



Cityscape Abu Dhabi 2010.

EVENT INSIDER CITYSCAPE ABU DHABI

Group director **Chris Speller** says transparency, project delivery and sustainability will be the key themes at Cityscape Abu Dhabi 2011, taking place from April 17-20. *The Big Project* finds out more



Cityscape group director Chris Speller.

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How are preparations going for this year's event?

It's a busy time, especially as we've just taken over the existing real estate event in Egypt called Next Move, which is held in April every year.

We'll be launching it a week after Cityscape Abu Dhabi, which is our flagship event, so in addition to preparing for Cityscape I've been back and forth to Cairo, recently.

Egypt had a prominent presence at Cityscape Global 2010; will the country be significantly represented at Cityscape Abu Dhabi 2011?

We expect to see a lot of Egyptian companies coming to the event as Abu Dhabi is a pinnacle for the MENA region in terms of how real estate is being developed at a slower rate, giving the market sustainability.

The Egyptian market is an exciting one but for an institutional investor, it comes with much concern due to a lack of transparency. It's in its

first year as an emerging market and is a great place to invest if you're careful. All investors across the world have learnt lessons in buying off-plan and now want to see where the project is and what stage it is at.

What new participants have been confirmed for this year?

We have got several more of the government entities onboard, such as developer and project manager Musanada, and the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture & Heritage, which is spearheading a lot of developments for schooling, mosques and Emirati housing.

What are the key themes that will be addressed?

The key focuses for Abu Dhabi this year will be transparency, project completion and delivery, and sustainability.

There is also an interest in how Vision 2030 is progressing and what industry laws and regulations are being introduced.



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Are you expecting to see more international visitors at the event than in 2010?

I expect we will see a more international visitor focus. There has been investor interest from abroad, looking at Abu Dhabi as a sovereign wealth fund.

We'll see people coming from Canada, Australia, the UK, France, China and Korea. I've also had enquiries from Russia as there is a lot of growth in that area.

Plus, investors aren't coming here looking to make money; they want to create relationships with developers from the GCC, specifically Abu Dhabi and the UAE.

Last year, Cityscape Dubai was rebranded as Cityscape Global reflecting a slow market; do you plan to rebrand Cityscape Abu Dhabi as an international conference?

Abu Dhabi focuses predominantly on what is happening in the emirate; international visitors targeting people operating in Abu Dhabi. The event in Dubai is a truly international event which doesn't focus on one target market.

Abu Dhabi is a market which continues to carry great weight and strength behind it, as well as confidence.



A product demonstration at last year's Citybuild.

Will new projects be launched at the event?

There will be new projects announced, some of which we're waiting for confirmation on, but we cannot reveal these at this stage.

What areas of opportunity will be highlighted at the show?

Retail will be a very strong aspect. There has been a lot of growth within that particular area so it will be interesting to see how the Government of Abu Dhabi will support and drive that sector further.

Obviously tourism and three key aspects of Vision 2030 will be prominent: real estate, infrastructure and economic sustainability.

How many visitors are you expecting to attend?

Visitor registration doesn't normally start this early, though we have communicated with previous visitors and participants. We're not looking at a massive growth in terms of numbers compared to last year, but we do hope to sustain the level of visitors and participants.

Is this the same for the Citybuild component of the show?

This year's Citybuild will see a 200% growth. We've partnered with the Malaysia Trade and Development Corporation (Martrade), which is hosting its show alongside the event

What is the general attitude of show participants to market conditions in 2011?

Many have faced difficulties — the global economic downturn has affected everybody, but Abu Dhabi hasn't been hit as hard as some other markets.

However, the feedback that we're getting is that the market is more positive and there is a sense of realism.

We expect that some of the effects and consequences of the downturn will be raised in the conferences, including levels of pricing — from a developer's perspective — and what will happen in the future.

Cityscape gives people an opportunity to ask these questions and allows for more transparency in the market. ●

