



# Cannes do

**Organising an overseas party for a multinational client at a series of venues, including a £30 million yacht, might have fazed some event companies. But TAO Productions simply lived up to its name. By Sat Bal**



"We try anything once," quips TAO's Andy Cotton, revealing the approach behind the acronym. Indeed it was the first time that TAO had been approached by telecoms giant Motorola to stage an event. The occasion was the recent 3GSM World Congress in Cannes. Over 18,000 delegates attended the conference, and the blue chip telecoms companies vied with each other to host the biggest and best parties for their top brass.

Motorola enlisted the services of Holly Benson Communications in order to devise the "bigger than ever" party concept. TAO was then

invited to help by Holly Benson at Motorola's request.

The anticipated corporate one-upmanship meant that Andy Cotton was presented with a demanding brief by Motorola. "Motorola wanted to entertain its international guests with three concerts in three venues," says Andy. "The music had to reflect the tastes of the guests. 20 to 30 percent were British, 40 percent were from America, and the remainder from Europe and the rest of the world. The artists had to appeal to different genres. For example, Steps are big in England and the rest of Europe, but not in the

United States. Samantha Fox, on the other hand, is not as prominent in England, but is huge in Europe, India, and the Far East."

Other artists appearing included the Commitments, Spandau Ballet's Tony Hadley, and Jason Howard. Sourcing the bands took approximately six weeks, and was not without its problems. "Steps were the most difficult to schedule, but in the event they flew in from Madrid," says Andy. "Following an hour-long set and a 'meet and greet' with Motorola's top executives, they flew out to Barcelona the next morning."

TAO wisely decided that this was not the time to become experimental. Instead tried and tested contractors and equipment were brought into the project. "We didn't want to reinvent the wheel," states Andy. "Nothing was left to chance, and the equipment was mainly taken from England. Luckily, the timing of the event was good, as there is not a lot of outdoor stock in use in February. We called in people that we trusted and had worked with before on the festival circuit."

Venues ranged from Planet Hollywood which was

restyled as "Planet Motorola", to the Ineke IV yacht which Motorola hired for three days.

Celebrity hotspot, Bar Farfalla was renamed "Bar Motorola". Ironically, the smallest venue caused one of the biggest problems. "The bar was being refurbished when we carried out our site visit and this prevented proper scrutiny," explains Andy. "It was the smallest of the venues that we planned to use so it didn't worry us too

much at the time. We later discovered that power capacity was inadequate. As soon as four spotlights were connected, the power would disappear."

To compound the problem, no facility existed for generator use. "We had to leave half a truckload of equipment unused," says Andy. "But we managed to make the most of what we had, and the client was happy with the result."

**Ineke sets the party stage**



TAO's foresight saved them at Planet Hollywood. "We knew at the outset that it didn't have enough power," continues Andy. "Showpower brought in two 75kva generators which enabled us to supply power for sound, lights, and external architectural and tree lighting. We also had the power to light Holly Benson's walkthrough VIP tunnel."

Power to the yacht was tapped into from Cannes marina. "Loading was murder!" admits Andy. "The banners had to be loaded over a very small gangplank."

The difficulties of staging the event abroad surfaced with the revelation that France does not recognise the HSG 95 notification of laser displays, and has no equivalent laser standard. "We made sure that our health and safety package was very advanced," explains Andy. "The documentation had to be translated into French, and we needed authorisation from Nice Airport to use the lasers."

Although Nice Airport is 12 miles away, the lasers would have hit its flightline. But Nice cleared the use of the lasers. Bar Motorola and the yacht were themed by Holly Benson and S & B Wyres. S & B Wyre was brought in to handle Motorola's intensive merchandising exercise. Motorola stickers were individually applied to 1,200 Steps albums. Stickers also had to be attached to 2000 flashing devils' horns in recognition of Steps' *The Devil You Know*. This required a painstaking two days. In addition flags had to be mounted onto illuminating cocktail stirrers. Batteries for the devils' horns had to be installed when the cargo arrived in Cannes. "The challenge lay in getting people and merchandising into

Cannes on time," says S & B director, Brigitte Wyre. "We had to make sure that the artists arrived in Cannes on schedule. We organised VIP transport, and hire comfortable people carriers and a stretch limousine."

The limo was for the use of "Will Smith" who was hired by TAO for the event. "He is a really convincing lookalike, so much so that one Motorola executive worriedly asked how much 'Will' had cost,"

laughs Brigitte. He needn't have worried as the bemused bus driver from London came in at a three-figure fee.

The task of getting artists and equipment to Cannes was not to be underestimated particularly when Heathrow Airport managed to lose the Commitments' baggage and equipment. "We sat there wondering where we were going to find trumpets, saxophones and other instruments at such short notice," says Brigitte. "Luckily, everything was despatched an hour before the soundcheck and three hours before their performance."

The budget allocated to the event ran to nearly seven figures, according to Andy Cotton. "The budget was a nice size," agrees Andy. "But Motorola wanted a very good party."

And that, it seems, is precisely what they had.

**The Commitments, TAO, and Holly Benson assemble**



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