Dealmakers: joining the dots on event M&A

Steve Monnington of Mayfield Merger Strategies reviews the M&A January transfer window.

As I stated in my January column, there were 60 event M&A transactions completed in 2024. Activity gathered pace through the year with 30 of these reported in the last four months of the year. January has continued at that pace.

One set of transactions in late 2024 that weren't announced related to the withdrawal of RX from Austria.

The hall management for both the Vienna and Salzburg exhibition centres together with the exhibitions organised by RX and the stand construction company Standout have all been sold.

WSE Wiener Standortentwicklung owned by the City and State of Vienna acquired **RX Wien** and **Messezentrum Salzburg** (again effectively the City) acquired **RX Salzburg**.

The stand construction company **Standout** has been sold to **mac.brand spaces GmbH**, a live communications company. It has been estimated that the total Austria business generated revenues of £70-90m in 2024. RX took over the Vienna operations in 2001 and announced its intention to withdraw from Austria as a whole in November 2023.

As I reported in my last column, the first big private equity-related transaction of 2025 has already been completed with **Clarion Capital Partners** acquiring **Marketplace Events**, the largest B2C organiser in North America.

Marketplace was owned by PennantPark Investment Advisers, Abacus Finance Group and single family office, Webster Capital.

In December I highlighted the first investment by **The Events Venture Group (EVG),** an initiative set up in the US for entrepreneurs, in **Quantum World Congress**

(QWC).

The EVG investors have now been joined by the **Consumer Technology Association**, owner and organiser of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES). The announcement was made at last month's edition of CES in Las Vegas.

QWC was launched in 2022 and takes place in Greater Washington, focusing on quantum technology for the defence, aerospace, life sciences, and cybersecurity sectors.

Exhibition organisers are starting to take a leaf out of football's transfer window. During the January window, **Easyfairs Nordic** took over the management of the **Nordic Organic Food Fair** from **Diversified**, a geoclone from Natural and Organic Products Expo held in the UK. The show will move from Kistamässan in Stockholm, back to its original home at Malmömässan.

Pro Integration Future Asia (PIFA) also changed hands from **Montgomery Group** to **Nineteen Group** following on from Nineteen's launch of Safety and Security Asia which saw the establishment of its APAC headquarters in Singapore.

PIFA is an exhibition for commercial Audio, Video and Lighting (AVL) manufacturers, suppliers and specialists. It has run twice so far, having been launched by Montgomery Asia in 2023 in partnership with the

Professional Audio Visual & Lighting Integration Association.

CloserStill Media meanwhile carried its 2024 M&A momentum into 2025 with yet another acquisition, this time acquiring **Digital Health intelligence (DHI),** a London-based media business founded by Jonathan Hoeksma serving the UK's digital health community.

Its main event is Rewired, launched in 2019 and held at the NEC. It connects NHS IT leaders, professionals and suppliers with health tech and service providers – right in CloserStill's wheelhouse of healthcare events. DHI joins the recent acquisitions of healthcare-focused hosted buyer events run by OpenRoom Events and PNE.

Turnmill has acquired **Dealmakers Forums LLC,** organiser of high-level events in the legal, finance, and technology industries, based in Brooklyn, New York.

Its flagship events are LF Dealmakers, a conference for litigation finance, and IP Dealmakers, and a forum for intellectual property transactions with a focus on content, A-list speakers, and one-to-one meetings.

Turnmill is owned by Horizon Capital and has former Clarion Events guru Simon Kimble as its chairman. Horizon launched its PE fund in late 2018 and this is its third acquisition in the event space, having initially acquired Turnmill, organiser of Global Banking and Markets (global markets focused financing events in

emerging markets), in February 2024.

Turnmill subsequently acquired Completely Events, organiser of retail property event, Completely Retail Marketplace.

MA Exhibitions, the events arm of Mark Allen Group, has acquired **The Inclusive Workplace Conference** from co-founders Madeleine Cole and Ursula Tavender. The acquisition of the event, which champions DEI – diversity, equity and inclusion – expands the offering of MA's Health and Wellbeing @ Work, the UK's largest event on workplace health, wellbeing, and culture.

Mark Allan has also been in the news recently for rescuing **Estates Gazette**. The 166 year-old brand, owned by RELX and rebranded as EG seven years ago, was due to be discontinued until Mark Allen stepped in. The transaction has now been formally completed with the original *Estates Gazette* named to be restored. EG's online property data and information business will be sold separately.

Flashback to 2016

I was looking back at the Dealmakers column of 2016 M&A highlights. The big transactions of 2016 included **Informa's** acquisition of **Penton** for $1.6bn and **UBM's** acquisition of **Allworld** for $485m. It's interesting to see the connection between some of the transactions then and those being reported recently.

The private equity-owned organisers such as Clarion, Emerald and Marketplace Events were among the most active acquirers in 2016. **Emerald** had not yet been floated on the New York Stock Exchange (this happened in May 2017) and it made six acquisitions in 2016 including American Craft Retailers Expo (ACRE9), RFID Journal LIVE!, National Pavement Expo and Digital Dealer Conference & Expo.

Marketplace Events, which acquired six businesses in 2024, was doing the same thing back in 2016 with four acquisitions. In early 2016, Sentinel Capital acquired the business. With a new PE owner in 2025 we can expect more of the same.

Artexis Easyfairs (as it was then known) also featured heavily in Dealmakers during 2016 with six acquisitions including its largest deal – Evenementalhal in the Netherlands, organiser of 78 exhibitions and operator of three venues.

This was the transaction that turbocharged its business. One of its other transactions in 2016 was the acquisition of UK show **CCR** (Clinical, Cosmetic and Reconstructive) from **Nineteen Event**s, the early incarnation of what became Nineteen Group.

This marked the end of Nineteen's launch, develop and sell strategy as it settled down to build a group subsequently backed by Phoenix Equity in 2020.

Artexis Easyfairs finished off 2016 buying back the 12% shareholding held by its partner finance.brussels which had been involved in Artexis since 1997. Following purchase of the shares the management owned 100% of the business. and things remained that way until last year's investment by Inflexion and Cobepa.