

# BGP Stories from the front-line

Mark Beaver on Charting a Path to Success

**"When we presented our plan to the BGP panel, they were sceptical about the scale of our ambition. In fact, we've doubled our turnover and are bang on target!"**

**Mark Beaver**



On Friday 14th October, Mark Beaver, founder of Event Concept, joined the BGP September cohort as our third guest speaker this autumn. For some fifty minutes Mark kept his audience of fellow entrepreneurs enthralled and entertained with the story of his journey to success as a business founder. It has been far from an easy ride. Mark shared the

ups and downs of a career in the events industry that has progressed through lighting to sound, to audio-visual and on to full-scale event management for some of Britain's best-known organisations.

A self-described army brat, Mark seemed destined to join the armed forces, but fate decided otherwise. After a false start in an estate agency, he joined a marquee business, where he got his first taste of organising events. From there he progressed to working for a lighting company, which serviced high-profile corporate event venues such as the Natural History Museum. This led on to a job in an event design company, but the upheaval resulting from the first Gulf War caused him to be made redundant. For a while, he freelanced as a lighting professional, but a string of referrals from former clients convinced him to establish his own business in Battersea and to start recruiting.

The early days of Event Concept, as Mark admits, were all a bit ad hoc and improvised. Finally, a conversation with a client triggered the realisation that the business would need to professionalise. Systems and structures were put in place and the firm moved to bigger premises in order for Mark and his team to expand their range of services. The foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 was a major setback, but the business survived and moved premises again,

to South Bermondsey. The next evolution was driven by Mark's burning ambition to bring audio visual services in house, historically this had been outsourced, but a series of international business forums and major works for ultra-high net worth individuals provided the cash to build EC's AV division.

By the mid-2000s Event Concept was turning over £6 MM and had a history of trading profitably. The next storm to hit was the financial crisis of 2008/9, which put a brake on corporate spending and the company's income fell to £4 MM. Once more they survived and when the economy picked up Event Concept was one of the few in its sector still able to provide a full in house technical, scenic and floristry offering. Mark pushed hard on the accelerator, but turnover remained stubbornly around the £8 MM - £9 MM level, despite his ambitions. Attending a BGP briefing shone a new light on his situation and in 2015 he joined the programme.

BGP was a transformative experience. In particular, Mark describes how working in small groups with fellow business founders from completely different industries created new insights into his own business and brought new solutions to long-standing problems. "Every business is individual, but we all have common issues," he says. "A lot of those boil down to people." The research he conducted while on the programme was the major revelation, however. Until that point, Mark had taken a narrow view of his industry. Now he realised that the combined size of his sector was actually £19 BN, and that there was plenty of scope to take Event Concept to the next level. He finished the programme with lots of quick wins under his belt and a plan to hire a new Head of Marketing to deliver on his vision.

Mark's big idea was to restructure the business into three divisions:

- Conferences, to ensure a regular flow of repeat business,
- Experiences, comprising larger events with more scope for creativity,
- Private Events, enabling the company to utilise its equipment and services at weekends – these were previously quiet periods due to the nature of corporate work that predominantly takes place on a weekday.

And it's worked! In the intervening years since BGP, the business has doubled its turnover and has increased its workforce to over 100 staff, featuring designers of events, lighting, sets and graphics, architects, engineers, construction and production experts. This year income should hit £22 MM. It's still not been all plain sailing. As for many other businesses, Brexit has created a huge

amount of uncertainty and delayed decision-making. The business was also the victim of a sophisticated bank fraud which diverted £120,000 of payments into the hacker's accounts. It was a long fight to get his money refunded and Mark advises every business to implement 2-factor identification to protect itself against cybercrime.

**Mark also offered the audience two further recommendations. First, he has found it incredibly helpful to bring an external perspective on board, in the form of a non-executive director. Second, he continues the BGP experience through membership of a BGP Club, which meets regularly. His fellow members, again all from very different industries, hold him to account and ensure he stays on track. Now entering his seventh decade, Mark and his business are just getting into their stride...**

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### Event Concept

Event Concept is a creative event production agency bringing innovative design and technical precision to events across the globe. From corporate conferences and award ceremonies to experiential brand solutions, we're a creative and supportive team with a shared passion for delivering extraordinary experiences.

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