



Leading conference organisation

THE CONFERENCE COMPANY

celebrates its 25th anniversary

THE COMPANY WAS ESTABLISHED in Durban in 1997, when the industry was emerging in South Africa. Today, it also has branches in Johannesburg and Cape Town, to serve this fast-growing industry, where people come together to shape the way forward in their specific fields of interest, from AIDS to zoology. Founder, Nina Freysen-Pretorius, is the past-president of the International Congress and Conference Association (ICCA) and has been instrumental in ensuring that South Africa claims its rightful place in the international conference arena.

Nina has had a long association with the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI), firstly as a member, then as a patron member. She is also a board member of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and a member of the WPCO Alliance.



"I am proud of the role The Conference Company plays in facilitating events that can change the course of history while contributing to the growth of our local, regional and national economy."
— Nina Freysen-Pretorius

"When The Conference Company was established 25 years ago, the first international convention centre was opened in Durban — the only city at the time to have a purpose-built conferencing facility. Today, South Africa boasts numerous world-class convention centres and meeting facilities, and specialist service providers have evolved," Nina said.

"Numerous provincial and city convention bureaux have also been established, to attract conference and meetings business. The conference industry has become a powerful force in creating jobs and promoting the skills development that our country so desperately needs," Nina explained.

The Conference Company has managed more than 260 conferences since its inception. It has not only continued to

strengthen its networks locally, nationally and internationally, but also continued to research, adapt and embrace technology, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, to remain competitive in this market.

Technology

"Technology has, in many ways, been disruptive, changing the way conferences, meetings and exhibitions are managed and attended. Twenty-five years ago, it took 24 to 36 months to setup, coordinate, market and manage a conference using the postal service and fax machine.

"With the outbreak and spread of Covid-19 in early 2020, many of the industry service providers had to close their businesses, and retrench experts that had a wealth of knowledge and skills within the conferencing and hospitality sector. Having used our project management software for a number of years, our team was fortunately able to convert our efforts and migrate to offering a virtual business platform. In a sense, it has been a metamorphosis and complete transformation of the approach taken in the past. Whilst many key milestones remain important, the technological element is something that is here to stay. With the current world economic outlook being very bleak and challenging, the need to meet, share and learn is still there, but the format and the costs are scrutinised and questioned. Because Covid-19 did not only impact on us economically but emotionally too, the importance of a balanced approach and family impact is more acute. Why attend a meeting that takes two days out of your schedule getting there, two to three days attending the conference, followed by another two days of travelling and potentially recovery upon your return home? The time and financial cost will become ever more questioned," Nina said.

Association business

Nina said: "Working with associations who have volunteer leaders and a chairperson, that are professionals operating within the specific association sector of expertise, the time that they can contribute towards the association work is normally after hours and on weekends. With the added demand on specific skills across all sectors ever increasing, this makes it challenging from the association's, individual's and our perspective, as the consulting entity.

I have had to learn to be patient, be prepared and always anticipate planning accordingly. It has also taught me to really value the wonderful clients we have and the contribution that we can assist them to make in their respective sectors. Over the

Year we opened | **1997**

Offices DBN, JHB, CTN | **3**

Years of conference management experience | **25**

Number of conferences managed | **260**

Average number of delegates at each conference | **450**

One stop conference management service | **1**

Covid-19 pandemic lockdown period, I have also learnt how blessed we are to have such a dedicated, committed and skilled team. They have managed to migrate from doing in-person to virtual conferencing, at times making it seem easy."

Women power

"Whilst many women have taken up incredible leadership positions around the world in many different organisations, with different skills and abilities, my sense is that we are still faced with the same prejudices that woman before us have had. We are always judged by our outer appearances first and not the contribution that we can make with the abilities and skills set that we have," Nina said.

She added: "As a mother, wife and employer or consultant — woman just get on with the job at hand. How and when it gets done — has become immaterial. The 'work from home' scenario, in many ways, has proven to be beneficial to many women who need to take care of their children whilst also earning a living."

Global view

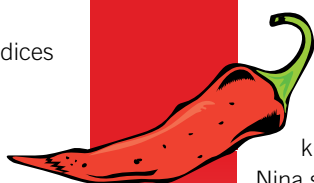
Having an ICCA membership has put The Conference Company in a position to have an oversight of the global conference market and emerging trends, and to play a pro-active role in strengthening Africa's share of this fast-growing business.

Highlights

Nina said: "Becoming a mom whilst at the same time having to run a business. I am sure that many working moms will be able to relate to how challenging these two roles can be at times. One never feels like you are doing either one justice! But, as children become less dependent on you as a parent, the systems and procedures put into place for your business allow you to appreciate that the stress and hard work is worth it."

"Being elected as the ICCA president was also one of the highlights of my career, whilst at the same time, a tremendous challenge due to the management change

ONE STOP SERVICE



within ICCA that had to be addressed. It taught me that one must believe in yourself and keep pushing, as that is the only way that you will realise what you can achieve.

"Having the right people and support at your side, taking people into your confidence to address challenges and to collaboratively find solutions and a way forward, has been a valuable lesson learnt," she said.

Lessons learnt

"Just when you think you have all the answers — they change all the questions. You are never too old to learn, you have to be adaptable and be prepared to learn from those younger and older — as knowledge and skills come in all shapes and sizes," Nina said.

One-stop service

The Conference Company's service goes way beyond the project management one would expect from a conference organiser. It includes the preparation of bids for national conferences, the formation of the conference legal entity and preparing and managing conference budgets and finances. Project management services cover registration, accommodation, transport, tours and social programmes, conference management including printing, venue, suppliers, programme and speakers, exhibitions, sponsorship, marketing, media relations and publications. In response to demand, The Conference Company has also taken on ongoing association management, including database management for numerous clients, to ensure their growth and sustainability, as well as the success of the events they deliver.

Currently, fully virtual conference services or hybrid services have become a more common offering and the format, style and components of engagement and skills transfer continue to change and adapt, to remain in line with market demands and technological developments.

Market insight and experience, together with a preferred supplier network developed over 25 years, enable The Conference Company to provide quality, value-for-money solutions that keep clients returning for their next conference.

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A timeline of highlights

The beginning

Nina began working at Conferences & Promotions, owned by Sue Bumpstead and Melanie Campbell. One of the first PCO businesses established in South Africa. Other colleagues at the company included Leora Burger, Felicity von Oettingen and Gwyn Glaister-Heaton.

"During this period PCO's did not charge management fees, but relied solely on the hotels paying commission for bookings. All project managers worked on an income split with the partnership. Unfortunately, due to this financial structure the business became financially constrained and the partnership was dissolved at the end of 1996," Nina said.

The Sanlam Komkamp

Nina added, "One of the first large projects that I got to manage under the Conferences and Promotions company was a 'Sanlam KomKamp'! It was called this 20+ years ago and was an incentive for the best marketers. These were awesome conferences to arrange, as they had to be inspirational and have a lot of wow factor. I can recall, for one of these incentives, we

chartered five helicopters and did catering in the hangar — so that all 200+ delegates could go for a flip along the North Coast. They then got transferred to the station and we had chartered the Umgeni Steam Locomotive to take them down to the Wild Coast Sun for the weekend. Dinners and the décor were really something to behold. Draping was not 'good enough'. We had painted murals, depicting the theme of the dinner! Janet Landy and John Lang from Party Design were the designer and décor experts."

Site Inspection — Godfrey King

Nina said, "One of the treats in those days was to go on a site inspection. I got an invitation to go to the newly opened Fancourt Hotel. We had to fly there in a small aircraft and, as luck would have it, I got to sit next to Godfrey King, editor and owner, of the *Business Events Africa* (then called *SA Conference, Exhibition and Events Guide*). He was very highly thought of in our industry, somewhat of a guru and very well-connected. I was so intimidated, as a newbie in the sector. Little did I know that this was the start of a friendship and mentorship that lasted for many years."

1997

Nina married Michael Andrew Pretorius in July 1997 and after the honeymoon, The Conference Company was established. Initially, working from home — large enough to accommodate two desks and a chair — Mom, Janelle, was brought in to answer the phone and assist with the faxing!

2002

In 2002, as The Conference Company grew, they acquired a small Victorian-styled house as their new offices.

Milestones

1998 - Nina joined SAACI.

2003 - Birth of Ben Pretorius.

2004 - Birth of Matt Pretorius. International Chambers Conference.

Nina said, "Whilst pregnant with Matt, we bid in a partners venture with Ikhono Communications, chief executive officer, Zodwa Msimang, to manage the International Chambers Conference. The day after I had given birth to Matt, I received the phone call that our partnership had been awarded the contract.

"Work started almost immediately and there was no maternity leave to speak of. I should have



COP17/CMP7
UNITED NATIONS
 CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 2011
DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA



complained to my boss about poor working conditions."

2006 - WISA – The Conference Company bought the congress management agreement from Sue Bumpstead due to her ill health.

Due to the successful management of the WISA 2006 conference, The Conference Company was subsequently appointed to assist with the 2010, 2012 and 2016 conferences and now, in 2022, will be hosting the WISA conference in Sandton, Johannesburg, in hybrid format.

2008 - ICCA membership

Nina said: "Whilst involved with SAACI and getting to know the industry members and colleagues, plans were afoot to build the Cape Town International Convention Centre. Dirk Elzinga was initially employed to do the marketing for the RAI group in Amsterdam who had been tasked with the feasibility study of such a centre and design. Dirk visited me in Durban at my office to discuss the exciting CTICC and during our conversation, mentioned that I should really consider joining ICCA. I clearly recall saying to him – Me? The little PCO business in South Africa – and he said to me "yes of course it is good for networking and international business." This stuck with me and I always wondered how I could afford to be a member firstly and secondly, pay to attend IMEX and the ICCA Conference."

Nina is elected Geographical Representative for Africa/Middle East in 2008. She was re-elected in 2010 and 2012. Her term ended in 2014.

"Having saved and budgeted to become a member of ICCA, I embarked on the adventure of being an international PCO! It has been the most wonderful journey and I have been extremely blessed to have had this opportunity. It has blessed



me in ways unimaginable, but it has also challenged me personally with difficult decisions and choices," Nina said.

2009 - Nina becomes SAACI national chairperson. Her term ended in 2013.

2010, January - Adene Pringle appointed general manager of SAACI.

2011 - COP17 CMP7

A tender was sent out for the eThekweni Project management for the COP17 CMP7 that was to be hosted in Durban in December 2011. Nina said: "It was a rollercoaster ride with meetings held with SAPS that included trips to the DIRCO offices in Pretoria; a trip to Bonn in Germany and Panama to learn more about how the COP works and operates. Under the leadership of Michael Sutcliffe and Sue Bannister from the eThekweni Municipality, the city of Durban arranged with city managers to obtain bicycles for guests to get around."

2012 - ICP – Largest conference CTICC had hosted with 2,000 delegates at the CTICC.

2013 - Paediatric Diabetic Congress

Nina said, "Due to Ben's chronic illness at birth, we were introduced to Dr Kubendra Pillay, a Paediatric Endocrinologist that saved his life when Addison's Disease was diagnosed. This led to the bid for Durban, South Africa to host the Paediatric Diabetic Congress in Durban in 2013."

2014 - Nina Freysen-Pretorius was elected president of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA). She is the organisation's first-ever African president, and its third-ever female president.

"Under the ICCA presidency of Arnaldo Nardone and past president Leigh Harry, I was coerced or



convinced into standing for the ICCA presidency. During the run up to election and voting for the ICCA 2014 Presidential – I can remember asking myself, "What are you doing? How did you even put your hand up? Stupid woman!" My competitors in the election were very well-established industry colleagues with a wealth of experience and extremely well-networked. Handan Boyce from Turkey and Martin Winter of the Brisbane Convention Bureau. So, I recall saying, I will do my best and hold my head high – congratulating the elected winner. I was completely overwhelmed and surprised that I was elected by a majority vote," Nina said.

2014 - ICCA Presidency

Elected: 2014.

Re-elected: 2016.

End of term 2018.

2018 - 2nd Annual Conference and General Meeting of the International Association of Prosecutors 2018 (held in conjunction with the NPA).

2021 - ICZ first fully virtual conference.

2022 - IOU largest virtual event in celebration year 2022. ■



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