

DMG EVENTS: THE BIG 5

BUILDING FOR SUCCESS





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The Big 5 International Building and Construction Shows in Dubai and Jeddah are going from strength to strength. Event director Andy White talks about innovating to attract more high value visitors and to facilitate exhibitors' export potential

The construction industry may still be struggling to recover in many parts of the world as a result of the global economic crisis of 2008, but it has hardly even changed pace in some of the GCC countries. Funded by oil revenue, the region is in the process of diversifying—breaking its economic dependency on oil by investing in anything from real estate and tourism through to industry, healthcare, education, transportation, media and financial services.

Even Dubai, which over 35 years of almost continuous development has transformed from a quiet fishing village clustered around a peaceful creek into an extravagant tourist destination and global business hub replete with luxurious hotels, apartments, business and leisure facilities, is beginning to move again with infrastructure development after the recent real estate crisis.

“The building sector across the region is very vibrant, and it’s currently being led by construction in Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Saudi Arabia,” says Andy White, director at DMG Events, which stages The Big 5 Dubai International Building and Construction Show. Launched 32 years ago as a construction exhibition, The Big 5 Dubai has become the largest and most prestigious construction industry event in the Middle East and North Africa region. Attracting buyers and suppliers from all over the world it has grown with Dubai, mirroring its prosperity and success.

Held annually at the Dubai International Exhibition and Convention Centre, just minutes from the airport and surrounded



Products at
The Big 5 2011



The Big 5 Saudi 2012 was opened by the Mayor of Jeddah, His Excellency Dr. Hani Abu Ras

by ample five-star hotel space, this year's event is scheduled for 5 to 8 November and is set to be bigger than ever before.

The event brings together serious purchasing personnel from construction and development companies throughout the MENA region and matches them with suppliers providing the latest building materials, technology and services they are looking for. In 2011 the event attracted 50,275 professionals from 130 countries, 35,224 of whom were pure visitors. These buyers came to view the stands of 2,333 exhibiting companies and 33 national pavilions displaying products from some 64 countries.

This year's exhibition, which looks set to completely fill this vast venue, is divided into product sector zones to make it easy for visitors to navigate around the enormous show and find the products they are looking for. Sector areas include HVAC, bathrooms, marble ceramic and stone, water technology, concrete and windows and doors.

An innovation for last year was the introduction of seminars on the exhibition floor, and this is being expanded this year. "People come looking for products, but they're also looking for innovation and new ideas. So the idea behind the seminars,

which are free to attend, is to turn this into an information event as well as an exhibition. We will be providing far more this year," White explains. With seven months still to go, the team is working on a programme of content and will then invite speakers.

Last year also saw the event host its first Green Build Congress—a strategic level discussion about the design of sustainable buildings and the impact on

the environment. Speakers included Adrian Smith who designed the Burj Khalifa, and the explorer and environmental activist Jean-Michel Cousteau. "It went very well," says White. "Environmental construction is a real issue and concern here, so we intend to repeat this event this year."

A new feature for this year is aimed at facilitating the export potential of the exhibitors at the show, and is based on a pilot event that proved very popular last year. "About 75 per cent of our exhibitors are from overseas, and many of them want to start trading in the Middle East. So last year, in the morning before the doors were opened to visitors we put together a seminar called 'How to do business in the UAE'. We brought in experts who described

how to set up a business in the UAE, how to register products and form contracts with distributors and so on. It was standing room only." This year, the initiative is being expanded to include seminars on how to trade in the other booming regions—Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The success of the event hinges on attracting a strong portfolio of exhibitors and the high value buyers. DMG not only invests considerable time and money in marketing the event across the MENA region, but it has also developed a Platinum Club for the Dubai event. Now entering its fourth year, the club is by invitation only and comprises buyers from across the region who are responsible for purchasing on projects worth in excess of US\$100

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million, and are intending to come to the show. “We vet them very carefully,” White says. “In some instances we fly them into Dubai, book their hotels and bring them to the show, and we put them in direct contact with the companies they want to meet. This year, we hope to arrange more meetings prior to the show so they can make the best use of their time at the event.” Last year the club had 700 members and the target for

this year is 900.

Where sophisticated, glitzy and spectacular Dubai is a destination in its own right and attracts buyers from some 103 countries, DMG launched a sister event last year in Saudi Arabia, aimed at a very different market. “Construction in Saudi Arabia is huge,” White explains. “Our market research shows that 51 per cent of all spend on construction products in the GCC is

taking place in Saudi Arabia. And unlike the UAE and Qatar where construction is based on future projections, Saudi’s construction efforts are fuelled by current domestic need.” There are six economic cities at various stages of planning and construction, to cater for the needs of a very young and rapidly growing population.

With construction exhibitions already located in Dammam and Riyadh in the east, DMG launched The Big 5 Saudi in 2011, and has recently closed the doors on the 2012 event. It was the largest event ever to be staged in Jeddah. “We have been able to bring in international companies into Saudi who have worked with us in Dubai, and many of their products have never been here before.”

With a total of 518 exhibitors from 36 countries and a preliminary estimate of 10,800 unique visitors attending the event, the format is specifically designed for the Saudi environment. One of the primary needs throughout the Kingdom is for training in modern construction methods. “This year, we introduced two training workshops, one focusing on concrete repair and the other, our LEED 201 workshop, on sustainable building concepts. We found visitors were very keen to learn; in fact they were even flying in from Riyadh to attend.”

The plan is to extend and diversify the programme of workshops next year and to market the event in Riyadh and Dammam. There are also plans to provide added services for exhibitors, with a ‘How



to Trade in Saudi' seminar and site visits to some big construction projects. "We believe this will then give them a clearer picture of what is going on in Jeddah, and what the industry needs."

Although small by Dubai's standards, the Big 5 Saudi 2012 not only completely filled the Jeddah Centre for Forums & Events, but an 8,000 square metre marquee was erected on the car park opposite, doubling the available exhibition space. "The marquee was a challenge, but we were clever in managing the traffic flow, and it was very successful."

Saudi Arabia, of course, has a reputation for being a challenging work environment. "As Saudi was new to events like this we did have a few problems getting visas," White says, "but we've had a great deal of support from the local people. They were very proactive, and we've found they are very willing to change the way things are done. We expect next year to run much more smoothly. And we will have to increase the floor space by 10 per cent too."

With both The Big 5 events expanding, DMG has a great deal to think about and to strategise. "We do have plans to expand The Big 5 elsewhere next year," he concludes. "We have two new locations that we can't reveal at the moment but they're outside of Saudi and the UAE." So, watch this space. **BE**

The Big 5 2011 was opened by H.H Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai

For more information about DMG Events: The Big 5 visit: www.thebig5.ae



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