

Staying

OPEN

Formerly event planners' main source of uncertainty, Brexit slipped down the priority list in 2020. Now the UK has left the EU, corporate event planner **Liz Taylor**, CEO of the Taylor Lynn Corporation, explores how event professionals will be affected.

Here we are, deal done. Out of Europe. And many event industry professionals left wondering, without a litmus paper of live events to plan, just how Brexit will affect the event industry when we are able to get back up and running.

My view – it will undoubtedly add to our burden now, but as with most challenges, it is how we respond that counts.

There are some things we know. For one, migrant workers make up 44 per cent of the UK's event industry workforce. The process of employing and retaining these workers is set to become much more admin-heavy and complicated, which could result in certain staff shortages once events ►

do resume. However, if the pound continues to climb against the euro as it has in recent days, there's a chance this may be offset by an attractive prospect of amassing sterling earnings from a stronger pound. The jury's out on this one.

Certainly, it will be at least six months until we feel the full impact of Brexit. Longer if Covid-19 restrictions remain in place past Easter, as per the rumours, and we must be prepared to hit the ground running.

Additional paperwork

The movement of goods and supplies to European destinations now comes with a lot of additional paperwork. Previously, if we were to hold an event in, say, Barcelona, we would simply load up the lorry, round up the team and head off. Now, with additional red tape there may be pressure on clients to go with local suppliers at the destination, quite possibly teams that we have no working history with.

For me this is huge. After 35 years in business, I still remain loyal to suppliers and careful who I choose to bring on board. They need to reflect the quality and

creativity that I demand for clients. Creating this level of relationship with locally based suppliers, while not impossible, will take time and huge effort. I have learned from bitter experience that you will need multiple trips to the destination on top of virtual calls to ensure that you're all working to the same brief. And that high expectations are met. To invest this amount of time and energy into creating event partners in multiple locations in Europe will come at a cost. Invariably the added time, admin and logistics will mean a higher cost to the customer. And as we expect budgets to be tight post-Covid-19 – will they want to pay?

The result – I worry that UK-based clients may opt to use European planners instead. And I can see why. It will possibly be less expensive, and a European planner will be better placed to deliver the quality suppliers from a local city. Of course, for the UK we will see a loss of revenue not just for planners, but along the whole supply chain.

Get creative

In reverse, will we see more European companies using planners based in the UK to deliver events here? An opportunity, perhaps. Could it result in UK event management companies setting up regional offices in Europe? Absolutely.

Mirroring many industries throughout the UK, there is a shift to bigger event companies looking at European hubs from which to serve the EU. Smaller companies and independent event planners will need to be

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creative in finding EU partners to develop a long-term relationship with. Sadly, the Covid-19 situation means planners are not able to do this – time, travel, resources – and so will come to the party late.

Of course, over time, we will build up networks of trusted EU suppliers but as I mentioned earlier, this in turn means that UK-based suppliers – florists, set designer, audio-visual teams – could miss out on lucrative overseas events. And there will also be restrictions on artists and performers – something I’m currently unpicking first-hand with The Swan Band – a continental ensemble under TLC’s exclusive management. The UK Government rejected a visa-free travel agreement for musicians. The reciprocal touring agreement would have freed artists from additional bureaucracy and it’s a decision that has been met with contempt from many artists. Petitions gain traction, we’ll watch how it plays out.

Master the red tape

Finally, Brexit both in its political handling and the negative perceptions of a UK wanting to be separate from the rest of Europe, will undoubtedly result in a drop in European firms using the UK as an event destination. London has already slipped down the list of popular destinations, according to the ICCA 2019 rankings. UK venues may not get the revenue they may have had historically and frankly, this is the last thing they want to hear.

There is a huge job ahead to master the red tape and develop ways to allow EU companies to plan event simply and cost effectively in the UK. First on the list will be to rebuild reputation. Make clear that not only do we have some incredible locations, but the skills, experience and imagination to deliver the best events

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in the world. That hasn’t changed. And, this is important, that we want to trade with EU partners – we are open to ideas and initiatives.

It is this very thing that gives us the greatest chance to overcome yet another hurdle and re-ignite the event sector. Polish up your foreign languages – we are taking this industry to Europe. ■