

Been there, done that, now let's get really smart!

By  Karen Ashwin

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Thanks to the human race's preference for face-to-face interpersonal communications, meetings, events and marketing activations enjoy pride of place as fabulous marketing tools. However, we also know that great events come at a price.



More so than ever, the heat is on to ensure that events deliver serious marketing and financial results - and that clients are assured of their incomparable experiential value, especially when paired with the latest trends and technology!

1. With face-to-face contact and personal interactions taking the number one spot as the most prized (but often the costliest) form of communication, the **pressure to deliver memorable live event experiences and ROI in an increasingly competitive environment is set to increase.**
2. The communication technology available - live crossings, feeds, broadcasts, Skype and webinars - which promote real-time, online consultations and exchanges of ideas in different locations (across the country and the world) have certainly presented a challenge to the event industry.

Companies and individuals are **questioning and closely examining the costs and benefits associated with face-to-face meetings and events.** These can be considerable, when taking into account travel, accommodation - not forgetting the associated carbon footprint which is now also factored into the equation.

3. So, when the event route has been selected as the way forward to achieve a business objective, the **pressure is on to ensure that this premium option delivers everything - and more** - for both the customer and their specific target audience.
4. Working within the limitations of a looming recession, tight budgets and pressure to deliver something exceptional, clever **creativity remains a key differentiator** to delivering value for money and an unforgettable "wow" element to any event experience.
5. The clever use of increasingly **smart technology** in every single aspect of the event process is set to increase - enhancing everything from budget limitations and effective niche marketing to a very select target audience and database management to paperless delegate management and extraordinary creativity.
6. **Social media** (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), **QR codes, microsites and mobile apps for iPhones and iPads are enjoying increasing popularity** to enhance the live events process and this will continue, especially as all these forms of communication continue evolving and becoming more sophisticated themselves.
7. **All about the brand:** focused events, tight messaging and invaluable business networking opportunities will predominate over a more relaxed and entertaining approach to events. Time and budget pressures will ensure that event objectives and formats are simplified and rendered more powerful by focusing on the brand as the golden thread, binding everything together.
8. However, the trend and push for ever more slick, technologically smart and creatively astounding and memorable event experiences is balanced by the global demand for events - be they meetings, incentives, conferences or exhibitions - which are sustainable from a social, environmental and economic perspective. The **People, Planet, Profit** sensibility and way of doing business is here to stay.

9. **Think global, act local.** So while we're globally connected and competitive, looking at the rest of the world as our playground, we need to take into account the communities on our doorstep and behave ethically and inclusively.

This includes supporting local communities in terms of buying locally produced food, arts, entertainment, crafts and other supplies related to the entire event process, as well as ensuring that our carbon footprint is minimised through not only the reduce, re-use and recycle concept, but also initiatives such as planting trees as carbon credits in an effort to minimise the environmental impact relating to events held.

In keeping with this, corporate will embrace this trend, enhancing their corporate social responsibility efforts by including teambuilding events such as **voluntourism and community and environmental interventions** on their annual calendar.

10. Now for some really good news! As the international economic community increasingly regards **Africa as an attractive investment partner and destination**, this will translate into corporate meeting and event opportunities, not only within South Africa, but also the rest of the continent as well.

SA boasts an exceptionally well-developed, professional and competitive events industry and SA companies will find opportunities to work further afield on the continent, as the demand for services increases.

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