



Of Mice & Meetings



The Meetings, Incentives, Conference and Exhibitions (MICE) industry in the country is boosting major business confidence abroad, generating millions towards the country's economy and developing SMEs. Yet it remains one of the more underrated industries when it comes to South Africa's success indicators. CEO of the Johannesburg Expo Centre Craig Newman offers a different perspective to the industry.

An economic impact report of the 2018 Rand Show alone indicates that about R50-million was injected into the Gauteng economy, over 900 part-time personnel were hired and more than 200 000 people attended the show. Those are just some of the statistics off the back of only one of the many events hosted annually in South Africa. If that's the micro snapshot, then zoom out for a moment and you're looking at a contribution of R115-bn to the South African economy, more than 2 000 000 jobs created directly and indirectly and more than one million business delegates visiting our shores annually according to the most recent news out of the Meeting Africa conference this year – figures that certainly grab attention.

A LONG AND SUCCESSFUL HISTORY

"The South African MICE industry is alive and well and we are certainly no strangers to the exhibition and events space," says Newman. "South Africa has been involved in the exhibitions industry for over 120 years. We are after all coming up to the 125th instalment

of the Rand Show, so there is no doubt that our model works. Exhibitions were designed to create a platform for trade that benefits the economy, creates jobs and secures investor confidence. And that is exactly what the South African MICE industry is doing."

There's certainly no shortage of examples either when it comes to large-scale events that have put the country on the map. From the 2010 Soccer World Cup to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, it is clear that South Africa has the experience and infrastructure to host successful events that bring immense value to the country. South Africa is also leading the charge from the south of the continent throughout the SADC region and the rest of Africa. Craig Newman's appointment as the first African president of the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry is testament to that.

"But, like all industries, ours also comes with interesting challenges. One that we here at the Johannesburg Expo Centre are passionate about resolving is creating the necessary change within the industry when it comes to the supplier chain and emerging small business. It's time to drop the fear tag," Newman adds. "Older and well-established suppliers need to take SMEs and emerging players under their wing and show them the ropes to ensure sustained service delivery quality and broaden the marketplace. Of course, emerging SMEs need to develop a good reputation in delivering too, but they need a foot in the door to do that."

Having said that, Newman suggests that it's the smaller players who need to be knocking



Craig Newman

on doors and taking the initiative to collaborate with the big guys if they want to make inroads. "At the end of the day, the client spending the money wants action and delivery. They want the results, no matter who the supplier is – so established or not, you need to deliver. At the Expo centre, there is a focus on giving emerging guys the opportunity to get involved and we try and influence collaboration."

As the MICE industry in South Africa continues to grow exponentially and international confidence increases, this is certainly a space to watch.