

# On Show Solutions all-female team make it happen



Amanda Margison and Jacqui Reynolds

ON Show Solutions is a dynamic exhibition and events team with a personalised approach and clear vision for global marketing. Their strength is project management with a passion for tourism.

Driven from the front by co-owners **Amanda Margison** and **Jacqui Reynolds**, there is a very capable all-female team that makes it happen. They started their careers in the business events industry almost 20 years ago, acquiring their organising skills on various trade and consumer

shows. These dynamic women teamed up while working on the tourism account for Indaba and went on to host international roadshows promoting tourism to Africa. They attribute their achievements to passion, professionalism and hard work with support from a dynamic team of women.

Amanda and Jacqui provided *Business Events Africa* with some insights...

## WHY DO YOU THINK WOMEN ARE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTORS IN THE BUSINESS EVENTS INDUSTRY?

So many industries are dominated by men, yet the business events industry is largely driven by influential women. It's a highly stressful industry that requires careful attention to detail, multi-tasking and ongoing dedication, elements that many women achieve admirably.

## HOW HAS YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE MADE YOU THE LEADER YOU ARE TODAY?

'We've been working in each others' pockets since 2003, which has helped us develop a good understanding of how we both respond to

# Accomplished Gail Westphal leads from the front

**GAIL Westphal**, general manager of sales and marketing at Gooderson Leisure is passionate about South Africa as a destination.

Tasked with looking after sales and marketing for hotels and self-catering establishments within the group, she has certainly seen her fair share of responsibility.

"I am definitely a people person and believe in relationship marketing. While I go all out to motivate my team, at the same time I expect them to be self-motivated. I enjoy coming up with unique solutions and being different, and pride myself on many firsts that I have conceptualised in the industry which continue today, such as Tourism Month and various international road shows."

After studying public relations and marketing through Damelin, she actually got into the hospitality industry by mistake by joining The Don Executive apartment/Hotels.

Her career began at The Don Executive Apartment/Hotels where she handled all the sales and marketing for the group, as well as developing the concept of alternative accommodation to hotels. After eight years, she joined Exeter Game Lodges handling their sales and marketing.

She then became chief executive officer of SATSA, before opening her own specialist tourism consultancy McCann & Associates. She was also the first woman elected to the board



Gail Westphal, general manager of sales and marketing at Gooderson Leisure

of FEDHASA – which she puts down to sheer determination.

Like many women, her career in hospitality has had its ups and downs – especially in a sector which has not seen women as major contributors over the years. "I think it is easier nowadays compared to 10 to 15 years ago when women had to fight really hard to be taken seriously. "Due to my big mouth and tenacity, if I have believed in something, I have never taken no for an answer. If something stands in my way – I always find a way around it."

Ms Westphal believes that being part of Gooderson Leisure, the oldest independent hotel group in South Africa, has provided a number

of growth opportunities. The leadership of experienced hospitality guru, **Alan Gooderson**, whom she respects and sees as something of a mentor, has also played an important part.

"I get bored very easily, but at Gooderson Leisure, each day is a new one that provides continued growth and learning experiences. Gooderson Leisure adapts, changes and often leads the way when it comes to setting trends and creating opportunities in the South African tourism industry. It is really rewarding to be part of that."

Married with two daughters, family is also a priority for Ms Westphal – although juggling career and home is not easy for a confirmed workaholic. "Certainly, looking back, this took its toll as I eventually got divorced after 17 years. I am happy to say that I have learned how to balance my personal life with my hectic business life, ensuring that I am there for my husband and kids.

Her hobbies and interests include reading, gardening, travelling and cooking when not working. However, she concedes that her career is also a hobby.

If she had to give one piece of advice to a young woman following in her footsteps in the hospitality industry, what would that be? "Stick to what you believe in and make your integrity your sounding board. Follow your dreams and believe in yourself and your abilities."

situations. Having a reliable business partner that is trustworthy and committed is the key to our success, as we're able to provide a balanced approach for our business, our team and our clients. While I'm the driver and over-achiever, Amanda is the nurturer and the rock that holds it together," states Jacqui.

## WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU OFFER WOMEN WHO WANT TO START THEIR OWN BUSINESS?

Do it and have fun while doing it. Running your own business is the most rewarding way to make your own decisions and build income while having the flexibility to be available for your family. Just be prepared to work much harder than if you're working for someone else. Cash flow is key and it's essential to network with other business owners for advice. We believe in the saying that experience is knowledge, and knowledge is power.

## HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A GOOD WORK/LIFE BALANCE?

The key to balance is enjoying what you do at work so that work doesn't feel like a chore. When you're at work, be at work and when you're at home, be at home which is sometimes easier said than done. "Mindfulness" is a useful catch phrase to adopt as it encourages you to focus on always being present and involved. As our business is largely international, we need to travel regularly which is a strain on family life, but we are both fortunate to have supportive husbands who see the value of our business and are very involved fathers. When you're home, it's essential that life continues as if you haven't been away so there's minimal disruption.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST ISSUE FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE?

"Nowadays, women are required to have a career while still being a mom. This constant juggling act is difficult to get right and stay sane.

Many women don't have the luxury of being able to manage their own time, yet when you work for yourself you get to decide which 18 hours a day you're going to work," jokes Amanda.

## AS A WOMAN, WHAT HAVE THE HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES BEEN IN THE BUSINESS EVENTS INDUSTRY?

Highlights: From managing Indaba for South African Tourism to launching our Africa Showcase roadshows, we are appreciative of a number of great career highlights. Yet, our overriding achievement to date is sustainably running a successful company for the past seven years with an incredible all-women team.

Challenges: Dealing with a predominantly male supplier mix has its challenges.

## WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE OF ON SHOW?

We're ready for On Show to boost to the next stage of its life cycle. We believe that a business should always be in a growth phase; evolving with new partnerships, strengthening relationships with clients who support you and attracting new business potential. We've got lots planned for the coming year for both our tourism roadshows and our corporate clients.

## DO YOU BELIEVE THERE ARE ANY "TYPICALLY FEMALE" TRAITS THAT ARE BENEFICIAL IN BUSINESS?

Effective stress management, multi-tasking and attention to detail are critical in our industry. Management of your personal brand is equally important, as professional conduct in the way you act and dress (and manage your social media personal) goes a long way towards earning respect. Female leaders tend to offer an emotional ear to staff and clients rather than a hard-core business approach. Women seem to be more aware of these traits and those who embrace them, will thrive in business. ■

Celebrating an all-women business!



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