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Besides finding ways to diversify, event companies have to find temporary funding to help sustain operational obligations, says events director

by **NUR HANANI AZMAN** / pic by **BERNAMA**

WITH the fresh wave of Covid-19 infections further threatening the country's economic climate, the entire event planning industry is experiencing a downward spiral with serious sustainability issues.

Events Wizard Sdn Bhd events director Loh Tjun Hong said the industry has been hit just as badly as the tourism industry this year.



He stressed that with few to zero events being planned and the sheer number of event companies in Malaysia, the once-booming industry is now an empty shell.

"In the past two months, we have seen an increase of enquiries with very few confirmations. But, with the sudden increase in Covid-19 cases, companies have put all their plans on hold and are even apprehensive about going onto a virtual platform.

"I am certain more event cancellations are coming soon," he told *The Malaysian Reserve (TMR)* recently.

Weddings, like corporate events, are also stagnant.

"Couples are still tying the knots, but they have moved towards a simple registration and no-frills ceremony, ultimately forgoing the big bash and extravagance," he explained, adding that this is also highly affecting the events industry because there is no demand for their services.

"In order for companies like us to survive, we need to be creative to pull through financially. If we fail, you will not see any event companies at the end of this pandemic.

"So, besides finding ways to diversify, event companies have to find temporary funding to help sustain operational obligations," he added.

All government grants have been dispersed. Commercial banks have blacklisted the events industry, Loh said.

"Even with a good credit standing, we suddenly find ourselves in the dark and deserted. How then, can we help ourselves? We need loans, funding or grants to survive.

"Not just for ourselves, but for the extended survivability of the industry. Thus, it is a matter of policy setting and executions by related parties," he concluded.

Earlier this month, various organisers decided to postpone events as a precautionary measure following a rise in infections to protect public safety.

Association of Wedding Professionals Malaysia president Leticia Hsu echoed the same sentiment and said events have generally been postponed to next year.

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"There are almost no events confirmed for this year because clients are apprehensive what tomorrow will bring. On a corporate event standpoint, everyone is playing the waiting game.

"Just when things were getting better and enquiries for events were slowly returning, we hit the worst levels of the Covid-19 pandemic and everyone hit the pause button again," she told *TMR*.

Hsu said only a few small-scale weddings are taking place, but most couples have postponed their weddings to next year.

"With everything so uncertain, couples are not committing to anything except pre-wedding photos at this current point," she added.

Hsu suggested for event organisers to go virtual, whether corporate or weddings.

"Events can be held with strict standard operating procedures on a fully virtual or hybrid module, with limited guests and a tweak in the proceedings.

"But you can still launch your product, get married or visit an exotic location on a virtual platform," she suggested.

Meanwhile, Penang Wedding Professionals Association co-founder Low Chin Siang said this year, the goal is to survive, so industry players need to get more creative.

"To be frank, this new norm will be with us for some time. So let's buckle up, be creative and innovative.

"When things are better, all our hard work will put us a few steps ahead in the market," he told *TMR*.

Although clients are postponing or cancelling their events, Low said service providers cannot stop.

"For us, it is just a change of how to organise events.

"The demand is there, but people are just unsure of whether to hold virtual instead of ground events, or even a hybrid," he added.

In recent years, he said the wedding trends are elaborate and luxurious.

"However due to this pandemic, many couples opt for simple celebrations. So the challenge for vendors now is how to let couples have intimate yet unique weddings," he said.