



Spring Fair attendance tops 71,000 as exhibitors rack up record orders

February 19 2010

Retailers with a combined spending power of £12 billion heralded a boon of record-breaking transactions for many exhibitors at Spring Fair International, the biggest home and gift event in the buying calendar.

It is estimated that around £2 billion of orders will be placed by buyers as a direct result of their attendance at the show, which took place on February 7 – 11 at the NEC Birmingham.

At the close of the show, visitor numbers totaled 71,239*, outstripping the previous two years' attendance figures. Not since 2007 have so many retailers flocked to Spring Fair. International visitors also increased by 8 per cent to over 5,600* compared with last year's event. More than 20,000 jewellery buyers attended The Jewellery Show (Halls 17 & 18) alone.

Over the five days, buyers keen to restock for 2010 visited the show's 2,800 exhibitors, who launched more than 270,000 new products between them. Some suppliers reported their best-ever trade show.

Show organiser Emap Connect invested some £2 million in the production of Spring Fair International and The Jewellery Show, which was spent on the creation of crowd-pulling new features, customer service initiatives and marketing and PR campaigns. This built on the success of Autumn Fair International 2009, which signaled a retail revival and also saw an increase in visitor numbers from both the UK and overseas.

The managing director of Emap Connect, Louise Young, commented: "Spring Fair International 2010 has been a resounding success. Our feedback indicates that substantial orders have been placed. Retailers are keener than ever to restock and differentiate their offering.

"The retail industry is one of the UK's biggest employers and if the high street thrives in 2010 it will help lift the country further out of recession. No one is resting on their laurels now thinking it will be easy, but exhibitors at Spring Fair have provided an outstanding range of products to give retailers the best possible platform for success in the year ahead."

In attendance at the fair were UK multiples including Amazon, Asda, Beaverbrooks, Bentalls, Clinton Cards, Debenhams, Dunelm, Fenwicks, Harrods, Hobbycraft, John Lewis, Lakeland, Scotts & Co, Sainsbury, Selfridges, Toys 'R' Us and WHSmith, who joined product-hungry independent retailers looking for a vital competitive edge.

Exhibitors across the show were delighted with the event. Mike Burgess, managing director of Summerhouse exhibitor Parlane International, which celebrated 40 years of trading at Spring Fair, said: "We enjoyed a record Sunday. It was the best day we have had at any show ever, and not just by the number of orders placed, but also the number of new accounts and the values. It was phenomenal.

"And then we had a record Monday. So, in two days, we had overtaken our total for the whole of last year's Spring Fair. I came to this year's show in an optimistic mood, but it has exceeded my expectations by a long way. I believe people are now getting on with it and are fed up with talk of recession."

Annie Paddison, director of Black Ginger, was equally upbeat: "The Monday of the show was phenomenal – our best day ever. Retailers were very confident and wanting to buy new things across the board. The average orders are probably up and we have opened lots of new accounts."

Stuart Illingworth, managing director of Widdop Bingham in Contemporary Gifts & Collectables, said it had been the company's best show for four or five years and added: "The footfall has been huge and we have had an increased number of orders and increased values as well. It's been fantastic. We have 33 members of staff on the stand and we still had customers writing their own orders or wanting to come back to see us because we were so busy.

"We have also had more international visitors. What has been great is that we have been a part of springfair.com and as the giftware sponsor it has given us a big export audience that we couldn't have reached on our own. And we have opened lots of new accounts, which are the lifeblood of the company."

The Creative Britain logo was revived to highlight companies with products designed in the UK and available for export.

For the first time, Emap Connect flew 75 hand-picked international buyers to the show, rightly believing that well-designed British products would even greater interest than usual because of favourable exchange rates.

Chris Voisey, managing director of Junction 18, commented: "The first three days have been very strong for orders from the UK and overseas. We have done a lot of export business at Spring Fair with buyers from Italy, South Africa,

Norway, France and Russia. Things are looking much more positive for the industry than they were last week.”

Exciting new product features and innovations brought the wow factor to the show and helped to create an event that Louise Young believes fulfilled the aspirations of both retailers and exhibitors:

“We worked hard during our preparations to give exhibitors the best possible return on their investment in a show that would make the industry proud. I think we have succeeded. But there is always room for improvement and discussions with suppliers, buyers and trade bodies about Spring Fair International 2011 have already begun.”

The 2010 fair included the unveiling of a revamped and re-edited production of The Jewellery Show, the UK’s largest dedicated exhibition for jewellery, which attracted almost 20,000 visitors.

Visitors and exhibitors alike welcomed the spectacular launch of the Pandora Catwalk Café, a specialist jewellery catwalk and central café at the heart of The Jewellery Show in Halls 17 and 18, which drew large audiences daily.

Georgie Cahill, joint manager of George Banks Jewellers in Preston, said: “I think the Pandora Catwalk brings pizzazz to The Jewellery Show and encourages people to visit the stands of those companies who are showing their jewellery on models. It looks so different to what it does in a display cabinet and gives you a better idea of how wearable the jewellery is. I will now visit more stands as a result of seeing the catwalk show. It’s a great idea.”

Sponsored by designer cookware supplier Maxwell & Williams, Cook Live! was another highlight of Spring Fair International 2010, creating a massive draw for visitors at the heart of Kitchen, Dining and Housewares Hall 2.

A large, working kitchen showcased the new products and equipment being sold by exhibitors and featured live demonstrations by professional demonstrators, top designer Nick Munro, and star chefs Raymond Blanc, James Martin, Jason Atherton and Aiden Byrne.

Stephanie Todd, joint owner of the Cascade gift shop in Great Bookham, Surrey, said she thought: “Cook Live! was absolutely fantastic. You see someone like James Martin on the television, so it’s nice to actually watch them live.”

Louise Young, who describes newer, smaller businesses as “the creative lifeblood of the home and gift industry” was delighted that recently introduced initiatives resulted in some 500 suppliers taking stands at Spring Fair for the first time. An inaugural reception was held at the show for new exhibitors to meet the press and buyers.

One of those new exhibitors, Susan Doha, managing director of bagabook, commented: "This is our first trade show. We didn't know what to expect and it's been absolutely fantastic. We are overwhelmed with the response. We have had all sorts of retailers wanting the products. Interest has come not only from the UK, but the United States, France, Italy and Ireland as well."

Well-known visitors to the show included Birmingham Ladywood MP Clare Short and there were celebrity appearances from Jeff Banks, Kara Tointon, Hairy Bikers, Laurence and Jackie Llewellyn-Bowen, Jody Craddock, Rachel Elmore, Dave Lee Travis, Anton du Beke, Erin Boag, Gino D'Acampo, Rachel and Sophie Conran amongst others.

Spring Fair International 2011 will be held from 6-10 February at the NEC, Birmingham.

* Subject to audit.

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