

Expo! Expo! Trade Show Mardi Gras

TSE STAFF

It was the largest Expo! Expo! in 17 years.

The International Association of Exhibits and Events (IAEE) annual show sold out its floor space at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center for the Dec. 11-13, 2018 show.

IAEE President and CEO David DuBois called it one of their largest trade show floors ever, with 298 exhibitors in 41,400 net square feet of sold exhibit space.

Besides a bustling show floor, Expo! Expo! featured a diverse lineup of events and learning experiences that attracted more than 2,300 attendees from 26 countries.

The show even included surprises like an on-stage marriage proposal, puppies to pet, a walk down memory lane commemorating IAEE's 90th Anniversary and a preview performance of "Michael Jackson ONE by Cirque du Soleil," to generate hype for this year's Expo!Expo! Dec. 3-5 in Las Vegas.

Here is a recap of our favorite talks, happenings and educational sessions:

BLUE-COLLAR CEO™ MANDY RENNEHAN'S (EXPLETIVE) KEYNOTE

In a speech peppered with curse words and comedy, Freshco.ca's Blue-Collar

CEO Mandy Rennehan's keynote presentation combined brash talk and sound business advice.

The Canadian-born Rennehan, known as the "Blue-Collar CEO," shared stories of working as a kid, as a local fish broker at the age of 10, in her hard-scrabble town of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. At age 18, she left with everything she owned in a dirty hockey bag and dreams of doing more with her life. Today, she runs one of the most sought-after retail maintenance and construction companies in North America.

Rennehan emphasized the importance of being real and good to people. That means good communication with staff, resisting the temptation to be negative and calling out people who misbehave.

A large portion of her speech touted women – their loyalty, strong work ethic and high value to companies. She blasted the pay inequities between men and women, as reported in the *Trade Show Executive* Dec. 2018 issue, which showed women earn up to 78% less than men on some levels.

"It's wrong!" she shouted, throwing the magazine on the floor, stomping on it and kicking it. "Women, kick their (expletive) and start now. Men, they're worth it, and so are you."

Rennehan questioned why the trades are frowned upon as careers, and why this generation of kids feels like they're a "nobody" if they don't go to college. She noted the amazing benefits of a trade career, and shortages of tradesmen and tradeswomen. Only 2% of women make up the skilled trade industry, she said. She highlighted that perception is the problem, and once the perception of blue and white collar are equal our economies will truly flourish.

A BIG SURPRISE!

Following Mandy Rennehan's keynote speech, ACT/EXPOCAD CEO Rich Stone took the stage. He talked about how shows often feel like a gathering of friends and family, and that every successful show needs an element of surprise. Then he called Richland College faculty member M.T. Hickman, CMP, CPECP to the stage and pulled off a surprise of his own: He got down on one knee. As the audience collectively gasped and cheered, he said, "M.T. Hickman, will you marry me?"

It was a full-circle moment, as the couple first met at an IAEE event 10 years ago, and have been



long-distance dating ever since (he's in Chicago, she's in Texas).

DE-SILO THE DATA

Data, and what to do with it, dominated the panel discussion with Bruno Group President Michelle Bruno and Gleanin CEO Tamar Beck, moderated by Dahlia El Gazzar from DAHLIA +. They agreed the first thing that must be done is to filter data and make sure it's "truthful," so what you're left with is actionable.

It's also increasingly important to take in data from various sources and "de-silo it," the panelists said. One of the digital marketing tools mentioned was Freeman's Quant, which can merge data that's pulled in from multiple places, including social media. Data should be viewed as a marketing funnel, they said, with different goals at different points of the year. For example, who is already looking at pricing? They're the ones you want to send an early bird offer to.

Areas that still need work? Personalizing emails so they don't look like marketing materials, and not buying technology because it does cool things, but because it will achieve your marketing goals.

"THE MOST DEPRESSING SESSION"

Presenter Sam Potolicchio, Georgetown University's Director of Global and Cus-

tom Education, jokingly described his presentation as "the most depressing session of the whole conference," but it was also one of the most compelling. He touched on a dozen global and political issues that could potentially impact the trade show industry including market volatility, climate change, and added restrictions on cross border flow of people and products.

Cybersecurity should be of top importance to companies, he said. Cyberattacks have doubled in the past five years, and have penetrated blue chip companies. Fortune 2000 companies spent \$15 million per company this past year to fend off cyberattacks, a 27% increase over the previous year, Potolicchio said. In the next five years, he said it's expected to cost U.S. companies trillions of dollars.

THE FUTURE OF CHATBOTS

Everyone uses their phones, and everyone wants immediate answers rather than going to a website, app or show guide and searching for what they need. That's why chatbot use has been increasing at shows.

"Chatbots are here to stay," said Bob Caldwell, founding partner of EventBots by Scienzio, noting that there will soon be chatbots for things like weddings and youth sports.

Caldwell led a session explaining how chatbots are being used at shows, both from a practical standpoint ("What's

the WiFi password?") to safety uses in an emergency.

Shows bombard people with information, so these bots appeal to the "Don't tell me things, I'll ask you what I need when I need it" mentality. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has allowed chatbots to deliver personalized support based upon user identity.

A self-service chatbot template can be filled out in 20 minutes, but most shows want a customizable template that only takes a few weeks. Prices range from \$500 to \$5,000-plus, Caldwell said. He recommended that people shopping for chatbots look at the "IDK" rates and make sure the bots deliver a comfortable conversation.

CHINA UPDATE WITH DAVID ZHONG

China isn't for everyone, but you might not know if it's for you unless you experience it firsthand.

David Zhong, President of VNU Exhibitions Asia, told his audience that China's trade show market is maturing and evolving in ways that still present opportunities for U.S. and European organizers. The best way to determine if getting into the game is a prudent move, he said, is taking that long flight and experiencing China for yourself before making any decisions. "We say, 'Smell the market' for yourself," said Zhong. "See it first before you even think about it."



China may not be the Wild West for show organizers, but it is still the Mysterious East. Local customs and murky regulations can trump international best practices when entering the Chinese market, especially in major convention cities where seemingly small and obscure agencies can carry a high level of clout.

Finding local partners remains standard procedure, but where to begin? “Transparency is a foundation of trust; it is very important,” Zhong said. “But in China, it can be difficult to find companies that are transparent.”

Zhong’s best advice: Partner with an established show organizer – IAEE and UFI are good sources of connections and advice – that has a large staff on the ground and has cultivated the level of trust required to successfully navigate the process and give the Chinese market the sweet smell of success.*

CASTING A WIDER NET WITH A.I.

Beating the bushes for new attendees can be a time-consuming exercise for trade show marketers, but artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming a reliable means of casting a wider net for registrations.

Sifting through reams of data and contact information for thousands of potential attendees is a task that it is squarely in the wheelhouse of AI, knocking out the grunt work that can take weeks for mere humans to accomplish.

“It is becoming increasingly difficult to do your job,” Gil Allouche, CEO of Metadata, Inc., told his audience of show marketers and IT managers. “You have to spend all day managing the technology process.”

Managing the technology process for show marketers means telling your current IT system what to look for among the mountains of information contained in most commercially available contact lists. What AI does, Allouche told his

audience, is to take over that task and whittle it down to the most promising of prospects. “It can be overwhelming to read all of those data sources and then analyze them,” he said. “This way, you can run 10,000 possible (marketing) campaigns and narrow them down so you aren’t wasting your time.”

An AI system won’t replace a marketing department. Humans still have to tell the computer what to look for and approve any course changes. AI will instead make marketers more efficient, expand their outreach and keep their heads above water as the volume of available data keeps increasing.

KEEPING THE TEAM COOL AND ON COURSE

Empathy and accountability are the keys to avoiding, or at least minimizing, the naturally occurring friction between sales and operations teams.

Human resources consultant Claudia St. John, President of Affinity HR Group, was particularly empathetic to show managers who have seen the relationship between the two cadres become icy and suspicious over disagreements about what is humanly possible to deliver.

“Every group I meet with has this same problem,” St. John said. “These are naturally conflicting groups and it happens everywhere.”

Keeping things cool and on course requires managers to, of course, see both sides of an issue, and to be empathetic to both sides. St. John suggested that sales people be asked for suggestions on how the operations

people should deliver these hairbrained promises. And the stodgy ops people could be reminded that it’s not easy to say “no” to a waffling exhibitor about to write a big check.

But once a promise is made, it absolutely must be kept. And that means calling out the employees who fail to deliver the goods for whatever the reason. “They aren’t going to feel like the aggrieved person if they know they are going to own it,” St. John said.

CONTENT IS NOT KING, SUBSTANCE IS KING

With so much social media, how do you get seen without being spammy? Marketing veteran Sherron Washington, Founder and CEO of The P3 Solution, led a session with tips and tools for how to create content that’s impactful and not annoying.

Her entertaining session explained how to wow audiences with good content on social media. She debunked the myth that the secret is putting out more content or doing what’s trending. She said the key to making people pay attention to what you post is quality, not quantity. She cited some examples, like Coca-Cola, and its word scramble to find the word “Joy,” a visual which engaged everyone.

She labeled Facebook as the water cooler (a mix of professional and personal conversations), Twitter as the newsroom, LinkedIn as the boardroom where professionals commune, and Instagram the storefront.

“You do not have to be on every platform to make an impact. All you need is one to make an impact,” she said.

"An AI system won't replace a marketing department. Humans still have to tell the computer what to look for and approve any course changes."

*Learn more about expanding into international markets at TSE's Global Direct event on Sept. 24 or visit www.tseglobaldirect.com.