

#BehindtheSelfie with... Simon Robinson

 By Leigh Andrews

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This #InnovationMonth, we go behind the selfie with Simon Robinson, co-owner, organiser and head of marketing for Mediatech Africa, and owner of the Sun Circle Group.



Mediatech Africa is all about #imagination #innovation #techtrends...

1. Where do you live, work and play?

I travel extensively to international B2B trade shows of a similar ilk to Mediatech, as a means to keep step with the advances and evolving trends in technology. So out of necessity – although my base is in Gauteng – I generally live, work and play wherever my mobile phone is.

2. What's your claim to fame?

Besides co-owning and running the largest, most successful media and entertainment expo on the continent, I can build absolutely anything with a fold-up shovel. DIY is my thing!

3. Describe your career so far.

In a previous life I earned a living selling diving equipment but that all changed when, almost 20 years ago, I joined the exhibitions industry. It was at this point that my job became a career and this move allowed me to cultivate my entrepreneurial spirit.

My experience in the industry has been notched up across various verticals, including expos that cater to the sports market, franchising, property, health and beauty, gardening, and through Mediatech Africa – technology. Like most people, I worked my way up the ranks; a journey that started with selling exhibition stands – to my current role as co-owner, organiser for Mediatech.

Working on all these shows has given me a unique perspective into what makes an exhibition successful and during this time I have also developed relationships that are 20 years in the making – all of which continue to contribute to our success.

Spotting new opportunities has always been a skill and it was this proclivity for new prospects that resulted in the purchase of a publication in 2009 – *Screen Africa* – and I launched Prosystems Africa News in 2013 – and so, a publishing arm was added to the business. A strategic move – these publications have contributed to the growth of Mediatech and had a fundamental influence on the show's evolution.

4. Tell us a few of your favourite things.

While I value technology and its ability to enable and unleash creativity, I really love the sea and I have a reputation for being a bit of a storm chaser. I always choose the road less travelled and when I hit the beaten track; I set my GPS to “avoid tar roads.” I take great satisfaction from exploring unknown territories and it's the rawness of the outdoors and the solitude of nature that helps inspire clear thinking around business issues.

5. What do you love about your industry?

Being in the business of exhibitions – specifically technology – I would have to say it's the creativity that technology can deliver and the amazing way that technology brings creativity to life. Not static and always evolving – there's an energy about technology and showcasing it that cannot be replicated by any other industry.

6. What are a few pain points your industry can improve on?

As an industry as a whole, exhibition organisers need to get a handle on their market and learn to recognise they are not just event organisers. Their real role is to deliver the right quality of visitor to their exhibitions – to keep their exhibitors satisfied – and in so doing ensure continued support of their show.

Delivering better customer service and a more professional means of communication is implicit in this.

7. Describe your average workday, if such a thing exists.

I have a real appreciation for the benefits of sleep and definitely cannot be described as an early riser. This helps me avoid the traffic. Once I am in the office - most days can be described as manic – particularly as the show [Mediatech] draws nearer. Every day is about our clients – the exhibitors – what they need and how we can facilitate their requirements. Because of the nature of my job, I receive a huge number of daily emails which need attention – some days more successfully than others. Many of these mails are from PR companies seeking to place editorial in our publications and getting these titles to print is a full-time job in itself. I cycle to avoid mental fatigue.

8. What are the tools of your trade?

A laptop, a mobile phone, a GPS and a good sense of humour!

9. Who is getting it right in your industry?

As the largest media and entertainment technology trade show on the continent, we believe we are getting it right with Mediatech Africa. The only show locally and internationally that has three different industries represented at the show, each with a different visitor base, and each equally supported, is an anomaly. We are able to deliver the right visitor profile for each vertical and our show has grown and evolved and continues to enjoy support from the industry.

Globally – Integrated Systems Europe (ISE) – the world's leading AV systems integration exhibition have definitely implemented the right approach and they have grown year on year. The 2017 show in Amsterdam was no exception, with over 1,200 unique exhibitors. An association-based show, the organisers of ISE have developed solid relationships with their exhibitors and they have a keen understanding of the market.

10. What are you working on right now?

We are wrapping up from Mediatech 2017 and focusing on the publications in our stable.

11. Tell us some of the buzzwords floating around in your industry at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself.

In the tech world, our show jargon includes: bringing to life, IP integration and adoption, VR, AR, and experiential networks. And of course no show would be complete without the occasional – “fok, Mariaan” – as so eloquently paraphrased by Suzelle DIY!



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Leigh Andrews 23 Aug 2017



12. Where and when do you have your best ideas?

During conversations with people; engagement, connection and conversation stimulate the flow of ideas. I am definitely energised by the right company. I also read a lot and track trends from the content I consume.

13. What's your secret talent/party trick?

I am a fixer and can DIY anything back together or from scratch. I love planning and the preparation is half the fun; a

quality that has served me well in the exhibitions game. I am also a master packer and if you go on holiday with me there is nothing I haven't thought of and packed, including two back-up GPS systems.

I am always prepared for anything.

14. What would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

A massive amount of unread emails, plenty of music and, of course, Spotify – my most used – and all-time favourite app.

15. Are you a technophobe or a technophile?

I am definitely not a phobe or a phile – on a continuum. I am probably somewhere in the middle. I can't live without my phone but, that said, I opt to go places where there's no signal.

16. What advice would you give to newbies hoping to crack into the industry?

Build relationships – they will help advance your trajectory to success. An aptitude for selling is critical and with that comes a need for tenacity and an ability to articulate. Be prepared to work hard, you'll need a thick skin to survive.

Simple as that. [Click here](#) for Mediatech Africa's press office and [here](#) for their LinkedIn profile, while following their updates on [Twitter](#). You can also [click here](#) for Robinson's MyBiz profile and interact with him on [Facebook](#).

*Interviewed by [Leigh Andrews](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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