



The 2011 Trade Show Season Has Left the Building

On Jan. 1 of each year, two business-related things happen for us vendor-types. First, like you drillers, we start at \$0 again. It doesn't matter how good your previous year was; the New Year starts new again. The second thing that happens when the calendar flips to January is that trade show season starts again. I picture the clock on the movie "Groundhog Day" (1993) flipping over, but instead of Groundhog Day, it is trade show season again.

Trade show season (first quarter) used to mean just state trade shows. Now 80 percent of the state water well trade shows across North America happen between Jan. 1 and Mar. 31. Today, depending on your industry, these trade shows may include state, regional, distributor and different organization's trade shows, too. Today, add in educational events and company-sponsored classes, and the list can fill a Web site. This is good news for contractors living in states that require continuing education; there is no limit of events to attend.

Trade shows are a great time to get out there, and meet old friends and soon-to-be new ones. In winter-weather states, it is the slowest time of year for drilling distributors, contractors and manufacturers alike. Isn't it funny that, during our slowest season, we have the highest expenses for trade shows? For vendors, there is the cost of the booth rental, shipping displays and materials, travel and expenses (e.g. hotel, meals, customer entertainment). For the contractors attending, there is added cost, even if you live locally and attend the trade show for the day. There is trade show registration, local travel and your time to attend. If you had not been attending the trade show, you would have been billing that time on a job – so just being there costs you money. For all who attend – vendors and contractors – we need to get the most out of these events.

For all involved, a well-run, well-executed and well-supported trade show is invaluable for both attendees and exhibitors alike. A poorly run and poorly attended trade show is an expense drain. You hear things like, "You're missed if you don't attend" or "We stopped doing that trade show years ago." Trade shows that don't reinvent themselves in a timely manner tend to fall victim to this parking-lot criticism.

Industry trade shows and events are



Industry trade shows are held for the attendees. What makes attending worthwhile for you?

your events. What makes a good trade show for you? What do you want to see or do at an industry event? Is it all about location (someplace fun), or is it about education? Is it a family event, or a chance to hang with your crews? Think about the last trade show that you thought about attending, but did not. Why? What was the deciding factor? Were you busy? Is there a better time of year for your company or industry? Was it bad weather, or was it good weather and you needed to be working? Is the location not convenient? Was the expense too great for our new economy? What made you stay back while others attended?

These questions are the questions that states need to be asking of the licensed drillers who don't show up. They say the

sale you didn't get is the one you need to ask the most questions about; so I think the feedback needed for a trade show is from the people who don't attend. As an industry, we need to know what you – the industry – want out of your local, regional and national trade shows. Nothing is worse than a poorly attended trade show where vendors spend the day talking to each other.

One difference in today's events is we have different organizations fighting for your education dollar. I can count six different organizations or associations that offer geothermal training ongoing through the year. That is six without thinking too hard, and I bet I could come up with more. How do you decide which training is right for you or your crews? I use this only as

an example, as every industry has this internal competition, and it seems to be increasing every year.

Personally, as a vendor, I feel I get the biggest bang for my buck at regional trade shows or trade shows that combine two or more states. Two that come to mind in my territory are the South Atlantic Well Drillers Jubilee and New England Water Well Expo. Both of these trade shows include multiple states, and always have proved to be well-attended conventions. Trade shows like this are fun to work, and it is great to talk with so many different people.

At a recent state trade show, we joked that the vendors should just get a tour bus and travel together state-to-state, saving respective company funds. Can you imagine a bus full of reps pulling into town like the circus? We could have roadies, and throw in a few groupies to inflate our egos. The t-shirt sales alone would be worth it – Horizontal Directional Tour 2011.

All kidding aside, the point of this article is to get you to voice your opinion. I enjoy working these trade shows because I enjoy meeting with the contractors and teaching classes. Truth be known, the vendors even enjoy the time to network and share. But, at the end of the day, these are your events. They are hosted for you and other members of your industry. So rather than say, "This tradeshow isn't what it used to be" or "I remember when this trade show was," take the time to write a letter, make a call or drop an e-mail to voice your opinion and give suggestions to the associations and organizations. In fact, if you thought a trade show was especially good this year, take the time to let the organizers know. It takes a lot of effort and work by many people to run these events, and they really do want feedback. I have seen the pride on the volunteers' faces after a well-run event. It is like cracking the ball on the sweet spot of the bat – they know they hit it out of the park.

I'll close by saying thank you for another great trade show season in 2011, and thank you to the countless individuals who put the unseen hours into producing these trade shows and training events. At the next trade show or in the field, I can't wait until we have the opportunity to meet again. **ND**

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When it comes to trade shows today, contractors have a number of different options.