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INSIGHTS, IDEAS, CASE STUDIES



Know Your Current Events

Plugging real-time events into an event's curriculum can bolster attendance and exhibitor counts.

BY NANCY MANN JACKSON

For the 20 years of its existence, the Clean Gulf Conference and Exhibition (CGC) has been the largest North American show for the offshore oil spill community. But last year, in the wake of the Deepwater

Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the show took on new importance. And by tailoring the event's content and approach to answer the questions raised by the ongoing news of the oil spill, the CGC increased both exhibitors and attendees by 65 percent, resulting in an addition of more than 600 people at the 2010 event.

"The oil spill was such a tragic situation, and we didn't want to exploit it in any way," says Laura Couvillion, show director at the TradeFair Group, which produces the show. However, news of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill was coming out so quickly and changing so often, and the show's stakeholders were intently interested in the cleanup effort and related information, such as the potential for new regulations. So show organizers were compelled to keep constituents

informed about what was going on and to educate new groups of potential attendees and exhibitors who were suddenly interested in the industry. Staying on top of the news became crucial for show organizers to develop new, relevant educational content and to publicize the conference to new groups.

"Real-time information was the key to our successful show," Couvillion says. "Our key market was 100 percent vested in the current oil spill in the Gulf, and the spill also brought new markets to the oil spill and emergency response industry. So we were constantly focused on the news coming out of the Gulf."

It wasn't enough to simply keep up with the news; show organizers had to respond to that news quickly and appropriately. When the BP oil spill occurred in April, CGC organizers were at a program advisory committee meeting, working on the educational content for the upcoming October meeting. Almost immediately "we recognized that the conference material we'd developed was completely out the window," Couvillion says.

Because all the people serving on the program committee were suddenly thrown into action, helping to clean up the oil spill, it fell to show organizers to develop a new educational lineup for the meeting. "We really don't want it to fall on our shoulders to plan the content, because we trust our advisory committee; they are the experts and the ones working in the field every day," Couvillion says. However, in the wake of the oil spill, committee members were largely unavailable and the show management team had to rely on news articles to guide their development of a relevant educational session lineup.

"The news was coming in daily, and our team constantly passed news arti-

The TradeFair Group Strategy

GOAL: To take advantage of real-time industry news to make the show more relevant.

STRATEGY: Completely overhaul content based on fast-changing, daily news of a major industry event, communicate regularly with constituents about the current news and ongoing changes, and reach out to new sectors of attendees involved in the news.

RESULTS: Attendance increased from 1,800 to 2,700, including a 65 percent increase in the number of exhibitors.

cles back and forth to each other," Couvillion says. When the team agreed that a topic mentioned in a particular news article would make a good session topic, they would circle the key players named or quoted in the article. Then they'd contact those individuals about presenting at a session or workshop.

While show organizers tried to reach out to advisory committee members to make sure they were choosing the right topics and pinpointing the right presenters, committee members were knee-deep in cleaning up the oil spill and often unavailable. "We really had to redesign the content ourselves with input from the people we could get in touch with," Couvillion says. "Reading the news was our single most important source."

Not only did CGC organizers read

the news to incorporate it into educational sessions, they also helped spread the latest news to keep attendees and potential attendees informed and engaged. The team distributed press releases about the cleanup and the industry behind the job; those releases were picked up by all major business wires. They organized email campaigns that were more market focused, offering news tailored for each specific sector of the market, which helped new markets understand the industry and the role of the show for professionals to meet and learn more about the oil spill and emergency markets. The team also participated in social media to provide real time information via Web site updates and mobile apps for those in the field. As a result, the show attracted more than 50 new companies and a large contingent of high-level attendees. ■



Reality TV on the Show Floor

PAACE Automechanika Mexico partners with a TV show to film a live episode on the show floor.

BY NANCY MANN JACKSON

The most established automotive trade show in Mexico and Central America, PAACE Automechanika Mexico attracts automotive wholesalers and distributors, car

repair, transmission and service shops, technicians and mechanics and other retail outlets in the automotive industry. And by partnering with a popular automotive-themed TV show to film a live episode on the show floor, Automechanika Mexico became even more popular. Thanks to the increased energy and excitement that live TV brought to the show, more than 21,000 buyers from 34 countries visited the 2010 show, up from 11,400 in 2009.

"We originally partnered with West Coast Customs Mexico to display their live workshop on the show floor and

customize vehicles from start to finish over the three days of the show," says Kristen Woodburn, CEM, group show director of technical shows at Messe Frankfurt, Inc., which produces PAACE Automechanika Mexico. "It was a great way to promote the customization of vehicles in the automotive aftermarket as well as educate our audience on techniques, options and products with the live display." After developing that partnership, West Coast Customs Mexico came to show organizers and asked if they would be interested in filming a live episode of the West Coast Customs TV show onsite at the event. The show, TV Azteca's "Tuneame la Nave," is Mexico's version of the popular "Pimp My Ride" show that MTV aired in conjunction with West Coast Customs in the United States. Organizers agreed to the proposal, and a live TV episode was born.

The TV Azteca film crew was in and out of the show filming throughout the three days of the show, as auto customizers worked on site. On the last day, the unveiling of the project attracted large crowds to the floor, and "the majority of the [TV crew's] filming time was spent covering the unveiling of the final car product on the last show day," Woodburn says. Live footage of the episode is available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWtqO50YDGE&feature=related>.

Messe Frankfurt took advantage of the TV partnership by including news about the live show in pre-show marketing materials. "The TV show assisted us with added excitement on the show floor while they were filming and definitely provided us with both pre-show excitement as we advertised the live recording and post-show coverage since it has aired," Woodburn says. "Because the West Coast Customs Mexico staff represented the celebrities and personalities aired on the show every week, they also drew quite a bit of excitement and visibility to our show."

While it's difficult to identify exactly how many new attendees were drawn specifically by the partnership with West Coast Customs Mexico, Woodburn says it's clear that the part-

The Messe Frankfurt Strategy

GOAL: To build attendance and increase energy and excitement on the show floor.

STRATEGY Partner with West Coast Customs Mexico to offer a live vehicle customization workshop on site, which was featured as a live installment of the TV show "Tuneame la Nave," Mexico's version of MTV's "Pimp My Ride."

RESULTS: Even though admissions costs were doubled in 2010 compared with 2009, the number of buyers on the floor increased from 11,409 to more than 21,000.

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nership helped build attendance. “We doubled our admission cost in 2010 in comparison with 2009, and still managed to increase the number of true buyers on our show floor last year,” she says. “This feature area added additional value for our attendees and allowed them to be part of not only a trade show, but also current pop culture related to their industry segment.”

In addition to increasing the number of buyers on the show floor, the live TV coverage also helped create a better,

more robust show. “I think this partnership has really helped us enhance the Accessories & Tuning product category of our show by demonstrating the options available for vehicle modification through the West Coast Customs Mexico display,” Woodburn says. “By focusing our efforts on serving this market as it grows in Mexico and creating meaningful partnerships, we are growing both our exhibitors’ participation in this category and our buyers interested in these types of products.” ■

Paone says. “As a result, we were able to target vendors pre-show and at-show deals specific to both the consumer and business attendees.”

Prior to opening registration, exhibitors were asked to complete a pre-show questionnaire that included a category listing of products and services. As business attendees registered for the event, they were provided with the same list and asked to check the categories that interest them. “Reports were run using our registration system, and the attendees were then given a listing of exhibitors whose products and services matched those they had identified,” Paone says.

Not only did the report show attendees a list of vendors offering the products and services they were seeking, but it also provided an opportunity for attendees to schedule one-on-one appointments. “Although there are one-on-one programs that allow you to choose a time slot, we opted to have the business attendee and vendor contact each other to have an initial discussion pre-show to further pre-qualify their interests in one another,” Paone says.

In addition to pre-show up-selling to business attendees, show organizers also focused on making additional sales to consumer attendees at the door. “Since we had live tournaments and training seminars at the show, attendees were able to pre-purchase [tickets to these events] online during registration and at the show,” Paone says. “Most of the selling was at the gate, where front-desk registration staffers were required to ask attendees if they would like to purchase tickets to autograph sessions, training seminars or other events.”

While there’s no way to determine how many additional sales would have taken place without the extra encouragement to buy both at online registration and on site, Paone says he knows the efforts were worthwhile. “Without the on-site upselling, the results would have been much different,” he says. ■

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Selling Up

MMA World Expo matches attendee data with show events and merchandise sales to boost revenue.

BY NANCY MANN JACKSON

The MMA World Expo Strategy

GOAL: To increase revenue by up-selling additional services and products to attendees.

STRATEGY: Use registration system technology to match attendees’ interests with available products and services.

RESULTS: Numerous attendees purchased tickets to specific events after the prompting, and post-show surveys showed that exhibitors experienced increased sales thanks to the matching process.

The MMA World Expo, launched in 2009 and held each November at New York’s Jacob Javits Center, brings together the mixed martial arts community. That community includes a wide range of interests, including MMA athletes, both professional and amateur; MMA school owners; trainers; fans; fight organizations and promoters; and vendors of apparel, nutrition, gear and equipment. Last year, in an effort to increase revenues for the show and its exhibitors, organizers decided to use the detailed data in their registration database to notify attendees of specific show events and merchandise that might match their particular interests, resulting in numerous “up-sales.”

Because the registration process already required registrants to provide so much specific information, it simply made sense to use that information to help attendees get more out of the show—and build revenues in the process, says Paul Paone, the show’s founder and organizer. Because the show offers separate exhibit hours for business-to-business and business-to-consumer sales, there were already two separate registration forms in place. The b-to-b forms requests information such as specific buying interests, while the b-to-c forms ask consumers about their buying interests and whether they are amateur athletes or fans. “In both instances, we attempted to gather information that would be of most interest to our vendor base and to also recruit more vendors with the statistics com-