

# Sustainable event practices to grow in 2014 and beyond



By [Justin Hawes](#)

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I think that because events like exhibitions, mall activations, experiential events and conferences engage all of the senses, they represent the marketing medium that will champion sustainable growth and development in 2014 and beyond.

At an event it is easy to observe exactly which resources are being used, how much is being used, how briefly it is needed, and how much waste is generated. As a result we have become aware that we need to manage our resources in a more responsible way - both for the environment and, given the current economic climate, for our pockets.

This awareness has resulted in a number of exciting 'trends' emerging in marketing activations and events. Here are some examples:

## 1. Paperless, wireless - just less!

With streamlined systems and simplified processes, the events of the future are sleek, neat and efficient. Resources are chosen wisely and used for maximum effect. For example, a mobile app for an event removes the need for printing and is also a more effective communication tool for reaching your audience beyond the timeframe of the event. The app's information can be updated on the go, keeping it fresh, while users can also engage and contribute to the content.

And on the topic of efficiency - your technology needs to be efficient, not only in terms of how you can use it, but also in terms of how it uses energy. Less is more.

## 2. Virtual events

Tying in with the above, less travel is also made possible with virtual events and Skype meetings. While nothing beats the power of face-to-face, technology has allowed us to communicate in other ways that complement and add to the effectiveness of the face-to-face meetings.

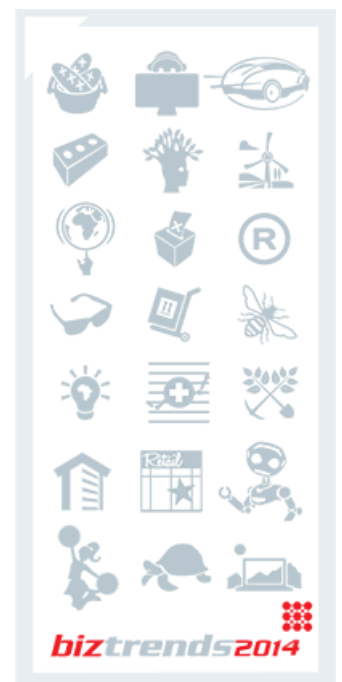
## 3. Collaborative consumption

The basic premise of collaborative consumption is the pooling of limited resources to be used by many people, rather than individuals having their own exclusive resources.

Typically these resources are non-consumables, so they can be re-used and shared easily. A good example here is car pooling, where one car can lift many people, rather than each person using his/her own vehicle. Public transport is the ultimate collaborative mode of transport. This is set to grow in South Africa, particularly as options like the Gautrain, Rea Vaya and my CiTi expand, and increasing fuel prices and e-toll make them more appealing ways to get attendees to events.

## 4. Conscious consumerism

This is a movement whereby consumers 'vote' with their money by only buying products and services from companies that meet their criteria and expectations for what is ethical.



It's another way individuals can influence companies, much like social media can be used to invoke brand action. The consumption of food is an area where this is especially apparent - organic and free range meats are gaining in popularity not only for their health benefits but also for humane reasons.

As an event organiser, you can make your attendees feel good about supporting you by demonstrating conscientious procurement choices, such as serving SASSI approved seafood, Fair Trade coffee or BWI wines.

## 5. Supporting local businesses

Conscious consumerism also advocates supporting local businesses, and thereby supporting the local economy and aiding job creation. I predict that, despite the influx of cheap Chinese goods, South African businesses will increasingly start opting for local suppliers. This will be driven by the weakening rand, and equally by the belief that 'local is lekker'. For example, locally produced conference bags are gaining popularity, especially those with an African flavour or which are manufactured through a charitable organisation.

## 6. Up-cycling and recycling

Being wasteful is no longer acceptable, and more and more people are trying to avoid waste or up-cycle it into something cool. For example, old branding from events can be made into furniture covers or bags, while old wooden pallets are used to create furniture. And if up-cycling is not possible, recycling always is, and this has now become a standard fixture at events rather than an anomaly.

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## 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 SA events industry. He currently serves as Treasurer of the International Federation of Exhibition and Event Services (IFES). Contact details: email [justin@scandisplay.co.za](mailto:justin@scandisplay.co.za) | Twitter [@ScanDisplay](#)

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