

Africa's execution of UFI Global Congress an extraordinary success

The 84th UFI Global Congress saw more than 450 delegates from 50 countries around the world converge on Sandton Convention Centre during the first week of November. This was a landmark occasion for the South African exhibitions, conferences and events industry.

Proving once again that South Africa is a country that is alive with possibilities, international delegates were treated to an unforgettable event, which will no doubt leave a lasting impression.

"It was a great honour to welcome the global industry to our African shores," said **Craig Newman**, chief executive officer of Johannesburg Expo Centre and incoming president for UFI 2019.

"Our intention as a collective industry was to leave a lasting impression on our global delegates by giving them a taste of our continent's unique culture and exceptional hospitality," he said.

The local organising committee for the South African edition of the congress pulled out all the stops to ensure that global delegates enjoyed the experience.

The 2017 UFI Congress included a broad range of enriching, insightful and inspiring presentations, conferences and other events, as well as a multitude of social events and networking opportunities, supported by the best in local cuisine,

beverages and entertainment.

Showcasing the best of local industry, the event served organic wines, from Reyneke Wines, hosted tastings from the internationally-awarded cream liqueur, Amarula, and other house brands from the renowned distillery, Distell, in between sessions. Local crafters also showcased their products on site.

Global industry insights

The UFI conference programme encompassed valuable insights to enhance events organisations across the globe. The digital disruptions and Global Index Report sessions were particularly well-received by delegates, along with the African Focus session, which was aimed at presenting the African continent as a worthwhile investment as part of the future of the industry.

Speaking at the UFI General Assembly, outgoing president, **Andreas Gruchow**, said that UFI's membership has grown to 752 members in 2017, an increase of six per cent since 2016, significantly increasing

its footprint globally and boosting its strength as the association of the exhibition industry.

UFI has broadened its base in the Middle East, Africa and Americas chapters. The 43 new members, mostly exhibition venues and exhibition organisers, represented a wide scope of exhibition spaces and agencies all over the world, attracting a host of new talent in the exhibition sector.

True to its theme of "Pressures & Profits", the programme for this year's UFI Global Congress was loaded with sessions focused on overcoming obstacles and adapting to change.

The sessions featured a number of respected, experienced and knowledgeable industry professionals sharing case studies of successes and failures, unpacking research results and discussing the latest trends within the exhibition industry.

The congress highlighted the fact that security remains a crucial factor within the exhibition and events industry when considering aspects such as crowd control, surveillance and security threats.

In future events organisers and venues will no longer be able to ignore the security elephant in the room and industry players be forced to rethink the way they do business, trying to maintain a secure establishment while remaining hospitable and inviting to the public?

Other hot topics included ongoing challenges with regards to human resources and the challenges faced by family businesses.

One of the event highlights included a keynote address by **Johan Reyneke**, founder and owner of Reyneke Wines, who shared his inspirational story in a keynote speech at the UFI Congress.

Years ago, Mr Reyneke wanted to develop an organic wine brand underpinned by his personal philosophy





FROM LEFT: Kai Hattendorf, UFI managing director CEO; Dr Andreas Gruchow, UFI president; Craig Newman, CEO Johannesburg Expo Centre, UFI Global Congress Host.

“there can be no greatness without goodness”, gleaned from his favourite book, *Life of Pi*.

He purchased a piece of land, and began to grow grapes without using any pesticides or artificial components. Of course, as most entrepreneurs can attest, he suffered years of trial and error, was plagued by multiple financial collapses, and stress had a devastating impact on his health.

Driven by the philosophy that you can empower people by providing them with choice, Johan turned a quarter hectare farm into an 80 ha farm, which more than 80 families call home. This cooperative will continue to empower his employees through education, housing and investment, all underpinned by his firm belief that people are not objects or commodities; they are an essential.

Homegrown talent and entertainment

The Gala Dinner hosted at the Johannesburg Expo Centre (JEC) on

RIGHT: The Johannesburg Expo Centre team received a silver plate from UFI as a token of their appreciation of the Expo Centre as host of the UFI Congress 2017. From left: Refilwe Mokgaotsi, marketing and communications executive; Craig Newman, chief executive officer; Tracy Malebana, marketing and communications executive; Leighton May, marketing and communications executive and Desrae McDonnell, exhibition and events manager.

Thursday 2 November provided delegates with an authentic African experience of Ubuntu (the philosophy that ‘I am

because we are’, with strong emphasis on humanity and compassion); showcasing a variety of great cuisine, exquisite wines and home-grown entertainment.

The cast of the global musical sensation, African Footprint, presented a spectacular show as well. The nature and historical tours organised outside of the official programme schedule were designed to position South Africa as a number one tourist destination as well.

“We are exceptionally proud of the success of this year’s congress,” Mr Newman said.

“I believe that our collective efforts made a lasting and positive impact on our international delegates, and that this year’s event will go a long way in positioning the African continent, and South Africa, in particular as a serious international contender for the international future expansion of this sector,” he concluded. ■

