

The BH&IA Summer Event – 10th September 2020

5 things I took away

Neil Osmond - Chief Executive Officer, Earthware Ltd and BH&IA Board Director

The BH&IA Summer Event was the first large BH&IA event since I was elected to the BH&IA Board of Directors. I am guessing you probably expect me to be all about ‘bigging up’ the event and the BH&IA. Well, I think I will leave that for the official communications.

Firstly, I should say that I feel like a bit of an imposter on the Board as I am really a digital guy masquerading as a BI expert. I once was a Head of Business Insight and Head of Market Research. However, nowadays you will find me thinking more about Agile, Machine Learning, Usability, Social Media, Chatbots and Social Listening. However, I really feel that over the last few years that the world of digital and the world of insights are coming closer together. Anyway, this blog is not about me or what I think but about what I heard today at the BH&IA Summer Event.

I am a bit of a guinea pig really as we only decided to have a go at an informal blog in the Board meeting a few hours before the Summer Event. What we thought was try something different, something a bit more informal, something a bit more ‘personal opinion’ rather than a ‘sanitised article’. I should probably add therefore that the following are my own thoughts and not endorsed by all, or maybe even any, of the BH&IA board members.

1. What a time to take over the chair of the organisation!

Paul O’Nions had the challenge of starting his first major meeting as Chair, for the first ever online conference of the BH&IA. Paul reflected on 60 years of transformation, and of global challenges, as that is the lifetime of the BH&IA (and I am ashamed to say I am old enough to remember the BPMRG days).

It’s the first year in my 25 years in the industry where I actually believe that next year won’t just be like last year but a bit different, and I think Paul set out his stall about where he thinks Business Information is likely to go with both the challenges and also the opportunities.

What I particularly appreciated is that Paul has a focus – on making ‘the UK the place to be for excellence in healthcare insight.’

I really like the clarity of ‘thought leadership’, ‘professional development’ and ‘ethical standards’ and I think the challenge of the board will be to judge everything we plan to do and ask “Will it expand thought leadership?”, “Will it enable the membership to be better BI professionals?” and “Will it help maintain, or improve, ethical standards?” – if we cannot confidently say yes to at least one of these questions – we should probably not be doing it.



Many of people will know Nick Coolican-Smith and the great job he has done over the years and I am delighted he has stayed on to help Paul in stepping up to the Chair role as he tackles these new challenges and opportunities.

2. The quality of speakers and panellists

I really don't know if this is true, but I am not sure you could have had any chance of getting the same level of quality of panellists and speakers if this had been face to face.

The panellists included MDs, Healthcare professionals and pharmaceutical professional leaders and it was clear that we had very thoughtful, very experienced insights and comments and (forgive me), not someone popped in by an agency or company as they are available.

The coup de grace was being able to get Hugo Fry, the Vice President of the ABPI and Country Manager of Sanofi in the UK to offer to speak and tackle the challenging questions of what the future is going to look like for our industry. I suspect this was a real draw and maybe one of the reasons why a lot more people signed up than for a normal summer event.



My thought would be that if the panellists and speakers, often some of the busiest people in the greatest demand, had been required to give up an afternoon, rather than 30 minutes and travel into London, I suspect they would have been far more reluctant to agree to participate and we would have all been the poorer for this.

3. You can make a virtual summer event work, but you must think a bit differently

I went to last year's Summer Event (and Winter Seminar) and even spoke at one of them. If I am being honest, whilst the content was solid and many of the speakers were experts in their field, it was very broadcast from the front with little interaction. It was very agency dominated with very few industry members in the room (which is at odds with the membership). I do not think that this is a good sign – it is not good for PharmaCos as they are getting little benefit from these events because they do not attend. It is not good for agencies because they only meet other agencies and it is not good for speakers as the thought leadership isn't being heard by the very people that are making the decisions (worse even – they might be upskilling our competitors!).

So, what happens when you make it so you do not need to leave home to engage and where you don't need to find a budget from your boss as it is FREE. We are losing the face to face and socialising and beers is more challenging, but do we gain more than we lose?

My view is yes but with a caveat. I think we should probably be striving for a balance between face to face (I totally support the conference being much better in person) and online. I also think that one is not a substitute for the other. Excellent events online require a different way of thinking,

different way of presenting and a different way of facilitating. This was the first time for the BHBA, and probably therefore the worst time, but I think the first online event was promising and, in a world, where we can meet, I am not sure we always should!

4. The future is different but who knows how – probably no-one

We heard time after time, starting with Jason Bryant on the panel with his pithy observation “We now need to go to market the way our customers want to buy”. Dr Martin Ledson offered an insight about how a year ago firewalls, no Wi-Fi, no virtual consultations, no working from home, no mobile reception and no chance of using your own devices and in a really short space of time this has all changed in ways that will never be reversed.

Graydon Reading put a point of view where he believes that there is a natural human desire to move back to face to face. Rachel Medcalf put a more moderated point of view commenting on the ‘forced change’ and talked about the Vmap model (I think) that has a motivator, ability and an opportunity to change and how these things have aligned to the potential benefit of commercial but potentially a downside for society.



5. BI is not dying but it might be evolving

This was a theme that went throughout that life is trickier for BI groups and professionals and Graydon Reading put the view that BI is going to have to answer some different types of questions:

- What is currently going on?
- What is the future going to look like?
- What do our customers now want?

and Rachel Medcalf talked about how pharma companies could use digital for more intelligent patient management and BI can drive these from insight.

I was even brave enough to add a comment and ask a question:

“I think we have to be careful with comments like “people like ...” and “As a society we...” as my personal observation is that there are many spectra (included human connectiveness) and anyone can sit anywhere on these spectra and even move around from day to day. As Dr Martin Ledson said is that One patient may love the fact they have the option not to visit the hospital and the next patient really misses the opportunity to meet face to face.

My question is how much more sophisticated will our research and insight need to be as interactions will be blended for HCPs and patients rather than 90%+ face to face?”

And Jason Bryant put forward that this is likely to drive personalisation of experiences (and I assumed less ‘one size fits all’. I happen to agree with this and used the story of the boat website that leads the user through a personalised journey.

But what could have been improved?

I thought it was really a pretty good effort from everyone for the first time out. What I would like to see if this were done again was even more audience participation. Perhaps questions could have been submitted in advance, perhaps we could have done live polling, perhaps the questions could have been raised in the voices of the people who raised them. However, I understand that the first time you have enough challenges without making life more difficult so maybe possibilities for the future.



If you have any suggestions on how events for the BHBA could be improved I know that Paul, Jenny, Aline and others would love to hear from you and the easiest way of getting hold of them is to email them on admin@bhbia.org.uk.

I hope you found this a helpful article and please feel free to reach out to me if you want to chat:

neil@earthware.co.uk

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/neilmeosmond/>

Image copyright:

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/battle-black-blur-board-game-260024/>

Photo by [Aleksandr Neplokhov](#) from [Pexels](#)

Photo by [Alex Knight](#) from [Pexels](#)

Photo by [Marcus Lange](#) from [Pexels](#)