

Level one BEE rating for Global Conferences

"We're now 53.3 black-owned and we're also a level one contributor from the Department of Trade and Industry's balance scorecard, which is the highest rating a company can get. We're absolutely delighted. It shows that we're not just talk but we are serious about transformation," says Brian MacDonald, CEO of Global Conferences, which offers a one-stop shop for large-scale, inbound, international conferences.

For Brian, the long road to BEE compliance started five years ago. "We had to accept that we live in a democratic, integrated society and if we wanted to grow as a business we had to be more embrace. What accelerated the process was that government departments were starting to request and query what you were actually doing in terms of your BEE status, so there were definite commercial considerations."

The first step was to look at staff. "Our criterion was to look for people with energy, enthusiasm and potential from previously disadvantaged communities, people who could do more than a menial job, people who could progress within the business. That's been one of the more satisfying things. We've got one member of our management team is a person of colour (which is 20 percent). And we've got probably five people in middle management who have come up from more junior positions. These include two THETHA learnership students."



Global Conferences handled the accommodation and tours for IDF

Brian says finding partners was trickier. "We had a couple of false starts where we had people who were not active in the business and did not contribute. We wanted someone who would help us to understand the business better, rather than just be on the letterhead. We had to buy them out and start all over again."

Eventually, they met up with Vuyal Investments, which is predominantly a women-owned business. Izandla Trust, which owns 45% of Vuyal, is a grass-roots trust which is involved in food processing plants, embroidery and sowing. Vuyal now own 49% of Global's BEE ownership coming from Imperial and Tourvest, the companies they fall under. "Vuyal has been a good experience," Brian says. "Our chairperson is Mertia Isaacs,

two small projects, which we're working through with them. I find it very stimulating, because they're so grateful for the support and the encouragement I'm giving them."

Global Conferences have donated the money they've received from the Western Cape Government for this programme to SAACI's bursary fund for previously disadvantaged individuals.

Brian says, "Becoming BEE compliant has allowed us to overcome a potential hurdle, rather than being a recipe for instant success. It's allowing us to be on a shopping list and it's allowing us to present."

Brian would like to see tenders requesting SAACI accreditation as well as BEE compliance in the future. "There are companies which are awarded business who qualify on BEE but lack the necessary experience, and it backfires badly on the country at some of these bigger events. We hear stories and it's frightening what goes on. In our industry, you can claim that you can do anything. So a lot of decisions are made on a piece of paper, without properly investigating the claims that are made. I don't think we as an industry have done a good enough job of telling people what a complex thing it is to put on a conference for 500 people and I don't think the industry has done a great job yet on communicating with government that SAACI accreditation should be mandatory on all tenders."

who was chairperson of the Western Cape Tender Board. She's a well-known, dynamic businesswoman who has done a lot for us. She's helping us currently with our procurement policy, our employment equity and our skills training. She herself is an exceptionally good trainer."

On the skills training side, Brian says Global Conferences always try to have one or two THETHA learnership students, Brian adds, "We're also involved with the Western Cape Government's Tourism Mentorship Programme. We have a mentorship with a company called Avista, which is three charming previously disadvantaged individuals who run an event management company. I meet with them on a formal basis for two hours every week. They're going to be working with us, paid, doing IDF, and we've given them