

No more private jets: Interview with Abena Poku-Awuah, founder of Legacy

The UK events industry emits 1.2B kg of CO2 every year and audience travel is typically around 80% of an event's overall footprint. Physicist turned sustainable events producer Abena Poku-Awuah has launched Legacy, a green events agency, consultancy and marketplace, to shake up how we get together.

Maddyness spoke to Abena Poku-Awuah about including events teams in corporate conversations about sustainability; how we can jazz up virtual meet-ups; and Legacy's new innovative marketplace.

Tell us about your background and what led you to founding Legacy. Give us a brief overview of what it does.

I'm a science nerd turned event organiser. My whole career has been about raising awareness of climate change and how to improve our environment and society for the better.

I started off as a physicist, specialising in improving sustainability in buildings and for towns and cities. I spent 15 years doing this as a sustainability consultant and a sustainability manager. I am a chartered scientist, a fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts, a member of the Energy Institute and a member of the Institute for Materials, Minerals and Mining.

I've always organised events as an unofficial part of my role and really enjoyed it - so decided to make them the focus of my work.

I founded Legacy in 2016 as a sustainable events agency and consultancy, to make environmental and social sustainability intrinsic to event management.

We're actually just about to launch a pretty innovative event marketplace called [Legacy Marketplace](#). It is an online platform to help anyone organise an event using sustainable suppliers. It aims to solve two problems: making the event organising process easy and hassle free whilst increasing awareness on the environmental and social impact of events.

What is the carbon footprint of the events industry - and what are the big emitters?

The UK events industry emits 1.2B kg of CO₂ every year and audience travel is typically around 80% of an event's overall footprint (Source: Powerful Thinking). Whether its a hundred thousand attendee festival or a 20 person conference, an unfortunate and unavoidable fact about the events industry is that it tends to create a big carbon footprint. From leftover food to the carbon emissions created by powering a venue, getting a lot of people together in one place can have a huge environmental impact.

What's previously been the challenge for sustainable events?

Events bring people together, they are powerful mechanisms for facilitating change and they're hugely important for companies to connect with their staff and stakeholders.

Unfortunately, the events team in a company are often left out of discussions that are happening at a corporate level, especially around sustainability. This can create a disconnect between what a company is saying to its audience and how their events are perceived.

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It can be so jarring as an attendee to go to a business event and see plastic everywhere, huge amounts of waste and no consideration of social issues.

I mean, imagine going to a recycling event and being given single-use plastic... sounds ridiculous, but believe me it happens!

The clients that are approaching us now are not sustainable brands, but realise they need to act sustainability. I want to show that by carefully considering the impact of the suppliers, venues, and materials that you use for your events, the communities that they are located in and how you clean up after yourself, anyone can design beautiful events that delight and inspire your guests and motivate others to bring positive change.

Have you noticed an increased demand for sustainable and ethical events in recent years?

Public awareness and concern for the climate is at an all time high, which is impacting demand as audiences will expect events to be more sustainable. People want brands and business to play a bigger role in looking after our world - this includes the events they run.

Restarting in-person events safely is obviously a priority for event professionals. Making events sustainable must be a priority as well. The largest ever poll on climate change reported recently that two thirds of people around the world want the climate emergency to be tackled urgently. A sustainable recovery for events is a must.

Finding suppliers to deliver events sustainably has been a challenge. The Legacy Marketplace will help by connecting organisers to products and services that reduce the environmental impact of events. It will include a hub of info from a community of experts on sustainable event planning.

Beyond running events for companies, what else does Legacy do?

It's important to us that we share skills and knowledge with the events community, so we run training and workshops on sustainable events for event professionals and run an online discussion forum.

In addition to building a platform where you can buy sustainable products and services, Legacy put their expertise in your hands. You'll find a hub of info from a community of experts on sustainable event planning.

Not only this, but Legacy provides event management services whilst considering the environmental impact of the event, the carbon footprint and the potential for positive social change. My mission is to transform the old ways of organising any type of event, by making sustainability the guiding light for everything that we do.

What has the rise in virtual events meant for you and Legacy?

The rise in virtual events is better for our planet, with fewer travel emissions and less waste, but it's also led us to realise that previously these events were pretty dry.

There's a huge opportunity to revamp the world of virtual events and make them easier to run and more fun to attend.

That's why we've developed [Legacy Marketplace](#) to help make this a reality. The marketplace will offer a platform where organisers can book everything from entertainment to suppliers for their own virtual events and come to the platform for inspiration and guidance on how to make them more engaging.

And finally, a more personal question. What's your daily routine at the moment – and what are the rules you're living by to get you through COVID-19?

At the minute, I'm waking up at about 8am – I might read a bit or listen to some music and dance around. I check my schedule for the day and try to do any morning prep. With no separation between work and home, I try to keep my working hours to 9.30am to 6pm, and try and keep my mornings focused on getting work done, as opposed to replying to emails. I use my lunch breaks to catch up with life admin or see what's happening on the news. The afternoon is the time when I go through my emails and catch up on calls.

As we're all spending more time indoors, I make sure I get in a daily walk or cycle too! When it comes to rules, I'm really trying to limit my time on social media and on my phone, and trying to be strict on not finishing too late in the evenings.

Discover Legacy Marketplace

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