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The Growth OF Event Venues: Challenges for Events and Facility Management in Nigeria

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Abstract

The desire to celebrate functions in covered elite spaces became a vogue in the early '90s while the ability to pay for such venues became a status symbol. Event venues sprang up in all areas of Lagos state as they became major revenue earners. People with landed properties took to building event centres while old properties were converted to accommodate event halls. The demand for these venues in their different capacities in choice locations determined their status and categories. Old club houses renovated to meet the new taste of their members while generating extra revenues for the clubs. The desire to take advantage of this relatively 'easy money' led to a supplier's market economically and the market is still growing. The result is the emergence of "Event Managers" covering a broad range of event needs. This paper traces the fast growth of event venues since 1990 to date, the qualities of premier elite venues which led to the current event venue explosion, and the challenges for events and facility managers in Nigeria. The paper is a modification of an internal assessment study as a management staff of the MUSON Centre¹ (1994-2002) in the face of growing competition.

Keywords: Event; Venue; facility management;

Introduction

Organizational chain and social life become symbiotically relevant considering the impacts one has on the other due to government policies, industrialization, improvement in personal income, and subsequently, in individual lifestyle, including leisure and habits. In Managing Arts Institution in Nigeria, Awodiya observes that the impact of the oil boom led to "the shift in societal values from tight and disciplined structures to more permissive and indulgent values

made the wealthy citizens to spend more of their disposable income on art consumption, be it drama, painting, sculpture or literature" (27-32). There is no doubt that the venues for the expression of these social values also witnessed a boom owing to the renewed interest and patronage:

The increase in leisure time that became noticeable in the 1970s, contributed immensely to the large numbers of attendance in libraries, museums, concert halls, theatres, recreation clubs, athletic clubs and a host of other leisure time resources (Awodiya 27). Government had also provided an enabling environment leading to the emergence of "dynamic arts administration in Nigeria...in 1977 just at the opening of the National Arts Theatre and the hosting of the Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77)" (Adedokun vi-vii).

By 1990s, the spaces which accommodated this leisure and lifestyle had begun to wear new looks. Before 1990, it was rare to see an individual or outfit registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in the "Event Management" category. Since they were not registered as such, it was also difficult to find them in the "Yellow Pages". There were of course individuals whose names would easily pass as "trade marks" in the various units of event support services like Tent Events Limited (balloons), DSV Limited (Stage & aesthetic lighting), Master Sounds Limited (music and speech enhancement equipments) and Mama Cass (catering services). These are expert decorators in flowers and balloons, catering, suppliers of wine, spirits and other alcoholic beverages, packagers of assorted gift items, suppliers of chairs, tables, tents and specialized stage and lighting equipments for open air celebrations. Event management before now was determined by relationship and personal affinity with the organiser who may be a friend, colleague or family member. But the growth of event venues has led a number of these individuals in different areas to formalize their businesses as well as evolve better management structures in order to achieve better rating and recognition, which corporate

organizations prefer rather than work with the hustlers in the fast growing event service industry. The many specialist participants who are collaborators in the business of Event Management tend to be creating some confusion on who an Event Manager is in the modern parlance, and where to receive specialist training in event management.

Toward a Definition

The phrase "Event Venue" may sound foreign or modern; both are fallacies if considered as such. It is a fallacy in the sense that it exists in every organized society no matter how rustic. Traditional African societies have their village squares for communal activities involving large crowds like festivals while the village or town halls are used for such meetings that do not involve displays.

An Event Venue is not difficult to define and understand if seen from the layman's point of view. It is a place which a celebrant has chosen to host an event. By a celebrant, we mean the organizer or his chosen representative. The organizer is the owner of an event and the individual who funds the event. It could be for itself or in honour of someone else. On the other hand, the representative is the event manager or facilitator of that event. The event manager is the individual or organ with the requisite knowledge and wherewithal in terms of training and experience to execute the ideas of the organizer. In recent times however, event venues have become assets that attract profit for owners.

An event is any occasion involving the gathering of people. The nature of the event determines the kind of crowd in attendance as well as defines the kind of attention or treatment to be given to a particular event. Therefore, an event is the gathering of people for celebration, entertainment or other forms of interaction.

However, the process of hosting a proposed event is not only broad but complex. In other words, event hosting is bigger than the idea; it calls for meticulous planning, hence Event Management. This is not as simple as it sounds because Event Management has taken a professional dimension. By professional, we mean that event

management has become an occupation where the practitioners are masters in the trade. Event Management is motivated by the need to satisfy individual tastes through corporate planning, organized packaging and careful execution. The aim is to free the celebrant from the hassles associated with event processes while his money engages those with the expertise for better hosting experience. This way, invited guests receive the value that comes with professional planning.

Since event management is to take the burden and stress off the organizer, the manager adopts an impersonal attitude to every step of the task with a view to delivering the best attainable objective value for that event. For instance, notable event managers not only have top master of ceremonies or stand up comedians in their contact list who oblige them even at tight schedules. Likewise, stand up comedians cum master of ceremonies have preferred outfits based on mutual working relationships that translate to comfortable charges for elite events or goodwill appearances for charity shows. This type of elastic relationship must exist in any service based profession. Any service which does not add value arising from prestige, goodwill or cost saving mechanism would be unattractive. Quality packaging has contributed greatly to the rise of Event Management in Nigeria. Those involved in the discharge of that duty must also prove that they merit the cost of their hiring. The words quality and efficiency are two ingredients that are synonymous with professionalism, and in effect, distinguish those with the requisite training and experience from the amateur driven counterpart.

Event Management then is the act of planning and executing events successfully through organized processes. It takes careful coordination of the set of activities involved in event hosting. The mere fact that the word “management” features in the act of putting up an event calls for the adoption of clear management procedure in order to enhance effectiveness toward envisaged standard necessary to achieve success. The process is important because the

organizer has placed absolute trust on the Event Manager. It means that so much is at stake in terms of the mutual images of both parties, but especially that of the organizer who stands to lose more in terms of fund and clientele. This is the difference between modern event packaging and management and the traditional method. The private organized sectors, in modern times are the most influential factors in the determination and setting of standards in event packaging and management. This is because they have the fund to set and meet these required standards in terms of class, aesthetics and precision. Without doubt, the media agencies in charge of preparing the advertising and promotion of the many brands of these companies have also spearheaded or dominated the outing decisions at the events through the selection of event support service providers.

Retrospectively, Event Management is not new. This statement in its simplest sense and context refers to given abilities to arrange or organize the coming together of people to socialize, brainstorm, or celebrate. Such celebrations like welcoming a new child into the family, mourning the deceased and celebrating victory over wars is shared by societies the world over in a manner that modern society cannot lay claim to. In fact, Peter Drucker had observed as well that all the approaches to modern management have long history of inherited practice. Despite the strong impact of industrialization which led to the evolution of scientific management, Drucker in *Management* maintains that "Management is a social function embedded in social values, customs and beliefs of a people" (25). In effect, rather than being recent, the occasions enumerated above make events organizing an almost prehistoric practice. In all, some form of entertainment would usually take place while the style and method vary.

The form of entertainment of guest may vary from society to society or event to event. One thing that is common in all celebrations is the involvement of music and food. Sometimes, the 'idea' may be the unifying factor such that the entertainment aspect

may be inadvertently partitioned. For instance, it is a common practice in Yoruba land for some members of the extended family to invite their own friends in a manner that frees the celebrant of financial burden while adding colour to the occasion. If it is a wedding or engagement ceremony, a relative or family member of the celebrant could carve out a special section of the venue for his or her own guests. He or she decides what level of entertainment to be accorded depending on his social or occupational status in the society. In some cases, the invitee comes with either food or drinks to support the occasion independent of general service. This practice still exists. Feeding of guests may be just one aspect in the broad needs of the entire function but it is a significant item in Events Management.

The Qualities of an Event Manager

The rating of an events manager in the hierarchy of event planners depends on pedigree and the models on which the reputation of such event manager is built. This study argues that there are three models that are most practiced in the Nigerian environment. They are what this paper calls the Expert model, the Fair Play model and the Pointer model (Iwuh 2000)². The Expert Model presents a situation where the organizer appoints a consultant, accepts his proposals and recommendations with minimum changes. In this model, the organizer believes in the ability and expertise of the consultant for the event based on pedigree. In the Fair Play Model, the organizer exercises a good measure of influence in the decision process through shared ideas and opinions. The organizer is not in doubt of the ability of the event manager to execute but only after both would have agreed on the choices to be made. The Pointer Model assumes that the event manager constantly gropes like a blind seeker. In this model, the organizer wishes something exoteric but does not have a clear idea. In this case, the event manager constantly shops trying to present samples of choices which the employer might eventually like.

The event manager's reputation is also guided by six identifiable qualities. The event manager among other requirements:

- (i) Should be knowledgeable about his job and how to go about it with little reliance on the organizer other than financial. He works with designs.
- (ii) Must be observant, up to date with trends of events and development of events facilities. He provides ready options.
- (iii) Should be a good net-worker, Sociable but target driven and focused toward deadline. He works with ready-made portfolio.
- (iv) Must have the ability to plan (in terms of time and resources) with the ability to execute an agreed work-plan to detail. He exudes confidence based on pedigree.
- (v) Must be a good researcher, especially for corporate events. The reason is because companies are into competition with each other. No company wants to be seen to lag behind their competitor or to be an imitator of ideas. That is why creative branding of competing products is usually captured more through colourful environment, attendant funfair, and the presence of popular dignitaries. He is constantly innovative.
- (vi) Finally, must be conscious of the organiser's class and taste, abreast with current trends while creatively staying a step ahead to make a difference. He strives for the cutting edge.

Categories of Events

The word "event" is broad. Nearly every activity that involves the gathering of people irrespective of the number can be called an event. The dictionary makes a further distinction by adding the word "important" while adding that it an event is usually marked with "excitement". But events fall into categories depending on the purpose of that particular gathering. Most popular events fall within the following subheads:

- (i) Social Events – Wedding Ceremony, Birthday Party, Naming Ceremony, Burial Occasion, Luncheon, Graduation Ceremony, Book Launch etc. These are social in the sense that the event is of personal or family or group nature aimed at expressing gratitude, joy and happiness for personal attainment or celebration of life. A good instance is the celebration of silver or golden jubilee to mark years of successful marriage or academic career.
- (ii) Cultural Events – Next most popular events in Nigeria are the various forms of festivals, kingship coronations, traditional title investitures and state cultural days. These activities celebrate functions recognized by traditional institutions. How popular a particular festival is determines the complexity of its planning and logistic needs. If top government functionaries are expected, the more the expertise required to put up an impressive occasion. The Abuja Carnival, Osun Oshogbo festival of Oshogbo, and the Argungu fishing festival in Kebbi, Calabar Cross River State Carnival and EKOFEST of Lagos State etc.
- (iii) Academic Events – Conferences, Workshops, Colloquiums, Convocations etc. These types of events are dedicated to academic discourses usually to improve and broaden the knowledge of participants who are professionals in the field of education and academics. In this kind of events, researches present new findings in their fields, while participants offer wide ranging observations and discuss the implications of such findings. They also discuss the current trends in academic development. Numerous academic institutions and the associations of disciplines thereof organize local and international conferences which produce the various journals. Examples are African Theatre Association (AfTA), International Federation of Theatre Artists (IFTA), Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA) etc.
- (iv) Corporate Events – A corporate event as the name implies has come to be associated with organizations of commercial or elite

business nature either as manufacturers or service providers. These are Guinness Breweries, Nigerian Breweries, Unilever, Cadburys, Telecommunications giants like Siemens, Nokia, Telephones service providers like MTN, Globacom, Internet search engines like Google, Yahoo, MSN, auto giants like Toyota, Nissan, Honda etc. These companies have very strong financial bases, which make them aim for very high standard in whatever event they choose to undertake. They also offer substantial financial support to small business outfits, especially the non profit making types. So they are veritable sources of funding to educational, social and entertainment industries as part of their social responsibility. Examples abound in the frequent launching of various services of the telecommunication companies following the introduction of GSM type of mobile telephony into Nigeria.

(v) Product Launch – This category of event is a subcategory of the Corporate Events. The various companies at one time or the other create avenues to show the public what new product they have. The new product may be in the form of a new item in the range of the company's products or it may be a repackaging of an existing item among its range of products. The idea is to convey to their customers the new image of that same product. Another type of corporate events is the Trade Fair. At a trade fair event, an organization brings several companies together under one umbrella to showcase their different products. It is always an opportunity for companies to showcase new range of products in the market. The MUSON Centre is reputed to have hosted the Computer, Telecommunication and Office (CTO) equipment trade fair organized by the American Embassy in Nigeria since 1995 to display innovations in American businesses in computer and allied products.

(vi) Sporting Event – This is as broad as the number of games that exist. Obviously, sporting event unlike the rest is dominated by

physical exercises requiring specialized venues due to the broad spaces needed to exhibit the games as well as contain the spectators. However, a sporting event is different from a forum organized to raise fund for sports or an event in honour sport men and women. Often, the later requires an atmosphere of relaxation and not of competition. An example was the assembling of dignitaries from government and corporate organizations to launch or receive the mascot of FIFA world 2010 in South Africa and to raise fund for Nigerian's participation.

(vii) Theatrical/Musical Event – This is entertainment based performance, where vocal power is backed by verbal and emotional rendition to determine the impact of the message behind the act. The venue and equipment required to increase or reduce the level of illusion also determine to a great extent the quality of excitement for the audience. And example is the annual Star Mega Jam by Nigeria Breweries which involves foreign and Nigerian hip-hop artistes, or the Chams Theatre Series organized by Chams Plc aimed at encouraging a return to Nigerian folk writings through the adaptation of classic Nigerian literatures into drama.

(viii) Religious Events – This kind of event is organized by churches or religious groups for evangelical and spiritual purposes. These religious events adopt radical or hyper- marketing strategies with publicities as advanced as the types carried out by corporate organizations. They also employ the services of the best media outfits owing to the competition among the many incorporated Pentecostal Christian Ministries. A good example is the Redeemed Christian Church of God's annual Holy Ghost Congress which brings members of all its parishes and believers from all parts of the world.

Traditional Event Venues

The social life of the African, festivities, performances and ceremonial functions is marked in the open air as Bakare Traore observed in his famous book *Black African Theatre and its Social Functions*. Thus, most popular event venues known to people living outside the metropolis are the open spaces, especially the village squares. They are limitless and every society has it. Their needs are usually inevitable, especially for communal functions. In fact, some events are so large that they are better left in the open. However, families with large compound spaces like traditional rulers rarely take their immediate family events out of their compounds. There are also the school compounds, especially football fields. These social spaces have remained unavoidable spots even in the presence of rising modern spaces for events.

Until the last ten years, Lagos State inhabitants knew fewer indoor spaces for events other than the streets. The major streets in Lagos Islands were usually impassable every weekend; the most humane of such arrangements would allow vehicles to sandwich through an obvious irregular isle created by seated guests. The allowance is usually maneuvered with much struggle. In some cases, the eventual space was usually an adjustment driven by instinct. The guests would pull their seats barely enough to make way for a passing vehicle. The created space would normally seal up as quickly as the vehicle passes on. Proud organizers like politicians or wealthy individuals and notable socialites would order an outright closure of the street (venue) and the adjoining ones in order to avoid intrusion. The final ban was imposed by the administration of Babatunde Raji Fashola, the Lagos state governor. Until it was outlawed, the practice attracted a token payment (between ₦3,000- ₦5,000) to the local government council as "hall fee".

Pioneer Event Venues

Modern event venues in Nigeria cannot be separated from the development of the hotels and hospitality industry in Nigeria. Hotels the world over are places for high network individuals;

industrialist and tourists. They are designed to have complete facilities for relaxation, lodging, feeding, entertainment and mini-marts. Hotels in Nigeria were about the only places of comfort that provided all-in-one services including food and drinks that meet international expectations. They were the popular choice of industry movers in Nigeria which comprised of expatriates. Up to 1990, even with the Glover Memorial Hall and the National Arts Theatre, the choice was still quite limited for government and the organized private sector. Even though, the hotels have not lost their patronage, they remained attractive mainly to thriving industries and the organized private sector. However, they have lost considerable patronage from individuals due to the emergence of state-of-the-art event venues that sprang up in the early 1990s. The reasons for this shift are not far fetched. One, the capacities of most hotel banquet rooms were not big enough for most social events. Two, the Nigerian socialite cherishes freedom; he prefers an environment with few rules and where he commands total presence. Three, he wants to allow as many well-wishers, social groups and traditional music revels as possible to attend the function, participate and talk about it. Finally, he wants the freedom to bring in caterers of local menu which are outside the competence of five star hotels. These are excesses and sometimes, outrageous demands, which hotels normally would not accommodate.

Modern Event Venues

These venues are dedicated to event hosting because of the yawning gaps created by the hotels in one hand, and on the other hand, the need to meet the cultural expectations of Nigerians. The completion of The Musical Society of Nigeria's (MUSON) Centre in 1994 did not only mark a new era in the emergence of state of the art event venue in Nigeria but it also sparked off a revolution of ambitious projects in multipurpose hall facilities in Nigeria. The end result is that the hotels which started the trend and in fact, had the monopoly of high profile event spaces in the banquet halls and pool side spaces quickly reviewed their positions with less recourse

to conferences and brainstorming from their management consultants. Many quickly embarked on the building of new blocks or revisited long abandoned building project. Many were either remodeled or renovated; this was the case with Eko Hotel (Expo Hall) along Bar Beach in Victoria Island Lagos and many more, the Rasaq Okoya-Thomas awesome facility along Lekky expressway, the National Museum at Onikan, the Glover Memorial Hall and Etiebet's Place on Bank Anthony way, Ikeja. The aim was to offer some measure of competition to the MUSON Centre and share from the emerging economic powerhouse. It was not long before other organized institutions saw the goldmine that abounds in event centre business. The churches capitalized on the large numbers of their members who wed weekly to developed idle spaces within their land properties for event purposes. This is not a new practice to some orthodox faiths like the Catholic Churches wherever space permits. In like manner, many of the parishes of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, a major player in the Pentecostal faith has in recent times adopted a bi-visionary approach to most of its church buildings. The need for each to double as event venue for its members especially the newly married couples could be among the strong reasons to do so.

The National Arts Theatre

The National Arts Theatre was designed to best cater for an event that it was conceived for. That is, theatrical activities and similar performances. However, it is also suitable for products and book launches and seminars and award presentations. Beyond that, it is limited. Specifically, it has the advantage of capacity and strategic location between the residents of Lagos Island and Lagos mainland. Sadly, it has not lived up to expectation in the face of rising competition with other elite venues due to decrepit facilities, especially cooling and fixed seating which limits multipurpose-use. Discussing the National Arts Theatre is by extension exposing the conditions of the various state arts and cultural centres throughout the country. To say the least, the cultural centres have not taken

advantage of the goldmine in event venues to upgrade their halls for competitive advantage. This is because they are funded by government subvention. Secondly, government institutions in Nigeria are not known to be proactive in responding to changes in tastes and needs of the people. However, the commercialization of venues, the proposed threat to sell the complex and the dominant status of MUSON Centre provided the challenge needed to reposition the National Art Theatre.

MUSON Centre

The emergence of the MUSON Centre began a new era in the history of event centres in Nigeria. It subsequently changed the pattern and direction of event centre management. Its vision and mission was clear; it had focus that enables it to define its clientele. The MUSON Centre has stood like a colossus since 1994 when it was completed. It is about the first and the most articulated independent events venue in Lagos state. This is so because each of the halls is clearly designed to cater for specific types of events only. The first category is dedicated to weddings and all similar social functions that go with food and drinks. The Other category goes for product launches, musicals and presentations ceremonies. The third category handles minor workshops and Completion Board Meetings and similar private programmes. The management has versatile and dedicated staff for quick turn-around from one event to another. The credibility of the centre rests on the founders of the organization led by Akintola Williams who sees to it that a perfect structure was put in place for articulate and effective management of events at the centre with well laid out structure for facility maintenance.

By virtue of its proximity to Lagos, Ogun state gets appreciable amount of development spillover, an advantage that comes from land availability at cheaper rate. Redemption Camp of the Redeemed Christian Church of God on Lagos/Ibadan Expressway is a clear example of this situation. It has also grown into a city with its own administration, wonderful infrastructure including water

works and an independent power station through installed turbine. At least, ten standard event venues including the massive Youth Centre that sits upward of two thousand guests, the Redemption Resort, Cherith Multipurpose Hall, Banquette Hall, Bethel Place and the BOJA Arts Theatre. All but BOJA are fully air-conditioned. In the state capital itself, a number of notable venues like D'Olive Events Centre and DLK Events Centre in the same vicinity with Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library Complex.

Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library Hall

Perhaps, ranking in size, quality and panache to The Agip Hall of the MUSON CENTRE, is Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library International Hall in Oke Mosan, Abeokuta. It received its final touches March 2012 and for its class and purpose. It is the most modern, cosy hall in Ogun State. The hall comes with a raked floor, excellent acoustics because both the wall and floor fully rugged, and an impressive Public Address system and package unit air-conditioning system with efficient auto-retractable seats. In planning, the hall appears to have been considered for "the round" given the oval design of the middle section of the ceiling which serves as compartment for stage light fittings. It is a commendable installation of modern lighting with over 40 lanterns comprising of Moving Heads (including colour changers), Mini Par Cans and Selcon profiles. From professional angle, the open stage was an after thought, given the absence of Arena Stage for which the stage lighting was meant. Except for the future, the stage, including the Orchestra area are in "darkness", lit only by 16 low wattage energy-saving recessed lights except when supported with a few stage light directed cluster at the centre.

Criteria for Patronage

Every event is best at a particular venue; a five star reputation does not necessarily make a venue the most suitable. Due to the growth and availability of wide choices coupled with aggressive marketing,

organizers are becoming ever more confused. According to Shawn parker:

Every possible type of venue now suggests that is capable of being a conference venue, ranging from farms to 5 star hotels, from rugby ground to racecourses. The problem a conference organizer faces is how to narrow down these choices (1).

However, a careful and experienced organizer would consider the following criteria. The first determinant for the patronage of any event venue is location and proximity to users. This is because the first function of an event venue is to serve its immediate environment. That is, the organizers and those living around that community. Easy access to the venue by invitees from outside that community must also not be taken for granted. The second consideration is the kind of facility which the venue offers to the organizer. The most important among the range of needs are the right capacity for the event, cooling facility like air-conditioning (or adequate ventilation), steady electricity supply to power the equipments (especially in Nigeria), good public address system, security, adequate illumination packing space for cars and quality client service relationship and quality delivery. This list comprises the minimum attraction for most residents in highbrow areas like Ikoyi, Victoria Island and Ikeja. These facilities are also fast becoming a national standard owing to competition, but parking spaces still remains a major problem even for the elite venues.

The challenge for Event and Facility Management

Of all the events, dramatic performances are the most shortchanged when they are performed outside a theatre. The fact remains that the numerous event venues are not designed for dramatic performances. However, this has not prevented independent theatre producers from patronizing them due to the excellent facilities which offer extra comfort for the audience and especially sponsors.

Besides, only a few theatre companies could be said to own theatre structures of their own. There is the urgent need therefore, for similar structures to emerge incorporating these facilities. With the allied disciplines and amateur outfits getting involved in events management, the strategy for dramatic artists is to stay focused; get into partnerships with corporate bodies to develop structures uniquely designed for the theatre and allied performances while remaining versatile for multipurpose use. The Little Theatre in the National Theatre of Great Britain is a near model to adopt.

One of the reasons for the proliferation of event managers is not unconnected with the proliferation of media outfits which represent the corporate bodies in all aspects of advertising and promotions. They decide the venue to use for Product Launches, Annual General Meetings, Award Ceremonies and the event service support provider to engage for the event. They can be insistent in their approaches and sometimes persuasive. Often, the facility managers succumb to their pressures to bend some strict rules governing event types and set ups. This occurs in order to retain their clientele, especially if the venue is a new one or if the organizer is an influential person who may also enjoy the sympathy of a member(s) of the board. Sometimes, they are compelled to make these difficult demands considering the cost of renting such venues.

A closer look at the numerous event venues reveals some flaws which arise from poor planning thereby creating problems for event designers. For instance, most of the event spaces have no hangers, receptors and anchor points which decorators need for banners, drapes and balloons. The implication is that organizers are compelled to nail the walls or gum on them. Thus mutilating, staining and eventually defacing or destroying the walls. Often, the organizers nail at weak sections and ceiling guards. Study shows that maintenance after the first year normally poses a great challenge, especially for the personally owned event venues where the interest is in the money coming in. It did not take long before facility managers overcame this dilemma through the introduction of

“service charge” hitherto known to be the phrases of hoteliers. However, only a few venues could be said to plough back the monies accruing from these charges into fixing the damaged parts of the building.

Other flaws that call for urgent redress include ineffective cooling facility contrary to what the publicity and adverts claim. The reason is that the decision to build or convert a number of these spaces into event venues was taken in hurry. This is not unconnected with poor public relation practice which most often presents situations contrary to what actually exist. Quoting Jon White (1991) as cited in Victoria Ajala (1993), the public builds up “images of dishonesty, disinformation, veiling of the truth and manipulation” (7), a situation which can only be overcome by looking at business from long term perspective rather than short term gains.

No doubt, there were few outstanding event managers by mid 1990s; two in particular were worth the mention for special reasons. They are Silver Bird Productions, managers of the Most Beautiful Girls in Nigeria pageant and Zmirage, an event and multimedia consultants. The 1994 edition of the pageant took place at the MUSON Centre, but today, the Silver Bird Group owns one of the most popular and eye-catching event venues in Lagos, the Silver Bird Galaria on Ahmadu Bello Way, Victoria Island. Silver Bird Productions have enjoyed the goodwill of sponsors for their vision, innovation, patriotism and consistency. The Zmirage is a technically based event management outfit. By 1995, the company revolutionized event support service delivery in Nigeria when it imported the most advanced equipment in lighting and sound technology. The company also set the rental price of stage lighting equipment beyond the reach of dramatic performances, thus becoming the toast of corporate and high network individuals. Zmirage as an events management outfit and patronage can be compared only to the MUSON Centre in terms of market share and quality events clientele.

There is need to mention a few others by virtue of the fact that they are courageous to avail their presence on the internet. These are Treasures Halls and Events Place, Abigail's Wedding Bells at Palmgrove, Hooray Children's Entertainment Services at Plamgrove, Brides Ville at Ogba, T&Y International Limited at Ogba, Excellent Virtue at Ogba, Booms Design at Egbeda, Bukky Events Solutions and Décor Limited at Surulere, Royal Treasures at Surulere, Just Weddings at Surulere, Celebration Center at Lagos Island, Dunamis at Agege, Events Management Services at Ikeja, Kiddies Incorporated at Ikeja, Temi's Jump at Ikeja, Frannicole's at Victoria Island, Victoria Praise at Victoria Island, Princesskay Event, Ikorodu, Prolifics Event Manager at Gowon Estate and Pyramid Events Solutions at FESTAC, Lagos. These few have been selected to show the spread and growth owing to the confidence the clientele has placed in them. The expansion is not unrelated with their expertise and proximity to their clients. One striking thing in addition is that apart from Silver Bird Productions which is in its 25th year, none of the above listed existed before 1990. It is important to note however, that these names are not consistent in the directories due to defaults in the company's inability to update their subscriptions. On the other hand, the business directory websites do not reliably connect as at when required. This is a major impediment to marketing which is the primary reason for getting listed in the directories.

Training

The confusion is worsening with the re-christening of many disciplines in order to be socially acceptable or employment friendly to Nigerian employers. The fact remains that theatre reputes itself as the trainer in the packaging of entertainment and hospitality products. Many quasi or pseudo training outfits are springing up, after participating in one or two events. This is normal since one of the best ways of transferring knowledge is through experience which comes from participation also known as learning on the job. However, the economic drive should not allow for the projection of

claims which these amateurs do not possess. Proper training at the institutions of higher learning is recommended.

A number of allied disciplines are beginning to take up aspects of the theatre discipline. These are the art of pretence or imitation which characterizes the dramatic art. In the course of training in the theatre, a candidate is trained on appearance and posturing for front of house occasions etc, event packaging and presentation through live or recorded format as part of Theatre Administration and Management in which Events Management takes one or two semesters as the case may be. The fact that this course exists as part of theatre arts programme is not in doubt, what is bemoaned is the extent of practical involvement which students would normally short-circuit. As Julius-Adeoye rightly asserts:

They come to the theatre on the day of the production to sell tickets, clean the theatre, and distribute programme notes. It should be the duty of the management students to be part of the production process...and even made to design how to raise fund for the execution of the production
(132)

The belief which characterizes the student's lethargic attitude to recommended intense practical is the perceived notion that the academic environment is at micro level. Fund is limited and every effort results in low returns while sponsors have little preference for campus programmes. Besides, students feel there is limited time to engage in broad search and waiting game associated with sponsorship. So they look forward to applying the theoretical steps stored up in their knowledge bank in the larger society. This attitude is new, unhealthy and calls for change as every practical in the academic curriculum is a test in wait for the macro society.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the growth of event venues in Nigeria was necessitated by the need to fill the missing gaps left by the hotel industry. However, the present dimension is driven purely by economic gains. The MUSON Centre became the model for "empty halls" fully dedicated to event functions in February 1994 and charged a mere ₦15, 000.00 for Shell Nigeria Hall, ₦8, 000.00 for Agip Recital Hall and ₦5,000.00 for each of the Function Rooms. However, administrative and maintenance exigencies necessitated urgent review. Each time they did so, others did the same even though they lacked the facility and efficiency of MUSON. By 2011, charges for elite venues had risen to as high as ₦2.5m for a basic 12 hour service window. Over time, venues like Silver Bird Galleria, Balmoral, Yard 158, The Renaissance, LTV Event Centre, and the renovated Eko Expo Hall and The Lagoon all in Lagos have become preferred event venues for the elite. Outside Lagos, the hotels still dominate the priority list of corporate bodies.

A number of the event venues located at the outskirts of Lagos like Ikotun and its environs do not reflect a drop in the general quality but rather, a standard different from the high profile types of their counterparts in Ikoyi, Victoria Island and Ikeja. Economic explanation holds it no doubt, that the spaces in the outskirts are designed to meet the purchasing power of the residents of these communities. One good effect of this development is that it has almost completely eradicated street parties in the streets of Lagos especially and Nigeria at large. It has also provided avenues for self employment in the last 20 years and the service providers are becoming more creative. Again, the infrastructures, even where they fall short of expected standards, have become reference points in the communities in which they are located. The huge requirements of events packaging and management have led to very high mobility of skilled personnel in these areas as they travel to different states nationwide to offer their services. The cozy environments of these new events venues have added value to all the functions. The

venues have encouraged new dressing habits among invited guests as the venues are almost all finished in marble tiles, well maintained flowers and lawns and good house lighting for the halls. We can conclude that event spaces do not only provide employment but also create environmental beauty through its structures. Finally, even though a few online information and business directories such as the Lagos business directory, Abuja business directory, Port Harcourt business directory have emerged, there is the urgent need to compile a list of event venues and event managers in Nigeria. It is equally imperative to rate them according to their competences in order to guide and direct the choices of clients.

Notes

1. MUSON is the acronym for The Musical Society of Nigeria [Centre]. The credibility of the board rests on the members of the board led by Akintola Williams. The Centre commenced business to the public with the Gowon-Azikiwe Convention in 1994. The high profile event brought the crème de la crème in Nigeria; government officials, members of the diplomatic community, and chief executives of corporate bodies. The event publicized MUSON Centre shortly before and guests were impressed with its magnificent facilities. Subsequently, MUSON received on-the-spot marketing locally and internationally.
2. Event Management is still evolving in Nigeria so also are its models. These models are based on the characteristics and processes exhibited by three major groupings of event planners and liaison officers (managers) who coordinated events at the MUSON Centre between 1994 and 2000. Categorization was based on the analysis of event registers using the following criteria: client type, event type, processes, degree of authority and control exercised by their managers. The Report focused on three issues; the need to retain clientele, the need to recognize competition and the need to upgrade and maintain facilities, power, cooling and event support equipments and materials.

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