

## IEDC Alumni Success Story

**BENEDIKT BINDER-KRIEGLSTEIN: » THESE WERE SOME VERY INTENSE DAYS FOR US ALL THAT HIGHLIGHTED THE VALUE OF PERSONAL INTERACTION.«**

Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova

Photo by David Payr

**E**vents industry, trade shows and exhibitions found itself in a very difficult situation in 2020, it seems. How did the industry react and who so far managed to adapt? Reed exhibitions, being part of RELX Group plc, is present in 40 countries, including China, which was hit the first - so you saw what was about to happen pretty early on. Did it help to get better prepared to what was about to happen in Europe?

It's been a dramatic year and we got a flavor of what was coming in January-February. I can say that no one could have predicted how large of a hit it would be. Overall, we do 38 shows per year and at

the end we had to cancel most of them. In the first half of the year we were moving events to autumn, however, most then got cancelled. Looking at the situation now, we do not expect any shows to be done in the first quarter of 2021, however, we hope that by summer the situation will have improved a lot. I'd say all of us were heavily shocked but did our best to adapt to the best of our ability – first of all by rescheduling shows and putting strict hygiene and safety measures in place and secondly, by offering digital solutions.

**Did any of the shows go online? What kind of shows in fact went online, industry-wise? Did you see a change in the target audience it**

**attracted? Would you say these online shows were profitable or was the aim more focused on not losing important connections and relationships with the suppliers and buyers involved?**

Yes, a number of shows went online. We had to decide on a case-by-case basis which ones would make sense to put online. Among them were education fair "Interpädagogica",



*We were all heavily shocked, however, did our best to adapt quickly."*

the gastronomy show "Gastrocircle", "FIBO" being the fitness trade show and "Bar Convent Berlin" (BCB) - all B2B exhibitions. We managed to attract a big number of clients, since the brands we own as Reed Exhibitions are very strong, which supported our initiatives a lot. For instance, 47% of the "Interpädagogica" visitors attended online, which would otherwise have been onsite. Keeping important connections and relations was and is very important. However, the online format of course has its weaknesses and that is face-to-face interaction, which is not the same when it happens onsite. So reaching out to visitors - in terms of one-on-one interaction - was much harder, and the response was weaker. As for how we implemented the events, we were using both our own platform and already existing solutions in the market.

**How did the whole corona crisis affect your event organization in terms of communication with the clients and potential visitors (suppliers and buyers), internal organization, communications and marketing? Did you have to reduce the staff and let go of subcontractors you work with?**



*We managed to attract a big number of clients, as Reed Exhibitions brand is really strong.*

Most of our staff was ordered to work remotely. These were some very intense days for us all that highlighted the value of personal interaction. We had to reorganise our offices and that meant also laying off some staff. Moreover, we are investing heavily in digital business solutions. As I mentioned, the situation made us realise that internal

the number of visitors that the shows attract is much higher and the public is broader, the interaction is in fact much lower, so that likeliness to respond is lower.

**Did you manage to organize any shows during this year in a classic onsite form? What did you have to change in their organization?**



Photo by Sebastian Datzreiter

communications need a lot of investment. Keeping the motivation of people up is not an easy task. The intensity of communication has to be higher than ever before.

**One of the things that happens at onsite shows is tracking valuable visitors and other statistics, since it's a very important data at the end of the day to exhibitors. At online events statistics of attendance is probably much easier to collect and it is more visible. Is there a big difference in attendance of online/onsite trade shows?**

Indeed, online exhibition statistics is easier to track. The difference with onsite physical shows is that while

Yes, a few shows in spring and one small show in autumn took place. The organization of the exhibition in this situation was really complex, from introducing hygiene measures like disinfection dispensers everywhere, to counting how many people are onsite on the floor and location of stands had to be taken into account, staff allocations, etc.

**As someone who is involved in the work of UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industries, and its European chapter, did the association propose some actions to support to the industry on EU or regional levels?**

Well, there is not really a lot



that could be done on that level. Just to mention the EU, where in Germany alone each land, each region, has its own different criteria about the safety criteria for organization of the shows. So, having a consistent approach is hard to achieve.

**Do you think corona crisis will change attitudes of exhibiting companies towards trade fairs? Will overall exhibition industry go down or transform?**

I think upcoming two years will be difficult, however, we could catch up later, maybe in 3-4 years' time to the levels before the crisis. I believe, we will be able to compensate for it. I also think trade shows will be done in a hybrid mode. What we observed is that people are in fact starving for interaction. Just to illustrate what I mean, if you like music, for instance, if you like Coldplay, you can listen to it whole day through on Spotify, even to recordings of past concerts, but nothing can replace the experience of seeing Coldplay live. Online, digital experience cannot compete with that – we are all familiar with mics being on mute, people being disturbed, nobody can be present online without being distracted... There are a lot of elements of a physical event that cannot be substituted. So, the whole industry will definitely survive.

**It's been many years since you did an MBA at IEDC. Back in 2006, when you enrolled, you already had a lot of executive experience. Would you recall why did you decide to do an MBA?**



Photo by David Payr

**How come in Slovenia at IEDC and not any other school?**

The reason for doing an EMBA at IEDC was that, that what the school was offering – education that was more about forming leaders and not just only offering technical skills for a manager – was a decisive factor. When talking to Danica (Purg – President of IEDC-Bled School of Management), I got exactly that impression of what the program is about. Plus, the network in SEE and CEE region was really important, as at the time I was very busy working in the SEE market. I just wanted to deepen my knowledge and get a better general management perspective. While many of us

had a lot of experience, it was really beneficial to reflect and learn from other top managers in the class.

**How did you learn about the IEDC? Was it at an event or some meeting?**

Actually, it was my mentor who offered to me to consider the IEDC.

**How come your brother joined you and enrolled into the same program?**

I was not courageous enough to do it on my own (laughs). In fact, my brother mentioned in his wedding speech last year that the EMBA was an incredible binding experience

for us both. It's quite rare that siblings as adults do spend so much time together and such a great time it was.

### **Did they make fun of you in the classroom?:)**

Actually, we were not the only brothers in the class; there was also Mario and Robert G. So, no.

### **Would you say that the EMBA helped you in that stage of your career? Anything particular that you took from EMBA studies at IEDC that you still apply or use in your work nowadays?**

It's hard to say something

particular that I learnt that I used then. However, the program helped me get a more holistic approach to things. It does change your perspective as a leader. I can say that I am more reflective as a leader. I do appreciate or evaluate people higher and better, I am more thoughtful about the steps I make. I would say I became a different leader, I'm focusing more on my team rather than myself. In short, I went through a transformation from a leader to a team leader.

### **Do you still keep in touch with your classmates from IEDC?**

Yes, we regularly communicate,

mostly over the email or phone.

### **Last but not least, besides work, what makes you happy and helps you re-energize?**

I do a lot of sports – cross-fit, skiing, golf, running. I love nature – things like quietness of the forest after a heavy day helps me relax. Every day in the morning before work I do a 45-minute training with my personal trainer, I run 8-10 km per day, however, I'm not a fanatic. Sports help me relax, to feel good, to clear my head. Of course, besides sports, meeting friends, and also being able to rely on my team is what helps me do well.

## MEET BENEDIKT IN PERSON



EMBA 2006-07

**Benedikt  
Binder-Kriegelstein**  
CEO Austria & Germany,  
Reed Exhibitions

*The first place I would go to for holidays when all travel restrictions are lifted is... Seychelles, I already bought the tickets.*

*The last book I've read is...«A Promised Land» by Barack Obama. I think he is the best speaker in the world and he is the best storyteller of our time.*

*My favorite movie is »Love Actually« with Hugh Grant and the best song of all times for me is »We have all the time in the world« by Louis Armstrong.*

*My favorite drink is....red wine.*

*On the level from 1 to 10, I think my friends would say I'm a fun person to be around is ... 7, because I can laugh at myself.*

*My best friend would say he/she likes the most about me is that I'm loyal 100% and always available and the least about me – that I'm too pushy.*

*What I learnt from my mother is that love is most important thing in life.*

*What I learnt from my father is that you need to work harder than anyone else.*

*Back in school, I was best in the following subjects... in none particularly. I liked sports the most. I actually liked to play the clown of the class.*

*I would wish to my family and friends and to each and every one of us for 2021...that we learn our lesson from this outgoing 2020 not to take anything for granted, to remember that we are living in an incredibly privileged environment, in great countries, in a rich world, which we tend to forget sometimes. I wish we appreciate our life and value it much higher, we stay healthy take time to see people that we love.*