

# The Focus was on Change at ECEF



**View from the Top.** A panel of power buyers held a candid discussion about what they like and dislike about trade shows during a session at the *Exhibition and Convention Executives Forum (ECEF)* in Washington, DC.

By Renee DiIulio, senior editor, news & directories

“Wake up and change!” was the message threading through each session of the Exhibition and Convention Executives Forum (ECEF), June 19 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC. It was a message that was delivered by a wide complement of industry experts who offered supporting statistics and anecdotal evidence. The theme was evident in the first session as much as in the last.

The conference opened with keynote speaker, Greg Reid, chief marketing officer of YRC Worldwide Inc., who offered tips for the “deviant show producer.” His perspective was that of a company deviating from trade shows toward corporate events. His first piece of advice: change. “Don’t just embrace it. Create it,” he said.

Closing presenter Galen Poss, president of Hanley Wood Exhibitions, delivered the same message as he

described how the Surfaces team was forced to undergo change after losing a large percentage of major exhibitors after its best show ever. “If we don’t keep up with change, we’ll die. Someone will exploit our disconnect,” said Poss. [See full story next month]

**New Faces.** The trade show industry’s determination to stay on the cutting edge was shown in another crowd for the annual *Exhibition and Convention Executives Forum*. The June 19 event drew 170 high-level delegates, one-third of whom were first-time attendees.



To initiate change, show organizers must study and respond to the demands of both customers: exhibitors and attendees. Ruth Stevens, president of eMarketing Strategy and author of *Trade Show and Event Marketing*, addressed both of these perspectives in her two sessions: “Our Attendees Speak” and “Why Some Fortune 500 Companies Fail as Exhibitors.”

“Our Attendees Speak” offered organizers the chance to ask regular trade show attendees about their motivations and processes in selecting and attending a show. All three attendees cited “change” or “innovation” as a major driver of their decision to attend. Yet they also mentioned the face-to-face value with vendors, products and peers as a major attraction.

In her exhibitor-focused session, Stevens noted the changing landscape within exhibiting companies: the elusive decision-maker combined with a sales process that increasingly involves the exhibiting company’s purchasing division. “Decision-makers are everywhere and nowhere at the same time,” Stevens lamented. She discussed the implications for exhibitor performance (failed strategies) and organizer response (value-propositions).

Another common theme throughout

the day was that of metrics and measurement. Glenn Hansen, president of BPA Worldwide moderated a panel on “Measuring Engagement and the Effectiveness of Marketing Media.” He noted that trade show participants want to see quantitative measurements supporting participation. Vague goals such as ROO [return on objectives] no longer suffice. The panel addressed new resources to achieve measurement including industry research (such as surveys by ABM - American Business Media) and industry tools (such as the ROI Toolkit, a venture of IAEE, CEIR, PCMA and Exhibit Surveys).

The good news is that industry-specific events continue to be an important marketing tool. And they reflect an important international component. Unfortunately, many shows are still stymied by the restrictive visa regulations put in place after 9-11. Helen Murano, director with the U.S. Department of Commerce of the Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, discussed the current situation in “Getting International Delegates to the U.S.” New programs such as the DHS Model Ports program, the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), and CPB Trusted Traveler Programs are helping to alleviate some of the associated challenges.

**Instant Replay.** Sam Lippman, the organizer of ECEF, goes over some of the many major points presented at the conference. The event included networking opportunities along with the educational sessions.



**The Truth from Ruth.** Ruth Stevens, president of eMarketing Strategy, was the featured speaker at two sessions. She stressed continuing customer research into the needs of customers, exhibitors and attendees.

## The ECEF Community

There was a lot of interest in Murano’s session. Only 17% of the attendees claimed that tightened visa restrictions had made no impact on their show, yet 82% expected international revenues to become increasingly important over the next 10 years.

The information came via a polling system supplied by sponsor Freeman. Wayne Jacobs, chief executive officer of Jacobs Jenner & Kent, ran these sessions with Sam Lippman, ECEF’s producer, throughout the day. Only show organizers participated in the polling.

The event drew 170 delegates, and more than one third were first-time participants.

The conference is restricted to executives of event-

producing associations and business media companies with strategic, decision-making responsibilities. In the first polling session of the day, 62% of the attendees identified themselves as association executives and 38% are with a media or show management company. Nearly one third produce an event with more than 400,000 net square feet of exhibit space. They represented a broad cross-section of industries including manufacturing, construction and healthcare.

Attendees were able to compare notes and enjoy the face-to-face component of the event at an opening reception held the night before the conference at the Renaissance Washington, DC Hotel. A lunch break during the conference provided another opportunity, along with presentations from the Walter E. Washington Convention Center and Destination DC, both of which introduced new marketing campaigns, further emphasizing the notion of change.

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