

MEMO:

TO: ECN

RE: Coverings Show

Date: April 20, 2017

International Trade Shows in the USA

Differences Unite for a Common Goal

As the world grows to be smaller, international trade shows grow taller. They attract attendees from around the world. Although many trade shows have a regional focus, every industry has a world class trade show, held somewhere in the world, that attracts a global market. Shows like the CES, IMTS, Detroit Auto Show, RSNA, Pack Expo, Minexpo, and Conexpo are American trade show events that market the world. Exhibitors and attendees at these events represent every continent. One such US show is the **Coverings Show**, this year held at **McCormick Place, April 18-21, 2016**. International exhibitors at American events might normally represent 30-35%, but for the Coverings Show international exhibitors represented 78% of the total exhibitors. The show is promoted as *The Global Tile & Stone Experience*. **Coverings** is the premier international trade fair and expo dedicated exclusively to showcasing the newest in ceramic tile and natural stone. It has grown to be the largest and most important show of its kind featuring exhibitors from more than 40 countries and attracting thousands of distributors, retailers, fabricators, and architectural and design professionals, representing this dynamic industry.

Coverings is the stage for introducing some of the most innovative tile and stone products in the world. The exposition also serves as a valuable resource for continuing education for all categories of attendees, with accredited seminars and live demonstration sessions conducted throughout the event.

What is unique about this show is that the majority of exhibits were designed and built abroad. Many of the stone and tile associations from each country prefer to work with suppliers from their own country to design and build their exhibits. The exhibits follow a European approach to exhibit design with raised floors and high walls; most floors and walls are covered in stone. Many exhibits were built in Europe and shipped over with carpenters and stone masons. Most all exhibitors partner with a U.S. exhibit builder or an installation company.

The American show site regulations, methods, and labor requirements are often misunderstood or misinterpreted by the international exhibit suppliers who ship and install their exhibits. Service items like material handling (the dirty word drayage), electric, cleaning, and catering cannot be executed by the international work crew as done in Europe. The American way requires that you work with the show contractor to obtain these services. The exhibitors who have the least problems are those that have worked in the USA before and recognize the virtues of “when in Rome, do as the Romans do.” In my book I say..”there is no right way, there is no wrong way, there is only a different way. Know and respect what is different and you are on your way to success in any region of the world”.

There are four major stone and tile shows in the world- *Cersaie/Bologna*, *Coverings/USA*, *Cevisama/Valencia*, and *Batima/Moscow*. Since the majority of the exhibits are covered with stone, most components of the exhibit are scrapped at the end of the event. The frames, counters, and speciality items are then kept and stored in a local warehouse or shipped back to their countries of origin. Each country where the show is held has their own labor and regulation differences. The adjustments that need to be made by international exhibitors for shows in the USA present the greatest points of difference. Considering that the USA is the land of the free, doing trade shows are not so free. There are strong reasons why trade show methods are what they are here in the U.S., but it is not a smart strategy to try and beat the system and work around it. It is best to work with a partner. As long as the value of the event, the exhibitors, and the attendees at U.S. tradeshow remain high, the rules be be slow to change.

One of the major points of confusion for international exhibitors at **Coverings** are the labor regulations. International exhibitors and suppliers

who did the **Coverings Show** last year in Orlando were allowed to do much of the install labor themselves. This labor regulation does not apply in Chicago. Orlando is a 'right to work' state, and Chicago is not. Chicago requires that the labor team consists of a certain percentage of union labor to work with international workers. The installation labor is monitored by McCormick Place staff and is firmly enforced. Those international companies who prepared in advance and partnered with a US labor company were then guided well and had little problems during set up.

European exhibit design and fabrication methods are different from the methods used in the USA. Most all international exhibits at **Coverings** had a raised floor, a bar area, and much of the exhibit was fitted, painted, and stone covered on site. This is not a common practice in the US, but because it was the **Coverings Show**, the product in many cases was a design component of the exhibit. Stone dust and the smell of mortar were everywhere during set up!

There are four major stone and tile shows in the world- Cersaie/Bologna, Covering/USA, Cevisama/Valencia, and Batima/Moscow. A&M is strongly represented at each of these events. Since the majority of the exhibits are covered with stone, much of the exhibit is scrapped at the end of the event. The frames, counters, and speciality items are then stored in a local warehouse. A&M presently has facilities in Italy, Russia, and the USA.

Lessons learned..

- * Events in the U.S., where exhibitors and visitors are international, will require a **recalculation of your thinking** about preparing for the show. *There is no right way or wrong way, only a different way. Work through it.*
- * When working internationally, **partner with a local company** to guide you through the requirements at any trade show.
- * *For the Installation...* Trying to work around the system will create trouble and will slow down the installation. For the international exhibitor, material handling, freight regulations, electric, and labor regulations are managed much different than doing a trade show anywhere else in the world. You don't have to like it, but you sure need to understand and respect it.

- * *For the Exhibitor...* The art of engagement that lead to business discussions at US trade shows are different than when greeting guests at shows in Europe and Asia. For the international visitor, slow down on your sales pitch, offer a cup of coffee or a water, sit down, and engage in small talk before pitching your product. Adjust your sales approach to suit the variety of guests who visit your stand.

- * ***In conclusion..*** The magic formula for success between International exhibit partners is preplanning and establishing a clear understanding about what needs to be done, and who can do it. When expectations between partners are on the same page, all parties are happy.