

# Full Interview

February 2017 | Laurence Gaborieau

## What part do you play in organising the show?

As head of the Health and Nuclear division, I oversee several events. The Health division with scientific conferences, one in Cardiology called *Cardiostim*, which is a big cardiac electrophysiology congress held in Nice every two years. We work with a scientific team and chairman--and another in Medical Biology that is both an exhibition and a conference, which we organise on behalf of a union of French medical biologists. It is an event for French-speakers, but it is international as well, since 65 countries are represented. The second half of my division is an event in the nuclear world, which is called the World Nuclear Exhibition. We organise it on behalf of the French Nuclear Industry (AIFEN - Association de l'Industrie Française Exportatrice du Nucléaire). It's an exhibition held every two years.

The role of a division director is in my opinion to manage the **development** of these events, to **lead** a team--we have on the scientific side a marketing communications team and a sales team, and we **unite** these teams with technical and logistical teams to create a great event. It's also about **representing** the event in France and internationally, as well as managing the whole financial side which is essential in running an event.

## As the manager of *Cardiostim*, *Journées Internationales de Biologie* and *World Nuclear Exhibition*, what are your challenges?

The challenges of a manager are...well there is the financial challenge of course, but that's not the primary one. The primary challenge is to bring together the two targets--the show visitors or conference attendees and the exhibitors--so that they meet each other at the right moment and that we bring them the people they are expecting to meet. On the conference side, the attendees, they're looking for scientific content that meets their expectations. As for the shows, we are more like business facilitators. We set the stage for putting the exhibitor in contact with the show visitor and we do everything we can to meet their needs and expectations. An exhibition organiser is also a community organiser all year long--the show doesn't end when the doors close--throughout the year, we have to organise the community, so that at the show they can physically meet up and do business. Then, within the framework of the show, we can organise business appointments, conferences, set up different special events or activities to facilitate both the life of the show visitor and of the exhibitor doing business.

## What do you like about your job?

The development side, I love coming up with new ideas. Repeating the same thing over and over, year after year, that's not for me. I believe that in event management the challenges are such that you constantly have to try something new. We live in a changing world and the Internet has completely transformed everyone's perception. *We constantly take a fresh look at what we do. The advantage of organising events like ours, it offers us that possibility and I like that.* But what I like even more is the genuine development of new events.

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**Two years ago, you launched a new Reed Expositions event: the “World Nuclear Exhibition”. How did you manage that “enormous” challenge?**

Launching a new event means having capacities that are not conventional capacities. You need to have a natural inclination for development. I managed that team and the management of that challenge in ‘project mode’ and not the way exhibitions are usually organised with processes. For WNE, there was a month-long invitation to tender during August and on 5 September we learned that we had been accepted. Normally to launch the first exhibition of this event would have required at least two years, but we only had just one; without a database nor visitors nor exhibitors and no team. I started from nothing. And that’s where the challenge is, starting from nothing with a blank sheet; Setting off with the best of our experience, whether from exhibitions or conferences: I took matchmaking, business appointments from certain shows, VIP management...we took the best from what was happening on the market and passionately put it all into WNE. It is an international event, sensitive and political, so you have to be flexible and adapt to everything. Having an international vision is essential for this event.

To accompany me on the project, there was in-house mobility, with staff joining this beautiful big venture, but some recruitment as well. We worked like mad for a year, but with great success. We had an objective of 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> and we finished with 6,600 m<sup>2</sup>. It is the finest event in France, and the best success in the Reed Expositions group...all that hard work paid off and with great satisfaction.

**Tell us about an experience at a show (before, during or after) where you had an adrenaline rush, a worry, a big stressful moment, a big surprise, a success...**

One of the first, early in my career, was a spark at a stand that started a fire. Walls of water came down putting the fire out and in a night the show was flooded. The entire team was requisitioned. Throughout the night, we contacted the exhibitors explaining to them what to do about the carpeting, the installations, the compensation...it was real crisis communication, since the show had to open.

Apart from that I had other experiences, still to do with flooding, but this time at the CNIT. That particular year, I had offered umbrellas as a gift to the exhibitors, while there was water leaking everywhere, so you had to keep your sense of humour. The exhibitors weren’t happy because the financial stake was a significant. It was a crisis situation that had to be managed by responding to the exhibitors as best we could.

Another intense experience was at the Nuclear exhibition when we had to work with the different police and security services, the prefecture, the DGSI and set up an anti-terrorist security plan for the event. Only screened people were able to enter the show.

**Reed in a word?**

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