

Column Title: **As The Saw Turns**

Article Title: **Where the Rubber Meets the Road**

How many of you have never been on a trade show floor? I'm talking about those of you who may be working on the production floor of an exhibit house, the account support office for an I&D company, in the dispatch office for a freight carrier, or any number of other critical positions that support our industry and clients.

This came to my attention the other day when I realized how many of our staff had never been on a show floor. Everything we do is built around what happens when our client gets to the show...the ease of installation of their exhibit, the success of pre-show promotions, the ability to get the results at the show that our clients need.

We have recently hired several people from outside the industry. It has been an interesting experience to see this industry through their eyes as they try to figure out exactly what it is we do.

That got me thinking about how many people out there in our industry that play very important roles in winning new projects and managing large programs never get to see the end result of all their hard work. I've been so used to being on the show floor – for over 20 years – that I have taken for granted that everyone has had the experience.

From the perspective of someone out on the floor during an installation, all of that preparation and all those details that are done (or not) in advance can mean the difference between a smooth set-up and a nightmare. The right orders for services placed in advance, the right target inbound freight date met, the right exhibit hardware and supplies in the gangbox all take planning and attention to detail in advance.

Sometimes I think we focus on those things that may not have been done correctly, and forget to acknowledge all the work that has been done. We come back from a show and talk about what was missed, what could have been better, and how we can improve for the next show. Those are all important. But what is also important is to recognize the efforts of so many people behind the scenes that are being proactive and thinking about providing what you will need in a show floor environment they have never experienced.

So here are a few ideas for giving them that experience:

(1) Check out your local convention center. See what shows are coming to the convention center closest to your business. Make an effort to take those employees who have never been to a show down to the hall. Do it on the first day of set up. Show them the marshalling yard, the docks and the empty show floor. Describe how the whole inbound freight process works. Talk about the advance work to mark the floor, lay out electrical and hang signs.

Go back again on one of the last days of set up so they can see the floor completely full of crates, skids, and exhibits partially assembled. Talk about how the installation process works; different labor groups doing different parts of the work, and all the service suppliers – floral, telecommunications, audio/visual, etc.

Then go back one more time during the show, and explain the registration process, and let them see the floor as the attendee sees it. Point out both the good and the not-so-good in booth staff behavior. Look for exhibits that work – where the message is clear (you know what they are selling).

(2) If TS2 or Exhibitor Show are within easy reach of your company – a short drive, an easy ride on a chartered bus, or a cheap flight – take a small group to see the show. This will give them a glimpse into all of the various aspects of our

industry...from custom, system and portable exhibit companies, to graphics, freight, audio/visual and other service suppliers. It's a great way to get exposed to what all is out there. And, of course, there are the educational sessions, where they can learn more about their specific part of this industry.

(3) Pass industry magazines around the office. Admittedly, it's not like being there, but there is a lot of helpful information, and at least a peek into what it's like.

Finally, do something special for those employees who work so hard to support the road team. Recognize that without them doing what they do so well, you would be in a world of hurt out there.

See you on the show floor!

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