

What to look for when choosing a conference



By [Daniel Marcus](#)

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In recent years, the South African conference industry has had a fall from grace in respect to content and organisation. Poor websites, generic information and ill-informed, badly briefed spokespeople have dominated the arena. Desperate to make their share of attendee commission, conference salespeople are selling seats to the incorrect audiences ultimately resulting in irritated attendees that feel their money has been wasted and precious time stolen.

The industry offers many horror stories including apparently 'personalised' delegate prospectus documents sent out to over 300 email recipients and addressed 'Dear '. In other instances, information packs have included low resolution screenshots of the organisers websites, with little notice taken of the computer information bar at the bottom of the image. I'm sure it was of no interest to the recipient to know that the sender was enjoying Facebook, a Skype conversation and a Gmail chat during the time he was communicating with his audience.

Conferencing

I haven't even ventured in the conference's themselves. Despite paying exorbitant fees to attend some of these forums, attendees are greeted by disinterested students on arrival offering little more than a nod in the direction of the presentation room. Once in the conference itself, the content is usually unrelated to what the attendee was expecting, and in many cases turns into a company sales pitch by the presenter on stage. Audio visual requirements are overlooked, the air-conditioning is weak and catering is inadequate and badly timed. I could go on, but I'm sure you get the point.

Taking all of this feedback and insight into account was critical when we conceptualised the Integrated Marketing Communication Conference concept five years ago. To be fair, there are a handful of decent conference organisers out there who are offering great content in interactive and interesting formats, but unfortunately these are still few and far between.

Cutting edge concepts, fresh speakers and interactive content is the way forward. The old adage still rings true - Content Is King! Delegates are demanding far more value from the conferences they attend and conference organisers need to give delegates more than just a few reasons to be there.

Important questions to consider

Here are a few questions you can ask yourself prior to booking your next conference. Alternatively, you can use them to stump the sales representative on the phone. If they can't answer all five, then don't let them waste your time any further:

1. What exactly do I want to learn and do the conference topics cover this?
2. Are the topics being discussed current and relevant to my industry?
3. Will the speaker presentations be unique or have they been rolled out at many similar conferences?
4. Who are the delegates? Will this be a worthwhile networking opportunity for me? Ask for a list of companies attending and the positions of the delegates
5. Who are the conference organisers? Do research on the company hosting the event, how long have they been around, what other conferences they might host.

When booking your next conference, take time to remember that whilst you'll gain guidance, current trends, practical examples and the opportunity to question spokespeople, it's up to you to make the most of your conference experience. Ask 'that' question regardless of how you think it sounds in your head, engage with the delegates around you and challenge the speakers. These pointers, together with the information above, will ensure your conference experience is worthwhile.

For more information on the upcoming Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Conference, visit www.imcconference.com or follow [@IMCConference](https://twitter.com/IMCConference) on Twitter.

ABOUT DANIEL MARCUS

Daniel Marcus, is a serial entrepreneur and co-founder of Magnetic, a cloud-based small business management tool that streamlines the day-to-day administrative functions needed to maintain steady growth in a small business. Additionally, Daniel also manages and co-owns Living Your Brand, one of South Africa's leading events and conference agencies, which counts Bentley SA, FNB Wealth, Nedbank Capital, Sanlam Investment Management, Vodacom and Standard Bank among its client list. Dan@magnetichq.com

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