

Here's looking at you

» A new system to record visitor behaviour could revolutionise the exhibition environment

Technological advances are always promising to revolutionise the way people work in the event industry, but one piece of technology in particular has captured the exhibition sector's attention in recent months.

Its name may not be particularly inspiring, but as *Event* went to press, Fish's Real Time Measurement System was busily being installed in two of the UK's most prominent exhibition spaces – Excel London and The NEC.

The system works by using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) to measure the location of visitors at an event to within an accuracy of 12 centimetres via their badge, enabling organisers to gather previously unobtainable information about their movements.

"RFID technology gives organisers and exhibitors the same kind of measurement that marketers expect from the internet – it allows us to understand how visitors behave and personalise the entire show experience," said Fish CEO Michael Gilvar.

"Not only that, the benefits are reciprocal, so although organisers and exhibitors are getting really powerful analysis, the visitors are benefiting from a more tailored experience. We have gone from not being able to measure anything at all to being able to measure everything."

It is perhaps this ability to measure that has afforded the system so much attention.

"From what I have seen it could take the exhibition proposition forward at a time when everyone has a higher demand on ROI," said Fresh RM group exhibitions director Toby Wand. "It is a fabulous opportunity to enrich ROI investment for exhibitors and enhance the visitor experience."

Installation at The NEC is expected to be complete by summer next year and will be up and running in time for shows such as UBM Live's Industry Week, and Event UK, which take place this month.

UBM group director Simon Parker is positive about the changes that the software will make to his events. "Anything that helps us increase the measurable ROI for our customers is a massive positive," he says.

"Fish will enable us to monitor and record visitor traffic flows, and increase our clients' ability to target key customers and then deal with them



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CEO, Fish

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effectively. It will give both organisers and exhibitors better ways of capturing data, and, more importantly, will ensure that our exhibitors are following up leads in an effective and targeted way."

Excel's system is scheduled to be in place before The NEC's – installation is due to be complete by spring next year – in time for events such as Oceanology International and Liftex 2010.

Exposure Communications managing director and Fish EMEA ambassador Simon Burton believes the changes at these venues will have a much wider impact on the industry than people might think. "Other venues and event organisers will need to up their games in terms of the measurement tools that they provide," he says.

"Exhibitors and brands are going to demand that the venues they use enable them to accurately measure the effectiveness of their events."

There are some concerns, however, mainly regarding cost and the response of visitors to Fish's system. "We need to ensure the costs are realistic and that our visitors are comfortable with the increased levels of scrutiny," said Parker.

Upper Street Events managing director Paul Byrom is of a similar opinion. "It must be driven by the visitor, not just the organiser," he said. "We have to make it clear what it can allow them to do that they can't do already."

The future success of the system, then, seems to lie with those people actually attending the events.

"Organisers are going to have to come up with a precise communications plan to prove to visitors it isn't a Big Brother operation, but an enriching experience for them," said Wand. "Unless visitors use it, it's worthless."



Simon Burton
MD, Exposure Communications;
Fish EMEA ambassador

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