

Acquired agility will underpin hybrid events

 By [Carol Weaving](#)

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When the sheer scale of the global pandemic became clearer in early February 2020, there was little in the way of formal, comparable data to help the events industry understand Covid-19's immediate and longer-term impact on our customers and our events.



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RX Global quickly conducted a frequent Covid-19 Customer Needs and Mindset Barometer, reaching out to exhibitors and attendees of some 201 events across the globe. This enabled us to determine how to pivot, and just how agile we'd need to be to keep the doors of events and entertainment open.

Noting many participants were open to engaging via digital platforms alongside face-to-face interactions, RX Africa quickly created the platforms that gave exhibitors a genuine opportunity to connect with their attendees using digital event tools that provided remote buying and selling opportunities for attendees and exhibitors. Events, as we knew them, were disrupted and our RX team embraced new solutions for our partners. Adversity often helps us to foster innovation and with Africa Travel Week we were prompted to rapidly embrace the development of online platforms. This was the realisation of Africa Travel Week Connect, a travel show held virtually for all in tourism and a massive success

When Covid-19 protocols allowed, we included in-person events at Decorex and the exceptionally successful inaugural FAME Week Africa, in collaboration with the City of Cape Town.

A particular highlight was Reel Talent Showcase, which saw over 200 entries from more than 20 countries submitted, providing a unique opportunity for creatives in Africa to display their work and explore possible opportunities with industry leaders.

Given the exceptional events the RX Africa teams were able to bring together throughout 2021, including Africa Travel Week and Decorex, my predictions for 2022 are significantly brighter than this time last year. I foresee substantial use of digital platforms across all sectors of the industry, not only because of potential waves of the pandemic, but also to reduce our carbon footprint where it makes sense to do so.

I predict the now-common hybrid "work from anywhere" model is here to stay for those staff members able to coordinate business requirements remotely, and event engagement teams coming together to engage with clients and attendees.

My feeling is that more shows will insist on proof of vaccination or a negative PCR test due to Government regulations before entry is allowed. RX Global's major 2021 shows Comic Con New York and World Travel Market London piloted this without any problems.

The future is all about innovation, agility

The future – both immediate and longer term – will require all organisations to do a "whether check" before embarking on large projects or events to see whether the world is open to travel, and whether a hybrid event is most appropriate. It would be a big mistake to undermine a virus by wishing it away – but equally inappropriate not to implement the precautions we can and learn to live within the framework of the best of medical knowledge.

Africa Travel Week, headlined by WTM Africa and ILTM Africa, will be hybrid in April 2021, and World Travel Market Africa (WTM Africa) and the International Luxury Travel Market Africa (ILTM Africa) will be adopting a hybrid format for the popular travel and tourism trade shows in 2022, allowing exhibitors to connect with buyers both at a live event and a two-day virtual event.

The hybrid format ensures a significant return on investment and buyers and exhibitors can benefit from 22% more meeting time slots than what was previously available to them.

WTM Africa will be held live and in-person from 11 to 13 April 2022 alongside ILTM Africa and it will include 365 solutions throughout the year. As Africa's only inbound and outbound premier travel and tourism trade show, the event will once again bring together exhibitors and buyers from across the globe to connect, exchange ideas, share news and discuss innovation within the travel and tourism sector.

The three-day live event in the Host City of Cape Town is open to all travel trade professionals. Visitors can look forward to attending conference sessions with speakers from around the globe, face-to-face networking, the African Responsible Tourism Awards, press conferences and more.

Decorex 2022 will be unveiling an exciting new approach to its shows and will continue driving the successful online marketplace which was launched as a way to connect exhibitors with their clients, our exhibitors.

Africa Automation Technology Fair will be an in-person event in 2023, and RX Africa has built a virtual network which will keep this community-engaged until they meet in person.

How event organisers can add value in 2022

Even while live events are already up and running, global sentiment shows that some customers are anticipating virtual meetings to continue into 2022— so if you have hybrid capabilities you can run alongside the in-person event, you'll cast a wider net.

Pre-registration badges and the ability to complete covid screening forms prior to arriving at the venue on the day of the event is key, so implementing systems that will ensure entry and exit points, toilets and exhibition spaces comply will ensure peace of mind for exhibitors and guests. Organised queueing systems and sufficient space to adhere to physical distancing throughout the venue. Having onsite testing stations for international delegates to have tests done where they are required prior to returning to their country of origin.

Travellers have taken to the skies again - however, we'd be wise to note that Covid-19 has not disappeared and variants may continue to plague us and stymie our plans. The advice here from Hotel News Now is, "be flexible and don't panic". RX Africa suggests our sector works to create a strategy for cancellations, possibly allowing groups to use their deposits should they need to reschedule; or offer a special for online attendance and purchasing.

While 2020 will be remembered for the shock and horror Covid-19 thrust on us, I believe that both 2020 and 2021 will also be remembered for being the years that gave rise to immense human resilience and encouraged true creativity in our quest for immediate and long-term solutions. The power of live events has been amplified with digital offerings and RX Africa is embracing this innovative way of doing things.

ABOUT CAROL WEAVING

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