

PRESS RELEASE

Business trends that will grow in 2017

15 December 2016, Johannesburg: A new year is upon us, and with it comes the promise of a fresh start and renewed promises to think positively, achieve more and eat less carbs... However, to achieve these resolutions, it is time to start planning for the upcoming year. To help you get started, we speak to Jurie Hanekom, Chairman of leading windows and doors manufacturer, Swartland, a successfully thriving family-owned enterprise – he offers us some insights into what he believes are the top business trends for 2017:

1.) Focus on Millennials

Also known as Generation Y, Millennials are a demographic segment that were born between the early '80s and late '90s. With their older members entering their late thirties, the millennial generation is reinventing the way business is being done and how people are managed. Says Hanekom: "Millennials insist on all-inclusive leadership, and opportunities for growth in every position that they fill. As such, business ethics such as transparency, collaboration, and a healthy work-life balance are vital for any business looking to attract the best and the brightest going forward with regards to employees, as well as loyal future customers."

A major Millennial-inspired trend is that more and more businesses are hiring freelance or virtual employees, notes Hanekom: "Today, many companies are turning to a virtual employee model, or they are hiring freelancers where they can, due to the numerous perks it provides both the business and the employee. The benefits for business include saving money, expanding your pool of applicants, increasing productivity, and improving employee retention. For the employee, you can earn more as a freelancer or contractor, and it allows you to work from anywhere you want. The latter is especially attractive for mothers with small children, or the many Millennials who have chosen to reject big city living, in lieu of smaller towns that offer a better quality of life."

2.) Start prepping for Generation Z

Generation Z, also known as the iGeneration, is a specific demographic that were born between the mid-1990s and the early-2000s. Hanekom notes that the first members of Generation Z will be graduating from university in a few years time, and he believes that it is imperative to start planning on ways to tap into their psyches now. He notes that although they haven't started flooding the workplace just yet, it is never too early to start worrying about them: "Generation Z the world over has, to a large extent, been shaped by recession, and they have seen their parents suffer through it."

"Generation Z are thinking about university and job prospects very early on in high school, and they do not regard education as an experience, but rather as an investment. This new generation is far more pragmatic and a lot more prepared

than their recent predecessors, and this is a worldview that is not something they are likely to outgrow. In order to attract customers and employees from Generation Z, business need to be able to recognise what is important to them, and to start customising their offering to them," Hanekom explains.

3.) Building tech for the non-technical

Everybody needs to use technology in order to get ahead, but not everybody is tech-savvy – business needs to cater for this, notes Hanekom: "Social media, Internet marketing and ecommerce all help to empower a business, allowing it to reach potential customers in untapped markets, both locally and abroad. However, although there are increasingly more people online, lots of them are not particularly well informed about or proficient in the use of modern technology."

He says that the need to use technology is an essential element for conducting business and competing in today's market, and as such, he believes that there will be more and more technology being developed to help the less tech-literate entrepreneurs out there, to exist in an increasingly tech-swamped world: "Platforms like WordPress for example, allow for easy creation and management of a website with minimal technical know-how, so that even the smallest businesses can build an online presence."

4.) App fever

In this day and age, any company worth its salt is expected to have some kind of app or online tool, says Hanekom: "Today, the trend is to 'app-ify' everything, and it is easy to understand why – apps help provide shortcuts to the things we do – from finding a taxi, helping us workout, monitoring our loyalty programmes, and even our health. I don't think that app mania is merely a consumer phenomenon – apps have changed our lives and the way we do things, and I believe that it is the key to future success. It was with this in mind that Swartland developed SpecNet – a practical, easy-to-use web-based tool that supports professionals operating in the built environment by providing free downloadable ArchiCad objects, Revit families and product information for Swartland's range of windows and doors – making specifying and accurate design a synch."

5.) Greener and greener

Consumers in general are becoming increasingly conscious about what types of products they buy, and are especially loyal to those products that are green, and produced by companies that have an environmentally-friendly ethos as well, says Hanekom: "Consumers are placing more and more importance on going green – in part due to the ever-increasing tariffs being charged for water and electricity, and also partly due to the growing awareness of the fact that we need to start looking after the environment if it is to keep on looking after us."

Today, the green revolution has moved away from being an intangible theory-driven fringe movement, towards something that is tactile, expected and part of

our everyday lives. We turn off the sink when we brush our teeth, we turn off the water when we are washing our hair in the shower, we choose energy efficient products whenever we can – society in general is increasingly committed to becoming more eco-friendly. The truth is that we like saving money and we like doing our bit for the environment, and we like companies that also enjoy these things.

He says that for the younger generations especially, living sustainably is a fundamental value: “Going green is no longer simply a nice-to-have business ethos – today, it is a clearly identified megatrend. Over the past decade, environmental issues have steadily encroached on business largely due to escalating public and governmental concern about climate change, industrial pollution, food safety, and natural resource depletion, to name a few.

“As a result, consumers are increasingly seeking out sustainable products and services, and leaning towards supporting companies who are making genuine efforts to improve their sustainability rankings. Governments too are interceding with unprecedented levels of new regulation governing green practices and requirements. In South Africa, one example is the SANS 10400-XA National Building Regulations covering energy usage in buildings, which has had a massive impact on the building industry at large. Investors and stakeholders have a keen understanding of how important this megatrend is for business, and so, they too are paying special attention to companies with sound sustainable practices,” notes Hanekom.

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