

Exploring the Path to Sustainable Events

Season 2, Episode 7

The Xcast, an InVision podcast

Evan Strange:

Welcome to InVision podcast, the Xcast, where we help brands navigate audience engagement in times of change. Cue the intro music. Ladies, we are back with the Red Thread Crew to unravel a new topic, and we even have a guest today. Look at us. Ladies, welcome.

Molly Hodge:

We're growing up. We have a guest.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

I know. This is just the beginning for us.

Evan Strange:

This is great. I think my mom may have listened enough times to fool the metrics and they brought us back, but I digress.

Molly Hodge:

There you go.

Evan Strange:

Today, we're going to get a little controversial and talk about sustainability in events. The question we're going to try to answer today is very simple. When we are flying thousands of people from around the world to meet in one single location, drinking, eating, networking, doing all of those things, can events actually be sustainable? And what can we do in our own race to net-zero? So first question for you two. Yes or no, can events be sustainable? Molly?

Molly Hodge:

I'm going to be the optimist here. I think yes. I think we have a little bit of work to do, but I think that yes, we should all be working together towards that goal. Michelle, what are your thoughts?

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

I agree, yes. Being sustainable, it's a voluntary action, right? This is something that we're choosing to do, and if we do choose to do it, we need to be transparent about what we're doing so that we can be accountable. So yes, I do think that events can be more sustainable, but it's going to take a lot of work and everybody's got to be buy into this. We can't just do it ourselves. We all got to do it. Across the industry, we need to commit to this.

Evan Strange:

Hear, hear. I'm a yes, but as well. I still think we have a ton of work to do to get there, but I think there's just in our everyday work, I think there's a handful of things that we can do to be kinder to the environment. We know it's changing, we know our events have an impact on it, so what are some of those things that we can do. Before we get into them, just a few stats to think about, not so flattering but some food for thought. Some studies show that a five-day event with 1,200 people can create up to 15,000 pounds of waste. That is the weight of a school bus.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Oh, my God.

Evan Strange:

One study showed that each visitor to one of these events or conferences can cause on average anywhere from a half ton to one and a half tons of CO2 equivalence over the course of a three-day converts, and one study showed that You'd have to plant up to 46 trees to offset that.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Offset one person?

Evan Strange:

Offset all that CO2 that's been emitted into the air.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Wow.

Evan Strange:

And in some cases, at the end of the event, even in some of the best case scenarios, 41% of materials still end up in a landfill. So let's do this. We've all been doing this for a while. I'm Sure we have some sustainability tricks up our sleeves. Between the two of you, what would be a few things that event marketers, experiential professionals can do right now to make their events more sustainable? Michelle?

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Well, can we talk about one of my pet peeves first? Let's just go there. It's swag. Swag, shame on swag. I'd like to ask you guys, how many t-shirts and plastic bits and pieces do you have from events, not that you've attended but that you've been part of the crew and designing the event? I don't even want to think about what's in my closet, but it's all going to go to landfill. It really is. Even the t-shirts that I wore once or twice and was happy to wear, they've been donated and they're going to end up in landfills. So I think one of the things that we can do right now, and it's not going to be that hard, is to really be thoughtful about what that swag is. Is it necessary? Is it purposeful? So things like if you have to have a T-shirt, it's a new company and showing your pride in your brand is really important, let's consider using bamboo fiber for the T-shirts. The bamboo grows quickly, it's biodegradable, all of the good stuff.

There are clothing lines where the fibers are made from recycled plastic soda bottles, so if we're going to do this, at least let's use materials that are environmentally friendly. So that's one idea. Other things like reusable purposeful water bottles. Those are great. People can use them at the event throughout the space, rather than having big trash cans for the throw away plastic water bottles. Have a refill

station. Put some messaging on it. Remind everybody, using this water bottle is saving X number of plastic water bottles from going into landfill. As we do these things at the events, we're helping to educate the attendees too, making them more thoughtful about what their actions are doing.

I don't know. I have a million reusable shopping bags from these events, and those are great but how many do we really need? I think it's sort of like let's have those conversations. Is this swag really necessary? There's an option where companies, in lieu of having swag in an event, maybe you make a donation to an environmental cause. That boosts your credibility, it's great PR for the company. You're showing that you're a leader who caress about the environment and you're willing to do big things to make it happen, so swag, think about swag more thoughtfully. Molly, what do you think?

Molly Hodge:

I have a couple of thoughts, and it's definitely something that I'm very passionate about. I'm a parent. I want to leave this earth a better place and I want my children and their children to grow up in a world that's better, so there's that Margaret Mead quote about many individuals together can really make an impact, and I think that that's what we can do at these larger events. Everyone really can make an impact. So the first thing that I really, when I look at designing an event space overall, is I look at how much printing I'm going to have to do, and I really, really try to be very thoughtful on what this will look like.

Just because there's a column, does it have to really be wrapped? These column wraps and these giant branding moments, really be very thoughtful about what your printing is going to look like. Having a sea of meter boards isn't always necessary if you have digital signage or the venue provides different types of digital signage opportunities. Just really thinking about that in a different way I think is really super important to me.

Another thing that is low hanging fruit, but I'm going to mention it here, is renting local. So that's props, that's furniture, that's anything that already is in existence. Just because you use this incredible, wonderful, adorable furniture for South by Southwest in Austin doesn't mean that we should ship that in into a Las Vegas event. There are lots of other more local rental companies, and I think you can think about it in a different way. And on that note, I really also just recommend renting and reusing anything that you possibly can. Not building something from scratch, not necessarily purchasing because you don't know where that's coming from, if they're shipping it in from a further location. So to really think about renting and reusing.

And then Michelle, my third point, which I think you hit the nail on the head, is you have this captive audience They're coming in from all over. Why not educate them? Why not show them, these are exactly what you use to compost. This is what can go in the green bin versus this what can go in the blue bin, and just make it a bigger sort of education overall for everyone who's there. I just saw a picture recently of an event that had this giant box. I think it was Waste Management provided it, where it said, can we have your last sip? And people could pour whatever they were drinking, if it's beer or whatever, Diet Coke, they could pour it into this big trough and then they could recycle the cup. So it's the little things like that, and everyone can make a difference and all of us as event professionals, we should be a part of this. So that's all I've got to say, Evan.

Evan Strange:

That's great.

Molly Hodge:

I was going to say, Molly. You said something about going local, and I think too, we could and should consider our suppliers, our vendors, our crew. Thinking about how can we use local people versus flying somebody in from across the country to be on site. There's a lot of ways that just tweaking the way we're thinking about things and putting sustainability more at the forefront of our approach to how we're designing experiences can make a big difference. Like you said, it's the little things. When you add them up, it can make a big impact, but it's going to take consistent effort over time and all of us coming together to do it to make it really happen.

Yeah. Another thing I wanted to add, and Michelle, I had written this to you earlier, is about this movement towards plant-based diets and the effect that you as an individual can have by going to more of a plant-based diet, and just looking at lots of venues and caterers and restaurants and things like that to come up with options that are not sort of that typical, okay, here's your vegetarian option. Because vegetables and fruit can be really delicious and filling, and really look at that. Don't just offer what you see on the menu, but really, I would lean into the executive chefs and just say, what are these other options that you can give to us that have less of an impact to our environment? So I just wanted to pick one up too.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

But that too. Eating local, again, using local providers, local ingredients, all help offset that carbon footprint. But food just in general with events, we've really got to look at our appetite for sustainability because we need to definitely think about food differently. I saw a stat that food waste, and this isn't just from events, but food waste in general is responsible for 8% of global emissions. 8%, which is a heck of a lot, and the average event waste is as high as 20%. So think about it. That 20% of the food that is produced for an event, so that could be feeding the attendees, the crew, all the meals on site that people are having every day, three meals, snacks, that's a lot of potential waste. So we need to think about how can we do that better? And I think the plant-based eating is a great first step, because who doesn't love pasta? You don't need to have meat, and meat is very responsible for greenhouse gases, and a plant-based diet is good for all of us too. It just is. In addition to what we're serving, how we're serving it.

Molly Hodge:

What happens to it afterwards?

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Right. So is a buffet a good idea? Because I know I've been at buffets, in the back of house where there are just bowls and bowls and bowls for days of different things to choose, and when you're there and you're hungry, you're like, "I'm going to have a little of this, a little of that, a little of this." It ends up in the trash, and we can do better. Maybe we do boxed meals for people, so the food's boxed. They can take it wherever they need to, and if we decide that there's a lot left over, it's ready to be donated to some local cause, and there are organizations out there that will help. They will partner with an event company to cut down on the amount of food that's wasted.

Edible food can be taken from an event site, distributed to a local community center or place where people can come and get fed, or even donating the inedible food waste, and there's always a lot of that, but that can be recycled. So there are partners out there ready and willing to help make this happen, so what's your appetite for sustainability, people? What is it?

Molly Hodge:

Love it.

Evan Strange:

And we have clients, partners that we use right now that are helping get rid of the food waste, help deliver it to people that need it so it's not just getting thrown away. And then the other thing I'd say around vegetarian plant-based meals, another stat, seven to 18% of global methane emissions come from livestock. So we're not asking attendees to change their entire lifestyle, but while they're on site, I think we can be more cognizant of it. And I think we've all been to these events before, we're open to trying new things, and for those that aren't readily eating plant-based meals, I think people would be surprised about it and they are more open to try it at these three, four day events. And we have clients now that are only serving plant-based meals, and they have received rave reviews.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

And it's less confusing for, logistically speaking, you're not catering to all these different menus if it's conscious, if it's vegan. A vegan inspired menu, there's only good things, right?

Evan Strange:

Totally.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Totally.

Evan Strange:

And We've all been there. We're not just eating at the show. As an attendee, you can't wait for the show to be over and head out to some restaurant, sushi, steakhouse, so we don't have to have these huge buffets. So I am in total agreement. I think one of the biggest areas that we can improve and make a dent is in how we serve food, the types of food, and what it's served in.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Here, here.

Evan Strange:

I would add two more tips. Number one, transportation. We always want to get out and explore the city. I think an easy thing that marketers can do is partner with an e-bike program to get people around the city in a very harmless way. I think the other thing, especially for those of us that work with technology companies. A lot of these tech companies have either customers or clients or partners that are producing and creating electric vehicles, so why not encourage them to work with their partners to bring a fleet on site? I know we're thinking big. We'd have to figure out the logistics, but That's a great way to not only tell your story as a business, trying to make a dent in that particular industry, but you're also reducing the harm on the environment as well.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

I love the idea of the e-bikes too because from an experienced design perspective, you could turn that into a meeting on wheels or a team get together. You can turn it into a lot of purposeful content, right? It's not just a means of sightseeing. It could become a pivotal part of the event experience.

Molly Hodge:

I love that. Always creating, Michelle.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Always. We can't help ourselves.

Evan Strange:

Love it. Final tip for everybody. It may seem easy but we should do it. Ban single use plastic across the entirety of the event. Use those water bottles that you're talking about, Michelle. Let's work with our sponsors and partners on the expo floor. Encourage no single use plastic. The swag that you're talking about that most people probably don't want anyway. Let's be honest, they're not always taking it home so let's get rid of some of that swag and also that single use plastic.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Yeah. There's alternative materials for things that are part of conference culture, like a lanyard and a badge. You can get biodegradable material to print a badge on, or a recyclable material. The lanyard could be up-cycled plastic. Those kinds of decisions that we make, even for those little things. Again, I think Molly said, there's a lot of low hanging fruit. If we start picking that fruit off now, then we can focus on the bigger things. Let's get all of these other things that we've talked about, make them like this is just the way we're doing things from now on. It's not new, it's not unique, it's not special. This is the way forward.

Evan Strange:

I think we so often see sustainability goals listed on a company's website and not necessarily lived in the real world and real life, but I think events are a great place to do that. Show how we're living, show how our businesses are changing, and it's a great place for companies to actually walk the walk and show that they care. Being more purposeful, more mindful.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Green is more than a buzzword. It's an ethos, it's a philosophy, it's a value. And like you said, walk the walk. If you mean it, demonstrate it. It's just, at the end of the day, it's great PR. It's great for your reputation, it makes people feel good about your company. It's like, why not?

Molly Hodge:

A win-win. Win-win-win.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

It is.

Win, win, win.

Molly Hodge:

Win, win, win.

Evan Strange:

So these are just a few of our tips. I think especially today, there are so many resources available, not just our wonderful little podcast, to help experiential marketers in their own quest to net-zero. I think one that I'd recommend everyone check out is the Society for Sustainable Events. They have a ton of different resources. How to not only make these small changes but measure the impact that you're having on the environment. It's a great organization and a great resource to check out, and I think that is a great segue to our guest speaker. Should we bring him in?

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Yes.

Molly Hodge:

Do it.

Evan Strange:

So enough of hearing us chat. Now, we'd like to bring in someone who's really been a pioneer and an advocate for sustainability in events long before it really became an imperative for most companies today. Paul Salinger is the former vice president of marketing at Oracle where he was a champion for sustainable events for more than 20 years. And currently, he's a board member for the Society for Sustainable Events, where he's continuing his work to make events and experiential marketing as sustainable as possible. Paul, welcome and thanks for joining.

Paul:

Thanks, Evan. Thanks for having me.

Evan Strange:

So I think when most people think of events, sustainability isn't always the first thing that comes to mind. A lot of people from different places around the world come to a certain location to meet, to learn, to network, to eat - probably eat a lot - and so much more, and that's quite the footprint that can be left behind. But you've clearly been a champion of sustainability for a long time, and my first question for you is was there an aha moment at some point in time where you said to yourself, we need to be more gentle to the earth and our events need to leave as small of a footprint as possible?

Paul:

Yeah, I think there was actually. As you probably know, when I was at Oracle, our big major conference, Oracle OpenWorld, was an annual event, and we got to the point where we realized that not only were we having a positive impact in terms of the economics that we were bringing to San Francisco financially, but we were having a big impact in terms of just the sustainability of the event itself. We had a lot of people traveling in, we had a lot of food waste, we had a lot of overall waste, and so we decided that we really needed to work on that, and that was really kind of the aha moment. I had always been involved in and interested in sustainability, going way back to growing up and being involved in the very first Earth Day back in 1970, but being able to now bring that work and that passion to a corporate environment and to the event sector in general was kind of the aha moment in terms of this is something that we really need to work on.

Evan Strange:

That's great. And I think so often, we look at things through the lens of the bottom line. A lot of large companies do. How did you evangelize internally to bring the organization on board and get everyone to actually care about making real investments in sustainability?

Paul:

Yeah, it's interesting because we sort of took an opposite approach to what a lot of people traditionally think of needing to have a mandate come from the top down as to this is something to work on. We worked on it from the bottom up. So we recognized within the event group itself that this was something that we wanted to work on, and we didn't necessarily have management support at first. But after the first year or two of saving over a million dollars by doing very simple things like eliminating bottled water, not printing a 400-page guidebook to the event and digitizing everything, and really working on things like food waste and food orders, that caught the attention of people in senior management to where they started to support us more.

We were one of the first organizations within the company to really capture data from what we are doing, which became part of their reporting structure to some of the reporting entities that corporations use these days, and it was data that got put into the annual report, so we built it from the bottom up. A lot of companies built it from the top down, but you can do it either way. We just happened to do it from the bottom up, and so we built the business case by actually taking the actions that we took and then doing reporting around that and showing senior management that sustainability actually could be a cost saving measure for the company.

Evan Strange:

That's awesome. So it sounds like sustainability, that idea, and Oracle is a company that I think is known for many of their efforts in sustainability around the world, but it sounds like the events teams, although small and mighty, had a hand and helped getting that started maybe.

Paul:

Yeah, absolutely. And then the other thing that we did that I think is important is that we took that passion and we took that initiative out to our supply chain, and so we brought all of our suppliers on board. We created a network of suppliers within the city of San Francisco, and it included basically the entire event supply chain, from the destination to the venue, to food and beverage, to transportation, to our general services contractor, to audio visual production, even to our design, our signage and all of the onsite stuff. And we brought all of these people together in a room and we got everybody to basically commit to the goals that we were trying to get to, and to commit to giving us the data that we needed to report against our impact.

And by doing that, a year over year kind of thing, we were able to continually improve. So we took very simple actions at the very beginning and then increased our goals as time went on to basically having a five-year plan of getting to zero waste and carbon neutrality over a five-year period, which we didn't actually achieve but we made a lot of progress towards those goals.

Evan Strange:

That's great. I'm certainly a data nerd. I'm a strategist here so I think in many cases, data can speak for itself and help support the cause. I do think there is maybe a misconception among some folks that a sustainable event is also an expensive event. So what would you say to the head of events at a large company who's struggling to make the case for sustainability internally and doesn't have that data yet? What can they do to show their teams that the investment in sustainability is worth it?

Paul:

Well, I think the first thing that they can do is look at their corporate statements. Most corporations these days have made a statement around, "We're going to reduce our carbon emissions by X percent by X year," or, "We're going to reduce our waste by some percentage over the course of a year or two." And to basically say, okay, if the corporate is saying these things, then we need to get aligned around that from an event perspective as well. We need to look at and start to gather the data that we need to show that we are aligned with what the corporation as a whole is actually starting to say. And when people say that, "Oh yeah, but green events or sustainable events are going to be more expensive," my answer is is it not worth the extra few dollars that you would spend on green to save the planet basically is what it comes down to, and I don't think that there's an argument against that.

So yes, you may end up spending some more money for some premiums for sustainable events, but in the long run, there are ways that you can save money. And again, having saved over a million dollars over a couple of years at Oracle, we basically took that money and reinvested it back into our sustainability initiatives. So by hiring a consultant to help us gather data, audit our event and write a report, and to work with our design team, work with all of our suppliers to figure out ways that we could actually cut costs as opposed to increasing costs, by doing things in a much different way and rethinking materials, rethinking our approach, rethinking how we incorporated sustainability into our event planning process and the operation of the event. And then even post-event, how we communicated that back to all of our stakeholders, both internal and external.

So I just think that the myth of it costing more money is a red herring in a lot of ways, and that our job really at this point is to acknowledge that our events emit too much carbon, they waste too much, and it's way past time to acknowledge that and do something about it.

Evan Strange:

Agreed, agreed. I think too, I think far too often, corporate social responsibility is just a page on a company's website, and it actually needs to become alive and events and experiential is a great place to do that and actually live those values.

Paul:

Yeah, that's absolutely right. And in a lot of ways, the events team has the opportunity to get past that greenwashing that may be on the corporate page and to put into action some of the things that the corporation is doing. And we found, and I think it's true for most people that are doing this, that it has positive brand consequences. We got so much press for the things that we were doing around sustainability. We won some awards for what we were doing, so there's a lot of positive that can come out of this from a brand perspective as well. And it can help alleviate some of the negative impacts that people might see around a big company coming into a community and using resources in a less than positive kind of way. So the myth of it costing too much to me is just a red herring.

Evan Strange:

I love it. And I think too, our audiences are smart and they can see through some of the BS, if you will. Are you living your values or not? And I think it can come down to that.

Paul:

I think that we're starting to see a shift in demographics in live events. It's shifting towards younger generations, when those generations tend to have a bit more focus on saving the earth and being more environmentally conscious, being more socially conscious. And so I think we're starting to see things like

people not taking all the swag that we used to give out, and being particular about what it is that they do take. We're seeing more vegetarian meals, we're seeing more conferences start to eliminate meat on some days or maybe even across an entire conference, so we're just seeing more consciousness around sustainability.

And we're starting to see now companies that traditionally have not been very focused on sustainability, I'm thinking of event agencies in particular, start to be asked about it from their clients and start to need to figure out how to engage their clients and how to engage their vendors around this topic and around the actions that they need to take? Because it is becoming a risk factor for the live event industry, and it's something that we're going to need to really think about in terms of mitigating risk, as well as just becoming more sustainable overall and how to integrate sustainability into the entire event process.

Evan Strange:

That's great. So we've all been to quite a few events as events professionals. I'm curious. What are some of your sustainability pet peeves? The things that you see when you go to an event and know right away that an event is not truly focused on sustainability? Are you as tired as I am of seeing the expo floors covered in single use plastic swag?

Paul:

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I think my pet peeves are always around single use plastic, non-compostable food wear, food waste overall. It's changed quite a bit since the pandemic, but I think that people are still doing buffets and doing things where there's a lot of food wasted, and you don't really know whether that food is going into landfill or whether they're able to donate it or whatever, so yeah. But single use plastic is very top of mind in terms of something that the industry really needs to work on. That's always a pet peeve.

Just giving out swag just for the sake of giving out a promotional product is something that I think is a bit of a pet peeve. And I've gotten to the point where when I go to a conference, I never take the conference bag anymore. I never take any of their promo stuff because it's just so incredibly wasteful. So those are a couple of big pet peeves.

Also, I get annoyed when there's paper handouts for example, when it could easily be digitized. And there's something to say for inclusivity and accessibility. There are people that sometimes need paper, but I think that we need to be conscious of, again, just not wasting resources, and that becomes the biggest pet peeve.

Evan Strange:

So thinking tactically, what do you think are some of the low hanging fruit that every single event, regardless of budget, should do to be more sustainable? And then on the flip side of that, what are some of the tactics that may seem a bit daunting, but all experiential marketers should at least be trying to work towards?

Paul:

I'll give you, because I've been presenting this recently, I'll give you my list of what I think should be standard by now at any event, and especially at big corporate events. Number one, eliminate bottled water. Number two, digitize everything, but take inclusion and accessibility into account. Number three, public transportation whenever and wherever possible. Fourth thing would be reduce venue and facility energy usage, so things like turning off air-conditioning when it's not really needed and just being mindful of energy usage overall. Compost as much as possible and donate food wherever possible.

Reuse or repurpose as much as possible. We need to get out of the take, make, waste mentality and move towards a more circular approach to things in terms of making something and then repurposing it and reusing it, and giving it a longer life cycle.

We talked about reduce or eliminate single use plastic, donate, upcycle or recycle signage, fabrics and carpet. And then last but certainly not least, measure waste, carbon, energy, water, and write a report and tell us what you're doing. Make it public so that we can all learn from each other. So that's my list of what I think should be standard by now at pretty much any event.

Evan Strange:

Do you have any insight into the data collection piece? How can we as event marketers measure our waste and make sure that we're doing the right things and moving in the right direction?

Paul:

So there are tools out there. There's free tool that the UN has created for measuring your event data. There are other tools that you can pay for. MeetGreen has one. There's a really good one that was created by a company called Isla. The tool is called Trace. It comes out of the UK. There are a couple of other ones out there, but honestly, you can do it yourself. If you understand just the basics of what data you're looking for and get venues and destinations and your suppliers to provide that data, with an Excel spreadsheet and a little bit of math, you can probably get that information. And there's actually an event that I'm attending next week where somebody is actually doing a class on how you would actually do it just using an Excel spreadsheet.

So the key there is to set expectations early with your suppliers and with the venue in terms of what it is that you're looking for so that they can start to think about what data they can gather for you, and then in an ideal world, you would then have somebody to verify the data and audit it in a way and then write a report about it. But honestly, just getting that data, looking at it and using it as a way to continuously improve from year to year. Taking that data and saying, okay this year, we were at 50% landfill, the amount of stuff that went to landfill. How can we improve that and get that to a higher number? Or this year, we had x number of pounds of food waste. How can we improve on that? So just gathering that data, and even using an Excel spreadsheet would be one way of just getting everybody to figure out how to get some data.

Evan Strange:

And then tracking that year over year.

Paul:

And then tracking that year over year. Absolutely.

Evan Strange:

So I mentioned the Society for Sustainable Events earlier. What is it? How can experiential marketers tap into their knowledge and expertise?

Paul:

So Society for Sustainable Events actually grew out of what used to be the Green Meeting Industry Council, and the Green Meeting Industry Council, I was on the board of that as well back, I don't know, 10 or 15 years ago. I can't even remember now. And Society for Sustainable Events was the Northern

California chapter of the Green Meeting Industry Council. We had to change the name for some legal reasons because the Green Meeting Industry Council got absorbed into the Event Industry Council, which works on the Event Industry Council Standards for Sustainable Events, and anyway, that's sort of irrelevant. But what we do is we aim to educate and evangelize and advocate for sustainable events. And right now, we're doing a series of events that I host. That's almost like a podcast. It's sort of a talk show where I interview thought leaders on sustainable event topics. We have one coming up in a couple of weeks actually from today.

Yeah, so it's basically a local group. It's one of many. There are a lot of groups out there that you could tap into. Members United for Sustainable Events is another one. I'm a member of that as well. There's a Sustainable Event Alliance, there's the Event Industry Council, the Sustainability Committee. There's a lot of resources that you can find online. I'll be perfectly honest, that you could these days almost find everything that you need just by doing some simple Google searches, because the information is out there. It's just a matter of people really starting to adopt it and starting to think about how they can turn this into a valuable proposition for their event, and a purpose-driven value proposition for their event?

Evan Strange:

That's great. The information is there. Let's all use it.

Paul:

Yeah.

Evan Strange:

Awesome. So I think one final question for me, one burning question. Now, I'm an event professional so I certainly don't think events are going anywhere. We're always going to want to meet, so my final question. With so many organizations in the race to net-zero, can we still make it to zero while we're doing events at the same time?

Paul:

Yes, I think we can, and there is a net-zero carbon pledge that the Joint Meeting Industry Council has created, and they have now also created a roadmap for how to get to net-zero. So again, that information is out there, but to a large degree, it will involve some behavior change on our parts. We can continue doing live events, but the question becomes do we need to go to as many as we've been going to? Because part of the solution really is around flying less. I've seen examples of people going to do site surveys for an event, three or four times to the same venue, taking teams of people out when you could easily be doing a lot of that online these days. And I just think that we need to be asking ourselves even, does this event actually need to be live? If it's a pure educational event, could it be online? Could it be digital in some way, or virtual? And even for our live events, are we adding a virtual option so that people who choose not to travel can still attend?

Because I agree with you, live events are probably not going away and they probably shouldn't go away. I think we're all advocates for live events and for experiential events, and the question then becomes, if we want that industry to thrive and to survive, then we need to start thinking about how do we mitigate the impacts that we're having? And a lot of that comes down to eliminating carbon and eliminating waste, and those are the two biggest things that we need to work on.

But honestly, a lot of it is just about being mindful of the resources that we're using, being mindful of how to reduce our use of those, being mindful of how to repurpose the things that we're using, and starting to build that into our network of event supply chains and start to communicate with our

attendees about what it is we're doing and why it is that we're doing it, and getting them on board so that the behavior change becomes a loop of like, we're doing it, our attendees are doing it, our supply chain is doing it and everybody is participating in the process, and we're integrating sustainability into our entire event planning process.

I was on a call yesterday where there was a question posed about should we have a line item for sustainability in our event budgets? And we went back and forth, there was a lot of discussion about it, and ultimately, I think the goal should be to never have to have a sustainability line item in our budgets because we're just doing it as a matter of practice. So anyway, that's kind of where I am on that.

Evan Strange:

Great. And you clearly know your way to a strategist's heart by talking about the why and all the decisions that we make being on purpose. Events happening should be happening for a reason and be purposeful, and I think sustainability ties into that as well.

Paul:

And the why then becomes a decision-making tool in terms of if sustainability is integrated into your event, across the planning process, the operation of the event and even the post-event process, then you're starting to look at every decision that you make from a sustainability standpoint. Every design piece becomes a sustainability opportunity and every decision becomes a sustainability opportunity, and that's the ideal. If we can get to that point, then I think the event industry and the experiential industry can thrive and survive and succeed in the future and still deliver value for the attendees that are coming to our events.

Evan Strange:

That's great, and I'm a believer. Paul, thank you so much. Thank you for joining us. Let's keep pushing forward.

Paul:

Absolutely. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work, and become part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Evan Strange:

Let's do it. Well, now I am sufficiently inspired. What did the two of you think?

Molly Hodge:

I am too. He's been doing this for 20 years. He is really somebody that really inspires me and I hope that will inspire all of you who are listening. Just really exciting. I'm hopeful for the future.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

It's true. As people in events, there are thousands of people from all over the world who attend events, every week, all over the globe. If we start making changes in what we're doing and helping people see that their individual choices can make a difference, imagine the impact we can have. That's thousands of people all over the world doing one or two little things differently. We'll be on our way to net-zero.

Evan Strange:

We're on our way. People always want to meet. I don't think that is going to change, but we can at least change some of our habits on site and how we produce events.

Michelle Bartosiewicz:

Do you know what? I'm going to have an impossible burger? I'm going to have a plant-based burger later today, just to continue to get inspired by what we talked about today.

Molly Hodge:

I'm going to continue to drink out of my water bottle that I have here in my hand.

Evan Strange:

Same. Stay hydrated, everybody. Thank you too for joining me once again. Thank you to Paul, and we'll see you guys next time.