

Column Title: **As The Saw Turns**

Article Title: **Road Trip Ramblings**

I just spent nearly two weeks on the road, working for three different clients exhibiting at a large national trade show. This happened to be a show that had been re-scheduled and re-located from New Orleans after hurricane Katrina came through. It had been several months since I had been out on the show floor, and I was looking forward to it. But I am still amazed, even after all these years, at some of the things that happen out here in the real world of trade shows:

- Convention hall security is an interesting thing. It all seems to depend on where you enter the hall. If I entered the employee entrance, I submitted my driver's license in exchange for a laminated identification badge for the center. If I entered through the public entrance, I just signed my name and got a wrist band. If I walked in through the docks...well...I just walked in. I certainly wouldn't want the TSA (the airport security guys) to take over convention centers, but a little consistency would probably be good.
- Speaking of consistency, how do we as an industry insure more consistency in the quality of the labor that we use at large convention centers? Some of these new, hugely expanded convention centers in what used to be second tier convention cities are having serious problems supplying enough trained labor for the new large shows coming to town. Case in point: We hired six men from the show contractor to install one of our exhibits; four of them had never been inside the convention center before. They had no trade show experience, and absolutely no desire to learn. Replacing them was not an option...there were no more men available. Theoretically, the big shows in new big centers are supposed to be less expensive than those in the older upper-mid-west centers. That only works if the labor in these new centers is of decent quality...and I'm not sure that's happening yet.

- Even on a show that has a six day install, there will always be those that show up the morning of the show to set up their exhibit, and then get all bent out of shape because they can't get all of their show services taken care of before the show opens. Where do these people come from?
- One way technology has dramatically changed how quickly we can get things done: The afternoon before the show opens one of our clients discovers that one of his graphics is wrong. His office e-mails us the correct art to approve, we upload it to the FTP site of our graphic production house, which produces the new graphic, and puts it on a plane that evening. We have the new piece installed just as the show opens – less than 24 hours later. Couldn't have done that a few years ago...
- It happened again...after I had just been telling stories of similar past experiences: I opened the crate that contained the main reception counter to this client's exhibit, and inside found a stack of leads and business cards. This exhibit hadn't been used in six months! I spend more and more of my time with our clients doing training on lead qualification and pushing lead tracking systems, and I still find these little buried treasures every now and then. Who was supposed to be taking care of these leads? Who was supposed to be following up on them? How do they justify attendance when their 'results' are stuffed in a cabinet in a crate in a warehouse?
- And while we're on the subject of training booth staff, can we talk a bit about behavior when you're not on the show floor? Being selected by your company to work at a trade show is not a license to see how much alcohol you can consume in three days. A little moderation goes a long way. It's not hard to tell the rookies to show business. They're the ones that show up the second morning of the show with bright red eyes with dark rings under them. Just what you need to impress your clients, prospects and booth visitors...
- I get asked every once in a while for my opinion about this industry...will it continue to thrive with increased travel costs, freight costs, etc.? To get the answer, all you have to do is attend a show and watch what happens...watch the direct face-to-face communication. Watch prospective clients talk at length with

suppliers and get their questions answered – while they are seeing the product first hand. Watch industry friends re-connect with each other, and trade business intelligence. Watch deals happen in the restaurants and clubs after the show. I don't care how much technology you throw at us, humans are by nature social creatures. We need contact with each other. Come and watch what happens at a show. You'll figure out real quick that this business will never end.

As we close out another interesting year in the trade show industry, my wish for you is that you will have time during the holidays to relax, recharge, and spend time with those important in your life. This is certainly an exciting time to be in this industry, but not at the expense of time with family and friends. Peace.

See you on the show floor!

Jim Obermeyer has been in the tradeshow industry 25 years, both as a corporate trade show manager and exhibit house executive. He is now a partner in a trade show and event marketing firm: [Reveal: Exhibiting a World of Difference](#). He can be reached at jobermeyer@revealexhibits.com.