

Show Dates – The Big Picture



Once again, there are rumblings about moving the dates of the SIA show. This is nothing new of course; over the years, there have been many discussions about show dates. But this time it's different. Moves have been made by some suppliers involved that will permanently change the SIA show as we know it. If there's a time clock on this decision, that clock has been started.

Members of the NSSRA Board of Directors have been involved in some of the recent discussions around show dates. The most recent of these meetings was held this past summer and involved stakeholders from the entire product side of the industry; retailers, reps, vendors and SIA management.

Prior to attending this meeting, I think that my perspective on show dates would mirror the position of most retailers: Leave the show dates alone. While the current dates may not be perfect for all retailers, the retail community is used to them and they seem to fit most retailer's schedules reasonably well.

At the stakeholders meeting we got what might be considered a look "behind the curtain" of the industry. Clearly I'm not able to articulate SIA's position and perspective as accurately as they would, but what follows are some of the points made at the meeting:

1. SIA is an organization whose members are the hardgoods, softgoods and accessory vendors of the snow sports industry.
2. The SIA show is many things. It is a once a year meeting of the tribe. For many retailers it is the single opportunity to pick up on trends and issues that are shaping our industry. It is the single opportunity for retailers and principles of snow sports vendors to meet and discuss topics of interest. It is the only source of continuing education in the industry. And, the SIA show is the face of the snow sports industry to the greater world around us; it is attended by media from all over the world and garners print and visual images of snow sports that helps put our industry on par with all of the other sports and activities that our customers engage in.
3. Proceeds from the show support the ongoing consumer marketing, lobbying, research and educational initiatives throughout the entire year.
4. The softgoods business now accounts for 65% of the total sales in the snow sports industry.
5. Many of the larger "life style" oriented softgoods vendors' business cycles have changed. For more reasons than can be covered in this letter, their "sell in" cycles now begin in November and are all but over by the time the current show dates happen. Accordingly, some of these vendors have pulled out of the SIA show; this includes Columbia, Arc'teryx, and most recently, The North Face. As other vendors' follow, the SIA show as we know it will shrink, or worse. The resources to support the industry will shrink and the face of the snow sports industry to the world around us will diminish.
6. The lifestyle-oriented softgoods vendors that are large players outside the snow sports industry appear to need show dates that fall somewhere in the second half of the fourth quarter. The hardgoods and softgoods vendors with business cycles that are in tune with the retail community generally seem to be in favor of the current dates.

The dilemma of course is trying to find dates that meet the needs of all the stakeholders in the industry. Clearly that is not possible. For retailers it may come down to deciding to support SIA and all it does. That means being open to considering new show dates. The other option is to let the show be what it becomes and support the show(s) and vendors that best support the business cycles of the retail community. Clearly this is a tough decision. NSSRA would be interested in what your thoughts are. Please let us know by emailing NSSRA President Larry Weindruch, lweindruch@nssra.com.

There is no shortage of passionate perspectives on this issue, all of which seem to be valid when viewed through the lenses of the various participants. In the end, though, one thing seems certain, as the retail community is being disrupted by all manner of changes at retail, so is SIA and its members.

*Respectfully,
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Hi-Tempo
NSSRA Past Chairman*