

Changing Fashions

Straight off the Showfloor



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Apparel related fashion OEM and branded shows need to differentiate to show the strength of the industry.

As someone who has been deeply involved in the tradeshow floor scene for over 20 years and attended or exhibited at over 100 apparel related tradeshows around the world, I currently find myself adapting to China's show floors changes, the decline or maturity of OEM and the growth and opportunities of new or emerging brands.

It appears that in a bad economy everyone wants to take control of their own destiny by creating their own brand. This is a very expensive proposition, with brand and marketing costs exceeding many companies' budgets. It is often these same companies who find their spending is to no avail, as every year they come to the show looking for international and/or domestic buyers. In addition to tradeshow expense there is the extensive additional capital required for marketing, advertising and promotion around the globe that many of these companies are not accustomed to utilizing.

In China, 2008 and 2009 marked the decline of OEM, and I noticed the quality of the OEM exhibitors had diminished with it; it was appearing the OEM growth was in agents or third parties who represented or acted on behalf of factories. Brands were starting to dominate at previous OEM only tradeshows.

In Guangzhou, the Canton Fair which I attend regularly used to be known for top notch OEM suppliers but now their offerings were mixed and sold by different agents across the show floor. It was starting to look like the Canton Fair was trying to compete against other brand fairs including but not limited to the largest and most well known brand show in Mainland China the CHIC (China International Clothing & Accessories Fair) show in Beijing. One reason for this was due to the decline of OEM in South China and

the growth of OEM in North China. The other obvious reason was the declining and changing economy. This change of supply chain location helped improve OEM only shows like the Inter-Textile fair in Shanghai and Beijing.

The CHIC show has always been a brand-focused show and does not stray into the OEM arena. It has a strong following for domestic and international (Italian, France, Japan, Korean, and Taiwan Pavilions) fashion and accessory brands. One major issue of this show is that it only operates once a year when fashion has a minimum of two seasons and all larger shows will have two shows a season.

In Dalian at the China (Dalian) International Garment & Textile Fair there was a huge presence for Italian, French, and Spanish brands looking to expand into the Chinese marketplace while there are plenty local Chinese brands looking for retailers, distributors, and wholesalers outside of Mainland China. Dalian has even gone to the extent of opening an international brand agency (IBAC) for foreign brands

which includes new and leading brands. For the Fall 2009 fair there were over forty foreign brands listed in their show catalogue, including companies like Costume National and Byblos.

Shanghai and Beijing also have the InterTextile show which operates once a year in each city. The intertextile show is the largest OEM tradeshow in mainland China, which focuses on OEM suppliers in apparel, fabric and trimmings and has great success attracting domestic and overseas exhibitors and attendees.

In Shanghai you have plenty of shows that cater to both brand and OEM shows such as the Shanghai International Clothing and Textile Expo, Shanghai Textile and Apparel Trade Fair, China International Textile and Apparel Trade Fair, and the East China Fair, trying to grab as



many exhibitors and attendees as available. Like regional shows, these shows are challenged to attract domestic and overseas buyers. This is because these shows are smaller and not well known with exhibitors and attendees. In an effort to attract foreign buyers, the China International Garment Fair (formerly known as Shanghai International Clothing and Textile Expo) offers up to a US\$1000 travel allowance.

In Mainland China there are also the smaller regional shows (Ningbo, Suzhou and Keqiao) filling the OEM void and highlighting their regional strength. But one issue is these shows are not well known and have difficulty attracting domestic and overseas buyers. Last year I attended shows in Ningbo, Suzhou and Keqiao and found that they were lacking show atmosphere, energy and attendees. The only show that stayed open for the duration of the show time slot was the Keqiao fair. The Suzhou show closed after the first day and the Ningbo show had many booths leaving on the afternoon of the second day. Imagine if you are a foreign buyer traveling to a show that is closed when you arrive.

To conclude, I believe the strong will survive; the industry cannot support so many tradeshows with the same focus. Apparel

related fashion OEM and branded shows need to differentiate in order to show the strength and opportunities of the industry. There are too many shows trying to be everything to everybody. In Shanghai, I have been noticing the successful growth of category or product focused OEM shows. This year I attended the Spin Expo which is a smaller show with a focus on knitwear. Knitwear is in everyone's closet and is a necessity in fashion. The show was great for organization, inspiration, creativity, and suppliers. I liked how this show focused on the OEM suppliers (garment, yarn) and designers for the knitwear segment. In addition, there is the Mode Lingerie show in Hong Kong and Shanghai, as well as the other



fairs like the China (Shanghai) International Hosiery Expo and the Functional Fabrics High Performance Exhibition.

In theory only a few shows can be everything to everybody and those shows are the Canton Fair, the InterTextile Tradeshow and Fashion Week in Hong Kong, which combined equals six shows a year. Tradeshows need to make a presence that engages, entertains, and educates the exhibitors/attendees while also getting the industry talking. □

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