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Playing Games At Work Pays Off For South African Team In Global Challenge

A team of South African supply chain professionals recently proved that playing games at work can get you far; in this case, as far as Lisbon, Portugal, for the global finals of “*The Fresh Connection Challenge*”, an innovative business simulation game that is delivering big benefits for companies around the world.

Developed in the Netherlands nine years ago, The Fresh Connection was launched in South Africa in 2010 by leading Southern African supply chain and operations management association SAPICS. *“To date, The Fresh Connection has been experienced by more than 12 000 professionals in 600 companies and 12 000 students in 100 universities across the world,”* reveals SAPICS president Mungo Park.

“Businesses benefiting from The Fresh Connection include Fortune 500 multinational manufacturing businesses,” he states.

“For optimal performance, a supply chain needs the collaboration of team members from across the organisation. Breaking down silos and creating the right cross-functional mindset, however, can be a major challenge. The Fresh Connection is a unique supply chain management training tool designed to equip participants with the skills to rise to this challenge. In the ‘game’, company and individual teams, each comprising four members, participate in web-based challenges and compete against other international teams. They must make the best strategic and tactical choices to save a virtual company, The Fresh Connection, from financial ruin. Each function – including supply chain management, sales, purchasing and operations - can make a limited number of decisions and they must work together closely to positively impact return on investment. What makes the game even more interesting is that supply chain risks are randomly activated and can seriously harm the company if not mitigated against.”

The top teams are invited to take part in The Fresh Connection Global Final. It was held in Lisbon this year, and a South African foursome from Centurion-based Aerosud, a supplier of manufacturing solutions for the aviation industry, qualified to compete against teams from around the world.

“On arriving at the global final, our team from South Africa felt like they were the underdogs, but they soon overcame their reservations when they emerged as the top team in the first two rounds of the challenge, with the highest return on investment achieved for their virtual company,” Park enthuses. The South Africans finished the global challenge in 5th place.

This year’s winning team was a truly international collaboration, with team members travelling from Colombia, Vietnam, El Salvador and Brazil to compete in Lisbon. The 2017 Fresh Connection World Champions are Aaron Ramos Reyes (from Colombia), Andrea Tretti (originally from Italy but now working in Vietnam), Carlos Mira Padilla (from El Salvador) and Ivan Rogério Gameiro Roumeliotis (from Brazil). They met each other face to face for the first time at the challenge, having spent time collaborating, exchanging messages, working together and playing The Fresh Connection online. In addition to the title and prestige, their win entitles them to an intensive four-day Executive Education Supply Chain Management Course at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, MA, USA.

“The Fresh Connection Challenge inspires analytical and out of the box thinking, and allowed us to take risks and play out new ideas,” comments Andre Tustin, continuous improvement manager at Aerosud Aviation. *“The game was great for cause and effect, and helped with strategic and big picture thinking, collaboration and communication. It required the different roles to think outside of their normal activities; for example, sales was forced to check production due to very high promotion horizons. Our experience at the global challenge was structured to be very much like a ‘real day’ scenario. It effectively simulated a daily environment that included real work day pressures. The*

time given to make decisions was very short and created an incredibly pressurised environment. We were forced to make on the spot decisions. One of the rounds required the team to conduct real interviews with suppliers and make decisions about which supplier they would use right there and then. Overall, the Fresh Connection is a great practical learning experience,” Tustin concludes.

PHOTO CAPTION:

Aerosud’s South African team in action at The Fresh Connection Global Final in Lisbon: (from left) Andre Tustin, Ofani Magabe, Eugene Nel and Lee-Ann Slabbert

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ABOUT SAPICS

Since its foundation in 1966, SAPICS has become the leading provider of knowledge in supply chain management, production and operations in Southern Africa.

SAPICS builds operations management excellence in individuals and enterprises through superior education and training, internationally recognised certifications, comprehensive resources and a country-wide network of accomplished industry professionals. This network is ever expanding and now includes associates in other African countries. SAPICS is proud to represent APICS (the global end-to-end supply chain association) as its exclusive premier channel partner in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Established 40 years ago, the annual SAPICS Conference is the leading event in Africa for supply chain professionals. The 2018 SAPICS Conference takes place in Cape Town, from 10 to 13 June.