

Why the exhibition industry ISN'T dying - and never will!

 By [Justin Hawes](#)

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Justin Hawes, MD of exhibition, events and retail display company, Scan Display.

New technology disrupts. So when the internet, and then social media, gained so much popularity in the world of marketing, a lot of us in the exhibition business started to wonder if they would disrupt our industry in a way that would make it unrecognisable, or even irrelevant.



Having just returned from [EuroShop 2017](#), a retail and display trade fair (the biggest of its kind) in Düsseldorf, Germany, I discovered that this is not the case. The exhibition medium is both recognisable and a hugely effective marketing tool (the *most* effective, in my opinion).

Exhibitions are one of the older marketing mediums. In the beginning, they involved fairly simple, low-tech set-ups where the emphasis was on meeting and talking to people. Since then, innovations in materials, technologies and marketing knowledge have transformed them into far more sophisticated events. However, at EuroShop 2017 it felt like we had, in another sense, come full-circle, as a result of the emphasis and value being placed on face-to-face interactions. And I was reminded of just how powerful face-to-face meetings can be as a marketing tool.

While engagement has become a buzzword for social media and online marketing, it was also the driving force at

EuroShop 2017. The show takes place every three years, and within this short space of time I'm always amazed by how much can change. This year, exhibitors didn't have AV or brochures on their stands. I suspect people have realised that they can easily become distractions from, or even a substitute for, talking to people.

Everyone wanted to meet, to talk, and to find out how to do business together. Conversations can reveal a lot more about a company than a polished piece of marketing collateral, allowing trust to be built more quickly. Conversations are also an opportunity to get and give only the most relevant information – it's the ultimate in a customised and responsive marketing tool, something the digital space is good at, but I suspect will never be as good as people are.

Generally, the only marketing collateral in use at EuroShop was business cards, which were traded after a meeting so the relationship could continue beyond the show.

Of course, as with all things, you can do it, and then you can do it well. As an exhibitor, if you want to increase the number of *effective* face-to-face meetings, there is a lot you have to get right – your stand design and staffing, your marketing message and, of course, being at the right event in the first place.

But when you do get it right, it is incredibly powerful. Our company invested a lot in [exhibiting at EuroShop 2017](#), and I am expecting our return on this to be substantial.

ABOUT JUSTIN HAWES

Justin Hawes is managing director of exhibition, events and retail display company, Scan Display. He is actively involved in the industry, having served on the board of the Exhibition & Event Association of Southern Africa (EXSA) and co-founded the Event Greening Forum (EGF), a non-profit organisation aimed at promoting sustainability in the South African events industry. He currently serves as Treasurer of the International Federation of Exhibition and Event Services (IFES). Contact details: email justin@scandisplay.co.za | Twitter [@ScanDisplay](#)

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