



The benefits of consortium membership for independent venues and small venue groups.

Venues of Excellence (VOE), the UK's leading UK sales and marketing consortium for independent venues recently announced their new Quality Strategy to members in November 2022, which has prompted CEO, Mandy Jennings to engage in conversation with key partners within the venues to discuss how Venue of Excellence helps them deliver excellence within their own business.

Our venue partners have lots of ways to interact with the Venues of Excellence team, and in addition benefit from regular sales and marketing activity, peer to peer networking opportunities, a bespoke Learning and Development Academy and a Preferred Partner Programme that aligns key products and services to the hospitality sector to assist venues when seeking new suppliers.

Mandy Jennings, CEO of Venues of Excellence recently took time out to sit with Julian Kettleborough, Commercial Director for thestudio to reflect on their membership journey with the consortium and discuss what key benefits they feel have specifically helped their own organisation.

thestudio Leeds was introduced in 2019, followed by their Manchester and Glasgow venues in 2022, and most recently in April their Birmingham venue. Mandy was keen to learn how thestudio have benefitted from their membership journey, to enable the Venues of Excellence Membership team share their successes with others.

Julian, what did you look for from a consortium when you were considering membership?

We were keen to increase awareness without diminishing the individuality of our brand. Part of the membership process is a site visit and audit to ensure that your venues meet the Quality Criteria for Venues of Excellence Membership. The recently launched Quality Strategy gives us as a business an ongoing independent audit of our standards throughout our membership to the consortium.

The benefits from a membership consortium is important to us, so being able to have additional marketing support, a great business referral programme with 'likeminded' venues delivering a consistently high level of service and the opportunity to network with, share experiences and learn from other venues made us feel we were joining a family not just an organisation.

Once in the Venue of Excellence family, what do you feel are the three key things we demonstrate to you as a member?

Thinking about our venues, I feel these would be:

1. The commitment to delivering high standards across the portfolio of venues.
2. The willingness of other members to share experience and best practice.
3. The opportunities presented by referrals between each of the venues.

Thinking about thestudio Brand, how do you feel Venues of Excellence aligns with your own corporate identity?

We are grateful that we are still very much able to maintain our own individuality without either thestudio or Venues of Excellence being compromised. Venues of Excellence venues are by nature diverse; however, this is underpinned by a consistent commitment to quality, meaning the end guest can have confidence that their event will be a success, regardless of location.

What do you feel has given you the most support during membership?

Mandy and the team at Venues of Excellence have been so supportive of our brand and provided a welcome sounding board during some of the most challenging times our industry has experienced.

On a personal level it can sometimes be lonely being part of a small venue group and I have found the ability to network with other industry peers to be very motivating. I have learnt so much more about the strengths of our business and also developed personally as a result of this.

What enticed you to introduce your other venues into the Venues of Excellence portfolio?

Four years ago, we had several discussions with Mandy and Nicola on how we could work best together, and I was keen to trial the membership with 1 venue and we felt Leeds suited both organisations' objectives. We were really delighted with how quickly we became part of the overall family within Venues of Excellence and the sense of true partnership. After this success we were keen to be able to add our Manchester and Glasgow venues especially after a very tough trading period post Covid. We were genuinely delighted with the support we received during this time. Mandy approached us to say we would really love Birmingham to join the family as it did not feel right not to have it included and there is so much opportunity for this venue from a sales perspective. Membership of Venues of Excellence demonstrates our commitment to providing unique and innovative venues, as well as delivering excellent service through our teams who are equally passionate about delivering the best for our guests.

If you were to give advice to independent venues looking to join a sales and marketing consortium, what do you feel are the key questions to ask?

- Understand your financial investment and your expectations on ROI as these are not always financial.
- Have clarity on the organisations' objectives and annual plans.

Thinking about the consortium, Mandy said: "We have a proven track record when it comes to positioning unique and independent venues within the meetings and events market, our strong and visible Venues of Excellence brand allows customers to associate your venue with our criteria and 'Excellence' that comes with it.

During this membership year we have invested and driven our Quality Strategy by employing a past Venues of Excellence Chair, David Vaughton, as our Quality Ambassador, and he is currently visiting each of our venues to complete a full Quality Assessment and to follow the visit he delivers a robust report to assist them in striving for excellence in 4 key areas – Customer Service, Great Place to Work, Efficient Operations and Business Planning. Each venue is then given recommendations for any improvements to be made and support in how to do this if required."

Julian and colleagues from **thestudio** recently met with David to conduct a Quality assessment, and he commented: "We really appreciated spending time with David and the opportunity to have an external assessment with some suggestions on how we can evolve our long-term plans are much valued."

Our sales and venue find business has grown substantially since 2022 and we are proud to have converted the highest value of sales in the consortiums 30-year history. Our latest members to join our family continue to show our diversity of styles and venue types, from iconic sporting venues to private members clubs, academic venues to purist conference and training centres, all proud to showcase their golden thread of excellence.

Here at Venues of Excellence, we love Ambassadors of our brand and Julian is a great ambassador whose opinion we truly value. The trends in the hospitality sector are constantly changing combined with the needs of the conference and event planner; here at Venues of Excellence we continue to shape the consortium and strive to be a leader in the marketplace and a respected voice within the hospitality industry.”