes to a melting pot of talent, ideas, information and new technology that drives the global market.

The beauty of working in this global marketplace is the ability to use the experience and information generated by similar projects to make better decisions. It may also be a reassurance to the 2012 Games organisers, and the people of London, to be reminded that the build up to Sydney was far from smooth and there were significant challenges involved in making the Games a success. >>



<< Answering their critics

Even the Australian media had a pop, with an award-winning ABC satirical 'mockumentary' called *The Games* winning a huge audience on the back of jibes about cronyism within the organising committee and digs at Australia's Prime Minister John Howard. Of course, the best answer to these sorts of things is to stage a successful event. And so that's what Sydney did.

On a practical level, we had a number of significant challenges to overcome. One of the most critical of these was that the Sydney 2000 Games revealed a shortage of appropriately trained and qualified staff in the face of almost overwhelming demand.

As there is to be in London, there was a significant focus on volunteers to provide certain services such as way-finding and guest services. Yet, one thing that London has in its favour is a completely different labour market, larger and less isolated and arguably better qualified. It is also able to draw on the large EU labour market.

The issue of resourcing is not just about volunteers, however. The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) also faces the challenge of meeting significant demand for strategic and middle-management expertise in specific areas – especially security, logistics, cleaning, catering, waste management and guest services. The ability to attract this talent at the right time will be crucial in a market already experiencing a skills shortage and with little margin for error given the relatively short 15-day window that has to be hit.

While this talent is in demand, it's reassuring to note that the UK not only has these skills at a world-class standard already, it also has access to the experience of professionals in its partner countries. But the challenge is how to attract it?

So what will be of great value in meeting this demand will be a large number of three- and four-year secondments

from industry to LOCOG, typically for non-critical or management development personnel, to build the core of skills, retain learning and deliver and build appropriate relationships; although LOCOG will be aware of the challenges associated with firstly paying premium rates to attract the expertise and secondly of creating additional management layers.

As well as using existing resources, there will also be a need to look at appropriate training for all levels of staff. In part this will be necessary to respond to raised service level expectations. The experience of both Sydney, and UK developments such as Wembley, has already demonstrated how mega-projects can raise the bar to exceed changing expectations from the public.

It will also be essential to put in place the right information systems to ensure the successful implementation of the numerous projects associated with the Games. Inevitably, technology has developed to a level that would have been unrecognisable to the people working in Sydney, so the London organisers will also benefit from being able to share key data and reports from projects, make better informed decisions and further leverage the expertise of key employees.

At the end of it all, the committee will be also looking at the legacy of the Games. This will clearly focus on physical issues such as the use of residual venues, infrastructure and regeneration, but one thing that Sydney proves is there will also be a significant intellectual legacy. Certain professions are likely to benefit from the experience and learning that go hand in hand with the Olympics. It pleases me that one of these will be the FM profession, which will be one of the winners from the London Games. **FM**

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CASE STUDY THE SPONSORS' VILLAGE

One of the many venues created during the Sydney Olympics in 2000 was the Sponsors' Village. In many ways it typified the approach taken to the Games. First, it was established as a joint venture between local and international providers to provide a broad-based management team drawn from local and international markets offering expertise in convention centres, hotels, cleaning companies, logistics, project management and so on.

The middle and operational management staff were selected for the project via a global competition and successful nominees were offered an all expenses-paid trip to work at the Games as part of an overwhelmingly attractive package to ensuring the village got the best quality staff at little or no risk of defecting to non-Olympic businesses paying above-award rates.

In addition, the village sourced 90 per cent of its workforce for the duration of the Games via an international network of hospitality training colleges including many in UK and Europe, North and South America, and South-East Asia. We then accommodated all employees (around 1,500 people) in three-star accommodation in Sydney during the Games and offered leisure and recreation packages for non-working days.

Our aim was to ensure that our employees had a memorable "Games experience". The business was largely designed around the needs of staff including the provision of public transport to get to and from Olympic Park, dedicated staff facilities including in the design of the temporary venue and an extensive induction and training programme. People were looked after and nothing was left to chance, which is essential when dealing with such a short-lived but enormously important and expensive project.