

Dealmakers: 11 transactions in quick succession. What is going on?



Steve Monnington of Mayfield Merger Strategies joins the dots on recent industry M&A activity and agrees with Doug Emslie's view on the budget.

I normally write this column every couple of months when enough transactions have taken place so, given that the last column was only two weeks ago, what on earth has been happening? 11 transactions to be precise and the timing of at least four of the deals were driven by last Wednesday's UK budget with the well trailed increase in Capital Gains Tax which, in the end, was "only" 4%.

Emslie takes the prize goldfish home

Douglas Emslie wins the prize for the most deals completed within a week with three – two of which were with Mike Seaman through **Raccoon Media Group**.

Firstly, the acquisition of the **Pets & Aquatics Trade Show (PATs)**, the UK's main trade event for the pets and aquatics sector. PATs was launched by Gordon Thomas in 2009 and has outgrown its home at the Telford International Centre, moving to the NEC for 2025.

The second acquisition is **BETA International**, the UK's leading equestrian and country trade fair with visitors and exhibitors from over 25 countries. The event, which caters to both the trade and consumers, was launched over 40 years ago by the British Equestrian Trade Association (BETA) and will move from its home at Stoneleigh Park to the NEC on the same dateline as PATs.

The two acquisitions join the National Equine Show, which Raccoon launched in 2022 and has been somewhat lonely up to now amidst the running and snow shows.

Obviously, this calls for a new Animal Health Division and a new divisional CEO to go with it. Step forward Nicole Cooper, founder of Touchpoint Live Media whose events include DogFest and the Vet Festival. The Touchpoint Events remain independent (at least for now) with Nicole joining Raccoon full-time.

A few days earlier Emslie acquired a minority stake in travel media specialists **Jacobs Media** through a separate investment vehicle and joined the Board as deputy chairman.

The business is named after its founder, Clive Jacobs, who acquired Travel Weekly Group from Reed Business Information in 2009 and has built the company into a £20m revenue business with 50% of the revenue coming from 160 global events and exhibitions, including the Globe Travel Awards and Agent Achievement Awards.

The rest of the portfolio is a combination of multimedia brands such as

Travel Weekly and *The Caterer* as well as a travel club, a luxury travel private community and online travel training. There is no doubt that Emslie will use his investor network to help Jacobs Media punch above its weight and we should expect a series of shrewd and potentially game-changing acquisitions over the next couple of years.

That's not the end of the UK transactions

Three months after Opus Origin acquired Cloudfest, one of the world's largest Cloud and Hosting industry events, its subsidiary **InfraXmedia**, a B2B media and events platform for the digital infrastructure industry, has acquired a majority stake in **Data Center Nation (DCN)** from Italian entrepreneurs Aldo Mazzocco and Davide Ortisi.

In the short time since launching in 2021, DCN has established market leading events in Milan, Warsaw, Zurich, Dubai, and Riyadh. InfraXMedia already owns Datacenter Dynamics (DCD) which was acquired in 2022, and which runs similar events in London, Madrid, Latin America and Asia. The two businesses dovetail well and the DCN founders will continue to work with the DCD team to further develop the business.

It's great to see both Stephen Brooks, founder of Opus Origin, and Douglas Emslie using the money they have made from the sale of their respective businesses (Mack Brooks to Reed in 2019 and Tarsus to Informa in 2023) to further invest in the events and digital media space.

Meanwhile, **CloserStill Media** continues with what can only be described as a buying spree with the acquisition of **100% Optical** from Media 10.

100% Optical was launched in 2014 and quickly became the UK's leading event for the optical sector and joins CloserStill's portfolio of healthcare events. This is not the first time that Media 10 has launched an event and sold it to a larger organiser, having launched Design Shanghai in 2014 and sold it to Clarion in 2019.

These are not the actions of a company that is planning to sell the overall business anytime soon and it publicly asserted its independent

credentials at the *Exhibition News* Indy Conference last month, with Lee Newton handing over the CEO role to (former) marketing director Rob Nathan whilst on stage during the independent businesses' session.

It's not often we see a venue-to-venue transaction – the **Business Design Centre (BDC)** founded by Sam Morris 40 years ago and still owned after all these years by the Morris family has been acquired by **Excel London**, making this its second UK venue and the fourth overall (with ADNEC Centre Abu Dhabi and ADNEC Centre Al Ain) run by Excel's owner ADNEC.

The BDC has been a friend to independent organisers for many years providing a cost-effective home for many events such as Open Banking Expo and the Workspace Design Show and originally owned Upper Street Events before its sale to Immediate Media in 2019. My sincere hope is that this collaboration that has given birth to many independent event organisers continues under new ownership.

The USA muscles in on the action

Hyve has acquired US-based **HLTH Inc**, a leading community for international health innovators and organiser of HLTH USA, ViVE (digital health), and HLTH Europe which was launched in 2024. This is part of the continuing transformation of Hyve which has disposed of many of its heritage businesses in Russia/CIS, Turkey and Asia over the years and and acquired brands such as ShopTalk and Fintech Meetup.

The HLTH business was founded by Jonathan Weiner and HLTH USA becomes Hyve's largest event by Revenue. Weiner co-founded both Shoptalk and Fintech Meetup and also Money 20/20, along with Anil Aggarwal, which Ascential acquired in 2014.

Clarion Events, Inc, the North American arm of Clarion Events has announced the acquisition of **Information Forecast, Inc.** (Infocast).

Infocast was founded more than 30 years ago by William Meyer and organises events for the renewable energy sector including the Solar +

Wind Finance and Investment Summit and the NY Energy Summit.

Infocast will become part of Clarion's growing energy portfolio, which was boosted by its acquisition of Pennwell in 2018 which brought POWERGEN and DISTRIBUTECH into its portfolio, and which also includes energy transition events under the Enlit brand.

I missed this transaction in my October column as **Informa** didn't announce it but it acquired **VidCon**, an annual creator convention for influencers, fans, executives and online brands. It was founded by YouTubers John and Hank Green in 2010, and acquired by Viacom, a division of Paramount, in 2018, which has now sold to Informa. This will presumably be part of Informa Festivals, created following the acquisition of Ascential.

Meanwhile in China

In my October Dealmakers column. I covered the acquisition of China Pet Expo by **GLOBUS events** (formerly VNU Exhibitions Asia), which was acquired by PE firm Advent International earlier this year.

GLOBUS has also recently made a majority investment in two other events – **Powder Metallurgy (PM) China** and the **International Exhibition for Advanced Ceramics (IACE) China**.

Both events have editions in Shanghai and Shenzhen and are part of a wider portfolio of industrial exhibitions owned by Uniris Exhibition Shanghai, which was created in 2017 as a joint venture between IRIS Exhibition Service Co and Unifair Exhibition Service Co.

Since 2015, GLOBUS has had a joint venture with UK-based Rapid News Group for TCT Asia, an event dedicated to industrial 3D printing and additive manufacturing and they will co-locate TCT and PM South China in Shenzhen in 2025.

Jime Essink, who headed up UBM Asia, and subsequently Informa Markets Asia, for many years has joined the GLOBUS Board as an

Operation Partner of Advent. This is a homecoming of sorts for Essink who was president and CEO of VNU Exhibitions Asia for nine years until he joined UBM in 2007.

Does the UK budget clobber entrepreneurs?

How many of the 25 people in the Labour cabinet have actually held a job outside of government? None, according to Douglas Emslie in his state of the exhibition industry interview with Dan Assor. He asserts that the politicians around that table cannot possibly understand the sacrifices and risks that an entrepreneur faces when launching their own business.

The increase in the Employers NI rate from 13.8% to 15% looks bad for all companies but the small print actually results in a lower cost for smaller exhibition entrepreneurs.

The new rates kick in at £5,000 for each employee rather than the current amount of £9,100 but the Employment Allowance (deducted from the overall Employers NI bill) increases from £5,000 to £10,500 meaning that a small company employing six people on an average salary of £30k will not see an increase in their NI cost. Above this level is a different story and profits will be reduced by higher employment costs inevitably resulting in lower valuations by buyers.

If you get through those crucial first years of building a valuable business, the Labour Government is waiting for you at the end of the tunnel.

In the budget, headline Capital Gains Tax rates immediately increased from 20% to 24% (and that even included transactions completed on the morning of budget day). The lower 10% level for the first lifetime gains of £1m, previously known as Entrepreneurs Relief and now rebranded as BADR, remains unchanged for now but increases from 10% to 14% for the 2025-26 tax year and then to 18% the following year.

This means that an entrepreneur selling their first business for £3m in two years' time will pay £160k extra in tax compared to before the budget.

Emslie describes the budget as “anti-business, anti-entrepreneur” and he’s not wrong. The exhibition industry needs entrepreneurs to succeed – bear in mind that the vast majority of shows owned by the larger organisers were acquired from entrepreneurs – and the Government has just skewed the risk/reward ratio.