

Greening business events



By [Gwen Watkins](#)

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At Meetings Africa, now on at the Sandton Convention Centre, the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI) presented 'Green - the only colour for business tourism' workshop, as part of its educational sessions the exhibition. This covered the need for the events industry to embrace sustainable practices, an excellent case study of the building of Business Events Australia, the lessons learned from the greening of the Nedbank Golf Challenge and the introduction of the Event Greening Forum in South Africa.

SAACI national chairperson, Nina Freysen-Pretorius, welcomed delegates and introduced Juston Hawes, the workshop facilitator. The session opened with Valerie Geen, director: climate and energy at the National Business Initiative (NBI), who stated that the green business agenda is now an imperative across the globe and that event organisers must become aware of the need to meet clients' sustainable objectives, as part of the event process.

The greening economy requires more than just responsible tourism but should be incorporated into every facet. She said that in every venue she would attend, she would note the use of or lack of energy efficient lighting, the return to jugs of water and not bottled water and the incorporation of waste management.

While at Cancun, scene of COP16, she noted that the airconditioning was switched up so high that delegates complained of being cold - an obvious waste of energy. This was the kind of thinking that needed to be changed and South Africa has the ideal opportunity to demonstrate the industry's grasp of this at COP17, being held in Durban in late November 2011.

Mitigation is the key for the hospitality industry and business events, as the long haul of delegates to South Africa incurs a high carbon footprint. This could be classified under energy efficiency and renewable and alternative energy. Energy efficiency includes lighting, ventilation, cooking, laundry and IT and renewable would look at water resource use and management, conservation, catering, waste minimisation and transport.

The current South African carbon disclosure project of the NBI demonstrated that there are many large and small enterprises that put climate change at the forefront of their agenda and, as part of this carbon reduction, sought suppliers who could demonstrate their commitment to climate change interventions. This was an opportunity for event organisers and venues to visibly show their behavioural change. For more on the NBI's carbon disclosure project go to www.nbi.org.za.

Australia's successful branding

Joyce DiMascio, former Head of Business Events Australia and now an Australian consultant, reviewed the process whereby Australia produced a CSR programme for business events that had moved the country from a destination that was

the subject of protest in London, because of the long haul carbon usage, to one perceived as a responsible and caring place to do business.

The key issue was to divide leisure and business events, so that a clear brand and agenda could be formed with the themes of sustainability and CSR. The sustainability took the three Rs of reduce, reuse and recycle from industry and combined this with the idea to create positive community legacies.

Business Events Australia produced practical tools such as fact sheets and seminars and through extensive media support achieved positive reinforcement of the concepts in the industry. One of the organisation's successes was the marketing of the concept to Asia, which she had been told would be impossible, as there was no sense of environmental responsibility in incoming business delegates or exhibitors. DiMascio found the reverse to be true and that there was a high awareness of their responsibility to interact with Business Events Australia in a responsible manner.

Key success factors were uniform accreditation systems, using existing accreditation suppliers in Australia and measuring the impact with reliable, verifiable tools.

From the success of the brand from its launch in early 2008, key factors had emerged. The concept must be enshrined in policy, it requires thought leadership, reputation management is key, it requires strategic partnerships and one needs to build a community incorporating champions and operators. Australia found that corporate social responsibility was the key pillar to its success. Fact sheets and ideas can be found on www.businessevents.australia.com.

Greening Nedbank Golf Challenge

The 2010 Nedbank Golf Challenge at Sun City became one of the three global golf events to go green and the first in Africa, it also managed to reduce its carbon footprint and, had it purchased its intended carbon credits, would have been carbon neutral. Greg McManus, MD of The Heritage Environmental Management Company explained how this had been achieved and what all participants had learned from the event.

A key factor was the long term planning and commitment from the main players - Sun City, Nedbank, Oasys and other sponsors which began in 2007 for the 2010 game. Ten crucial steps had led to the success of the event.

1. Environmental statement - this was crafted that gave direction to everyone and supported at the main players at board level
2. Suppliers - selected suitable suppliers were informed of the need to meet the vision and agree to meet recyclability and sustainability goals
3. Admin systems and procedures - using electronic systems reduced paper
4. Destination selections - flights and routes were optimised to reduce carbon footprint of international and local visitors. Care was given to the impact of people on the community and environment
5. Energy management - an 'outdoor' event uses more energy than would be imagined - airconditioning, lighting, diesel generators
6. Water management - the international visibility of the event means that the greens have to be up to scratch, which causes a huge water spike. The event also uses portable toilets, which have a water impact. At this event, the grey water was treated and reused for the first time for the sprinkler systems, which meant 4 million litres of fresh water was saved
7. Waste management - the event produced 49 tons of waste in four days. The need to reduce the landfill impact meant visible recycling bins had to be installed and every effort made to reduce, reuse and recycle. This event recovered 72% of its waste and this year will focus on the only large remaining portion - food waste that will be utilised in composting
8. Transport systems - the use of the Gautrain and coaches reduced the car traffic and left only the high impact of truck deliveries
9. Communication and awareness - it is not only important to create sustainable actions but these must be publicised. It's a journey, so there are mistakes but awareness is crucial

10. Legacy issues - the community should be empowered by large events, not left in the same place afterwards as before

There were problems - doors to air-conditioned marquees were left open, lights were left on during the day, irrigation systems switched on at the wrong times and unmanaged transport issues meant trucks were idling. However, once the greening issues have been raised it is easier to spot these omissions. However, because of the extreme heat, the energy consumption went up 22%.

On the positive side, the suppliers excelled themselves - Oasys produced low level lights, Avis provided signs from recycled uniforms and Spur provided non-polystyrene containers. They installed solar heaters for washing-up water and managed overall to reduce water consumption by 12%, adding to the previous year's impressive gain of 27%. Had the event purchased the 750 carbon credits, it would have achieved a net gain, as the carbon footprint was 659 tons. The benchmark is set for 2011 and the event hopes to exceed last year's results. For more on green auditing, go to www.heritagesa.co.za.

Event Greening Forum launches today

The Event Greening Forum (EGF) launches today, Wednesday 23 February 2011, and in his talk yesterday, Justin Hawes outlined the scope of this organisation and how it will impact the events industry.

Its aim is to promote and embrace sustainable and ethical investment principles within the events industry in South Africa, with an initial focus on meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions and events (MICE).

Its objectives are to:

- be industry driven and have mandated representatives from main industry role players;
- set minimum standards around event greening within the industry;
- raise awareness and promote training opportunities for event greening principles and practices;
- ensure appropriate marketing and branding to promote event greening principles and practices;
- provide a platform for sharing information and best practice around event greening principles and practices;
- integrate current initiatives and role players and to draw existing frameworks into one system as far as possible, rather than develop an independent entity;
- initially work as a voluntary system but encourage regulation;
- ensure communication with government to promote event greening processes, standards and regulations;
- raise funds to ensure the long sustainability of the forum; and
- "walk the talk" through actions based on the triple bottom line principle of people, planet and prosperity.

The EGF aims to guide and promote sustainable business practices in the broader events industry. It has been operational since 2009, but the growing demand for more and improved sustainable practices in the industry has motivated the decision for it to become a Section 21 company and formally involve the associations in its structure. The response from the associations and their representatives has been positive, and has revealed a strong willingness to work together towards this shared vision.

Initial sponsorship has been raised from 3D Group, Baba Indaba, Coca-Cola Dome, Steadfast, The Event magazine, Octanorm, Vineyard Hotel, Scan and Centeq Events. Industry support has come from SAACI, CMP Network, TPISA, EXSA, IFEA, South Africa Roadies Association and SATSA. Or more on its activities, go to www.eventgreening.co.za.

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- Official site: www.meetingsafrica.co.za

ABOUT GWEN WATKINS

Gwen Watkins is a freelance writer, editor, subeditor and author. Almost 40 years of experience across industrial and commercial writing, as a reporter and PR consultant, has given her expert grounding in brand communication and native advertising. A Master NLP Practitioner, she uses these skills within the creation of copywriting, annual reports, brochures and website copy.

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