



Trade Shows: Part Carnival, Part Seminar, All Deductible

I had a long chat several weeks ago with a fellow who wanted to cover the International Builders' Show in early February for *Professional Deck Builder*. He took me, and the construction trade press in general, to task for what he felt was our inadequate coverage of trade shows. His point was that these shows represent

opportunities for those of us with mud on our boots and sawdust in our pockets to gain cutting-edge knowledge of techniques and products, and that the press shortchanges readers by not getting that word out. He was persuasive enough that I got him press credentials to the show.

Attending a big event like the International Builders' Show can be a lot like perusing the midway at the biggest carnival imaginable. There are literally miles of aisles rife with showgirls, celebrity spokespeople, and general glad-handing. Here's what I like about big shows, though. Tucked in among the big-bellied salesmen, the over-perfumed marketing managers, and the stray Nomex-clad NASCAR driver, you'll find smaller booths. These are often staffed by a husband and wife, and they've shot their company's entire marketing budget for the year on the dice roll of attending this show. This is where a journalist can find a gem that otherwise wouldn't have surfaced. That search is the assignment I gave the aforementioned correspondent.

In truth, I prefer smaller venues such as our own DeckExpo (Las Vegas, February 27 to March 1;

www.deckexpo.com), and our sister publication's JLC Live (www.jlclive.com) shows. These are different animals. The price of admission is cheaper, and it would be easy to walk the entire show floor in a day, except for the hands-on construction clinics.

These clinics are goldmines. Those on the show floor are covered by the cost of admission, and they're presented by some of the most knowledgeable tradesmen on the continent. If you read trade magazines, you'll recognize the names. What makes these clinics rock is that you get to sit just feet away from the presenters, and they encourage questions and suggestions. It's a relaxed, back-and-forth setting, and these guys aren't above learning from you.

Upstairs, you'll find technical and business seminars. Generally, you'll have to pay more for these, but as a friend of mine is fond of asking, "What's the value of one good idea?" And like the clinics on the floor, they're generally taught by industry experts, folks who really know their end of the business. Often, they're people who sit on the committees that write the building codes. Trade shows truly get you access to the horses' mouths.

So how about it? Check your schedule, set aside a day or two, and get out to a show. If it's DeckExpo or JLC Live, stop by and say hi.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Andy Engel".

Andy Engel
Editor

Unlike most of the people you know,
we want your two cents.

In future issues of *Professional Deck Builder*, we plan to publish your letters and e-mails. While it's nice to hear about what we're doing right, it's more interesting to hear about what we're doing wrong. If you saw

something you loved or hated, or if you've got a tip that could help out other readers, we want to know. Send letters or e-mails to the addresses below.

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