

CASE STUDY

Hotwire

Retail Tomorrow 2022

March 2022



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EVENTS

Hotwire reinforces its retail relevance and influence by reviving Retail Tomorrow event with remarkable results

Hotwire is a global technology communications powerhouse. It acquired several new strategic B2B capabilities in the UK when it acquired sales and marketing agency McDonald Butler in 2021, among them its rich credibility and contacts in the Retail marketplace.

After the pandemic enforced a long gap in the retail conference calendar Mike Butler, now UK Marketing Lead for Hotwire, was determined to revive its Retail Tomorrow event. He turned to 1331 Events to help him make it a success.

The two-day event took place in March 2022, with 80 delegates gathering at the Four Seasons, Hampshire – gaining stellar feedback from retailers and sponsors alike.

Mike explained how the project evolved. “Retailers themselves told us that they wanted Retail Tomorrow to happen in 2022” he said. “Although large retail events like NRF have returned, many retailers from the UK didn’t attend – so this January, we decided to put on Retail Tomorrow with just eight weeks’ notice.”

Speed alone demanded superior event skills

Putting an event together at that speed certainly isn’t for the faint hearted. He continued, “Instead of the typical 16 week timeframe, we had just eight weeks to put it together. It

meant putting the sponsorship documents together, locking down the venues, doing the delegate communications and getting the speakers committed at incredible speed.”

The speed and complexity of the need demanded event management experience that simply wasn’t available in-house – but Mike knew that Amy Calvert at 1331 Events had what was required. Having worked with him previously to create the first Retail Tomorrow event, Amy was deeply familiar with the challenge and would be able to move faster than anyone else.

“It was exactly what we needed. Within a week of working together we had pulled together the budgets, the sponsorship documents, and booked the venue,” Mike recalled.





Over the following four weeks, he worked to engage sponsors and reach out to retailer delegates, often working into the night. It wasn't an easy process – not least because Mike had to reassure Hotwire at every stage that this was not just a worthwhile but a financially viable event. 1331 Events and Mike calculated that around £200k of sponsorship would be required to cover the cost budget – so he would spend the next few weeks working to secure sufficient sponsorship to cover it.

While Mike worked all his contacts, 1331 Events handled not just all the event operations but also ensured that every secured sponsor and delegate was followed up and kept informed. “I had complete confidence that 1331 had everything in hand – from managing the budget to negotiating with the hotel and making all the payments. They planned and executed everything from the staging to the running order of the day, as well as communications with sponsors and delegates.”

The value of events expertise goes far beyond logistics

Mike needed more than event logistics, however. He said “the brief that 1331 Events took on was not just to execute the event but assure a Tier 1 experience for retail delegates that justified the investments by their sponsors. This was to be a valuable gathering of like-minded individuals, getting together to share insights and challenges – so the event had to be designed to allow that to happen

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Strategic input and business thinking from Amy was as vital as the hands-on help of the wider 1331 team. “Amy was in the thick of all the thinking about how the event would work, from the running order to who would sit with who on the day. We needed to ensure that sponsors who wanted to engage with a major retailer would have the opportunity to sit with them and be able to engage in a meaningful conversation.”

Having 1331 on board meant that Mike could focus fully on the elements that only he could perform and leave the rest to them. Mike reflected that “The value of an events specialist is not just about event logistics, but also about understanding the solution, the audience, connecting people and listening. Yet most event people just do event management. They don’t care much about what the subject matter is, nor who’s there, or why. Whereas 1331 was often driving me along. They would chase for more sponsor names – because they knew that we only had a few weeks, and that it was important.”

Designing details to engage delegates and elevate their experience

Input that helped to achieve the business objectives of the event were highly valued, Mike confirmed. “There were several moments where 1331 thought outside the box to elevate the customer experience. They created custom branded hotel key card folders that communicated powerful subliminal messages to retailers – it was beautifully done.”

Communications with delegates in the run-up to events is known to be essential to minimise drop-out rates. These commonly run at around 40% for many business events – and have become even more of a risk during the pandemic when people can be reluctant to attend large events. 1331 Events helped Retail Tomorrow achieve a phenomenal attendance rate of 96%.

“1331 went above and beyond when it came to continuous delegate communications, from the moment people committed right up to the day itself. They phoned every retailer to check they were still coming and that they had all they needed. They had also proposed an event app, which we built with the help of a Hotwire client’s app solution – and they checked every retailer had downloaded it or helped them through the process.”

The app that was provided to delegates during the runup proved a huge success and was used to support frequent polling and snap surveys during the two-day event.



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Mike Butler, UK Marketing Lead, Hotwire

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Driving 20% cost efficiencies changed the financial dynamics

The sponsorship target was set based on a pre-planned cost budget. However, Mike was delighted to find that the projected total cost began to decline downwards sharply in the second month of planning. He explained that “1331 challenged the budget on every line and found ways to reduce certain elements without compromising the event value or experience. They managed to bring the running cost down by a massive 20%. They didn’t simply manage with the budget they were given, but negotiated on every line item to find cost efficiencies.”

One of the areas of savings included replacing the event brochure with an app. Mike continued “The app alone saved around £10k in print and production costs compared to previous events. 1331 argued that a print piece for this event was not only cost prohibitive, but not environmentally sustainable – and would be hugely problematic given the tight timeline.”

These savings, alongside Mike’s successful efforts to secure advance sponsorship, put Retail Tomorrow well over the line and into profit. The team’s huge success in engaging retailers and ensuring that sponsors gained strong business value was evidenced by the incredible feedback received from attendees.

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Reinforcing relevance and presence in retail

Meanwhile, as well as reviving a strong platform for ongoing engagement with the retail market, Hotwire is now well positioned as a retail market influencer and stakeholder.

Mike concluded “This has helped to position Hotwire in retail more than ever before. I knew this event had to be a real success if it was to achieve that objective. With all the limits of time that we faced, we couldn’t have done it without 1331 Events.”

Plans are already underway to hold Retail Tomorrow again next year. Its successful execution in 2022 was perfectly timed to re-engage retailers and their solution providers after COVID. It has helped to cement a strong partnership between Hotwire and 1331 Events that is based on trust and proven success. It now provides Hotwire marketing with a turnkey event capability that makes it unnecessary to invest in building its own resource to capitalise on event-related new business opportunities.

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