

Re-examining Market Value

TO THE EDITOR:

I was intrigued with your article "Markets Then and Now" (December 2005). Although your article does do a good job of outlining what has happened over the past 30 years and the impact on Western/English markets (trade shows), I believe you missed an opportunity to promote the value of markets.

I was very disappointed you did not address what good things the markets still bring to the marketplace. True, the Internet has changed people's buying habits, but the Web does not provide the value markets have to offer.

I am sure there are many of us that work very hard to produce meaningful and successful markets, who would like to see Tack 'n Togs produce an article that addresses the value markets have, and how the industry can still benefit by their continuation as a benefit to meeting Hank Hibberd's "Four Things a Retailer Should Be Able to Accomplish at a Market." Those being:

1. Compare styles, prices and quality of goods and services offered by the manufacturers. The Internet does not offer this opportunity. Pictures can't identify the difference in quality. You have to see the product first hand to compare quality. Yes, you may order it and get it the next day, but if you don't like it you have to take the time to send it back. Having the ability to compare one product to another cannot be compared to the Internet buying process.

2. Locate new sources for products to keep consumers satisfied. The Web may have pictures, but until you meet the manufacturer or manufacturer's representative, or meet with other retailers who have found the products/services to be reliable and sellable, retailers need to see the products firsthand and meet the manufacturers face to face.

3. Make sound buys on new goods. Yes, the Web may provide specials, but you can say the same for markets. In fact, at most markets pricing specials are available that are not available anywhere else. Another good reason to shop at markets.

4. Exchange ideas and information with all segments of the industry. Yes, there is E-mail. But let's be honest. Is this the real answer? The Internet is creating a society that doesn't know how to network. Face to face communication is a real human need and should not be overlooked. What about the education retailers gain by attending workshops and seminars at market? What about the value of sitting down over lunch or a cup of coffee with a friendly competitor to compare notes and ideas? What about the fashion shows that allow buyers to see products as they will be worn and used? This art of networking must not be lost, and we owe it to the retailers to do what we can to promote it and provide venues to allow it to continue.

Yes, the Internet has changed the way we do business, but why not continue to promote the values markets have that cannot be duplicated by a computer? I think it only fair to share with your readers that markets still have a place in the distribution system.

True, the role has changed, but markets provide something the computer will never provide. I don't think it is time for us to turn over and die. Markets have a role to play, and I believe we all (markets, trade press, manufacturers and manufacturer's representatives) should be working together to adjust to changes while promoting the values markets bring to the industry, not just push them aside as old news.

Stephen Hamilton, Folsom, Calif.

Hamilton is executive director of the West Coast Western Wear & Equipment Association, which sponsors the Reno Market.



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