

# Aggregating Prospects: Bringing The Audience To Us

**S**ometimes it seems like the list of aviation shows is never ending. It used to be just the NBAA Annual Convention, the Paris Air Show, and a few other worldwide aviation events that combined military hardware and commercial aircraft with a sampling of business aviation entries. Never before has there been the explosion of worldwide, business aviation events.

Designed - both in the US and abroad - to bring together aviation enthusiasts, owners, operators, manufacturers and suppliers, these events are often viewed as a double-edged sword. For some they represent a great opportunity to network. For others, the events represent a great deal of cost and there are often too many from which to choose. By those who are on the supply side of our industry, the feelings often run to the 'too many events' side.

"With so many events we have no time to sell. We are just packing up from one event and shuffling off to the next." Booth space, transportation of displays, and dedicating static aircraft to events all over the world is costly. Is it worth it? Will this all come back as time and money well spent?

This month's article is going to look at both sides of these events - the side of the exhibitor as well as the side of the participant. Most importantly, I want to focus on the middle, the part where there is no side, just the benefit of aggregating the customer and supplier. The magic that can happen when these events are approached with the right expectations, as well as the right planning and follow-up of the exhibitor, is clear.

I hear the same thing all the time from the exhibitors at these events: "My feet are killing me. I hate to be away from home and I have not made a sale here yet. Why do we keep coming?" Or the best one, "I have to come because my competition comes!"

Occasionally, I overhear someone saying, "I am thrilled to be here. These events give me great chances to see what my competition is offering and to see the reaction from the customers first hand, as they themselves view the industry." That positive answer, although certainly coming from a tired person whose feet may hurt, is the answer com-

ing from a person who will walk away with future relationships and business.

My perspective of these events is that of an aircraft broker and consultant. I attend these events often with static aircraft to show, many times as a speaker, and of course often just as an observer. Frankly, in any category, the expense of the event drives me to find ways to maximize the return rather than complain about the process.

In fact, just last month, I attended the NBAA Forum in Scottsdale, Arizona. I was not a speaker, and I didn't bring any pre-owned inventory to that event. I did, however, take advantage of the fact that aircraft owners and operators would aggregate for the event. I held a private dinner party and was able to create a dialogue about the

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industry at-large, and new and important challenges that our industry faces, both on the regulatory front as well as the tax and fee fronts.

At the forum itself, having all the manufacturers there with current model aircraft on display, allowed for me to have trade-up discussions with my clients while actually sitting in the planes contemplated. Did I leave with an order? No. Did I leave with wonderful invitations from everyone to continue talking about transition strategies? Absolutely!

I think the expectation of those exhibiting must match the reality. Purchase orders may not be signed, yet doors will most assuredly be opened. When I hear the 'sore-foot' line and the 'not-worth-it' line, I wonder if I am just hearing it from people that expect to walk away with a pocket of money and call the event a failure with any other outcome. Mining leads, being enthusiastic about your products or deliverables and vigorous follow-up is a must to get the most out of the events.

My son Josh just returned from Hong Kong and Japan. He attended the ABACE

show as well as the NBAA Forum in Japan - a big expense both in dollars and time. Our expectation was to go and explore the events in parts of the world that are experiencing an explosion of

business aircraft activity. What was most interesting was what Josh found. Ever the optimist, (it must run in the family), Josh had great things to say about both events.

What I found most interesting was the fact that not only is there very little infrastructure in these remote parts of the world for the operational side of aviation, but there is also very little sales and consulting infrastructure as well. So like in more mature aviation markets, such as Europe and South America, these Asian areas do not even have counterparts to us with whom to build relationships. So the fact that these events exist and provide ways to aggregate end-users is powerful.

There would be no way for any of us to try to communicate with prospects or end-users without these impactful events. Not only is language an obvious barrier, just finding who the prospects are, and finding phone numbers or addresses for them is a near impossibility.

I applaud the NBAA and other aviation forward thinkers in developing opportunities not only for us as suppliers, but also, and most importantly, to the end users and future aviation owners. These events may never immediately bring dollars to our doors by making actual sales at the events. They will, however, with proper expectations, bring dollars to our world with dedicated follow-up, hard prospecting and patience.

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