

Halloween 'Show' Business

BY CHRIS ADAMS

The Halloween industry has three U.S. trade shows to service its needs. However, the role of each of these shows is morphing as the industry's buying cycle shifts forward. The shifting timeline and changing role of these shows has resulted in the industry at large taking a look at what each show means and what role each show will play.

Traditionally, December's International Halloween Show, held in showrooms in New York, has been the kick-off to the long-lead selling season. However, as the lead time grows longer and longer, that is no longer the case. Manufacturers interviewed say that in 2010, the long-lead selling cycle for 2011 started with private meetings with retailers in July 2010.

"At this point, the New York show is wrapping up the selling season for mass-market and long-lead buyers," says Stephen Stanley, president of Disguise, a division of Jakks Pacific. "They have all seen the line twice by the time they roll into New York. The New York Show is the last big reveal for the mass market and large specialty chains."

The International Halloween Show is sponsored by the Halloween Industry Association (HIA), but it is not the only show that the organization endorses. "HIA also proudly endorses the Halloween & Party Expo," says Michele Biordi, executive director at HIA. "Our members feel this show offers the opportunity to meet with a high volume of quality buyers at a time of year that works for their businesses."

The Halloween & Party Expo is held in January in Houston. It is the largest of the three domestic Halloween trade shows and its open-booth layout provides attendees a great opportunity to see the look, feel, and trends of the industry at large. A lot of paper is written at this show by independent retailers.

The show is growing in terms of exhibitors as well as attending buyers every year," says Jonathan Erwin of the Halloween & Party Expo. "Fortunately, this industry has a certain built-in security, as consumers may forgo other luxuries when times are hard, but they still celebrate their children's birthdays and they still celebrate Halloween. This translates into continued growth and success for this industry trade show, despite reports that other industry shows are shrinking."

The show that has taken the largest hit is the Halloween, Costume & Party Show, which will be held in March in St. Louis. According to manufacturers interviewed, the shifting buying cycle has made this show too late in the season for filling out many retailers' lines and too early in the season for last-minute additions to their offerings. The statistics show that the 2010 show underperformed compared to the 2009 show.

"A lot of lessons have been learned," says Sam Bundy, managing partner at TransWorld Exhibits, which puts on the Halloween, Costume & Party Show. "From 2010, a lot of it was understanding the supply chain dynamics have shifted dramatically. We need to take a better look at the marketplace and try to serve the segments that are still being underserved."

Bundy says that in addition to trying to meet the needs of the independent retailer market from a buying cycle and product mix, the show is expanding to include all things holiday- and special occasion-driven.

It is clear that the Halloween, Costume & Party Show is in transition. However, the Halloween industry as a whole is in transition as the buying cycle shifts earlier and earlier. Some may argue that three U.S. Halloween trade shows are a bit much and there may eventually be a shake up. However, for now the three trade show organizers are trying to meet all of the needs of this evolving industry.