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Spreading the word on stress

You can imagine how fulfilling it was for me, on our first big day, to step aboard the red, double-decker Stress Bus

By Carol Spiers, Special to Gulf News
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We're not in the market today, thank you!" Whether you're trying to sell a single product or a whole new concept, I guess you'll have been hearing those depressing words regularly during this recession.

Well, this is the tenth anniversary of a national, anti-stress initiative that I launched in the UK — which at first met with much scepticism but is now firmly established as an annual event in the British calendar of stress management.

It was at a meeting of our professional charity, the International Stress Management Association (ISMA), that we were sitting around the table discussing ideas to keep stress high on the national agenda.

Someone vaguely mentioned 'focus', and suddenly I saw that the whole emphasis could be focused on a single day in the year: 'National Stress Awareness Day'. Everyone loved this concept although nobody could suggest how to pay for it!

With sponsorship in mind, one of our colleagues introduced us to an Australian telecoms company, Telstra, who at our first meeting showed all the signs of being singularly unimpressed. However, at the end of my presentation they all agreed to a stress test.

Spot test

I took one of our company products out of my briefcase — a small business card embedded with tiny crystals that change colour with temperature which by pressing your thumb on the pad on the front of the card, you can get an instant readout of your own stress levels.

This small demonstration impressed them, and suddenly they agreed to be our first sponsors. And so, the first Wednesday in November every year became recognised as National Stress Awareness Day, in the UK.

You can imagine how fulfilling it was for me, on our first big day, to step aboard the red, double-decker Stress Bus, promoting 'National Stress Awareness Day' from its sides, as we set about touring London.

Wherever we stopped, people came pouring out of the offices to come on board the bus. It's hard to believe, but I had completed thirty BBC radio and TV interviews by 9am! By the evening, National Stress Awareness Day had been featured prominently by the Evening Standard, Bloomberg, CNN and Sky News, amongst others.

Soon, National Stress Awareness Day was being celebrated well beyond London. Members of the Association would run training initiatives up and down the country and it

had become, an 'event'.

Ten years on, my next challenge is to launch ISMA Middle East, here in the UAE. As you know, this column is equipped with a Readers' Comments feature, so let me know your opinion, whether you are an individual, stressed-out at work; a stress management consultant or a potential, corporate sponsor.

Hopefully, we may soon be hearing about International Stress Awareness Day, with red double-decker buses driving around Oxford Street in London and Shaikh Zayed Road in Dubai!