

the new guy **in town**

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With the economy in the state it is, the new easyFairs MD, Mathew Benyon, perhaps doesn't have it as easy as he likes. Here he lets Packaging Gazette know his plans for the trade show. **By Karyn Reidy**

*The figures for last year's easyFairs Packaging show at Birmingham's NEC broke all records in terms of numbers since the exhibition started. So what will new MD, **Mathew Benyon**, do to make sure 2010 continues on the success trail? easyFairs will make its packaging debut in Dublin on June 17 at the Royal Dublin Society Centre and at the helm of the operation will be new MD Mathew Benyon who has taken over from Peter Heath. Used to organising similar exhibitions in the UK and further afield, Benyon is looking forward to ramping up easyFairs' UK and Ireland operations.*

"I think I'm probably one of few exhibitions professionals that have made a conscious decision to pursue a career in the industry!" said Benyon. "Many people tend to fall into the sector - but I thrive on the show floor buzz, bringing

businesses together, and all the planning that goes into pulling off a great event."

Prior to taking on the role as easyFairs' UK MD, Benyon was Group Exhibitions Director with Expomedia Group, tasked with overseeing show launches and expanding the company's events portfolio both in the UK and abroad, particularly India.

"Venues in India are a world away from places like the NEC and ExCeL," says Benyon. "Some are literally falling down around you! Last September I organised a packaging show at the Bombay Exhibition Centre where pest control was part of my remit! Pigeons in the ceiling rafters clearly weren't happy to share their home with exhibitors, if you know what I mean..."

Before that Benyon spent six years as Managing Director at Montgomery International, in London, the division of the Montgomery Group responsible for launching key brands abroad. During this time (Feb 2002 - May 2008) he also served as a Director of Montgomery Exhibitions, which oversaw all companies in the Montgomery Group.

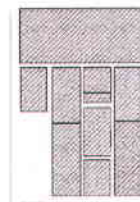
Benyon has a tough remit ahead of him. He has taken over in what is perhaps the

most challenging of economic times for the show and also has the fact that the show has experienced tremendous growth since its launch five years ago, with record visitor and exhibitor numbers at the NEC during February 2009's show hanging over him. He outlines his primary objective as to ensure that success continues next year and beyond, with his main challenge being to evolve the show and maintain interest over a period of years by keeping it fresh and addressing the packaging industry's burning, topical issues. He says the show promises to bring 35 per cent new content every year, be it new exhibitors, show features, or keynote seminars.

Speaking of the tough economy, Benyon does not think the recent Budget delivered by Alistair Darling produced anything significant to boost the packaging industry, but can see a few areas of the sector it may well benefit: "To be honest, there wasn't a great deal for the packaging industry to celebrate from the budget as the lion's share of business investment was directed at high-tech industries. However, the announcement that the government is to introduce a 'top-up' trade credit

insurance scheme - insurance against debtors going bankrupt - will be welcomed by those packaging companies that have been refused cover recently. On the flip side, increased fuel duty will impact on those packaging firms transporting consumables across the country, particularly those 'shipping air' as is often said of the corrugated sector and plastic bottles. But this could have some positive repercussions as it's likely to keep lightweight packaging, an area in which firms have made considerable progress in recent years, front of mind and drive yet further advances in materials and packaging design that minimise packaging and reduce transport costs.

On a wider scale, Benyon sees part of his new job's specification is to change public perception of packaging as the bad guys. "It is very easy for the media to have a pop at packaging - everything from plastic carrier bags to packaging that's deemed excessive," says Benyon. "And a lot of the criticism is unfair. In addition to containing and



protecting goods, packaging has to perform a wide range of other roles including carrying an increasing amount of information, much of which is required by law; being easy to open and re-close; tamper-evident and child resistant; and dispensing products. For example, an unwrapped cucumber loses moisture and becomes dull and unsaleable within three days. Just 1.5 grams of wrapping keeps it fresh for 14 days. Equally, selling grapes in trays or bags has reduced in-store waste of grapes by 20 per cent. Packaging represents only three per cent of all solid waste created in the UK and 60 per cent of that is now recycled. So educating consumers about packaging and its crucial role in minimising food waste is a key issue."

Benyon added that easyFairs research conducted recently showed that around two-thirds of product developers still struggle to find commercially viable packaging solutions that significantly improve environmental performance and believes more must be done to unite green packaging suppliers and those brands who want to further improve their eco credentials.

With the credit crunch biting, many companies will reign in their spending on things like trade shows but Benyon insists that trade shows have their place whatever the

economic environment.

"There is no more time- and cost-effective way for companies of all sizes to develop their business and for buyers to identify reliable new suppliers. At a live marketing event you can conduct a year's worth of networking and business meetings in the space of a few hours on the show floor," explains Benyon. "And our research ahead of this year's packaging exhibitions revealed that a third of brand managers and marketers view trade events amongst their top three most powerful marketing strategies."

Benyon isn't naive enough to think that shows can just continue what they have been doing for the last few years and survive the economic storm though, saying the way in which they are organised has to adapt in order to attract exhibitors during difficult economic times.

"Large, traditional trade fairs are demanding in terms of time, resource and budget and there is a lot of casual footfall. That may be great for making a brand statement but if we're heading towards further economic uncertainty is that really enough? Exhibitors want a tangible return on investment in addition to raising their profile. However, easyFairs shows enable exhibitors to do business, develop new contacts and make sales at a fraction of the cost of a traditional event. There is a

clear return on investment, and that's crucial for companies right now. And because easyFairs shows are very affordable, exhibitors generally only have to convert a couple of leads, or in some cases just one, before it's become a profitable experience." ■

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ABOVE: Jeremy Myerson the Helen Hamlyn Professor of Design at the Royal College of Art London.