



Rich Siegel welcomes the standing-room only crowd to the **Ask the Experts** panel at the New York Show (IH/M&RS). Since they are all experts, the panelists are not listening to what Rich is saying.

By Rich Siegel, Publisher

Is It Time to Reinvent Industry Tradeshows

For those of us who live, eat and sleep technology for the hotel, foodservice and travel industries, I think our tradeshow producers are at an impasse. In this column every issue I review the shows that we recently attended. The reviews are both positive and negative when justified. I think I am going to pass on my reviews this issue because the industry's tradeshow business is screwy.

Recently I reviewed a survey on technology spend of the hotel industry's CIOs commissioned by Danny Hudson of The Duck LLC. One of the questions asked was what industry events do the CIOs attend. Of those who responded the first two answers were not surprising—everyone attends HITEC and the International Hotel/Motel & Restaurant Show held every November in New York. The third most popular industry event they attend is The CIO Summit that *Hospitality Upgrade* created two years ago, which

is actually a conference and not a tradeshow. So, why don't the CIOs and the rest of the industry attend more events throughout the year?

While at FS/TEC (a show that many exhibitors there think is jinxed, read Joan's Journal on page 153) I spent a long time talking to one of the exhibitors. He said he wasn't surprised at the attendance; the tradeshow business as we know it is dead. In the old days people came to shop. Thanks to the Internet and magazines, like *Hospitality Upgrade*, people are doing their shopping elsewhere. I

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was thankful that he included our magazine in his comments, but then I asked him what was the answer. Should all the shows be cancelled? He believed the reason people attend shows is twofold. One is to network with their peers; the other is for the educational aspect. I started thinking he was right and not just for FS/TEC, but for all the industry shows. I sit on the advisory board for many different groups: the HITEC advisory board, the AH&LA Technology Committee and a few smaller events. Tradeshows are a big business. HITEC and the New York show will always thrive; HITEC because of the history, numbers and quality of attendee and the New York show because of the sheer volume. But what about the other shows including some of the smaller events?

I attended all the travel-related shows last year: EyeforTravel, TRAVDEX, ResExpo, TravelCom and a few others. Many of them seemed to be the same show in different venues and a few actually had the same panels and speakers. They all hoped for 200 attendees and I believe that's all they got. Isn't it strange that 200 attendees is considered a success? Many of these shows are financially successful because exhibitors and sponsors are footing the bill. But if attendance continues to lag vendors will stop spending big bucks on these events. What should be done to reverse this trend of so many lightly attended shows?

Beef Up Education

First of all we have to beef up education. We need to try new things and offer sessions that attendees cannot get anywhere else. I know many people have issues with HFTP, but give them credit; the educational sessions they put on are recognized as the industry's best. They very, very rarely let vendors be a part of the educational sessions, which is a philosophy that I often don't agree with. I was somewhat surprised to find out how many shows offer a spot on an educational panel as part of their sponsorship packages. I have seen people walk out of the room shaking their heads and complaining that they were in a sales presentation. Can you blame the panelist who paid to be up there? I can't. If education is the No. 1 reason people attend tradeshows, don't compromise on education but reach for new heights.



Jack Steenhausen and Bill Fitzpatrick (right) of **Spartan Computer Services** welcome their customers to their customer appreciation dinner on the docked Queen Mary in Long Beach, Calif. during FS/TEC. That ship might have been docked, but it was rocking before the night was over.

Take chances with subjects that are not considered mainstream but also cover the topical issues that attendees need help understanding. Improving the educational sessions will increase attendance which will enhance the networking opportunities.

Listen to Criticism

This year, instead of vendors complaining about HITEC to each other or to HFTP, they can now complain to the members of the advisory board who will be available every day of the show. Some of the people on the advisory board are high-ranking industry professionals including many CIOs. Hey, if I was a vendor and have a chance to sit down with a CIO I have been trying to meet, then I will find something to complain about. This may or may not work, but they are trying something different; good for HFTP.

More Suggestions

Let me start by saying I am not an expert in the tradeshow business, but I can proudly say that The CIO Summit has been very well received. What we do with BearingPoint is

bring in many industry outsiders as presenters, which has proven to be very successful. I think all shows should have some sessions with people from other industries who can share their experiences and expertise. We can all learn a great deal and possibly use some of what we

learned in our own industry. Again, this is a surefire way to boost attendance. As for vendors presenting, I encourage it. Let them duke it out, and more importantly, encourage the audience to participate. But if you do this then you definitely will need to have a strong moderator. And, don't charge vendors to be on a panel. Some of the sharpest minds are on the vendor side of the industry and audiences can learn volumes from sessions with vendors. Remember, attendees not only want to know what is going on today but also what might be happening in the future. Those who provide technology are often the visionaries who can suggest and advise what is coming down the road.



MIWA's formula for a crowd is to take the booth closest to the *Hospitality Upgrade Technology Innovation Pavilion* during the New York Show. It worked.



Minott Osborn (left) captivates his audience explaining why if he were a hotel he would only buy the **Springer-Miller Systems** offerings.

In Conclusion

I love attending shows. When I was a hotelier I hoped to learn a great deal. Then I was a vendor for many years and I hoped to sell a great deal. For the last 12 years I have been in the media and with that comes the opportunity to applaud or throw rotten tomatoes at those who produce the industry events. I speak at quite a few events during the year and moderate many panels. Some that I do are great and some are dogs; I am aware that perfection is not easily attainable. But I love trying new things and hope that the industry does the same. Networking and education are important, but a show has to change its mindset to survive. I am not positive what all those changes should be, but something must be done. Who knows, maybe I will start a show and then applaud myself or hit myself over the head with rotten tomatoes. Knowing me it will be the tomatoes since I am by far my own worst critic. We shall see.



At the **VIP International** booth at the New York Show, Brian Primeau of **Multi-Systems, Inc.** discusses potential interfaces with Lisa D'Angelo of VIP. Rita Emmer anxiously looks in the book of etiquette for confirmation that wearing red pants in New York is acceptable.