

The value of trade shows

By [Guy Stehlik](#)

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We've just seen the back-end of the trade show season in the hospitality industry. Current conversation concerns the present value of participating in industry trade shows. Should we attend? Should we not?



INDABA

Participating in trade shows depends largely on the evolution of your company, and perhaps more importantly, the market you are targeting. Obviously, some of the larger hotel groups who have a strong international buyer base find enormous value in trade shows, so it's a no-brainer for them to attend and participate.

Large groups, like the City Lodge Group, for example, don't find it necessary to exhibit at the international trade shows: a smart choice, one I presume that's based on the fact that their focus is local, not international buyers. We at BON Hotels have realised that the large trade shows are not actually designed for our particular market. So for the smaller guys like us, attendance is a 'nice to do' rather than a necessity.

Unfortunately, it is easy to get wrapped up in the 'have to be seen' to get your brand out there. While trade shows provide a place to raise the profile of your brand, let's face it, for a startup or any relatively young business, trade shows are expensive. Not only are you carrying the costs of the exhibition fees, but also air tickets, accommodation, entertainment, an entire staff complement out of office... the list goes on. So the question isn't just, can we afford to be part of the action? It's also, can we afford to miss out?

The highest value of a trade show for us at present is the networking. Meeting stakeholders and decision makers who we would not normally meet is a huge draw-card. Capitalising on meetings, attending enlightening workshops, learning new trends and networking at the social events are our top goals. So to make the most out of Indaba or WTM, preparation needs to be on point.

Of course, we would love to grab every opportunity, but we also need to make smart financial decisions. After weighing up the costs, the pros and cons, our target market, and the overall value to the company, we at BON Hotels took a courageous step this year, opting out of rather than in at our regular appearance at Indaba, Africa's biggest and most recognised travel industry trade show. We are realising the need to be quite selective, and at this stage in our evolution, we will spend our energy, time and money elsewhere.

The jury is out on whether or not we have made the right decision. It's interesting times ahead for our industry exhibitions and events.

ABOUT GUY STEHLIK

Guy Stehlik is the CEO and founder of BON Hotels and Director of BON Hotels International West Africa. Having vast experience in all aspects of Hotel Management as well as having owned his own hotels, Guy created BON Hotels as an "owner-staff-community-guest" centric company to herald in and define an exciting new era in hotel management.

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