

# Today's Market Spreading the Word

By RACHEL WIMBERLY

In most cases, the do-or-die that the success of a tradeshow depends on is whether the marketing accurately hit its target audience and not only drove buyers to the showfloor, but also convinced exhibitors it was the place to be to sell their products.

But, with red pencils carefully dissecting every bit and piece of show managers' budgets right now, everything – including the services provided by outside marketing firms – is being scrutinized.

Denise Paccione, president and CEO of San Diego-based Marketing Design Group, said it would be a big mistake, even more so when times are tough, for tradeshow managers to think about cutting back too severely on their marketing budgets.

"We have to get people to our events, and we have to advertise and bring people in the door," she added. "Statistically, if you cut your budget, you create the perception in the marketplace that (the show)

is not doing well, and you leave the door wide open for competitors to walk right in."

Marketing Design Group handles the accounts of 12 Tradeshow Week 200 shows, the biggest being one that the company just landed – **Pack Expo Intl.** – and, Paccione said, "If you cut back too much, it sends mixed signals and people think it's OK not to exhibit or attend."

Roger Halligan, CEO of Chicago-based H+A Intl., said his company, which oversees the marketing on 10 shows annually, including the Craft & Hobby Assn.'s **TSW 200 CHA Winter Convention & Trade Show**, said most of the shows haven't, as of yet, scaled back on the services his company offers them.

"Shows have cut back on other areas, but the ones we work on are all strong shows, and they know marketing is important," he added.

Marketing may be a key element for a show's success, but, according to Jean Whid-

don, president and CEO of Bethesda, Md.-based Fixation Marketing, which handles the Intl. Assn. of Amusement Parks & Attractions' **TSW 200 IAAPA Attractions Expo**, among others, that doesn't mean it isn't getting a closer look from show managers.

"I think they are, rather than cutting, taking a scalpel and being very judicious about being conservative with budgets," she added. "(For example,) instead of cutting direct mail, they are really looking at the list and zeroing in on people who might attend."

Sharyn Collinson, Fixation's managing director, said other methods of marketing an event, such as putting a show's conference program online as an e-brochure, instead of sending it out by mail, are being used. "It's very interactive and a great way to reach international audiences," she added.



Paccione



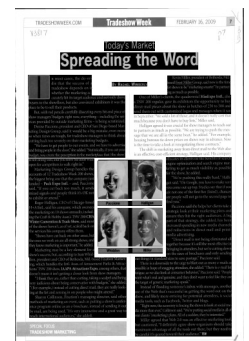
Halligan



Whiddon



Miller



Kevin Miller, president of Bethesda, Md.-based Frost Miller Group, said now is the time for shows to be “marketing smarter” by partnering as much as possible.

One of Miller’s clients, the quadrennial **MinExpo Intl.**, also a TSW 200 regular, gave its exhibitors the opportunity to buy direct-mail pieces about the show in batches of 250 to 500 and send them out with customized logos and messages when it ran in September. “We sold a lot of those, and it doesn’t really cost that much because you don’t have to buy lists,” Miller said.

Halligan agreed it was crucial for show managers to reach out to partners as much as possible. “We are trying to push the message that we are all in the same boat,” he added. “For example, housing bureaus tie down prices on shows way in advance. Now is the time to take a look at renegotiating those contracts.”

The shift in marketing away from direct mail to the Web also is an effective, cost-efficient strategy, Halligan said. His company educates its clients on the benefits of search engine optimization and search engine marketing to get as much visibility as possible for the show, he added.

“We’re pushing this really hard,” Halligan said. “On Google, you have to make sure you come out up top. Studies say that if you are not one of the first five (listed), chances are people will not go to the second page to find you.”

Paccione said she helps her clients take a strategic look at their marketing plans and ensure they hit the right audiences. A big part of that strategy, she added, has been increased spending in new media channels and reductions in direct mail and print-media advertising.

“Direct mail is not being eliminated all together because it’s still the most effective in bringing in attendees, but we’re cutting down on the sizes of brochures and only sending

out things in standard sizes to save postage,” Paccione said.

There is a downside to the urge to blast out as many e-mails as possible in hope of snagging attendees, she added. “There is e-mail list fatigue, so we also look at consumer behavior,” Paccione said. “People want what’s real and genuine, and they don’t want to feel like they are the target of generic marketing-speak.”

Instead of flooding someone’s inbox with messages, another use of the Web that’s successful in getting the word out on the show, and likely more enticing for potential attendees, is social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs.

“Right now, the economy is forcing the shows to look at social media more than ever,” Collinson said. “We’re putting social media in all of our clients’ (marketing) plans. All of a sudden, they’re interested.”

Miller agreed that Web 2.0 was an effective marketing tool, but cautioned, “I definitely agree show organizers should take maximum advantage of all the tools out there, but they need to be careful it’s geared toward their audience.” **TSW**