# Been around the world...

*At the last AEO conference,* **Steve Monnington of Mayfield Media Strategies** *received the green light from the audience for his explanation of how the company worked with IDG World Expo to launch Linux World round the globe. In doing so, they persuaded a number of companies, normally competitors, to co-operate and share sales leads. The resulting close relationships have boosted sales and led to some very successful launch shows.*

The 'Innovation Idol' slot at the AEO conference, where I presented 'how to launch 10 shows in 18 months without incurring any overheads' was just five minutes. Not very long to explain the essence of a project that has taken place over the last 18 months, but long enough for people to understand that this is, in fact, a very straightforward piece of best practice.

Mayfield Media was approached towards the end of 2003 by David Korse, CEO of IDG World Expo, the events organising arm of IDG Group. They had a number of exhibition brands in the US and, with the exception of one show in Germany, nothing had been replicated internationally. Its brief was very straightforward. "Help us launch our brands in every major market where there is a demand. Oh, and we don't want to have any offices or staff. In fact, no infrastructural overhead at all please."

This meant finding partners in each country to launch the show on IDG's behalf, so we devised


*Welcome to a new world network model*

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two standard agreements. One was a licence agreement for those companies who wanted to take the financial risk for the exhibition and pay IDG a percentage of revenue. The other was a management agreement for those who couldn't take the financial risk. Under the Management Agreement, the agents were responsible for covering their own staff costs but received a percentage of contracted revenue to cover their overheads and a profit share to incentivise them to keep direct costs under control.

We led off with LinuxWorld Conference and Expo as this was the most established US event and we could be first to market in most countries. It also gave the partners some good critical mass. Our idea was to establish a partner network with this show and then launch new IDG brands across the network following their successful launch in the US.

So far LinuxWorlds have been launched in Brazil, Mexico, Canada, UK, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Korea, and Australia (I know that's 12 but the title of the AEO presentation was set a couple of months

ago…and business keeps moving). The partners range from Reed (Brazil and Russia) and VNU (Netherlands), to IDC (Italy, Poland and Spain), to smaller companies such as Plum Communications (Canada).

'So far, not so innovative', I can hear you thinking. The clever bit is coming up. I've been involved in companies in the past where the licence agreement was signed and we waved goodbye, wished them luck and waited for the royalty cheques to arrive. However, this time, we were clear that, in order to maximise the success of the events and to ensure brand consistency, there had to be continual involvement.

LinuxWorld is dominated by a small number of global IT companies, such as IBM, HP, Oracle and Sun. Any departure from the brand identity or a less than successful event could impact

adversely, not just on the mother brand but on the other shows in the series. We created a number of 'commandments' such as no discounting as once a company received a discount in one country they would inevitably ask for the same elsewhere.

Our prime aim was to create a network for all the partners to interact. This operates on a number of levels which included an Extranet, regular telephone conference calls, an annual meeting for all partners at LinuxWorld Boston, a European partners meeting at LinuxWorld Frankfurt and on a day-to-day basis, our company acts as the conduit for all queries and problems and acts as an information exchange. We typically receive 60 to 70 e-mails each week. The network has proven so successful that other parts of the IDG Group in China, Japan and Singapore, who, for historic reasons, have run their own LinuxWorlds separate from IDG World Expo in Boston, have joined our team.

### Extranet

Everyone has access to the Extranet. This contains an enormous amount of information including:

- Branding documents which give guidance for logo usage, carpet colour, signage etc.
- Event profiles
- Global exhibitor database listing every exhibitor and which shows they have exhibited in
- Conference speaker database
- Conference programmes for all the events and for the USA events we give each partner the session counts and speaker ratings so they can see which sessions worked and which ones were less than successful
- Floor plans
- Monthly reports and post-show reports
- Global exhibitor intelligence which documents the attitudes of the major exhibitors towards investing in the shows and which countries are a priority for their marketing spend
- Legal contracts with global partners

The most important facet of the Extranet is that it's not just about posting information in the US for the benefit of everyone else. Everyone is expected to upload the information relating to their show and everyone is expected to download each other's reports. The monthly report gives a snapshot of where each show is in its planning, who they've signed up in the last month, what new features they're planning. The



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post show report isn't confined to statistics but covers what really worked and what didn't.

Everyone can see how many times each report has been downloaded and this helps us to continually refine the content based on how helpful people find it.

### Conference calls

These can be logistically difficult given the different time zones and the number of people involved but is invaluable as a communications tool. Here everyone can swap ideas and it's an efficient way of delivering new information. The most useful part of the call is when everyone compares notes on what the global exhibitors are saying to them.

### Meetings

I remember sitting back and reflecting during our first meeting in Frankfurt last October. The companies represented around the table are in competition in many other areas of their business but they talk freely and openly, sharing market intelligence and helping each other deliver exhibitors. There is no competition, no ego, just a feeling of community with everyone working towards the same goal.

I asked David Korse, who had come up with the concept back in 2003, whether it had turned out the way he originally envisaged. "Yes and no," he said. "Yes, in that we have successfully expanded the LinuxWorld series into a number of viable national markets. No, in that I never envisaged that we'd successfully expand into so many new markets, with so many different

partners, in such a remarkably short period of time."

So what's next? We have a few more countries in which to launch LinuxWorld but the next major part of the development is the rollout of the next set of events. There are six conference-led events that have debuted successfully in the US and are under consideration for various markets. Some of the existing partners are already working on some of these with go/no go milestones in place. I'll let David Korse have the last word about what he hopes can be achieved over the next 12 to 18 months.

"Our objective continues to be to generate incremental profits by exporting successful World Expo event brands into as many national or regional markets as may be viable. If we can achieve with one or more of our new events even half of what we've achieved with LinuxWorld, I'll be very happy. We're excited and enthusiastic about the partner network we've created to help generate profits for all concerned."

To conclude, don't assume that appointing a partner and leaving them to it will bring the most fruitful results. The LinuxWorld model has succeeded because we have pushed the boundaries in sharing information, trends and innovation and given IDG's partners support for the whole process. However, once you've created a brand and if you have the opportunity to be first to market, reflect on your options. Think about the LinuxWorld model before you start searching for office and staff across the world. We've proved it's not always necessary.