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Introduction

In the last few years, events have come to prominence as an important marketing communication tool. For a long time, these initiatives have lived in a grey area that made it difficult to distinguish them from other below-the-line communication instruments. With public relations, promotions, guerrilla marketing, and sponsorship agencies (among others) claiming events as part of their core business, it was not easy for to draw clear distinctions between one typology of communication instrument and another. Official statistics on promotional expenditures did not consider events as a separate category, thus contributing to difficulties in understanding the relevance of the event market. Similarly, academic research on this topic was virtually absent, particularly when compared with the abundance of studies regarding other more established marketing instruments such as sponsorship or trade shows.

Recently, things have started to change. In many countries, professional associations, the trade press and statistics providers have worked together to help events come out of the closet as a marketing communication tool with characteristics that set them apart from other instruments. Today, full-fledged events agencies exist, and it is increasingly common for companies to include in their organizational charts the position of event manager. Events have also started to attract the attention of the academic world. Nowadays, many universities offer graduate and executive courses in professional event management. While research on the topic is still in an embryonic phase, several textbooks have appeared in the marketplace. As a whole, these academic efforts are providing an initial answer to the need for academic and professional education that the event world had to satisfy, until recently, with learning-by-doing.

The idea of writing this book was generated by the sense of dissatisfaction I felt for available textbooks when I was asked by Bocconi University to design a course in Event Management for graduate students in marketing and management. The target most of these books have in mind consists of professionals (or aspiring professionals) in the meeting, conference and event industries. As a consequence, they focus on events operations and thus provide basic and advanced information on aspects such as event catering, décor, entertainment, risks, licenses and permits, lighting, sound and audiovisual equipment, and so on. While these elements are of utmost importance for an event's success, I felt that some of the key questions to relating to managing events effectively were left unanswered. For example, what is the role of events in the marketing communication mix? Which goals can be legitimately attributed to events? How are the results of events measured? How to deal effectively with event agencies? How to use events to deliver memorable brand experiences?

This book focuses on the strategic level, rather than the operational, and has been written by having in mind the knowledge requirements of companies that want to employ events as part of their marketing communication strategy. It will hopefully be a stimulating reading for brand, communication and event managers in both business-to-business (b2b) and business-to-consumer (b2c) contexts, for account managers in event agencies, and for those who aspire to work in the world of marketing events.

My deepest thanks go to the many friends and colleagues without whom this book would not be possible. I am also indebted with the many firms and agencies that over the years have intervened as guest speakers in my courses and have shared with my students the practitioner's point of view. In particular, I want to thank Francesca Golfetto, who was the first person in the academic world who believed in me and who taught me how to be a better researcher and a better person. Over the years, we worked together on many research projects regarding the trade fair industry. What I learned in those experiences paved the way for this book as a whole, and more specifically for chapter 6, which is dedicated to this typology of marketing events. A special thanks goes also to Alessandra Lanza, for helping me understand better the world of event agencies, and who helping in the crafting of this book by contributing a chapter on event communication, and to Giulia Miniero, for her precious assistance in the writing of case histories and the gathering of material for the first edition of this book.

This book is dedicated to the thousands of students who have attended my courses on marketing events, whose requests for actionable knowledge have dictated the hands-on style of this book. While I strongly believe that there is nothing more practical than good theory, in the pages that follow I have done of my best to adopt a down-to-earth and practical approach. My hope is that readers will find in the pages that follow inspiring ideas and useful instruments for their professional life.