

How local businesses can unlock B2B and B2G value



By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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The first World Expo to be held in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA) region, will take place from 20 October 2020 to 10 April 2021 and we spoke to VP of business programming, South African, Shaun Vorster about the opportunities that this event will afford businesses in South Africa and the rest of Africa.



Shaun Vorster is the vice president of business programming at World Expo 2020. Image supplied.

■ Please tell us more about World Expo 2020.

World Expo happens every five years and it's one of the oldest and largest international events in the world. The first World Expo dates back to 1851. So it's got a very long and rich history. It's a celebration of humanity, of human ingenuity, of innovation, of world cultures and that is how we positioned World Expo 2020 Dubai. It will probably be the greatest show of human brilliance and achievement.

It will bring together great innovations and inventions. At least 25 million visits, 192 countries and for 173 days – it'll probably be the biggest live event on the planet. We'll host 60 live events per day, across a range of programming genres – from entertainment and astronomy to business and thought leadership.

We'll also have 200 pavilions where participants will showcase their innovation on offer. Our participants include countries as well as multi-lateral organisations, corporates, educational institutions, foundations and so on.



Emirates unveils pavilion design for Expo 2020 Dubai

13 May 2019



In terms of the scale, you think of 25 million visits, which is the equivalent of taking the whole population of Australia, and having them visit the expo destination in a six-month period. So, it's very big and largely a leisure event and largely an entertainment event. But then there are also all these opportunities for business to benefit and to do their own events and really to unlock B2B value and B2G (business to government) value.

📊 **Sounds great! How did you get involved?**

I got involved in early 2015 and it's been, probably, the most inspirational and aspirational project I have ever been part of for four-and-a-half years now. What attracted me to it was the overall theme and brand mantra, which is 'Connecting Minds Creating the Future'. And it's only once in your life that you will be part of a project with the level of ambition that brings together people and corporations and other institutions from around the world with a brand positioning of connecting minds creating the future.

And then you focus on the free universal drivers of human progress that consists of substreams and those are: **opportunity, mobility and sustainability**. These really inspire our architecture, inspire the immersive experiences offered in the country pavilions and also our programmatic and thought leadership work. And for me, personally, this was just something that I knew I personally wanted to be part of.

It also linked to some of my previous academic work at Stellenbosch University Business School. At that stage, I just finished a mid-career MBA at the University of Stellenbosch Business School and I focussed on sustainable mobility for a lot of my research. So this was just the perfect fit.

📊 **Please comment on the opportunities that this event will afford businesses here in South Africa and also other countries on the continent.**

I would say there are at least three major opportunities for countries to contribute and benefit from the World Expo. The first is: on the journey to Expo, we procured them a lot of products and services and expertise. So we have established a digital portal called the online marketplace. [The Expo 2020 marketplace](#) is a free-of-charge platform that enables companies to showcase their expertise, to advertise and to compete for opportunities and to gain access to our local and international network.



Expo 2020 Dubai welcomes South African participants

27 May 2016



It's a platform where we do our own procurement, but also some of the countries do their procurement. It's really a place for companies and, I've got to stress small and medium enterprises, to use a ready-to-use platform to drive business connectivity, to drive growth and to do business at Expo 2020. And for every country on the African continent, and all around the world, it's a massive opportunity.

Currently, we are just over 37,000 suppliers registered on the online marketplace to do business with Expo, which enables them to win contracts and, to date, 34% of all our contracts have been awarded to SMEs.

So I think that is my first message, register, make your company or your services or your expertise visible on the online

marketplace because it's not only Expo using that to procure but also many of our partners and collaborators.

The second opportunity is during Expo when we will be hosting some very unique business events and thought leadership events. So we will be doing, some of our own and some with partners and collaborators, a series of conferences, summits, exhibitions, seminars, inspirational talks – which can be a platform and a meeting place for businesses to also connect with each other.

So for countries and educational institutions and corporates wanting to meet their counterparts in the rest of the world, scientific exchange, building new networks – there is no better opportunity to create these networks and meet your counterparts and potential business partners than during the World Expo. So that is the second opportunity; through our own programming.

The third opportunity for companies would be to do their own events at the Dubai Exhibition Centre. So, adjacent to World Expo 2020, we have a 60,000m² Dubai Exhibition Centre, which is a state of the art conference and exhibition centre. Companies have the opportunity to do their own product launches in the Exhibition Centre, networking events, incentive travel, gala dinners, conferences, summits and so on.

■ ***What's at the top of your to-do list with regards to World Expo 2020?***

To commission and curate and schedule business events of interest to business visitors. I understand very well that business and leisure visitors as a market segment is increasingly conversing – they talk of bleisure market segment. And for us, it's really to design a series of programming that is applicable to business and leisure and bleisure visitors to make sure that we create B2B value and scientific exchange and new networks that have long-term benefits and that have is a long-term in future growth. So that's for me personally one of my very big priorities at the moment.



Business-leisure market in Africa grows

Elzaan van Rhyn 9 Oct 2017



The second is for leisure visitors. We have a very unique opportunity to not only educate but also entertain visitors in every possible market segment – from old to young. We are currently in the process of permissioning and curating 60 live events per day for 173 days that appeals to all possible visitor segments. That is a very big priority as well.

■ ***Talk us through your career and some highlights. Just a little more about who you are and what it is you do.***

For Expo 2020, I am the vice-president of programming, which involves taking care of our live events portfolio, but then I am also responsible for business programming and curating, commissioning and sourcing a series of business events. And I do this as part of a colossal team effort.

We're roughly just over 70 nationalities in Expo and around a 900 full-time workforce. It's really a privilege to be part of such an amazing team effort. If I think of what I do every day and of the unique opportunity to create or to contribute to something as aspirational and as inspirational as World Expo, I think it can only fill you with a sense of responsibility and humility and a great belief in what we are about to deliver.

“ [#WorldExpo2020](#) event in Dubai will create more than 277,000 [#Jobs](#), according to the [#study](#) by Oxford Economics. The study says 90% of jobs will be created between 2013 and 2021, 40% of which would be within the [#Travel](#) and [#Tourism](#) sector. pic.twitter.com/zujYuMt2UF— angelo lo vecchio (@alv_lovecchio) [April 23, 2019](#) ”

It's not the what, it is the why. And the "why" is that we are on this project is that we want to create a better world by inspiring people and connecting people and ideas. Ultimately it is about having a transformative impact.

So that is what I do every day and that is what motivates me. I got to this after a mid-career study break at Stellenbosch University Business School. I published quite a bit in that period around sustainable mobility and low-carbon aviation and low-carbon transport. So this project was just amazing to come across. Before that, I spent 11 years in the national government of South Africa as an advisor to ministers of tourism and environmental affairs. And I was also looking for something where one could also contribute at a different scale and a different time.

For more info, visit the World Expo 2020 Dubai [website](#) or follow the event on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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