



THE MAN BEHIND THE JEC

With his unique ability to assess each situation and act without delay, Craig Newman has successfully turned the Johannesburg Expo Centre into a highly profitable business, year on year. This June, he celebrated 10 years of service as CEO.

O **N 1 JUNE 2006**, Craig Newman's appointment as CEO signalled the beginning of a new era for the Johannesburg Expo Centre (JEC).

Although it is now one of the top venues in Africa, the JEC was a forgotten gem when it bid to be chosen as host venue for the international broadcast centre for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

"One of my most memorable moments was my very first day at the JEC," recalls Craig. "Four hours into it, I sat back and asked myself, what have I done? The reality had kicked in that I needed to build this business up from the ashes. It was a quite a reality check," he laughs. "I've never forgotten that moment and it was that reality check that has driven me on continuously."

Having set about fixing things immediately, Craig became the major driving force behind the JEC, with his exceptional vision and his confidence to make things happen.

His liberal and frank demeanor is complemented by his positive outlook and

where some may see challenges, Craig sees opportunities for growth. "I grew up in a township called Wentworth that was known for its gang scene," says Craig. "It was a tough environment and, as a result, I became a very strong and determined person. Nothing really fazes me. I see setbacks as building blocks and stepping stones to the next level," he says.

EARLY CAREER

Craig's career began in 1991 at Forge Ahead Exhibitions. Since then, he has successfully occupied leadership positions in companies that included TML Reed Exhibitions, Oasys Innovations, Balanced Solutions and Kagiso Exhibitions and Events.

"I joined an organisation that focused on below-the-line activations," Craig explains. "This got me working with a lot of people, which I enjoyed because I'm a people person. It also led me to doing activations for my clients, which usually involved exhibitions, and that's how I got involved in this industry."

NATURAL-BORN LEADER

With more than 20 years' experience in the South African events and exhibitions industry, Craig has developed an enviable understanding of the market and his wealth of knowledge and experience has been tantamount to the excellent turnaround strategy for the JEC.

"The JEC has gone from strength to strength thanks to Craig," says John Webb of Expo Guys. Hannes Venter, general manager, JEC, says, "Craig is a good manager, a good leader and shows an incremental approach to changing the status quo."

"My fellow shareholder and business partner, Raymond Burke, is my mentor," says Craig. "He has over 40 years' experience in the South African exhibitions industry and, over and above that, he epitomises what an entrepreneur should be. He has everything in his arsenal to be a successful entrepreneur and he has taught me the importance of calculated risk."

As the current CEO of the leading, multipurpose venue, Craig is respected and admired by all who meet him. His friendly approach, together with his fearless attitude, makes for a potent combination that is capable of leading the JEC for years to come.

"In my time as CEO, I've learned that it's important to lead with integrity, confidence and insight," he says. "One must never become complacent and that's why I do whatever I can to feed my enthusiasm, so that I continue



FROM LEFT JEC is the proud host of the Gauteng leg of Ultra South Africa, the centre meets all the logistical and infrastructural requirement of construction machinery and mining machine trade fairs such as BAUMA CONEXPO AFRICA, Asia from its capacity for entertainment, the JEC is well equipped to host trade and industry shows, as well as company year-ends.



to develop and grow as a leader." Craig also acknowledges the importance that teamwork has had in his career. "You're only as strong as your weakest link and I'm lucky enough to have an excellent team to work with," he says.

ROLE AT UFI

In 2015, Craig was appointed on to the board of the UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry. This was followed by his appointment as the vice-chair of the Middle East Africa Chapter. "This has been one of the highlights of my career thus far," says Craig. "In my capacity as vice-chair for our region, it's my responsibility to draw more attention to the role that Africa can play in the global exhibitions industry. We believe that Africa represents the next frontier for growth and development for UFI, and global membership can only benefit by giving Africa its support."

Craig also believes that South Africa has what it takes to become the leading country within the business tourism sector for Africa. "We have the expertise, experience and capability to handle large-scale events;

in fact, we have never dropped the ball on a big international event, irrespective of its demands. We are right up there with what the rest of the world can offer and we need to drive this perception," he says.

A DECADE OF SUCCESS

Reflecting on the past and his time as CEO, Craig feels the best is yet to come. "It has been an exciting, thrilling and adventurous journey to get to where I am now," he says. "I started out in life as a musician and now I find myself in business," he laughs. "It's been a winding road, but also an incredible one."

What would Craig say to those wanting to pursue a career in the exhibitions and events industry? "It's a wonderful and evolving industry," he says. "Your attitude will determine how far you can go and where you could end up. Be diligent, be sincere and always keep your integrity."

Many years ago, a successful businessman posed a question to the JEC CEO that has stuck with him to this day. "He asked me, 'How much is enough?' So, I continuously ask myself the same

question and the right answer is always, 'Just a little bit more.' That's what drives me forward," Craig says. "This doesn't just apply to money but to knowledge and experience as well. I always want just a little bit more."

Thanks to his unwavering passion for what he does, it's clear that Craig will continue to lead the JEC with success for years to come. "When it's all over, I want to be remembered for making a difference," he says. With a decade of excellent service under his belt and a bright future ahead of him, this is certain to be the case. 



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