

Do sustainability

As a growing number of people push for a greener, more efficient and socially responsible world, more and more organisations are realising their businesses can do well, through integrating sustainability into their business strategy. But what does it mean to be sustainable in business? **by Aimee Meijsen & Gill Gibbs**

In its most basic sense, sustainability focuses on meeting the needs of the present customer with a set of values that positively affects the way a business operates every day, both within the company and in the community at large, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Simply put, the goal of a sustainable business is to make a positive impact on either its surrounding environment or that of its community, with the assumption that developing such strategies foster company longevity through ensuring resource availability and preserving or increasing financial performance.

With three of South Africa's cities being included in the 2017 Global Destination Sustainability Index, an innovative new measure for the level of sustainability that cities can offer to the business events industry, this illustrates the commitment of the country to becoming a sustainable destination for business events,

as well as the importance of adopting sustainable practices.

Hosting any business event is a resource-intensive activity, from event production, to delegate and exhibitor transportation, to food preparation, through to the manufacturing of stands. If done correctly, business events have the power to transform communities through developing businesses with sustainable employment.

In traditional business cultures, social and environmental concerns have typically been considered to conflict with financial goals.

The use of timber for custom stands in the business events industry, for example, requires an approach of sustainable practice. Contractors should innovate to introduce ways to reduce, reuse and repurpose bespoke stands and elements with the mindset of as little waste as possible in the forefront.

A conscious effort needs to be made to encourage clients to look at bespoke modular designs that can be used again. It is critical for

contractors to conceptualise, design, manufacture and plan their exhibition, activation stands and event infrastructure with the key strategy in mind of how they can repurpose and reuse the elements.

Equally, companies that invest in socially-ethical practices may initially cost a business money, but typically lead to enhanced recruitment, a professional industry, improved branding and public relations, which all tend to lead to increased profitability and ensuring the interests of the industry and its longevity.

This is why sustainability makes business sense. Just as technology, innovation and design apply to business, so too does sustainability. In context of the business events industry, businesses must be prepared for and cognisant of fluctuations in economic circumstances. Customers continue to cut back on their budgets and competitors become ever more aggressive and cut prices, which is not a sustainable business practice.

A message from EXSA EXCO

"It is important to protect and maintain a good, positive cash flow by pursuing smart, value-preserving and cost-cutting measures to ensure a good cash flow. Destructive or short-sighted cost cutting should be avoided at all costs. We must work on reusing and repurposing. The message to our clientele? Market, market, market – it is one of the most important investments to make during any economic slow-down, as it creates our pipeline of clients. Industry players can also look at developing core business and consider exploring areas adjacent to their company's core products or services.

"And finally, take care of your clients: It costs more effort and resources to find new customers than to retain existing ones: existing clients are the most important key to our survival. As an association, we must also collaborate to eliminate entities that are 'bad payers', as this impacts on all industry stakeholders in a 'domino effect'." ■

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