

CBI has taken over Battcon — the industry's most focused event for real-world battery expertise. Being held during the first week of August in Orlando, the conference promises unbiased insight, hands-on learning and direct access to the leaders solving today's biggest challenges. Here, CBI's director, **Alistair Davidson** and senior technical director, **Matt Raiford** reveal how they came to be running the show.

We took over Battcon because we believe in advancing the future of battery technologies

Batteries International: How did CBI take over the Battcon conference? I've heard it's Matt's baby — is that true?

Matt: I don't know if you would call it our baby, but we adopted it. Battcon has a long history in the United States. It was first started by Alber, a telecommunications company. Vertiv acquired Alber — Vertiv is a huge provider of UPS systems and data centers, and Battcon became their forum.

Alistair: It's a very end user focused conference. Battery companies talking to the end users, and the end users being educated how to use their batteries. We haven't had that before. ELBC, for example, is a platform focus.

Matt: So Vertiv acquired it, and then they held it for about 20 years. In that time, Vertiv changed and morphed and expanded. And a couple of years ago, their board changed, and they basically said: 'We don't want to dedicate time to things that don't make more than 150% profit.' So it was decided that they were not going to do conferences anymore and they got rid of all of their events. And it stranded Battcon.

That's when they put it upon the planning committee to find a new home. Vertiv were very kind, and they just said: 'Whoever you guys pick, whoever you want to adopt it, we'll give it to them, okay?'

Alistair: Our membership was really

supportive of us running it. They felt it was a technical conference, and obviously we had the equity of running a technical workshop already. So it was a sensible home for us, given our expertise in the field.

BI: Had you made a decision that you wanted to have a bigger platform in terms of conferences and that this was the direction you were looking to go?

Alistair: No, it wasn't that, but it did meet the overall objective of CBI. One of our big focuses is to showcase lead battery innovation, and this felt very alongside that. It's multi-technology and a great showpiece for the lead battery industry.

Matt: Also, a lot of our member companies exhibit and give papers at this conference. And I knew most of the technical committee anyway through my work with standards and fire codes on the stationary side. So they were finding a new kind of home to fall back on and they eventually voted for us.

BI: Was there anyone else in the running to take it over?

Matt: I do know that other companies were interested, but I don't know who.

Alistair: One of the things that we wanted, was to interact more with end users in the industrial energy storage

space and we thought Battcon would give us that opportunity and it has.

Matt: That's what allowed us to suddenly be able to speak to stationary end users specifically in the US — utility companies, telecommunications firms, data center providers. Companies like Southern



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Company, Comcast, AT&T — these pretty premier organizations that use a lot of batteries but they're typically one step back from that part of the supply chain.

So, it has allowed us to actually speak to these really large consumers in a more demonstrative, intentional way. And, like Alistair said, it's multi-technology, so lead has a significant presence there, but lithium, sodium and zinc all have their slice of the pie too. Lead will always be our sweetheart. But now we actually get to see how all the batteries play.

Alistair: We've had some big names, significant data companies have just signed up to attend which is great news.

Matt: About 40-ish percent of all the world's data centers are present in the United States, so that's huge.

BI: Do you have plans to change anything about Battcon?

Matt: We want to keep the fact that it's a really practical, end-user focused conference. There's a big training element around how to maintain batteries and also a lot of stuff about getting operators and engineers up to date on best practices and standards. We don't want to change any of that.

But one thing we are doing is bringing in students. Years ago there were mentorship programs associated with the event and we'll be resurrecting those.

BI: It's a bit of a departure from what CBI has done previously. What have been the challenges for you in terms of preparing for Battcon?

Matt: We've taken a step back to understand what the crowd who comes to Battcon want. We adopted the conference five months before it was due to take place in Miami last year. Vertiv had planned it all and then dropped it, saying "Go find a home for this." And it was a mad scramble for us before the event date to understand what we had.

Alistair: We inherited a lot of the program as well. And the feedback we had from some of the delegates was that the education is important but the program was getting repetitive.

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There wasn't anything new.

So one of the things we've done this year is implement some new speakers, slightly different directions on the topics, and also made it more global. We've invited our members from CBI who are not just in the US, but from other regions of the world as well.

Matt: The US is avant garde when it comes to very hot topics — no pun intended — such as fire safety for energy storage systems. Partly it's because of the sheer presence of BESS systems in the US, and then just a lot of different stakeholders, standards such as NFPA and international fire codes are housed in the US.

So these best practices — like how do you actually build a safe BESS — we want to translate that to the rest of our membership. And Battcon serves our membership in that way as we now have a forum for best practices. Battcon has always been a leader in that regard, and we want to maintain that.

BI: Is it a commercial project for you? Or an educational one?

Alistair: We don't run events for financial gain. That isn't the priority for these events. It's to help our industry. We're not here to make huge profits. We believe that running Battcon will help the lead battery industry to showcase their products and interact with end users.

Matt: The other thing about Battcon is that the paper selection process is extremely thorough. So the abstracts, the technical committee approves them. It's a smaller set of papers. And then you actually write a periodical, like a peer review.

They review every slide. It's very robust. Therefore the quality of the technical program — it's not meant to be commercial, it's meant to truly be educational. If you submit something that's too commercial it gets rejected. It needs to be something like, 'lessons I've learnt from my journey'.

Also, it's a forum to understand

how new technologies can serve this end user base. What technologies are actually gaining momentum? It allows us to understand the battery landscape a little bit more widely. There's an element of, 'What's on the horizon?'

Alistair: There's a lot of potential at Battcon. It should be our showcase. It's the only conference out there that has this sort of end user industrial focus on all batteries. And there's so much potential for us to improve it and grow.

Matt: It's important for us to get the right people in the room. We want the people who fix the problems — the engineers and operators, the technologists. So we're trying to keep that part very vibrant and alive. But it's brilliant because Battcon allows us to actually see the entire landscape. ■



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