



Behind the scenes at an exhibition

Jim Cook finds out exactly what it takes to pull together the ultimate turf management exhibition in Europe



For anyone who, like me, has attended Harrogate Week religiously in previous years, soaked up knowledge during seminars and workshops, learnt from exhibitions, built contacts in the industry and met some great friends, the thought of how it all happens and how it is put together may have slipped under the radar.

From cups of coffee and risk assessments, to delegate packs and schedules, every detail of the week must be planned meticulously to ensure the visitor has the most beneficial and enjoyable time possible.

To gain an insight into how this is all done and what goes on behind the scenes in hosting such an immense event I visited the BIGGA office and spoke with the team responsible.

Pauline Thompson, the Exhibition Officer, is first on site during the week and the last to leave. She has the task of organising the venue so that when exhibitors and delegates arrive, everything is where it should be and running as smoothly as possible.



Throughout the year, Pauline negotiates with various contractors and companies, manages content for the website, writes copy and sifts through photographs from the previous show. She also processes applications from the sales team, researches best prices on such things as lanyards, carrier bags and pens, looks after the health and safety side of things and has the sizeable task of getting information out to exhibitors about the build.

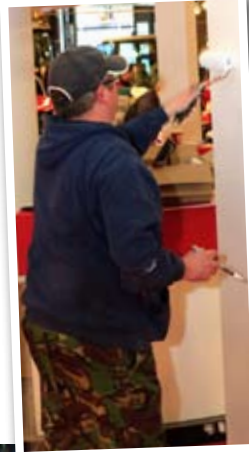
“It’s an extremely tight build time-wise and because of the location it’s like a big jigsaw puzzle. Contractors help me but I guide and drive it. We all work fantastically well as a team.”

The day after the show finishes, Pauline begins planning for the next one by holding debriefs with contractors, the Harrogate International Centre and various accommodation venues, to review how things went and build a template for the following year.

TOP: The Exhibition in full flow
INSET ABOVE: Work in progress
BELOW: Pauline discussing the Hall Plans

“I work all year round for this one event.
“When I know the build is complete on the Monday night I can take a deep breath, then the show opens and it’s lovely to hear people say thanks it’s been great and I’ve enjoyed the show.”





“All the little things where people say, ‘We’ll go for a coffee break now’ we’ve had to print out hundreds of coffee vouchers and made sure we have the right number in for each class”
Sami Collins



BELOW and ABOVE RIGHT: a seminar room in action and in preparation

This year the Continue to Learn programme at Harrogate will be the most comprehensive it has ever been. The pair organising it, Sami Collins and Rachael Duffy (shown above) start planning 14-16 months in advance for sessions running over the full five days. They organise featured sessions, which this year include Jim McKenzie, of Celtic Manor, and Chris Kennedy, of Wentworth, and allocate the rest of the seminars over the week. After sorting out all the accommodation and contractual requirements for the speakers, they write the brochure for the beginning of August and have the programme completed by June.

Sami explained the administration behind parts of the week.

“We make up all the delegate packs, all the speaker packs and do all the vouchers for lunches, coffee

and catering. All the little things where people say, ‘We’ll go for a coffee break now’ we’ve had to print out hundreds of coffee vouchers and made sure we have the right number in for each class. All the very small things that people may not think twice about have actually taken us maybe two days to do.”

Sami and Rachael arrive on site at 8am Sunday morning, start preparing rooms for speakers and by 9:30am start registering delegates, giving out badges and handing out delegate packs.

“Once all the delegates are in, calm starts to descend for a little while at least while we start thinking about what needs doing next and we start writing a reminder list for the next year. What could have been better; let’s keep that in mind; what didn’t we bring?”

Rachael is also co-ordinating

the Personal Development Zone adjacent to the BIGGA stand.

After the show there is no rest as it is back to work the next day.

“Friday morning we’re back in the office, unpacking boxes and sorting out everything that’s happened, what we need to address, getting certificates out to people and then the show starts all over again.”

Harrogate show provides a large part of the income for BIGGA and the task of selling exhibition space falls at the feet of the sales team,





Sue McDonough poses next to the Hall Plans, and two pics showing the Exhibition in full flow

Sue McDonough and Jill Rodham. They organise who goes where in the exhibition hall based on individual requirements of space and cost.

Sue said they book clients in as early as possible in the year and then help them with a number of things including sponsorship and how to get the best out of the show.

"The people who are coming to exhibit will talk about the show as a project so they'll know they'll come in January and show their product, but also know that it's an opportunity to see all their clients, meet and sell. It is their one shot in the year to get all these visitors in one place to show off their product."

This year the team has brought in a new Enviro-Zone.

"What I also do is go around other shows looking for ideas to make Harrogate better and this was one that Jill and I came up with. It is something that we can grow and expand on and hopefully end up with a half, or a full hall of environmental stands."

"I think next year we will because we will have an idea of what worked and what didn't from this year and we'll be able to move it forward," said Jill.

Sue explained her and Jill's role at the show.

"When we get to Harrogate it's a case of us walking around and making sure that everybody is happy and also meeting new

customers. It's to do with building relationships and we use these three days to get to know people. It's a very social and exciting job."

Anything media-related to the Harrogate Week is handled by Scott MacCallum.

His work also begins immediately after the previous show, when he starts putting the press centre schedule together and companies can book slots for press conferences in the media centre under Hall A.

Towards the end of the year he starts putting out press releases to all the media outlets, using e-zines to tell what will be new at the show.

During the week itself Scott juggles a number of roles as Press Officer, BIGGA official and the Editor of Greenkeeper International. He explained how he utilises his time there.

"I'm sometimes hosting press conferences, I'm sometimes doing my PR role, meeting and greeting people; attending press conferences in a journalistic capacity; taking notes, chatting to people and generally just making sure that the whole thing is running smoothly."

For a number of members it is the only chance in the year they get to meet up with Scott.

"They wouldn't get to see me during the other eleven-and-three quarter months of the year, but they'll pop in to say hello and it's nice to see a lot of the friendly faces

"We like to think that it is the biggest event of its type in Europe, so it's important that we get it right and that we plan it meticulously"

John Pemberton



John Pemberton at BIGGA HOUSE

BELOW: Scott MacCallum, concentrating hard at his desk



who I have got to know over the last fifteen-and-a-half years."

As soon as the show is over Scott focuses on the important February magazine.

"It's a great week and I have thoroughly enjoyed every Harrogate I've ever done. The first time I went there was 1996 and I couldn't believe the scale of it then and it's grown so much. It's an event of which I'm extremely proud to be a part. I know though, that these are difficult times and I really do feel sorry for those companies who have regularly attended and see Harrogate as a great launch to the year, but whose budgets just can't cope with attending this year. We would love to see them back when things are looking up and hopefully that will happen before too long."

Even though BIGGA organise the event, they are also exhibiting at the show and their stand remains an important focal point for members. Tracey Maddison, Head of Membership, Steve Wragg, Company Accountant, and Brad Anderson,



ABOVE: The BIGGA stand under construction, beside Tracey Maddison, working at BIGGA HOUSE

Membership Administrator, man this stand and ensure it is the best it can be over the three days.

The team head over on the Monday afternoon and set the stand up to be ready for Tuesday morning.

Tracey explained how, as well as giving away freebies such as beanie hats and pens, membership promotion was the most important aspect of the stand.

"We take all our equipment over to produce and process cards. A lot of overseas members take the opportunity to come along and renew their membership. We have about 260 overseas members and a lot have met friends here and come to see them every year."

The stand is in Hall C, where the escalator runs up to the learning and development section and near the Personal Development Zone manned by Angela Wilson.

Tracey mentioned how she was looking forward to seeing new and regular faces.

"It is a good chance for people to meet us as we are just names

throughout the year. I try and meet as many as I can during the week. There are four regional administrators there as well. It's nice to get out of the office for three days and meet people."

Design work for the week is done by Tom Campbell. He explained how his main job was in the build up.

"I'm dealing with all the visitor side of Harrogate Week. My major work is done before the show. I design and produce the advertisements which appear in a host of turf maintenance magazines, including this one (see next page!)"

"I also create the Continue to Learn brochure, the Show Guide and also the Show Planner, which folds out to form a map."

"For the show itself, I'm doing visual signs as well, those you see at the HIC, when walking through the main entrance etc."

Tom also designed the mastheads for the website. He spoke of his role at last year's show.

"I was based in the media centre assisting with any problems with people using computers or if anyone had any queries. Other than that I was with the photographer."

With 16 successful Harrogate shows behind him, John Pemberton is the man responsible for steering the ship in the right direction.

Preceding the week, John manages and pulls it all together.

"It is the biggest showcase for the industry, not only in greenkeeping but all sports and amenity turf to look at new products, meet people and take up the opportunity to take in some education. We have a massive education programme and 2011 is the biggest we've ever produced."

The fact that it attracts visitors

from overseas spells out within the industry how highly it's regarded."

At the show John is constantly on the move and engaged with meetings, organising AGMs and going around talking to key industry people.

"We like to think that it is the biggest event of its type in Europe, so it's important that we get it right and that we plan it meticulously. It's also an opportunity for the members to meet our staff and the Board, so we place great emphasis on making ourselves as accessible as possible. It's an opportunity to meet a lot of people very easily, whether they're on the retail side or the customer."

"This is my 17th Harrogate and we believe strongly in our product. Every year we produce a very good show that only raises the bar for the following year."

People come from America, Canada, mainland Europe and we've had people from Australia, Africa and South East Asia in the past.

This is great for UK members as they can talk to them and find out what life is like in other parts of the world.

It's a great learning opportunity for a whole variety of reasons. It helps make the world a much smaller place."

Harrogate Week is the culmination of a year's worth of effort from a dedicated group.

The teamwork involved in putting on an event such as this is phenomenal and with each section working like a well-oiled machine the end product, a show for us all to enjoy and learn from, reflects care and attention, built from experience, knowledge and expertise.



BELOW: As the Accounts duo Angela and Steve focus on the figures, BIGGA Designer, Tom, is laying out this article!

