

Tracy Lynn Chemaly on Business of Design and other things

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Business of Design is really for everyone from retailers and trend analysts to marketing and brand executives, and other industry entrepreneurs; even people from law and financial backgrounds...

The two-day conference takes place in Johannesburg on 16-17 August at The Forum in Bryanston, followed by Cape Town on 23-24 August at Inner City Ideas Cartel, 71 Waterkant Street.

As head of programme, Tracy Lynn Chemaly tells us what differentiates it from other stuffy, formal events is that it provides a more relaxed, yet still professional platform for exchanging ideas. "Business of Design is not simply an inspirational conference; it is a great combination of both this and learning," she says. "It is also a conference focused on local stories. All our speakers are working within the South African landscape and so the advice they are imparting is relevant and immediately useful.

"We also place a strong emphasis on networking with our ABSOLUT Networking sessions at the end of each day, allowing delegates to interact with industry insiders and fellow creative entrepreneurs and businesspeople, to expand their networks, gain new contacts, secure collaborations, source partners and make new friends."



Photographer: Adam Letch

■ What is your involvement in the conference?

I run the conference from beginning to end – from approaching speakers and liaising with them pre-conference, to dealing with delegate bookings, doing the marketing and social media, dealing with media around the event, sourcing venues and caterers and corresponding with partners.

Together with Business of Design founders, Trevyn and Julian McGowan, Laurence Brick and Cathy O'Clery, we decide on who we want as speakers, and then I run with it, obviously consulting with them all along the way and getting their insights and inputs from their years in business and the design industry. I have gained many lessons from them over the past two-and-a-half years.

■ How has the conference changed/improved since inception two years ago?

It's been wonderful for us (and a stamp of approval) to have delegates who have attended previous conferences return for another one. Our original plan was to host the conference twice a year, as we did in 2015, but this year we have decided to focus our energy on only one annual conference, so as to bring our delegates the best speakers possible and not have to have people choose between an autumn or spring conference.

Our network has grown too. Now we have people recommending speakers to us, advising friends and colleagues to book on for the conference, and register group bookings rather than just one person coming on their own from a company. Even previous speakers are booking and paying to join us now – that is a great compliment!

■ The conference is relevant to industries other than design itself, such as marketing, architecture,

retail, advertising, etc. How do you market the conference to these other industries?

We started Business of Design thinking it would just be for design businesses, but saw that other people were equally interested in what we were offering – everyone from retailers and trend analysts to marketing and brand executives, and other industry entrepreneurs. Even people from law and financial backgrounds have been booking.

We have had talks at ad agencies and various trade shows, visited retailer head offices, met with HR and training decision-makers and pushed the variety of speakers at the conference through our social media channels.

For architects, we have been accredited by the Gauteng Institute for Architects and so all members of the South African Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP) who attend receive Continuous Professional Development (CPD) credits. The Institute of the Interior Design Professions (IID) has also accredited us with CPD credits.

What has been the delegates' general response to date?

We have had an unbelievable return rate. Our alumni delegates are rewarded with a discount offer, but I really feel like they would book on again regardless, as the feedback received after every conference always makes everything we put into it so worthwhile. It seems Business of Design is a forum people have been needing for a few years in this country, and it's wonderful to offer people this opportunity to learn, exchange ideas and grow their businesses with the advice of industry leaders and design professionals.

Does this year's conference have a theme?

No, but we do tend to find that when we look back at the end of the two days, there is always a strong theme that seems to have evolved. At the last conference, it was very much about the significance of working on the African continent at this time and left us all with great pride for being African. Let us see what emerges from this next conference...

What are some of the major issues currently facing the industry/business, and how does BoD hope to address these?

Many creatives have had training in design fields, but have never been trained in business strategy, marketing, financial areas and the like. So Business of Design, through our expert speakers, addresses these issues and many more, and it is not just aimed at business owners, but at employees too – anyone who wants to revolutionise the way they work.

Many people want to exhibit at international trade shows, but do not know how to begin; others are curious about how to align social-media campaigns with their current marketing; while other people just want to learn about the latest trends and ways in which businesses are running in a modern world. We try to answer many questions in these two days.

How do you go about selecting the speakers? Comment on this year's speaker lineup.

We make sure there's a good balance between business strategy, marketing, design thinking and general inspiration. This year's speakers range from founders of large national and international businesses (such as Ian Fuhr from Sorbet Group and Robbie Brozin from Nando's) to the owners of young entrepreneurial success stories (like Kate Schrire from The Creamery and Paul Ballen from Paul's Homemade Ice Cream), to top-name architects (Stefan Antoni from SAOTA and Sean Mahoney and Pierre Swanepoel from StudioMAS) and innovative thinkers, such as Conn Bertish from Cancer Dojo and Scott Gray from Quirk.

What are you most proud about with regard to this year's event?

The lineup of speakers is one of the best we have had, and I think this really has to do with us having built a strong reputation that makes speakers say yes the minute I approach them. I really love how successful local businesspeople are so willing to share their time and knowledge with our delegates and us. It is refreshing.

I am also very excited that we are offering refreshed networking sessions, called ABSOLUT Networking. We have partnered with ABSOLUT ELYX to make our 5-7pm networking sessions (at the end of both days of talks) even more enjoyable. I always love the stories of collaboration that emerge after these sessions. People do make new connections at our conference.

What are you most looking forward to?

I am most looking forward to hearing chef proprietor Luke Dale-Roberts' talk. I have been a fan since he first started in South Africa at La Colombe, so have followed his restaurant success with great national (and foodie) pride!

Bizcommunity readers qualify for a R450 discount to attend the conference, making tickets R3,500. To claim your discount, email tracy@businessofdesign.co.za with 'Bizcommunity' as the subject.

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ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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