

An insider's take on the SA exhibition industry

By [Craig Newman](#)

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There's an exhibition for every niche - from MamaMagic to the Vodacom rAge Expo and HuntEx to SA Fashion Week - in South Africa every year, and for the most part, the exhibition industry is showing no signs of slowing down.



Image: [NAG](#)

Exhibitions are focused marketing opportunities that bring your target market to you and allow you to network with your audience for ongoing sales. They're fostering niche pocket economies everywhere.

It's not just the big ones that are doing well. Smaller-scale exhibitions are also seeing an increase in attendance. For example, broadcasting, entertainment and communications technology expo, Mediatech Africa, attracted 7,525 visitors in July this year – a 6% increase over last year, with 701 brands on display and 148 exhibiting companies.

South Africans love a good exhibition. We're a culture of hobbyists and weekend project collectors who love to turn up for a day out at an expo centre to consult the experts who know about the things we like, buy the latest and greatest goods and enjoy fine fare from food trucks, donut stands and boerewors roll sellers.

Exhibitions truly tap into the South African entrepreneurial spirit. An article published by Fin24 in 2018 states that visiting business delegates – many of them here for conferences or exhibitions – contribute around R115bn to our GDP annually.

The feelgood factor

The common denominator, whether you're at Africa Health, Discop Africa or Vodacom rAge, for the most part, is the positive energy you encounter as you wander between the stands and showpieces at most South African expos and shows.

The Rand Show in April this year completely changed lives with a local entrepreneur making a whopping sale of over R500,000. And it's a testament to the fact that destination shows can provide a captive audience for exhibitors. In this case, it was the Rand Show's dedicated SMME section, activated by the South African Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. And I'm sure we can expect many more stories like this one to come.

What does the future hold?

New tools and technology are making the exhibition business more exciting than ever before. Dedicated event management software is making it easier for organisers and exhibitors to plan their efforts to the letter, and electronic booking or ticketing solutions have done away with human error when it comes to letting people in and out.

Mobile technology is becoming more and more prevalent every year, with just about every big expo having its own dedicated app to help guests navigate their event and stay up to date with any panels, showstoppers or press events that are scheduled during an expo.

Digital design and the advent of technologies such as 3D printing have made stands easier to create, set up and strike, not to mention more appealing to the eye than ever before. And if you're not that keen on the crowds, who knows? There may be more virtual reality expo experiences coming up sooner rather than later.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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