

It's all about the energy

 By Marie Yossava, issued by Grapevine Communications

12 May 2022

Why the magic of personal connection simply cannot be ignored

When lockdown was announced just over two years ago, most of us balked at the idea of not being able to have a braai or a coffee, or sit down, glass in hand, to watch our favourite sport. We thought of how we'd miss those casual conversations with clients or colleagues over a bite, and some of us even began to think fondly of those long meetings we often wished had been cancelled so we could catch up on mails. The thought of three weeks seeing no faces besides those of our immediate household members seemed, well, untenable.

Then those three weeks stretched into five, and eventually we lost count... until we no longer needed to be urged to stay home. It became our default setting. Now, it was the thought of driving to the office for a meeting, the thought of putting on makeup and swapping casual wear for more appropriate attire, that was anathema. After all, why bother with a face-to-face meeting when you can achieve just as much over Zoom - with the camera off?

The answer to that question became clear to me one recent April weekend, when I was part of the team hosting Standard Bank Joburg Polo in the Park at Steyn City. From the outset, I was excited to work on this project: polo is, after all, such a prestigious sport, and the innovative format of this event makes for great pace and thrilling action. Add in elements from the world of business, fashion, sport and media, in a truly magnificent setting, and it becomes even more exhilarating.

As the project got underway in earnest, I realised how energised I was by being part of a team, by the swapping ideas, giving and receiving feedback and sharing inspiration. This is what I had unknowingly missed: the energy that people working towards a common goal give each other.

And that was just during the planning of the event. On the actual day, the atmosphere was electric. Speaking to different people meant getting different perspectives, thinking about things from a different angle, exposure to new ideas. Meeting up with industry contacts, briefly discussing what we've been up to during this time and scheduling a proper catch up session put me on a high... and got me thinking about how this is what we lack when we sit behind our screens, contemplating our bad hair day while struggling to concentrate on what other participants are saying during virtual meetings.

This is not to say that Standard Bank Joburg Polo in the Park has been our first event since lockdown but the realisation that the National State of Disaster has finally been lifted... We have been fortunate to be a part of smaller, bespoke media events in recent months as restrictions eased but with all the testing and screening protocols in place, from the opening of the Steyn City Ultimate Helistop and lagoon and pre-launch of Steyn City's ground-breaking City Centre to this year's inaugural Steyn City Golf Championship. While each special event has brought me into contact with different audiences who have added their own dimension to my experience, there was something wonderful about the polo that brought to mind our happy, pre-Covid days.

Thriving on energy

I appreciate the benefits the virtual world brought us when we really needed it, and I applaud us all for making the most of the resources we had available. Like most of us, I would imagine, I am grateful that we were able to continue with business as usual to some extent. But I am now also keenly aware that, convenient though they are, online meeting platforms are no substitute for the real thing. An online 'check in' cannot take the place of a warm greeting in real life, or that split second when you realise that your thinking is completely in sync with someone else's. The energy that fills the air at these moments is practically tangible.

Since PR is, at its core, dedicated to creating connections between people, both practitioners and clients – not to mention the recipients of our messages, the media – thrive on these moments. Personal engagement is crucial to what we do. And so, as we continue to make our through this utterly changed world, let's keep in mind that there is something wonderful to look forward to: the day when in-person meetings and events become a regular part of our week once more; when we can shake hands or embrace one another, and make great things happen – together.

ABOUT MARIE YOSSAVA

Marie Yossava, founder and owner of Grapevine Communications, embarked on a PR/communications career more than two decades ago. In the past twenty years she has built a solid media relations consultancy, which focuses exclusively on media relations.
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