

Editorial Board and Staff:

Editor:

Mark S. Nagel
University of South Carolina

Associate Editor:

John M. Grady
University of South Carolina

Consulting Editor:

Peter J. Graham
University of South Carolina

Editorial Review Board Members:

Rob Ammon—Slippery Rock University

John Bennett—Venue Management Association, Asia Pacific Limited

Chris Bigelow—The Bigelow Companies, Inc.

Matt Brown—University of South Carolina

Brad Gessner—San Diego Convention Center

Peter Gruber—Wiener Stadthalle, Austria

Todd Hall—Georgia Southern University

Kim Mahoney—Industry Consultant

Michael Mahoney—California State University at Fresno

Larry Perkins—RBC Center Carolina Hurricanes

Jim Riordan—Florida Atlantic University

Frank Roach—University of South Carolina

Philip Rothschild—Missouri State University

Frank Russo—Global Spectrum

Rodney J. Smith—University of Denver

Kenneth C. Teed—The George Washington University

Scott Wysong—University of Dallas

JOURNAL OF Venue & Event Management

INTERVIEW

Roger Kornmayer, Managing Director, United States NUSSL

Mark S. Nagel
University of South Carolina

The NUSSL Group is an international event and exhibition company that specializes in designing and creating infrastructure for events, with a particular expertise in temporary structures. The company has provided services to a variety of prominent sport and entertainment events. JVEM interviewed Managing Director Roger Kornmayer to learn more about NUSSL's current role in the sport and entertainment industry and how Mr. Kornmayer believed the industry would evolve in the future.

Q Could you please briefly discuss your career path?

A

RK: I started my career by doing a three-year apprenticeship to become a carpenter. Thereafter I worked for a year to learn the trade in full. From there I went to university to become a structural engineer. After two years working as a structural engineer I returned to the university again to pursue a postgraduate degree that would lead me to become an economical engineer. With this background I was trying to find a job, where I could combine my entire education as perfectly as possible.

When NUSSLI posted an advertisement in the newspaper seeking a project manager in exhibition construction I felt that this would combine my economical and marketing expertise well with my construction background. I was fortunate to join NUSSLI in 1999.

At NUSSLI for many years I managed major events and setups as a project manager before the company approached me in 2005 to organize and lead the new US-based office. In February 2006, I moved to the US and started what is now known as NUSSLI (US) LLC. Ever since 2006 I have been the US Manager and Managing Director. We have grown our business to the extent that we were heavily involved in the Vancouver Olympics, The World Equestrian Games, The USGA US Open in Pebble Beach and many other high-profile events.



What about the industry has led you to stay?

RK: The event business is very dynamic. No job is similar to the other which means one needs to be very creative and assume a lot of responsibilities. However, there is a lot of freedom to solve problems in unique ways. This industry involves a lot of time-pressure and stress as every event has to be completed by a certain deadline. But, this industry pays positive dividends because projects are usually covered by the media and if you are at an event after it took place you can notice with a high level of satisfaction that all spectators had a great time and you were one of the elements that led to it.

Also, due to the tight schedules, team work is paramount which means not only does the NUSSLI team have to be close but also the collaboration with other vendors, designers, and producers is very intense and many times those experiences grow into great, long-lasting friendships. On top of this, and the reason I especially like NUSSLI, is that the company is a family operated organization and many employees work not only to make a living but also for the team spirit. We all know that everybody in the company has the “NUSSLI-heart” and enjoys each outcome on each project.



How was NUSSLI and its special way of doing business initially developed?

RK: Mr. Heinrich (Heini) Nussli (Dec. 19th 1919 – Dec. 11th 2011) founded Nüssli as a one-man carpenter shop in Switzerland in 1941. He actually had to take the carpenter shop over from his employer as the patron unexpectedly died. A couple years into business Heini started to also install scaffolding and thought that there had to be an easier and more efficient method than what was currently standard practice. Heini and his engineer partner thereafter invented a scaffolding system which was very successful in the Swiss market.

In 1972, during a visit at the Munich Summer Olympics, Heini decided to develop a better way to create and install grandstands because he was not impressed by what he saw in Munich. This was the birth of the first NUSSLI Grandstand which was then used for many years. It actually had its last use at the Sydney Olympics in 2000.

The company expanded its product offerings and began to market itself as a provider for all types of sporting and entertainment events. In 1992 at the Barcelona Olympics, Nussli achieved an important milestone. Nussli was, for the first time, a top supplier at the Olympics and has been involved in almost all Olympic Games ever since. The business was eventually taken over by Heinrich Nussli Jr. who grew the business, along with the long-employed management team, by developing many new event systems and structures which established a worldwide market presence for the company.

Q What are the company's biggest challenges?

A RK: One of the major challenges in our business is material logistics. Unfortunately, many events happen in the summer time and thus there is never enough material available during those months whereas during the other months one has to pay depreciation on the acquired assets. The balance between assets and revenue is a key in our business.

NUSSLI has managed many challenges mainly because NUSSLI often has to offer a structure which has not been developed yet. As soon as a contract is signed all know-how has to be brought to the development of a new seating system, bridge system, stair system, decking system or even an entire stadium or company presentation pavilion to secure the full satisfaction of the client and to make dreams come true. Many times we faced a situation where everybody said it is not possible to complete a project but we didn't know that and made it happen.

There have been many challenges to overcome. We have had cultural challenges when starting to do business in foreign countries, material challenges in high season or the pure overwhelming backlog during events like the 2000 World Fair in Germany or the Soccer World Cup in Germany where superior strategic planning was needed to pick the right projects and balance resources and demand.

Every project in a foreign country where we have never operated before is a challenge and it comes always with nervousness until the contracted local vendors and suppliers perform as promised.

No matter what obstacles we find and have to deal with, a chair, table or structure delivered on Monday, when the event was Sunday has zero value so that guides all of our decisions and actions.

Q NUSSLI has received high praise for its development of temporary facilities. Do you think the recent economic downturn has accelerated the need and desire for this type of structure?

A Customer feedback has been incredibly positive. A recent survey of members in March found that 88% of people surveyed planned to return, 79% planned to refer a friend or family member and 76% plan to purchase something in the next six months.

Q How do you feel this aspect of the industry will develop in the future?

A RK: It has become "sexy" to have an ice hockey game in a football stadium. Spectators get attracted by the "other type of events" than what is usually held in a facility. One wants to be part of the show when something out of the ordinary happens. It is more attractive to go to a convention center to see a basketball game and on top of the game to experience the conversion and what has been done solely for that game and the spectator's experience. These types of events will likely require temporary structures and I see that continuing in the future.

Q NUSSLI has been successful in its past expansions outside of Europe. What are the future opportunities and challenges for expanding operations in developing countries and emerging markets?

A Temporary facilities provide the ability to start with a positive return on investment much sooner which is often attractive. Officials in emerging markets often feel that they want to have something that is available in other countries but they want it “today” rather than in a couple of years. A temporary installation often also serves as a test venue for further expansions. So with this said, yes, emerging markets are often very keen to get something created quickly. And due to concern about long-term expenses for maintenance and operating cost, a temporary facility can protect against the potential problems if an event does not generate anticipated financial returns and might be too expensive to operate after its initial purpose has concluded. Due to a lack of market experiences those emerging markets often are forced to start with a test market where temporary infrastructures provide the solution.