

Trends and Predictions Sometimes Do Come True!

Every decade or so, I try and purge through documents I have saved to one day put to use. Never know when you may need an old issue of Trade Show Week. While cleaning, I did run across a 1985 issue of *Exhibitor Magazine*. **Lee Knight**- founder & publisher prepared an editorial that spoke about predictions in the exhibit industry. Lee's insights have always been a step ahead of the curve and right on. Considering that this was written over 30 years ago, each of his predictions became a reality, and then some. Many of his predictions were perceived as controversial at the time, but his insights guided us all in the right direction.



Prediction-

Custom exhibit suppliers will expand their services to address trade show marketing beyond the structure alone.

"Custom exhibit companies were seeking to establish their preemptive positions with an evolving industry," says Lee Knight.

Fact- Today, most custom exhibit companies provide full trade show marketing services like lead management, booth staff training, event management, and international services as a basic service

beyond their exhibit design and fabrication skills.

Prediction- Exhibit systems and portables will play a stronger role in the mix of exhibit design solutions. Exhibitors continued to believe in the power of trade shows, but now need to do more with less due to high costs and budget constraints.

Fact- At the time most all exhibit solutions were custom. Portable, exhibit systems, and fabric solutions, were now growing to be an economical solution for some of the shows exhibitors were attending. Today, all custom exhibit companies offer systems, fabric,

and portables along with their custom designs. Many exhibitors now purchase these directly. Lo and behold, the largest exhibit company in North America today is Skyline Exhibits!

Prediction- *Exhibitor education programs will play a stronger role than ever before. Exhibitors are looking for data and insights to increase results for their trade show investments.*

Fact- Many custom exhibit companies and consultants began to conduct educational seminars to support their clients educational interests in trade show marketing. Today, many college marketing departments finally recognize the existence of trade show marketing as a part of the marketing mix. (Many still do not talk about it!) Over all these years, Exhibitor Magazine has stepped up to support Lee Knights predictions and have created educational programs that offer training and certifications to enhance exhibitor knowledge about trade show marketing.

Solutions like the Exhibitor Live trade show event, educational seminars to earn a CEM certification, and exhibit designer event/award programs each offer direct solutions for exhibitors to better succeed at trade shows.

Prediction- *Intelligent exhibit design will be a requirement for exhibit designers. Exhibit design consciousness that was demanded in the computer industry will permeate to other industries. Exhibit firms will be faced with providing more creative options to a more enlightened and competitive exhibit buyer group. Exhibit design firms will begin to encourage their designers to attend more shows and see 'whats new'. Trends outside the exhibit world will influence exhibit design at a more rapid rate than ever before. Exhibit designer symposiums and college level degree programs will begin to unfold as well.*

Fact- In 1997 EDPA created a three day Designer Symposium that was held for three years in different US cities. Exhibitor then formulated an expansion of this designer training in years that followed. Exhibitor also created exhibit design award programs to acknowledge excellence in exhibit design. EDPA created an "Exhibit Designer of the Year" award that continues to this day. During this period, Bemidji State University offered an undergraduate degree program in exhibit design. FIT then followed to create a masters degree in exhibit design. Both programs continue today and are strongly supported by industry suppliers, associations, and publications.

Prediction- *With higher costs for trade show participation, will come a need for better attendance profiles provided by show organizers. Exhibiting companies will need to justify the costs required to participate and will need to provide intelligent and measurable results for their show selections and their target audience focus.*

Fact- In 1985, few show organizers provided quality attendance data for their exhibitors to base trade show investment decisions. Today attendance research is provided by most all show organizers and is an expected piece of data that is no longer as rare as

hens teeth. Research companies like Exhibit Surveys, Inc now help to make this easily doable for show organizers and/or associations.

Lee's foresight and visions for the exhibit industry strongly helped to push all involved in the industry to do the right things, as well as to do things right for the sake of the industry. Lee Knight was awarded the EDPA Hazel Hays Award in 1990 and continues to contribute his thoughts to this day.

Another *Trend and Prediction* that was slowly unfolding in the late 80's was exhibitor participation in **international trade show** events. Companies like Octanorm saw this trend unfolding and created a select group of exhibit suppliers called OSPI (Octanorm Service Partners International). **Hans Steiger and Han Bruder** pushed for unity among exhibit suppliers (including US companies) to serve as trusted partners when exhibiting abroad.

Another organization that was also beginning to unfold with a similar mission was **IFES** (International Federation of Exposition Suppliers). In 1984, IFES was created with six country exhibit industry associations in Europe who joined forces to establish tradefair cooperation between exhibit suppliers when crossing borders. It was not until 1995 that the USA (EDPA/ **Ingrid Boyd**) joined IFES to be a part of a world community of exhibit associations. In 2012 IFES changed its by-laws to include exhibit supplier companies as well as the country associations as members. Their mission was to establish world cooperation and consistency at trade shows and fairs.

While Europe and the rest of the world freely participated in international trade fairs, the US was slower to do so since they were consumed, and very successful, with their trade shows in the USA. It was not until 2012 that US participation in international trade shows picked up speed to catch up with the rest of the world's willingness to expand to exhibit overseas. Through this period, international companies frequently participated in US shows, and gained much experience with US trade show differences. American exhibit suppliers are now getting the same experiences and confidence to do shows abroad and have caught up quickly.

In my book, *Trade Shows from One Country to the Next*, I review the venues, regulations, labor issues, exhibit design styles, and cultural differences when exhibiting in any of the 45 countries outlined. No one person or company is the expert for the entire world market. The theme of the book...*there is no right way, there is no wrong way, there is only a different way.* Find and trust a partner to work with, understand and respect what is different, then you are on your way to exhibit success.

New trends in face to face marketing will continue to unfold. Keep you eyes on the crystal ball and keep an open mind to accept changes, and a willingness to act on them. Wishing you all continued trade show marketing success!

Retired exhibit guy... **Larry Kulchawik**

