

# American Nurseryman

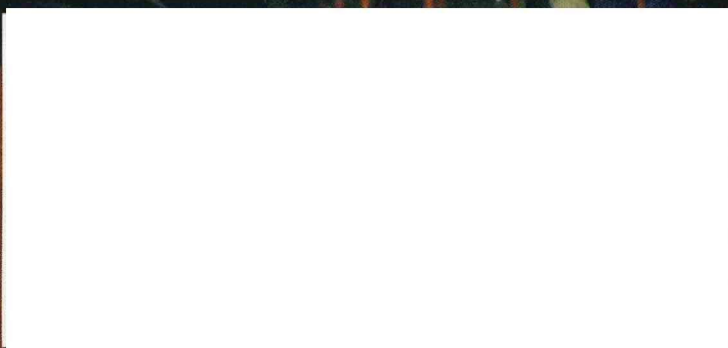
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## How did winter shows fare?



by MARIA ZAMPINI

“Where else  
can you buy a  
storefront so  
cheap?”

*Maria Zampini is president of Lake County New Plants LLC, Madison, Ohio. She co-founded the company with her father, Jim Zampini. Their focus is sales and marketing of LCN Selections along with research and development of new plant introductions. She can be reached at maria.zampini@yahoo.com.*

Last year the header on my first “Nursery Insight” column read, “Should we re-evaluate trade shows?” In a nutshell, I felt there were too many shows and that to have a profitable future—and to provide the same for exhibitors and attendees—organizers needed to seriously consider partnering and/or merging. Well, another winter trade show season has come and gone, and I still feel the same way. And judging from the feedback I received, the majority of readers agreed.

However, change doesn’t happen overnight, so I’ve tried to focus on what I can get out of trade shows, not dwell on what I might not be getting out of them. Even though I believe the trade show model (as it currently exists) is somewhat broken, it certainly doesn’t mean they are not one of our most beneficial business tools.

I spoke with Ed Gregan, a sales representative for Carlton Plants LLC in Dayton, Ore. He had just finished exhibiting at New England Grows. I asked how the show went and how he felt about trade shows in general. Ed countered with the question, “Where else can you buy a storefront so cheap?” What a great perspective! Whether you’re an exhibitor or customer, there is no more cost-effective way to see so many existing and potential customers; vendors, colleagues and friends in such a short time period.

But, as Ed pointed out, you’ve got to have a plan. When a blizzard blew through Boston as the show started, he didn’t just sit on his hands because there was no traffic. Instead, he took the opportunity to visit exhibitors who were also his customers. He also took the chance to do follow-up calls to people he’d seen at other shows. As for me, I always try to arrive the day before a show opens so I can pick up an exhibitor list and plot out all the booths I need to visit to be as efficient as possible. And as simple as it may sound, I think it helps to get a good night’s rest on the eve of the show. I want to have my best game face on for opening day.

### Identifying the challenges

I think there are at least two problems with trade shows that, to some

degree, are out of our control. The first concerns the “next generation.” Having grown up with social media as a daily part of their lives, is it possible they don’t understand and appreciate the true value of face-to-face interactions, and so they’re not attending shows? In life, everything appears to go in cycles. Growing your own fruits and vegetables kind of skipped a generation and has come back into fashion. Might it be the same with trade shows? Maybe with a bit of experience, the next generation will learn what they’ve been missing out on.

The second problem is weather. While the storm appeared to limit attendance at some winter shows, it was a different story in Ohio. I spoke with Pam Bennett, co-chair of The Ohio State University Short Course, which is held in conjunction with the Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association’s CENTS show in Columbus. Pam said that attendance for the educational sessions was up by over 500 people! She feels it was a combination of factors that led to the increase—a main reason being no snow.

I often hear grumbles from exhibitors that classes keep people off the show floor. On the flip side, however, I firmly believe that education helps lure attendees to shows. I think there is a delicate balance between trade shows and the educational programs or events that often run in conjunction with each other. To those who exhibit or attend shows and wish things were being done differently, I say don’t just sit on the sidelines and complain. Volunteer to be on a committee to help make improvements that will benefit everyone.

### Spicing things up

There was a new event this year at the National Green Centre in St. Louis. The Sweet Melissa Fashion Show was sponsored by *American Nurseryman* and hosted by Dr. Mike and Mrs. Bonnie Dirr. It was a fashion show with real models carrying 50 of the newest plant introductions. The runway was located in the middle of the exhibit floor, and when the fashion show began, everything stopped in its tracks—but in a good way. The one-hour event created high energy and buzz that was unlike anything I’d experienced. I think the

show organizers created an event that they can build upon, and it's an example of successful, out-of-the-box thinking. The Western Nursery and Landscape Association was quick to accept constructive criticism, which will serve to make the event even better next year in Kansas City.

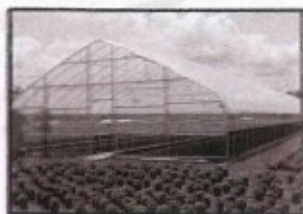
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### Making the most of it

In the recent "Covering Ground" newsletters from Tidwell Nurseries, Greenville, Ga., owner Bo Tidwell talked about "A Valuable Marketing Lesson" and his show experiences. Bo's proven trade show mantra is: lighten up, work hard and play hard. He feels the more fun you have, the more business you do. I believe he is right. Many people, myself included, find they do just as much business at the hotel bar after the show closes as on the show floor itself. Why? Because it's a chance to get to know your customers on a personal level, in a relaxed environment. And, just because you're in a bar doesn't mean you must have alcohol and stay up late. It's Coke and bed by 11 for me (okay, so I am old, but I'm still getting the job done!).

To get the best bang for your buck, trade shows are the most viable option. And to increase your payback, you must start planning now for next year's winter shows. If nothing else, simply commit in writing the answer to two questions: What worked well and what could I do better or differently?

If you answer them honestly, you'll find you have a head start on an even more successful marketing and sales event for your company.



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