

## The Move From Virtual Meetings to In-Person Exhibitions

Chief Editor of TechAfrica News, Chris Green, discussed the success of CABSAT '22 with Thomas Loffler, AVP, Events Management, Dubai World Trade Center.



INTERVIEW BY:

**Chris Green**

Chief Editor of TechAfrica News



### What is your general impression of the show?

We've spoken with many exhibitors and we've received a lot of positive feedback. We had a little situation in 2020 where the show was planned for March but had to be canceled because of the pandemic. A lot of travel restrictions were in place. So, we held a virtual event at the end of 2020. However, it wasn't as effective as a face-to-face event would have been.

Returning to face-to-face meetings was a boost and our exhibitors really appreciate it. We can see that many markets have opened up. We have also received many visitors from India, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Kenya, Oman, and Egypt. These markets have really picked up and our exhibitors are quite happy to meet in person again.

**Indeed. I think the exhibitors are quite happy about not just the quantity of the visitors, but the quality as**

### well. Is that the feedback you've had from them?

Yes, the feedback on the quality of the visitors was very good. Previously, travel was restricted. But now, even the decision-makers are traveling to these events.

**True, since these post-pandemic, in-person exhibitions started, it's the decision-makers who are really going. They want to see what's new. They want to have these face-to-face meetings and it's apparent that that has happened here as well.**

I agree. We always hope to attract people who are involved in decision-making. But ordinary users are also very important to us. We recognize that various stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process. So, it's not just the executives we seek to attract, but also their subordinates too.

**That's good. I've been coming to CABSAT since 2010 and I've seen it change over the years. I noticed that many new activities were introduced this year. Is that something you intentionally planned?**

In the past, we had a model where our conference area was tucked away in a corner, behind the black curtain. But then we decided to create more interactive events.

So, we positioned the conference areas at the center of the main

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hall. We also created little marketplaces where people could have more visibility and where people could actually meet and discuss certain things outside the main conference area.

We feel that this model of providing free content for the visitors works out quite well because it makes the event more interactive. In the past, we were using a rigid event structure. But we decided to break it up a little.

Also, by partnering with stakeholders from the content marketing sector and other industries, we have been able to bring in a new kind of audience.

Overall, we just want to create an event that people will want to go to. It is a real challenge to get people out of their offices to come around and spend some hours at an event. We hope to achieve a similar massive turnout next year.

### Historically, the date for CABSAT has always fluctuated a little bit. Do you schedule it that way on purpose?

That was a great challenge that we had in the past. We were constantly receiving improvement suggestions including a change of dates and a change of venue. So, that was happening frequently

and it was important for us to establish a kind of continuity in the calendar. Due to Ramadan and other issues, we had to move the program from March to May. But at some point, we had to switch back to March. In 2023 and the next couple of years, we intend to hold the event in May. We may move back to April if we find that that will be more expedient. Our goal is to avoid conflict of interest



in terms of holding the event at the same time as other important international trade shows. We want to give exhibitors a chance to exhibit with us.

### Finally, how would you sum up CABSAT 2022? How do you feel it as it has been?

I think we explored a lot of new topics at this year's CABSAT. For instance, we held discussions on the metaverse and blockchain technology.

These new technology sectors play a very important role in moving the industry forward. They show us where the industry is going. They also beg questions like how are we going to consume content in the future? Is it going to be just TV at home? Or is it going to be in a different environment? Is it going to be more on mobile?

I think this is definitely a big trend and we will have to observe and see how it goes. If you take Netflix

for example, they had a fantastic time during the early days of the pandemic. They gained a lot of new users.

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We're planning to grow and make the show even more exciting in order to attract more audiences and break into new markets and new territories. Overall, I think we've had a good show in 2022 and we are expecting an even better one in 2023.

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But recently, they've been experiencing some really challenging times because things have opened up again and other platforms have also launched. So, I think there's a lot of competition out there.

Another topic is sustainability. I believe we're going to see a lot more in the future. I learned that at the moment, there are 23,000 small space debris or space junk (bigger than a softball) floating around in space. Obviously, the initiatives that Elon Musk and other tech gurus have launched to make space travel affordable for everyone are very interesting.

Also, sustainability, filmmaking, and broadcast are other interesting topics and they will continue to be on the agenda. We are also planning to add a new sector that focuses on audio-visual technology. In fact, we are quite close to adding it to the CABSAT product index at the moment. We believe it will go a long way to improve the appeal of the show in the coming years.

So yes, we're planning to grow and make the show even more exciting in order to attract more audiences and break into new markets and new territories. Overall, I think we've had a good show in 2022 and we are expecting an even better one in 2023.



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