



*Exhibit design student group from Bemidji State, MN and FIT/NYC.
Photo courtesy of EXHIBITOR Media Group.*



Paving the way for Exhibit Designers

...By Larry Kulchawik

I continue to cite the CLC (Convention Liaison Council) study, conducted by Deloitte&Touche in 1995, which calculated the size of the Convention & Meeting industry to be **\$83 billion**, ranked **#22** in contribution to the GDP in the USA, *yet few have gone to school for direct training to work in this industry!* Most of us in the trade show business have fumbled into it in one way or another, and grew to really like it. We then became experts through on the job training and by trial and error. I suspect the US meeting and convention industry to now totals over \$100 billion in revenue. No small potatoes! Granted, this total includes many segments of the revenue generated in the industry

in North America, from exposition centers, show organizers, show contractors, exhibit builders, exhibit materials, and exhibit services. For this article, we focus only on the segments serving-exhibit design, production, and show services for trade shows.

For the past 12 years, EDPA has dedicated much time and energy to support exhibit design training at the college level. Two universities in particular offer an undergraduate degree in exhibit design (through **Bemidji State University**), and a masters degree in exhibit design (through **FIT/NYC**). EDPA created the EDPA University Affiliation Program, sponsored by EDPA member companies. Member companies conduct classroom sessions, donate money and materials, and create award contests, all to support exhibit design education and the benefits of trade show marketing for the exhibitors who use them.

Each year, **Exhibitor Magazine** organizes America's leading trade show for people who do trade shows called-**EXHIBITORLIVE**. It attracts over 6000 attendees and is held each year at the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. This year it was held March 13-16, 2017. The event offers over 180 educational seminars as well as top shelf exhibits with all major suppliers represented.

EXHIBITORLIVE also offers an educational program called **CTSM** (Certified Trade Show Marketer) for exhibit manager and exhibit suppliers. It is the only university affiliated certification training program for the expo industry. Also represented at this show were two US universities who offer a degree in exhibit design-Bemidji State and FIT.NY. The design students are given a pavilion exhibit to share their portfolios and attract internship opportunities. The exhibit is donated by and sponsored by EDPA companies and supported by Exhibitor Magazine.

EXHIBITORLIVE focuses on the needs and interests of exhibit managers, but certainly appeals to exhibit designers and suppliers looking to promote their products, services, and skills as well as to learn what's new in the market. Although the EXHIBITORLIVE is smaller than **EuroShop** (held the week before in Dusseldorf), its attendees come from around the globe representing 39 countries. Coming to Americas number one trade show city, Las Vegas, is an experience all and in itself.

On Sunday, the day before **ExhibitorLive** officially opens, Larry Kulchawik represents EDPA to conduct a pre show tour of the show floor. Students from both Bemidji and FIT first gather in the show organizers office and are briefed on how a trade show comes together. " We begin planning for this show years in advance, securing the space, marketing the training sessions, and the exhibit spaces on the show floor. It is a difficult task, but quite rewarding when the ribbon for entry is cut on Monday morning to open the show to many smiling faces," -says **Randy Acker/President and CEO/Exhibitor Media Group**.



“The purpose of this Sunday tour, before the show opens, is to allow student designers to see the chaos and anxiety of the exhibitors in the eleventh hour of their set up. Fork lifts, electric cords, and empty boxes scatter the floor. Be careful what you design, someone has to build it!”- says **Larry Kulchawik**.

Twelve stops are made to visit EDPA exhibit suppliers representing different segments of the industry- flooring, lighting, AV, general contractor, exhibit systems, portables, and full service exhibit design firms. The presidents and owners of each exhibitor stop personally take the time to greet the students and are asked three questions..Who is you company? Who is your target audience? Why did you select this particular exhibit design? After a two hour tour, hopefully the students each received designer tools to place in their tool box. The last stop on the tour was the EDPA pavilion where the students will go to work as exhibitors for the next three days to present their portfolios and attract opportunities for internship, and possibly employment.

As stated earlier, we all have been fortunate to have fumbled into a wonderful business that we have discovered and grown to love. I am now happy to say that the *industry* is sharing knowledge and preparing for the future with designer training, and not discovering the industry through serendipity.

