

### Centre Stage

A high proportion of the region's top sellers may come from abroad, but Belgium has developed its own export for the industry, and with a client list including U2, French superstar Johnny Hallyday, Bruce Springsteen, Oasis and Depeche Mode, Stageco is now a market leader.

With 170 full time staff and an annual turnover of €40m-€50m, the staging group has offices in Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the US. Its Belgium headquarters was expanded in 2008 with the additional of new office and warehouse space for its domestic division, following the purchase of local competitor All Stage three years ago.



Stageco operations director Tom Bilsen says the company is now as equally placed to handle major touring artists as shorter projects for trade shows, fashion, television or music. And with the local division supplying smaller Flemish festivals such as Suikerrock, Lokerse feesten, Maanrock and Marktrock (in addition to Werchter and Pukkelpop), Bilsen reports that some are feeling the pinch of recession.

"They're really suffering this year because many of the sponsors are turning them down," he says. But through refocusing on its domestic market, as well as continuing to break ground on international stage design (as U2's imminent 360-degree stage is rumoured to attest), Stageco's next challenge is finding regular work outside of the festival months.

"The mission now, for all of our local divisions, is to attract and support more events out of that typical outdoor season; to get a more stable workload," Bilsen says.

