

Leo van de Polder on expanding the Shop network in South Africa

By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Shop Association is a global NPO focused on enhancing retail environments and experience. With a presence in more than 20 countries across 6 continents, its purpose is to empower its broad spectrum of member companies with ongoing education, networking opportunities and real-world insights to equip them to innovate on demand and ultimately shape the evolution of retail.



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The trade association is the result of a merger in 2015 between the Association for Retail Environments (A.R.E.) and Point of Purchase Advertising International (POPAI).

Shop regards continuous education as crucial to the long-term development of the retail business. Members have access to training solutions in the form of online, face-to-face and workshop-style learning to support the personal development of industry professionals.

Likewise, recognition of standout achievements in the industry is also valued, and the annual Shop Awards competition celebrates the best new innovations in retail environments and experiences. Each of the four award programmes comprising the global Shop Awards highlights a different area of expertise, from point of purchase, to retail design, in-store displays and customer service.

Enhanced SA presence

Shop is in the midst of enhancing its presence in South Africa, a gateway of course to the rest of the continent. But more importantly, in an increasingly globalised marketplace, South African retailers and brands are not simply competing with each other; they're up against global online retailers and the growing list of international brands setting up stores in SA. Benchmarking is now done according to global standards, and Shop Association helps to expose local stakeholders to international trends.



Leo Van De Polder, Shop Association.

"From my visit to SA and my conversations with companies, educators and members, and from many store visits, we saw a need to inform the SA industry about what's happening around the globe. The sharing of knowledge and skills is so important ... global knowledge could help local business," explains Leo van de Polder, global development director of Shop.

He adds that because retail is going borderless, suppliers, producers and agencies are going global, and retail design and technology are global areas.

The Netherlands-based Van de Polder has worked in a mix of retail companies and creative agencies for more than 40 years. As global development director, he travels across the world serving Shop members, developing existing and new regions, monitoring the global Shop brand, collaborating with current and new partners, helping to develop new services based on member needs, and promoting the retail industry in general.

In this interview, Van de Polder shares more on the Shop Association's focus areas.

❖ ***As an introduction, what is the mission of the Shop Association?***

Our mission is for successful member companies to lead retail and brand innovation and growth.

❖ ***Which types of businesses should consider becoming a member of the association?***

When I take a look at our members worldwide, I see the following businesses: Associates/suppliers, brand manufacturers, consulting agencies, design agencies, visual merchandisers, producers, service providers, research agencies, retailers, universities and educators.

Any company that is active in retail can become a member of Shop.

❖ ***How is Shop equipped to provide its members with support and guidance in the retail business?***

Through research, events, networking, publications, education, and awards and recognition.

Two things that I want to highlight are:

1. Education: We have our MaRC (Marketing at Retail Certified) programme, as well as webinars and podcasts delivering content based on the reality of today. We'll also be introducing shopper marketing courses with local partners.
2. We are planning to bring the Shop Awards to SA, which is all about recognition and raising the bar in the industry. And a new item in the Shop Awards will be the Student Design Awards, which provides the next generation with a platform for their ideas and creative designs.

❖ ***Can you speak to the importance of education as a focus area for Shop?***

Because retail is changing so fast, education is of the essence. We need the new generation because they have their own way of looking at retail. Schools and universities are not always able to react fast enough in their education programmes, so we as an industry can play a role in this.

I also see that globally, schools and universities offer programmes for a specific area, such as 2D Design or 3D Design, but in reality what's needed is a combination of those. Students need to know the connection between the specialisations from a brand and retailer perspective.

Everybody around the world is talking about lifelong learning, and I agree, so let the educators and schools collaborate with the industry. Let's not think and act from our own silos.

🔴 **Briefly explain what you believe to be the key challenges and opportunities facing retailers today.**

I still see that retailers are struggling with technology, which I can understand... it's difficult for them to decide when and what to invest in. So insights from the industry are of the essence.

Next to that, I see what I call 'digital hysteria'. Sometimes it looks as if digital itself is an objective, but it isn't. It's a new tool for communicating with your customers.

Do not forget your daily store operations, keep your physical store relevant and inspiring!

The message will be king in the nearest future - it's about being 1 on 1 with your customer. What are you going to say to me? Is it relevant for me? What problem are you solving for me? Help me to make my life a lot easier and inspire me with solutions.

For more information on Shop Association and to become a member, [visit the website](#). And keep an eye out for Leo van de Polder's monthly editorial contributions on Bizcommunity.

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