



#### WHO IS IT FOR?

- >> 65% of the Design Indaba board are practitioners in creative fields
- >> 35% are people who commission creative work
- >> 20% of people who attend are overseas visitors
- >> 60% are from Gauteng

expertise and investigates how design can create a better world. On diversification, Naidoo points out that you can diversify only when you know exactly what you stand for. In 2004, he launched the Design Indaba Expo, a 100% South African celebration of the country's best creative talent across all the creative industries.

"The Design Indaba was in its eighth incarnation by then and we had to find a way to really differentiate it – we had to actually spend ahead of where the market was. There was not enough of a critical mass to justify the expo, but that is what turned it into a multi-sectoral event. And rather than just selling space to exhibitors, we curate the expo and we have an independent curatorial board of leading creatives to do this."

That's because standards are important, he adds. "We only feature what is home-grown, high-end and exportable. We are not interested in derivatives and mimicry. No knock-offs from Milan." "While the conference has always been fiercely global, the expo is entirely local. What we have today is a global, best-in-class conference with speakers from around the world, accompanied on the flip side by an exhibition of top local talent."

#### MAKING IT ALL WORK

One of the great lessons Naidoo learnt along the way is that in the events business, you have to get out there and campaign, canvas and forge relationships with people and organisations. The design Indaba has thrived because he has never run it like a creative or cultural event; instead it's managed like a sports event. That means securing robust sponsorship, ensuring accountability and strict auditing processes, and partnering with media organisations all around the world. These are what Naidoo calls the building blocks of success.

"As we grew, we set out to be the best – to become the Cannes of the design world. That's why we now have around 40 000 people attending. We are intensely competitive."

He straightforwardly declares the Design Indaba to be better than similar events held in design hot spots like London and

San Francisco. It's a claim borne out by EIBTM, a top global exhibition for the conference, incentives, events, business travel and meetings industry, which in 2005 voted the Design Indaba the best conference in the world. To date, it's the only African event to be awarded this status.

Naidoo is also aiming to open up another revenue stream through the Design Indaba's web strategy which includes an e-commerce channel.

"The retail side of the expo has been very successful," he explains. "In 2009, we had a total of R115 million in sales in three days. Our goal now is to build a design portal that will enable people here and abroad to buy South African artefacts, like Imiso ceramics, online."

Having built a strong brand, Naidoo and his team are often invited to speak at conferences around the world. He was invited to Singapore to speak about the relationship between design and farming, and paid \$50 000 for the favour.

Partners have played a major role in ensuring the sustainability of the event, with Naidoo having big names on board, including Woolworths, Absa, DSTV, Grolsch, Jupiter Drawing Room, Sappi, South African Tourism, Chaywa, and One & Only.

It's also key to remember, Naidoo says, that the Design Indaba is owned by Interactive Africa, itself a big business with clients like Vodacom and FIFA.

#### MANAGING MONEY MATTERS

Naidoo recalls that in the beginning, he was interested in breaking even, but had to tighten up his infrastructure and his team as the business grew. Financial modelling was vital, and he spent a great deal of time working out what the market could bear from a pricing point of view.

"The Design Indaba is the cheapest creative event in the world, priced at around \$500 to \$600. Compared to similar events that come in at 2 000 Euros, that's a compelling offer – you have access to a whole world of design at a rand-based cost. It was important