

Rave reviews

Gijs de Jong and Ben Veenbrink for *Stadia* magazine

Staging dance parties in Amsterdam

Managing the in-crowd at the Sensation events in the Amsterdam ArenA means learning from experience so that ravers, staff and even neighbours can all chill out

Saturday 5 July 2003 and the streets of Amsterdam and the motorways leading into town were filled with an energetic and vibrant crowd dressed in white. Some 35,000 “ravers” were making their way to the Amsterdam ArenA to play their part in Sensation White. The following Saturday, 12 July 2003, and the streets of Amsterdam were monochromatic once again, but this time the crowd were wearing black. Another 35,000 people made their way to the Amsterdam ArenA to be part of the Black edition.

The enormous success of the Sensation concept has been proven by its ticket sales. The tickets for the white edition were sold out in six days at €60 (US\$65) each; the 3,500 VIP tickets at €100 (US\$109) each were gone in an hour. Booking a private dance platform for 25 was just one of the options.

While the authorities in most of Europe scratched their heads as to how to deal with licences for dance and rave parties, the Amsterdam ArenA hosted, for its fourth successive year, “the world’s leading dance event”. The event is run and organised in close consultation with the mayor, the fire department, the police, the local health and safety authorities and the environmental agencies. The Amsterdam ArenA and dance promoter ID&T have now perfected this methodology to such a level that

the next logical step is the external marketing of this crowd-management concept. Initial discussions have taken place and in all likelihood there will be a number of Sensations coming around the globe.

Some 70,000 rave fans went completely wild in the first two weeks of July 2003 in the Amsterdam ArenA. Two nights, 70,000 Bacardi Breezers, 80,000 mineral waters, tons of steel, hundreds of security staff and hours spent in meetings and discussions. At the end of these two fantastic events, everyone counted their blessings and all involved looked back on them with pride.

Developing a theme

This was the fourth year running that ID&T, the leading dance-event promoter in the Netherlands, has presented its Sensation concept. Continuous development of Sensation has led to two editions: Black and White. White is more club and trance, accessible to a wider audience, whereas the Black version is more techno and hardstyle and directed at old-school heavy house fans.

As with all these events, the complete experience plays a major role, so this year’s themes – fire and water – were visible in all aspects, from the commercials to the website, the music to the decorations and show.

With the White edition, the emphasis was water, and throughout the show the transformation of ice into steam was a key directive. Ice-sculptures, water-organs and steam-blowers were used. There were hundreds of dancers and artists on numerous platforms entertaining the crowd. The Black edition had Fire as its theme, with the progression from spark to inferno. The symbolism of burning candles progressing into fire-eaters and finally into a huge pyrotechnic show was chosen.

Building bridges

The Amsterdam ArenA was built as a multi-functional events stadium. For both Sensation events it was imperative that the crowds were

able to make their way to and from field level to the stadium seating areas and walkways. The moats of the Amsterdam ArenA were filled with multiple bridges and staircases. Numerous hours of calculations as well as some earnest discussions with the fire brigade preceded being able to guide and monitor the logistical flows from the main building to field level and first ring. The logistics are for a completely different stadium usage as compared with “static” events such as football matches or rock concerts.

Other considerations for the logistical flows are catering (VIP and public), emergency services and refuse control. From a safety aspect, a pallet full of Bacardi Breezers can’t be brought through a heaving crowd of dancers. All the Breezers would probably be gone by the time they reached their destination anyway. The

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prevention of logistical flows crossing one another is also essential in avoiding chaos.

At the defining phase a number of profiles were initiated. This is done to provide a concrete picture for the organiser, stadium owners, local authorities and the licensors. A distinction is made between a visitors’ profile, an event profile and a stadium profile. This





[Previous page] Sensation Black, aimed at old-school heavy house fans, had fire as its theme and attracted 35,000 people, who were entertained by dancers and artists performing on platforms

[Above and below] Dressed to impress: it took four days to prepare the ArenA for the White edition, the success of which was reflected in ticket sales. Tickets at €60 each sold out in six days; the 3,500 VIP tickets priced €100 each were gone in one hour

[Photos] ID&T archives/Rud-gr



embodies each event having its own specific focus points. A Robbie Williams concert encounters essential risks that differ significantly to that of a football match. The main focus points for Sensation are the crowd flows, usage of resources and hindrance prevention for the surrounding neighbourhood. Apart from this, the risks involved with any event hosting 35,000 visitors is controllable, if only for the fact that the visitors are concentrated into a small area.

Terms and conditions

Once a clear picture is gained as to the shape of the event, this can then be translated into a number of terms and conditions. A project approach was applied, stipulating a multiple-scenario analysis. During this design phase the necessary and required documents were stipulated. These were then elaborated on during the preparation phase.

For ticket sales a ticket scenario was prepared. The applicable terms here were: using multiple entrances in order to spread the crowds, preventing forgeries and presenting comprehensible texts. Furthermore, the tickets also included mention of a compulsory dress code and that there would be no cloakrooms available, for example.

A second essential document was the handling profile. This was formed in collaboration with numerous authorities and included the following:

- Fire safety: the Amsterdam ArenA stipulated which specific materials could be used in specific areas, based on its regulations. Alongside this all other adaptations and variations were presented in schematic form to be approved by the fire department.
- Environmental laws: various steps were taken in order to prevent noise hindrance to those living in surrounding areas. Throughout the night the Amsterdam ArenA continually monitored the noise levels. Periodic meetings with neighbourhood delegates took place and a week prior to the event letters were sent out to all residents explaining the upcoming course of events and listing an information telephone number for any further enquiries.
- Medical services: in conjunction with the authorities a resource plan was formed for body searching visitors. Next, the medical stewards received supplementary training as to how to deal with drug-related issues. This has led to a minimal number requiring medical help in the past years. Central to this was a comfortable indoor climate and an adequate supply of drinking water. Drugs-advice group Educare estimated a 50 per cent drop in party-goers requiring medical attention over the past few years.

From paper to concrete

During the preparatory phase the transition was made from a paper-based reality into a concrete one. All agreements made had to be met and most discussion forums were intensified. A handling profile was initiated, to which all safety partners had to adhere. Agreements were made

under this profile or covenant regarding aspects of mobility, the stewarding and security, capacity and logistics, resource management, calamity scenario analysis, public relations and so forth.

It took four days to prepare the stadium for the White edition. More than 100 motors were hauled to the roof predominantly for the music and light shows, and also for the decorations in the stadium and tons of steel were used to fill up the stadium moat and in getting the crowds to spread out.

The timetable for the construction days broke down as follows:

- Day one – covering the pitch; placing production offices and telephone lines; rigging in the roof.
- Day two – building the main stage; filling out the moats; building dance platforms in the stands; putting in power supply.
- Day three – building concession stands/merchandise; building medical aid centre; decoration and wrapping of all the stages.
- Day four – putting in sound system, lights, laser and pyrotechnics; rehearsals.

The main focus points for Sensation are the crowd flows, usage of resources and hindrance prevention for neighbours

Security personnel for both event days were briefed in detail as to expectations and handling methodology, based on the handling profile. A supplementary evening was held for staff to familiarise them with the atmosphere, the layout of the stadium and the consequences of substance abuse among visitors and how to handle it if necessary. These measures meant that Amsterdam ArenA staff were aware of what was expected from them during Sensation and that they could act firmly and with flexibility as required.

At the end of the building phase, a detailed control visit was undertaken with police, fire brigade and the housing authority so that any potential shortcomings could be corrected in time for the event. The emphasis was on controlling the approved drawings, materials used and keeping emergency exits free. Furthermore, in conjunction with the licensors, specific attention was paid to the pyrotechnical entertainment and the related safety measures.

Throughout the night a service team of engineers, carpenters and plumbers were on hand to resolve any acute problems. Tasks from

making sure escalators and lifts functioned properly to preventing any toilet overflows all contributed to a successful event.

Party time

From early morning onwards, all services were on the ball and preparations for the big day were under way. The stadium had been under extra surveillance for a number of days, but as of Saturday morning it was sealed tight. All the mobility partners were on full alert and monitored all movements to and from the stadium. If necessary they could contact the command centre of the Amsterdam ArenA from where the whole event was directed.

Both editions started at 9pm and lasted until 7am the next morning. Stopping any earlier was not an option because public transport would not be available. Each show kicked off at 10pm, from which time various DJs let their music do the talking, accompanied by lights and fireworks shows.

Throughout the crowd inflow, tickets were checked carefully and visitors searched. Selling a limited number of tickets at the last minute at face value, having a tight entrance-control system and a highly advanced closed-circuit television system, adequately dealt with the problems of ticket touts and attempts at climbing over fences.

Throughout both nights, tens of thousands danced into the morning light to the tunes of world-renowned DJs such as Johan Gielen, MarcoV, Michel de Heij, Armin van Buuren and Ferry Corsten. For the Black edition, a few high-flying foreign DJs joined the line-up, such as DJ Dana, Luna and Takkyo Ishino.

The dispersion of the crowds at the end of the show was again a strictly controlled happening. Stewards and security staff were continually on hand while the outflow of visitors was managed and directed from 5am onwards. All exits were opened and at various stadium points the available public transport options were presented.

In between the two editions the stadium was transformed from White into Black. This meant that all the decorations, the wrapping of all the podia and stages and all the carpet had to be changed. With a week to carry this out there were no problems, but plans for an extra event to be held during that week next year presents a new challenge.

After the Black edition the stadium had to be cleaned within 48 hours, the constructions broken down and the technical equipment in the roof removed. Directly after those stressful hours, the production team for Robbie Williams came in with one of the biggest stages ever in the ArenA.

The party's over

The evaluations that take place after an event such as Sensation focus on whether all prior agreements have been met and on any incidents that occurred. Matters that can be repeated in forthcoming editions, as well as those that require improvement are looked at.

After this year's integral post-evaluation with the local authorities, no major points of improvement were singled out. In fact, those

responsible within the local council, the police and the fire brigade, as well as the local health authorities and local residents, were quite pleased and enthusiastic about both shows. Obviously there will always be some minor points open to improvement, and preparations for Sensation 2004 will begin next month. ■

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Venue	Amsterdam ArenA
Event	Sensation 2003
Promoter	ID&T
Technical production	Solid
Estimated cost of staging both events	€500,000 (including security)
VIP catering	Maison van den Boer
Public catering	Catering Club
Lights	Martin Rental
Sound system	Stage Pro
Laser	Laserimage
Video	Phase One
Podia	Stageco
Rigging	Frontline Rigging
Power supply	The PowerShop
Features	Promoter needed capacity of at least 30,000 visitors, the ability to let all visitors experience the main stage and a permit to use the venue all night.
Revenue	Ticket sales (€64 per ticket) go to promoter who pays rent. The venue gets a percentage of the catering turnover. Average per head spend at Sensation on concessions, alcohol and merchandise is €25
Staffing	150 technical staff, 300 catering staff, 250 security staff, 25 specialist medical staff and 250 dancers were involved in the event
Developments	Ticket design, public flows, communication during ticket sales and less noise hindrance for surroundings were improved from previous year. Improvements for next year include accreditation system, co-ordination during preparation and signing for entrances and VIP areas. Sensation has franchise options in Korea, China, Thailand and Argentina