

Virtual Shows Are Becoming the “New Normal”

Why The Virtual Outdoor Hospitality Expo is So Different

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In the 21st century we are moving inevitably into a virtual reality world. A recent survey found that 91% of Fortune 500 companies participated in a Virtual Event in 2010. Many big businesses (and small ones too, for that matter) have begun spending their marketing dollars in virtual shows and conferences rather than in physical ones. If proof is needed, witness the growth of such Internet communication programs such as Gotomeeting or Gotowebinar, or the growth of teleconferencing in place of corporate people actually traveling to a location to contact business associates. Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, are becoming another method for companies to make consumers aware their goods and services.

The trade show, for many years, has been the method of business-to-business or business-to-consumer solicitation. These shows, enhanced by educational seminars and social occasions have been the mainstay of many industries’s marketing. Then in 1993, according to Wikipedia, the "virtual tradeshow" was first publicly described and presented as "ConventionView" by Alan Saperstein and Randy Selman of Visual Data Corporation now known as Onstream Media, in a presentation to investors at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York City. Although not in the present format, their idea gave birth to the modern day virtual trade show.

Like a physical show, the virtual show contains, exhibit booths, conferences and an area where attendees can socialize. Unlike physical shows, virtual shows require no venue, show dresser, travel, hotel stays, shipping, car rentals, restaurant dining, or time away from business or home. These advantages alone are staggering, but consider this. Speakers need not travel nor stay at a hotel, saving the producer money and making it easier to afford and attract key speakers. There are no costs of renting a convention center for a given amount of days then having to leave it for the next event. That is why, many virtual shows run live for two or three days, but the booths remain for an additional period (like 60 or 90 days) in an “on demand” basis.

Most dramatically, attendees need not leave the comfort of their homes or businesses to attend and they can leave and return as often as they want. And businesses can afford to have many more of their people attend the show than they would otherwise have had at a live show. Since the only relevant cost of a virtual show is the software that runs the event, costs to exhibitors can be lower and, in some cases, such as the Virtual Outdoor Hospitality Expo, there can be NO cost to the attendee either for the trade show or for the educational conferences. Compare this to attending other shows in the park industry!

There are dozens of other features of a virtual show that are not possible at a physical event. Reporting facilities for exhibitors are greatly enhanced. They will know exactly how many attendees were present, how long they stayed, where they visited, what webinars they

attended, what materials they took with them in their briefcases and how many times they revisited the site. Links can be provided that will take attendees from an e-mail or a website directly into an exhibitors booth and that booth can look like a standard trade show booth or a cabin, park model, yurt or even an RV.

Instead of a badge that identifies an attendee, exhibitors will see a “business card” loaded with information gleaned from the registration information. Then, a variety of methods can be used to communicate between the parties including a webcam, a microphone or telephone or written chat. The attendee may see or download videos, brochures, flyers, the e-mail address of the exhibitors or go directly to their website. They can hit a “buy it now” button and be taken to the shopping cart of the exhibitor’s website to purchase products or services immediately.

The webinars will run in the Conference Center with a keynote speaker and the webinars will be recorded and viewable for the entire time the show runs including the “on demand” period. Because a virtual show is being run on the Internet, speakers may actually be conversing from thousands of miles apart.

There is no better example of all that a virtual show is capable of, than the Virtual Outdoor Hospitality Expo which opens less than a month from now on November 10th and 11th from 12 noon to 6 PM, eastern standard time LIVE on the internet. The Expo will cover the entire spectrum of outdoor hospitality businesses including campgrounds, marinas, ski resorts, golf resorts, canoeing and paddlesports and dude ranches.

Next week a link to the registration will be sent out to tens of thousands of outdoor hospitality businesses and record attendance is expected this year. But what of the physical trade shows? Will they disappear as the technology grows? Probably not! There is no substitution for meet your customers face-to-face and we don’t mean their avatar. As to the producers of the Virtual Outdoor Hospitality Expos reaction to physical shows? They say “See you in Savannah in December!”

David Gorin & Associates and Best Parks in America Presents the Virtual Outdoor Hospitality Expo, produced by Art Lieberman and Deanne Bower of Campground Expositions. They can be reached at 877-901-EXPO (3976) or by e-mail at campvirtualshow@yahoo.com. The website of the Expo is www.outdoorhospitalityexpo.com.