



## MANAGING RISK AT MODERN EVENTS

**By Weynand Haitjema, Pinkerton's Region Managing Director EMEA**

*As major events go, the UK based World Athletics Championships went off without a hitch – except for the unfortunate reports of a (non-cyber) virus! Capacity crowds every day were protected by enhanced but very discreet security to look after athletes and public alike: a very appropriate risk management strategy adopted by the organisers.*

Every event is unique and having advanced knowledge of potential obstacles must be part of security planning. However, what might work for minimising, say, a potential threat to a very public figure such as a President or royalty, could be considered suffocating if adopted at other prestigious occasions that attract large gatherings, so the approach to security needs to be individual.

Elections occurring across Europe this year have prompted many events and counter demonstrations, especially due to the rise of polarising populist candidates in some countries. The instability and tension that arise with a growing disenchantment with mainstream politics increases the concern when attending crowded events.

An event with greater access control, for example, is likely to be lower risk. However, there are other factors to take into account. Some factors to consider include the size and type of audience and the activities being undertaken – the "excitability factor", if you like. Not surprising, the availability of alcohol immediately heightens the risk to attendees, whether the liquor is freely available or controlled by facility operators.

The safety of spectators and those participating in events such as political gatherings, sporting occasions or carnivals is paramount. Even before the venue is chosen security should be at the head of the table. A chain of command and the duties each person has to carry out must be established at the start of the planning process.

Location is of course very significant, and not only in terms of a venue being the correct size and easily accessible. Event organisers should work hand in hand with their risk management partners to evaluate and manage any potential risks through imagining numerous scenarios, bearing in mind that any factors could change or escalate right up to the moment the event starts, and beyond.

A comprehensive risk assessment will take into account both aggravating and mitigating factors and continually adjust for variables such as weather, roadworks and any location-specific restrictions. Intelligence is vital and a good partner will have well established sources that can reveal any and every pertinent fact about a specific area or venue. Is there another event planned locally on the same day that could affect access? This is quite likely at political meetings, for example.

A political event may appear to be completely different to, say, a sports occasion but, really, any type of event can be a success: planning is of course key. Risk assessment is completely different to the actual provision of security services but the two are inextricably intertwined.

A holistic approach in conjunction with risk management partners is highly recommended. This ensures that each element that could disrupt an event or bring harm to an organisation is carefully considered. Thus, not only are the practicalities covered, but the recommendations are completely tailor-made to match the profile of the event as well. No risk assessment can generate a 100% guarantee of safety from illegal or terrorist acts, but a good partner will minimise or even negate risk from controllable factors - which are in reality much more likely to disrupt an event.

Perhaps the biggest mistake that an event organiser can make is to overlook the need for an effective evacuation plan – a surprisingly common error across all sectors. An evacuation strategy, including modes of transport, exits and, of course, back-up plans, should be one of the first elements to be established and continually re-evaluated until the event is concluded. What if a coach breaks down or disorder breaks out which blocks the main exit route from a venue?

Following local and regional news to be aware of developments and opportunities can make a significant contribution to successful event management; make the most of business connections and network for the same reason; and, if you fancy a particular venue for your event, call the local police station and ask them if they could recommend holding an event there.

There is a lot of information available for free so make the most of it. That said, this can help to a certain extent with preparation, but don't underestimate the value of a professional risk advisor as part of the vital foundations of a successful event.

With over 25 years' management experience in the area of security and safety, Weynand Haitjema serves as Pinkerton's Region Managing Director for EMEA. Pinkerton is a global provider of corporate risk management services, including security consulting, investigations, executive protection, employment screening, protective intelligence and more.

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