

Small is now big

Level: Intermediate upwards

Timing: 90 minutes plus

Material needed: One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 4/2013. The article is about bespoke business gatherings and the trend, in certain fields, towards holding these at luxury boutique hotels rather than in conventional business hotels.

The tasks in the worksheets check the students' understanding of the article and the language used, and also practise planning and writing a proposal.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

Lead-in

These questions introduce the topic of company celebrations and celebrating outside the company in an exotic or luxurious venue. For question *b*, the students should look at the two hotel photos in the article and discuss, firstly, what they see in the photos and, secondly, what they think about a company sending its employees or managers there. It's probably a good idea to ask them to think about small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or small subsidiaries of multinationals when answering the question.

Key words

Put the students in pairs and give them a letter, A or B. Student As should try to find the key words that match definitions 1-8 and Student Bs should do the same with definitions 9-16. When they have finished, they should share their answers with each other.

Stronger students could discuss what the key words could be before looking for them in the article.

To extend this task, ask students to mark the stress on each word (as marked in the key below).

Key:

1. *cliente*; 2. *staid*; 3. *bespoke*; 4. *venue*; 5. *trust*; 6. *charity*;
7. *heritage*; 8. *philanthropic*; 9. *perception*; 10. *cut back*;
11. *rationalizing*; 12. *competitive*; 13. *unique*; 14. *incentive*;
15. *knock-on effect*; 16. *discretion*

Understanding the article

The students should answer the questions with information from the article. The questions are asked in the order that the information appears in the article.

Key:

1. *a travel and events firm (para 1)*
2. *It means the outermost layer of the earth's atmosphere, or, symbolically speaking, the world of the very, very, rich. (para 1)*
3. *John Saunders implies that many employees find traditional conference venues uninspiring and they want something different. (para 2)*
4. *Companies want to seem forward-thinking. (para 4)*
5. *Firms are spending money on business gatherings; many are holding creative events in smaller venues rather than organizing standard meetings. (para 6)*
6. *by being focused, customized events that meet tighter budgets (para 7)*
7. *Often corporate clients will bring family and friends with them. (para 9)*
8. *firms in growth sectors, such as investment and technology (para 10)*
9. *high tech equipment, such as walk-throughs, augmented reality and 3D mock-ups (para 12)*

Understanding the title

Now that students have understood the content of the article, they should attempt to explain why the author chose to give it this title.

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Teaching and learning strategy:

Understanding the title

Many of us are guilty of skipping over or skimming the titles or headlines of articles. Yet they usually contain cleverly chosen words, often with double meanings, and are more than worth the time you spend looking at them.

With this in mind, the first thing to do with the title of this article would be to check that students understand what it relates to, i.e. the hotels and business venues mentioned in the article. Then we could look at the way the antonyms *small* and *big* are used. *Small* is used as a physical description; the simplest sense of the word, and the one that will be the first dictionary entry for *small*. *Big*, however, does not mean *big* in a physical sense, but rather *big* in a metaphorical sense – that is, *popular*. If you look up *big* in a dictionary, this will not be the first definition, but probably the second or third.

And do not forget the easily ignored word *now*. This also tells us a lot about the content of the article, i.e. that there have been changes and that things are different now. The verb turns the few words into a 'proper' sentence. Headlines often miss out some verbs. Would this title still work if the verb was removed?

With such a large amount of information contained in those four simple words, it's a good idea to take a closer linguistic look.

Language: Word pairs

First, students should match the words to make expressions that were used in the article. They should then check their answers by looking back at the article. The word pairs are in the order they appear in the article.

Secondly, they should use them to talk about the company Exosphere and what they can offer business clients.

Key:

1. i; 2. a; 3. f; 4. b; 5. g; 6. e; 7. c; 8. d; 9. j; 10. h

Planning a proposal

Put students in pairs or small groups and ask them to plan an outline of an extra-special event – a one-off in their company's history. Tell them that the funds are

available; they just need to convince the decision-makers into spending them.

Students should first read the MICE information box and then look at their answers from the previous tasks as well as take inspiration from the photos in the article. They should then put together ideas for a proposal to celebrate this event, e.g. by drawing a mind-map. The five specific questions will get them started. Explain that they should go beyond these questions and answers, and develop their proposal further.

Writing task

Using the information from Task 6, students should write a proposal to the appropriate decision-maker in their company.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business section on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: We are not geeks

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/we-are-not-geeks/552209.article>

You may also find topical and relevant *Guardian* news lessons here on onestopenglish:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/news-lessons/>

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1 Lead-in

Discuss the questions below.

- How are company anniversaries, jubilees or major successes celebrated in your company?
- Look at the hotel photos in the article. Why might a company decide to send their employees to these locations?

2 Key words

Read the definitions and find the words in the article. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

Student A

- the customers of a store, hotel, restaurant, etc. considered as a group (para 1)
- serious and rather boring (para 2)
- designed and produced for particular customers (para 2)
- a place where an activity or event happens (para 4)
- an organization that manages money or property so that it can help other people or organizations (para 4)
- an organization to which you give money so that it can give money and help to people who are poor or ill, or who need advice and support (para 4)
- the art, buildings, traditions and beliefs that a society considers important to its history and culture (para 5)
- helping people, especially by giving money to those who need it (para 5)

Student B

- a particular way of understanding or thinking about something (para 5)
- to reduce the amount of something, especially money that you spend (para 6)
- making an organization more effective, for example by getting rid of some staff (para 7)
- offering goods or services at cheaper prices than other companies (para 7)
- not the same as anything or anyone else (para 8)
- something that makes you want to do something or to work harder, because you know that you will benefit by doing this (para 9)
- the indirect result of something (para 9)
- careful and sensitive behaviour that does not upset or offend people (para 10)

Small is now big

by Vicki Sussens

Small is now big

Where should it be? In a castle or a railway shed? Company events are no longer always held in mundane, purpose-built premises; instead, the trend is moving towards more exclusive places, as Vicki Sussens reports.



The Kasbah Tamadot hotel, Morocco

- 1 Your firm is turning 25 next year, so how is it planning to celebrate? What about taking all the staff to the grand old Waldhaus spa complex in Flims, Switzerland, for a four-day skiing holiday? Probably not, but that may be because you don't belong to the exosphere, the outermost layer of the earth's atmosphere, or, symbolically speaking, the world of the very, very rich. For firms with money to spend, luxury events in extraordinary venues are in – such as the skiing week mentioned above, which was arranged earlier this year for a finance company by a London travel and events firm that, making no secret of its clientele, calls itself Exosphere.
- 2 Corporate events at the top end of the market have long moved away from staid hotels towards bespoke experiences, says the firm's head, John Saunders: "Once you start talking about hotels and PowerPoint presentations, you have lost this audience. They want something different." For example, the meeting Exosphere recently arranged in the Swiss Alps for a group of the world's largest individual investors included a private performance from the spectacular Canadian entertainers Cirque du Soleil.
- 3 And last year, the CEO of an international private-equity firm wanted to thank his staff for their hard work – all 120 of them. Exosphere booked them into the historic Four Seasons hotel in Florence, where they enjoyed three days of sightseeing, wine tasting and sumptuous meals, including lunch in one of the region's finest private castles. To add to the glamour, the guests toured the countryside in a convoy of classic Italian Fiat 500s and Alfa Romeo Spiders.
- 4 Venues play a big part in bespoke corporate events. "If you want to seem forward-thinking, then you choose an original venue," says Saunders. The Roundhouse in Camden was once used to clean and service British

Railways steam trains. In the 1960s, it became a rock-and-roll venue for bands like The Rolling Stones and The Who. Recently, it was taken over by a trust and renovated, with income from rentals going to charity. Exosphere persuaded one of its clients, a private bank, to use the Roundhouse for its annual conference, which it normally held in a London hotel.

- 5 "The bank was rebranding, and conferences are an important part of the marketing mix," says Saunders. "The venue was perfect. It has a wonderful heritage, is an interesting building and has that philanthropic aspect." Since the bank's key clients are big global names in the entertainment world, Exosphere invited some of them to give an exclusive performance after the conference. "Guests said, 'Wow, this is not what we expected of this bank', so we changed perceptions about how the bank will do things in the future," says Saunders.

**Venues reflect what your company is about.
"If you want to seem forward-thinking, then you choose an original venue"**

John Saunders, head of UK travel and events
firm Exosphere

- 6 But original, small venues are not only in demand in the luxury market. Recent studies show that, after having cut back during the difficult last years, firms are again spending money on business gatherings, also

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known as MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences/conventions/congresses and Exhibitions/events). This January, the global conference and hotel management firm Benchmark Hospitality reported a trend away from standardized meetings towards creative events in smaller venues.



Singita Sweni Lodge, South Africa

7 While industries in growth areas – such as technology and new industries – had healthy budgets, other firms were rationalizing. To get more value out of meetings, they wanted focused, customized events that met tighter budgets. The study also found that firms were choosing smaller venues for security reasons. “Today’s meeting technology brings a stronger need for secure environments. There’s much at risk in this competitive business environment,” the study says.

8 Small, exclusive hotels are benefiting from this trend. A study by the Meeting Professionals International Foundation, released in March, shows that, of more than 1.3 million meetings held in Britain in 2011, 64% were small (fewer than 100 attendees), with only 27.7% being held in large hotels and 14.2% in conference or exhibition centres. Almost 20% were held in “unique, unusual or special-event” venues. Indeed, a virtual tour of the world’s loveliest resorts, such as Banyan Tree, built at treetop level on Indonesia’s tropical Bintan Island, or the Kasbah Tamadot hotel at the foot of Morocco’s Atlas Mountains, once a palace, shows they attract this business – but don’t actively advertise for it.

9 The Singita Sweni Lodge, in South Africa’s Kruger National Park, for example, does not see itself as a corporate-events venue, yet several times a year, firms take guests there. Lodge manager Kevin Pongola says that, in the past few years, global companies, mostly in mining, banking and cars, have used Singita for

incentives. Recently, for example, a leading Swiss chocolate maker thanked its management for a good year by taking them on a tour of South Africa, including to Singita. These bookings are a big part of their business and have a knock-on effect. “Often guests will bring family and friends to visit,” says Pongola.

10 Greg Simons, events manager at the 19th-century Holbeck Ghyll Country House Hotel in England’s Lake District, once owned by the UK’s richest man, Lord Lonsdale, also confirms a rise in business bookings. They are usually for groups of 10 to 20 and typically from firms in growth sectors such as investment and technology. Holbeck Ghyll belongs to the Pride of Britain Hotels, which was started 30 years ago to combine the resources of small but exclusive hotels for marketing purposes. It does not actively promote members as corporate venues, even though 37 members offer exclusive use of their hotels for corporate events. But that’s probably a good strategy: businesses want venues that offer intimacy and, more importantly, discretion.

11 Saunders reports that Exosphere events are as discreet as possible: “Anyone walking into the venue would have no idea that an event is taking place there. Our clients are often high profile and don’t want to attract attention.”

12 But you don’t need to go to exotic venues for an extraordinary experience. Indeed, as Saunders says, you can be creative with almost any venue, especially with the help of high tech equipment. “The use of walk-throughs, augmented reality and 3D mock-ups has exploded in the last years,” he says. Exosphere recently turned rooms in a hotel into a virtual landscape for a property firm selling a luxury overseas development. “It gave guests the feel of the property without actually being there.”

13 Technology, however, can also be used for those with smaller budgets. So, while small venues are now big, companies don’t need big budgets to create meetings that are out of this world.

VICKI SUSSENS is a South African journalist and an editor at *Business Spotlight*, with a special focus on management, business and social issues.

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3 Understanding the article

Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What kind of company is Exosphere?
2. What are the meanings, both literal and symbolic, of the name Exosphere?
3. Why are companies moving away from holding their events in purpose-built business hotels?
4. Why is the choice of business venue important?
5. What reported trends are being seen in business gatherings?
6. How can expensive customized events still provide value for money?
7. What further benefits are there for hotels that offer bespoke business gatherings?
8. Which types of business are typically booking bespoke events?
9. What other services does Exosphere offer clients who do not want to book a luxury event abroad?

4 Understanding the title

Decide why the author chose the article title *Small is now big* and what exactly it refers to.

5 Language: Word pairs

a. Match these word pairs from the article.

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. luxury | a. venues |
| 2. extraordinary | b. performance |
| 3. bespoke | c. environments |
| 4. private | d. tour |
| 5. sumptuous | e. events |
| 6. customized | f. experiences |
| 7. secure | g. meals |
| 8. virtual | h. budgets |
| 9. exclusive | i. events |
| 10. smaller | j. use |

b. Use the word pairs to talk about the company Exosphere and what it offers its clients.

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6 Planning a proposal

Your small- to medium-sized company is going to celebrate its 25th year in business. Business is booming and this anniversary calls for an extra-special celebration!

Using the MICE information box below – and your answers from the previous tasks – put together ideas for a proposal to celebrate this event. Start by answering these questions:

- Who will attend the event?
- How long will it last?
- Where would you like the event to take place?
- How will you make it 'special'?
- Will you use the services of an agency like Exosphere?

MICE strong again

In a survey published in January 2013, the conference and hotel management firm Benchmark Hospitality reported increasing demand for venues for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences/conventions/congresses and Exhibitions/events). Other trends included:

- a focus on customized, creative and unique meetings;
- increased demand for team-building events;
- a growth in the market from these segments: education (particularly engineering and technology), medical, biotech, high-tech, new media, NGOs and financial services;
- a demand for venues providing fitness and recreational activities;
- socially responsible and environmentally sustainable venues.

For more information, go to www.benchmarkresortsandhotels.com/press_media/top-ten-meeting-trends-for-

7 Writing task

Put your proposal in written form so that you can send it to the appropriate decision-maker in your company.

