



Shifting Strategies – It’s Time to Be Bold

By Garrett Lai

Change is the only market constant. New circumstances erupt into being as old ones fade into irrelevance. Consumers age out or get displaced. The world evolves, audiences shift, and marketing must follow suit. The Travel Goods Show is the industry’s marketing vehicle for everyone – and as the industry and marketplace evolve, The Show has to keep pace.

Show planning is a year-long affair and then some – The 2019 Show started taking shape before anyone arrived in Las Vegas for the 2018 edition. Most years, many of the details continue to be molded and shaped right up to the eleventh hour, but with all the changes coming for 2019, things are a lot more fluid and ever-altering.

At an October meeting of the TGA Board of Directors, it was decided that the New Products Pavilion would retain its familiar limited-access format, rather than being open to all Show-goers. “The purpose of restricting the New Products Pavilion to buyers and media only is to create a safe and secure environment for all manufacturers to unveil their best new designs,” said Robert Dodson, TGA Board Chair. “We felt that opening the New Products Pavilion to all manufacturers would reduce the

number of new products submitted, and hence make our product awards less relevant.”

“We want to keep it exciting, we want to encourage manufacturers to keep those ideas coming,” said Product Innovation Awards Committee Chair Jerry Kallman. David Lomas, Show Committee Chair, added, “We are trying to entice vendors to show the small innovations, the clever stuff that the expert buyers will appreciate and not just the latest gimmick. What we would like to see is the next new thing that keeps the industry up to date and relevant.”

The Product Innovation Awards are also being overhauled from years past, and in an October meeting the committee voted unanimously to create five new judging segments. In 2019, the Product Innovation Awards will be broken into five categories:

- Best New Design – Accessories
- Best New Design – Business
- Best New Design – Luggage
- Best Use of Technology
- Most Eco-friendly Product

One winner will be declared in each category, with the caveat that all entries must be ready for market and in stores in 2019.

“Every category bears equal weight,” said Jerry Kallman. “Our Show is a lot more diverse now than it was just a decade ago, even a half-decade

ago. None of these categories are any less important than the next.” In other words, there won’t be an overall product winner; just five winners, one per category.

“The complexion of The Show has changed – we’re not a luggage-only show any more, and we wanted the awards to reflect that,” said Kallman. The categorization is also not as rigidly defined as it’s been in years past. “What’s a younger customer’s definition of a business case?” Kallman asked rhetorically. “It could be a duffel bag, a backpack. What is their business bag?”

There’s also potential overlap between categories. “The best technology or eco-friendly product could be luggage, a business case or an accessory,” Kallman said. “We’d like the submitters to let us know what category they’re competing in. It’s just like the Academy Awards – you can decide the category for yourself.” So instead of noodling over whether an innovative new laptop backpack with solar charging and recycled construction belongs in the business case, eco-friendly or technology competition, the 7-member judging panel can focus on the product’s merits. “We look for things like functionality, practicality – these are stalwart considerations in every selection we make.”

In just the last few months, the

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industry's trade landscape has altered. Radically. In particular, Washington D.C.'s ongoing trade dispute with China has cast a long shadow on the trade forecast. An August tariff action on \$16 billion in Chinese goods was followed by a 10% tariff on more than 10,000 Chinese imports – \$200 billion in goods – effective September 24, and slated to jump to 25% at the close of the calendar year. The ensuing saber rattling between the world's two largest economies has continued to escalate, casting a long shadow of uncertainty over financial forecasts the world over. Many companies and industries have taken a step back, with a wait-and-see approach and an eye toward what might happen January 1. The immediate ripple effect is still ongoing, and one of the casualties is, in part, the biggest change in the history of The Show: The first-ever

The Show to consumers represents a sea change. It's a terrific exposure opportunity, with the potential for generating a lot of positive press. It also creates its own issues, such as the need to alter displays for consumers and obscure wholesale pricing; whether and how to sell products to consumers, and how to collect and process the resulting sales tax. Taking Consumer Day off the table for 2019 lets exhibiting companies focus on core business – their relationship with retailers. "We have to do Consumer Day as a total show and be committed to it," said David Lomas. "A lot of vendors were just not going to be ready."

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She'll be a familiar face to many Show goers, having helped manage the Show's press room and media attendees at past Shows, so she has intimate knowledge of the industry which will be invaluable in drawing new people in to The Show.

The 2019 Show will also present a new educational experience for retailers. "The Retail Lab will be a place for industry pros to meet, share, learn and expand their business," said Michele Marini Pittenger. TGA has partnered with Retail Minded, which coordinates and delivers onsite education at trade shows, to deliver panels, keynote discussions and pop-up learning experiences on the exhibit floor that include one-on-one retailer/buyer sessions with retailing experts. "We're still in the planning stages, but we intend to bring in experts who will create a brand new educational experience with real-world insights you can take home and apply to your business," said Pittenger. This won't be the same-old same-old, but thoroughly modern, contemporary strategies for dealing with the reality of today's ever-shifting marketplace.

It's not enough for The Show to shift with the times; it has to lead. And that requires bold changes. "Our role as Board members is to take care of the industry, make sure we adapt to changes in the market and accept challenges from outside the industry such as the tariff issue," David Lomas explained. "Our goal should be to pass the baton on to the next Board with the Association in a better position than it was when we took over. We are extremely fortunate that everyone involved currently works hard and works together in a common interest even though outside of the meetings they are competitors. The Show itself also has to adapt and you can see from the changes that have been made in the last few years that we have tried to consistently improve the experience for both vendors and visitors, such as the introduction of hard-wall to replace the pole and drape, and the Best Booth Awards to try and raise the standards of exhibit."

There's a lot happening behind the scenes at The Show, with more to come. Look to The Show website, thetravelgoodsshow.org, for the latest developments as The Show continues to keep pace with the times, with new changes that will keep it energized and relevant for 2019 and beyond. 

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Consumer Day, which was slated for 2019 but has been postponed.

"As a concept, Consumer Day fits a growing trend of greater transparency and consumer engagement across a multitude of industries and trade shows," said TGA President Michele Marini Pittenger. Consumers have become accustomed to seeing things online that used to be exclusive to insiders – you can go on a virtual tour of a Coca-Cola bottling plant, see how luggage is routed behind the scenes at Sea-Tac Airport, or how suitcases are made at the factory. The Internet effectively grants everybody privileged access – it's become an expectation, and for a lot of industries dedicated to consumer goods, opening up formerly closed trade shows to the public is a logical extension of that expectation. "TGA is still committed to exploring a Consumer Day, but with the industry climate in flux for a variety of reasons, including increased China tariffs and the global situation in general, it's no longer an appropriate time to introduce such a big new variable to The Show," said Pittenger.

While it's just for a day, opening up

by marketing partner Virtual Minds Agency, which brings a lot of trade show experience to bear. Virtual Minds will be targeting new buyers and exhibitors from crossover industries with a strategic outreach plan, and taking the lead on the creative process of designing a new Show experience for exhibitors and attendees.

Social outreach expert Sara Ecclesine is leading a social media push across multiple platforms, including:

- Facebook: Targeting Gen X/Baby Boomer buyers, travel community interest groups and exhibitors
- Instagram: Emphasizing Millennial/Gen X buyers, travel influencers, exhibitors and media
- Twitter: Focusing on travel editors, exhibitors and consumers

Ecclesine is a veteran TGA/Show staffer, with more than two decades of trade show experience in the outdoor industry – as a retail buyer and with category leaders such as Specialized bicycles and SIDI cycling shoes – which shares parallel pressures in manufacturing trends, industry and retailer consolidation, and tension between independent stores and big box retailers.