

## Getting yer Ya-Yas out for the big event

From their Cornwall base, Anita Howard and Ken Robertson coordinate a networked team of consummate professionals that creates and manages every aspect of high-profile national and international events.

### Overview

If you're at a well-organised conference, launch or other major business event, it's blissfully easy to forget the amount of meticulous planning and sheer hard work that goes into making sure that everything runs smoothly and that delegates have an enjoyable and productive experience.

Unless, that is, you're thinking of holding a similar event, yourself. In which case, you might well take extra note of the professionalism and attention to detail that's been put into the occasion. And that's exactly how Ken Robertson and Anita Howard, the husband and wife team behind Ya-Ya Events get most of their new clients. Quite simply, the success of the national and international events that they manage is by far the best possible advertising for what they do.

In the events business, experience shows – and the Ya-Ya team have more than most. Events Director Anita has been producing conferences, exhibitions, roadshows and award ceremonies for 20 years, having headed the medical and scientific division of Reed Exhibitions before building a thriving independent company of her own in the 1990s, which she later sold on to a major publishing house. Ken's background is in marketing and design – he was formerly MD of Bang, a leading

### Clients

Ya-Ya's services span the whole event cycle, from creation and branding of the initial concept through to marketing, bookings and stage management. It has worked with organisations across a wide range of sectors, including some of the world's best-known companies, launching (for example) the Microsoft Tech-Ed exhibition, for which it achieved a ten-fold increase in exhibitor numbers within the first year. In the public sector, clients include the DTI, for which Ya-Ya organised the SMART Awards for technological innovation and the Biotechnology Means Business national event and roadshow.

The company has built a particularly strong track-record in the field of life sciences, having helped to create successful formats for events including: the European Life Sciences Conference, Europe's premier biotech investment networking event held annually in Amsterdam; the National Endowment for Science Technology and Arts (NESTA) Annual Conference; and the Start-up \$1 Billion, a two-day event in London to facilitate networking between US venture capitalists and UK entrepreneurs.

As well as taking on events management on a contract basis, Ya-Ya also partners with organisations and businesses to create joint ownership ventures where, for a reduced management fee and a percentage of ownership, it shares in the risk and reward. An example is the Cleantech Futures event, focusing on technology for a more sustainable world, which Ya-Ya is currently planning with partners including London First and the Green Alliance.

Invest in Cornwall UK & EU is a project of Cornwall Development Company



B2B creative strategy consultancy. Ya-Ya also benefits from the input of non-executive director Sally Deighan, whose expertise was recognised when she was selected to serve as CEO of BBC Children in Need from 2004 to 2006.

Ken and Anita's decision to move to Cornwall in 2004 was very much a lifestyle choice. "We had a young son," Anita explains, "and when it comes to a healthy and fun environment to grow up in, there's really no comparison between South Cornwall and South London." Anita and Ken planned to build an events business on a smaller scale – "Which is a bit ironic, really," Anita laughs, "given how busy we seem to be at the moment!"

By its nature, the business involves a lot of travelling, but for Anita and Ken this is made easier by the fact that they work with a team of freelancers who handle various aspects of event production on a project basis. And although all its main administrative functions are all in Cornwall, Ya-Ya has kept a small London office that comes in handy for client meetings. "We've certainly become very familiar with the train service from Bodmin to Paddington" Anita says, "but now that all trains have points to plug in a laptop, it's a lot easier to get work done while you're travelling."

### Workforce

Ya-Ya is a great example of a 'networked' company taking advantage of modern technology to work in a highly flexible way. Anita and Ken make up the core strategic and creative team in Cornwall, backed up by an administrative assistant. The company's finance director and most of the client-facing freelancers who work on projects are based in London and the South East. Anita and Ken cover the strategic side of event marketing, but draw on the services of an external telesales team as needed. Ya-Ya also works closely with a number of Cornwall-based suppliers, including the web design agency Iteracy in Loswithiel and the graphic designers Graphique in Bodmin, both of whom Anita describes as "just brilliant".

### Support

"We've been so busy with the business – and with restoring our house – that we haven't had as much time to network with local agencies and sector organisations as we'd have liked," says Anita. "But in many ways Cornwall has great potential as a place in which to host events, and this is something we'd very much like to explore – not least because it could mean not having to spend so much time on the train! There are quite a number of successful bioscience companies based in Cornwall now, and we're looking forward to linking up with them through BioApproaches Southwest, a networking group for the sector down here."