

Computer expo returns to brand roots

Appropriately, as it celebrates its 30th anniversary, one of South Africa's longest running annual exhibitions is returning to its roots as Computer Faire, offering an exhibition that caters to corporate, consumer and SMB visitors.

Over the three decades since its inception, it has been called Computer Faire, Computer Faire & Bexa (incorporating Office Automation), Futurex (following the merger with Tel.com and acquiring a distinctly corporate bent) and Futurex & Equip (with Equip catering to the SME market).

Consistently ranked

According to outgoing-MD Jo Melville, Computer Faire has consistently ranked as the IT industry's premier broad-based event.

"We've seen specialised, niche exhibitions come – and go – in the last 30 years. Some have been absorbed into Computer Faire, some have stayed the distance on their own and some have disappeared entirely."

Melville speaks from experience, having managed a number of these specialised shows during her tenure Systems Exhibitions during the 1980s and early 1990s – including names such as LAN World, CAD/CAM World and Computer Buyers. NetWorld, Windows World, Cell Expo and Tel.com were niche shows organised under the TML Reed banner, and LinuxWorld ran successfully as an Exhibitions for Africa even alongside Futurex.

"Despite all these niche shows springing up – and many of them were extremely worthwhile at the time – there has always been only one definitive show that encompasses the whole industry, and that's Computer Faire," she says.

Encompasses

"It is the one major event that encompasses all the universes."

Through the last 30 years, Melville points out, the focus of computing has moved from hardware-centric to software-centric and has now come almost full circle back to being driven by the hardware – with the difference this time around that the software and connectivity available today makes the hardware so much smarter than it's ever been before.

"At the end of the day, people want to hold the coolest gizmo in their hands, or have it on their desks. It's appropriate that as Computer Faire celebrates 30 years, the industry has just about come full circle and is now back to addressing the needs of three very important target markets: the corporate, the consumer and the SMB."

Feast of technologies

This year's Computer Faire will offer visitors a feast of technologies that are important both for their personal

entertainment and their business needs. It also hasn't forgotten its corporate focus and has pledged to ret the interest of this market.

"Don't forget that Computer Faire is also an international event," says exhibition manager Linda Kruger. "There is always healthy interest from the rest of the world and this year is no exception."

So far, trade contingents from India, Hong Kong, China, Macau and the Czech Republic have signed up for Computer Faire 2008. There has also been strong interest from Israel and Vietnam, with more countries expected to sign up before the show runs in May.

In addition, says Kruger, a number of companies from the UK have also pledged to exhibit.

Mini-shows and conferences

Helping to draw crowds to Computer Faire 2008, a number of mini-shows and conferences will be held alongside the main event – further broadening its reach.

The Computer Faire conference will be held on 22 May, with the theme Innovation in Technology. This conference is organised by the Computer Society of SA. In addition, Microsoft will be running a seminar on training and education alongside Computer Faire; Women in IT will be hosting a breakfast for professional women; SmartEx will run a workshop on the move to smart cards and their application; while CRN will hold reseller summit at the show.

Since it is a technology show, she says Computer Faire will make use of new technologies both in terms of visitor registration and marketing opportunities for exhibitors.

"With mobile and wireless technologies being so dominant at the moment and so important in most people's lives, we will be following these trends with some exciting new developments," says Kruger.

Retailing

Importantly, retailing has been brought back to Computer Faire this year, and visitors will be able to buy the products they want at the show itself. Exhibitors are being encouraged to run show specials on some of their products, which will help to draw more visitors than ever to the exhibition.

The Computer Faire 2008 will be held 20 – 23 May 2008. It is organised by Exhibitions for Africa (www.exhibitafrica.co.za).