FASTEST 50
AWARDS & SUMMIT
takes the
Windy City
by Storm

BY NIL ANDERSON, senior editor and
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“The stage at Trade Show Executive’s Fastest 50 Awards & Summit was only a few feet high but it offered a lofty view of the future of trade shows,” said Darlene Gudea, president of Trade Show Executive Media Group. Organizers of the fastest-growing shows were honored for growing their net square footage, number of exhibitors and attendance by leaps and bounds in 2012.

Fourteen organizers were honored further with crystal trophies for their ability to leapfrog over the other speed demons — in percentage growth or in sheer numbers. And during the Fastest 50 Summit, industry leaders and outside experts covered the bases, from tips on new business models and strategies for growing your show at Fastest 50 speeds, to hitting social media homeruns and turning detractors into advocates.

“We were very pleased with the turnout,” said Diane Bjorklund, TSE’s vice president of events. The 2013 Fastest 50 was held for the first time in Chicago and drew a record attendance of 120 registered delegates, reflecting a ratio of 60% organizers and 40% service providers. “The Fastest 50 drew a true cross-section of the exposition industry, from show managers of niche shows to the CEOs of the largest associations and independent organizers,” she added. The retail sector was most heavily represented, followed by organizers from construction, manufacturing, medical/healthcare and technology, reflecting a microcosm of the trade show industry and leading to interesting viewpoints and discussions.

High Achievers
Collectively, the Fastest 50 grew 14.3% in exhibit space, 14.3% in the number of exhibiting companies, and 19.1% in attendance from 2011 to 2012. By comparison, shows in the TSE Composite Index of Trade Shows (the Trade Show Executive Dashboard), which includes the entire U.S. exhibition industry, increased 2.4% in exhibit space, 1.5% in exhibitors and 2.9% in attendance during the same period. The top-ranked show, The Running Event, left a lot of shows in a cloud of dust with an 88% increase in exhibit space — nearly 37 times the average show growth in 2012.

And The Winner Is . . .
During the awards dinner, 14 of the top sponsors announced the winners of Fastest 50 Grand Awards and presented a crystal trophy to the organizer who ranked among the very elite in a highly competitive awards program.

The big winners of the evening were:
- **Carol Fojtik**, senior vice president of Hall-Erickson, who struck gold with MINExpo and Exhibitor 2012, winning three crystal Grand Awards and five plaques. She practically needed a dozer or forklift to haul her winnings back to the office.
- **Sharon Enright**, vice president of the trade show division, Business Journals, Inc., who won one crystal Grand Award and 11 plaques, which stacked up almost higher than herself despite her eye-catching designer heels. BJI organized five shows in the Fastest 50, including AccessoriesTheShow-January; AccessoriesTheShow-February; Fame; Moda Manhattan; and MRket.
- **Bob Harar**, chairman and CEO of National Trade Productions, winning one crystal Grand Award and six plaques for three shows: the EVS26/Electric Vehicle Symposium, Coverings, and the American Society of Plumbing Engineers Convention & Exposition.

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Three’s the Charm. Access Intelligence CEO Don Pazour and VP Jenn Heinold show off their three wins for the OR Manager Conference, a record-breaking show for operating room managers and hospital administrators.

**Flexing Their Muscles.** Business Journal, Inc.’s Sharon Enright (R) and GLM’s Penny Sikalis (L) are no lightweight contenders. Sharon and her team earned a prominent place in the trade show history books with a record five shows in the Fastest 50 rankings and earned a crystal trophy and 11 plaques. Penny’s SURTEX art and design licensing show knocked out all other contenders in the attendance growth category (by percentage growth) by skyrocketing 43%. 
Is There a Forklift in the House? A jubilant Carol Fojtik shows off the eight awards she and the Hall-Erickson team received for MINExpo and The Exhibitor Show at the Fastest 50.

#1 Double-Digit Growth in Two Categories. Todd Kotlarek scored two impressive wins — in net square feet and exhibitors — for his National Facilities Management & Technology Expo.

#2 OffPrice But On Target. Tarsus Expositions’ Todd Fabos accepts the honors for growing the OFFPRICE Show by 13% in attendance.

#3 Talking Shop. The International Council of Shopping Centers’ Amie Leibovitz earned kudos for RECon’s 10% growth in exhibitors, more than three times the benchmark.

#4 Painting the Town Red. Cheryl Matthews (L) from American Coatings Assn. and Heather Kuznetz of Nürnberg Messe North America celebrate their Fastest 50 double victory — high percentage of growth in net square feet and in number of exhibiting companies.

#5 Sew Incredible. Messe Frankfurt’s John Gallagher and Malin Lager were spotlighted for Texworld USA’s growth in exhibitors and attendance.

License to Drive — and Break the Speed Limit. Nielsen won awards for four shows and LVCVA’s Craig Erlander (L) and Core-apps’ Jay Tokosch were on hand to congratulate Nielsen’s Liz Crawford, who heads up marketing for the company and runs the Sports Licensing & Tailgate Show.

An Electrifying Presence. NTP’s Bob Harar and Andrew Ortale know how to sign up the exhibitors, winning a crystal trophy for the EVS/Electric Vehicle Symposium as well as plaques for Coverings and the American Society of Plumbing Engineers.
Here’s a look at the full list of Fastest 50 Grand Award winners:

**Highest Growth in Net Square Feet of Exhibit Space by Percentage (Annual Show):**
The Running Event, which grew 88% to 94,000 net square feet (nsf)

**Highest Growth in Net Square Feet of Exhibit Space in Sheer Numbers (Annual Show):**
International CES, which grew by 171,246 nsf to 1,827,557 nsf

**Highest Growth in Net Square Feet of Exhibit Space in Sheer Numbers (Non-Annual Show):**
MINExpo, which grew by 271,060 nsf to 852,030 nsf

**Highest Growth in Number of Exhibiting Companies by Percentage (Annual Show):**
EVS26/Electric Vehicle Symposium, which grew 60% from 125 exhibitors to 200 exhibitors

**Highest Growth in Number of Exhibiting Companies by Percentage (Non-Annual Show):**
MINExpo, which dug up 45.4% more exhibitors, expanding to 1,868 from the 1,285 at its last show in 2008

**Highest Growth in Number of Exhibiting Companies in Sheer Numbers (Annual Show):**
IMEX America, which grew by 546 exhibitors to 2,413 exhibitors

**Highest Growth in Attendance by Percentage:**
SURTEX, which grew 43% to 7,150 attendees

**Highest Growth in Attendance in Sheer Numbers (Non-Annual Show):**
International Manufacturing Technology Show (IMTS), which grew by 17,789 attendees to 100,200 attendees

**Highest Growth in Attendance in Sheer Numbers (Annual Show):**
Offshore Technology Conference (OTC), which grew by 11,220 attendees to 89,865 attendees

**Fastest-Growing Medical Show:**
American Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting, with a blended average growth rate of 28%

**Organizer with the Greatest Number of Fastest 50 Shows:**
Business Journals Inc., with five shows including: AccessoriesTheShow – January; AccessoriesTheShow – February; Fame; Moda Manhattan; and MRket.

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**Six-Figure Growth.** The International CES grew by a record-breaking 171,246 nsf, and Christine Franca proudly displays her trophy and plaque.

**‘Surge-Tex.’** SURTEX surged ahead of all others in attendance growth percentage-wise, and a beaming Penny Sikalis accepts the trophy from Hargrove’s Mark Shadwick.

**Big Incentive.** IMEX America’s Kimberly Meyer poses with MCCA’s Jim Rooney after her win as fastest-growing show in sheer number of exhibiting companies

**Tool Time.** The Intl. Manufacturing Technology Show won by a landslide in the category, “Highest Growth in Attendance in Sheer Numbers,” drawing 17,789 attendees more than it did two years ago, a 22% hike. Bonnie Gurney of AMT came to the stage to claim the award presented by (R to L) TSE’s Carri Jensen, and Ungerboeck Software International’s Doug Archibald and Bruce Higgins.
#1 This is No Fish Story.
Kenneth Andres reels in an award for ICAST, the 9th-ranked show in attendance growth.

#2 Quite a Stretch.
The International Limousine, Charter & Tour Show stretched to new heights in all three metrics. Ty Bobit and Kristen Messineo display their award.

#3 More Bling.
Two editions of Michael Breslow’s Jewelers International Showcase were real gems, ‘garneting’ three awards.

#4 BIO’s Wonder Woman.
Year after year, Robbi Lycett delivers a winning show.

Front Runner. Troy Leonard, organizer of The Running Event, won multiple awards, including the Grand Slam award for the fastest-growing show all around. With an 88% increase in net square feet, the show’s growth was nearly 37 times the benchmark in 2012. TSE’s Darlene Gudea and Choose Chicago’s Michael Tarr presented the honors.

Hospitality at Its Finest. The generous Don Welsh and his team at Choose Chicago rolled out the red carpet during the Fastest 50 to give the nation’s most impressive victors in trade show growth a glamorous week to remember.

Best of Both Worlds. SGIA President Mike Robertson is riding high, earning honors for the Specialty Graphic Imaging Assn. Expo, which was the largest Gold 100 show placing in the Fastest 50. CompuSystem’s Pat Fallon and Jen Mitchell cheer him on.
**Fastest 50 Double Header**
*(the Gold 100 show with the highest Fastest 50 growth)*
SGIA Expo, produced by the Specialty Graphic Imaging Association, with a blended average growth rate of 21%

**Fastest 50 Grand Slam**
*(Non-Annual Show that grew the fastest in all three metrics)*
MINExpo, which achieved a blended average growth rate of 44%

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**Fastest 50 Grand Slam**
*(Annual Show that grew the fastest in all three metrics)*
The Running Event, which achieved a blended average growth rate of 44%

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**Networking: Chicago Style**

With a leading cast of movers and shakers in the trade show industry, networking took center stage. The Fastest 50 facilitated that process by creating unique special events that highlighted some of Chicago’s notable landmarks:

- **The Chicago Cubs Baseball Game Outing**, sponsored by the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority, with lunch sponsored by Mobile Event Guide, kicked off the event at historic Wrigley Field. Attendees watched the Chicago Cubs take on the St. Louis Cardinals from the Budweiser Bleacher Suite in center field. Cubs Owner Tom Ricketts stopped to meet and greet attendees, as well as give away a wide array of prizes, including bases from the game and autographed baseballs.

- **The Fastest 50 Opening Reception**, sponsored by Global Experience Specialists (GES), was held at the legendary Harry Caray’s Italian Steakhouse & Bar. Attendees mixed and mingled at this must-see Chicago institution, named the “Best Steakhouse in Chicago” by the *Chicago Tribune* Dining Poll.

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**Pinch Hitters.** These organizers can show the Cubs and Cardinals a thing or two about hitting a home run. Hanley Wood’s Dana Teague and Nielsen’s Tim Fearney (R) both won awards the next evening for their fastest-growing shows. David Dubois, prez & CEO of sponsoring association IAEE, has a pretty strong batting average as well.

**Glancing with the Stars.** Philadelphia CVB’s Kevin Richards has these top show managers all to himself at the opening reception: Reed Exhibition’s Greg Topalian, the National Catholic Educational Association’s Amy Durkin and the American Thoracic Society’s Stacy Blackshaw.

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**Flying High.** Tina Jones of HELI-EXPO made a smooth landing in the Budweiser Suite at the Cubs game but soared on awards night, winning a plaque for ascending 20% in attendance.

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**Harry and Carri.** A Harry Caray look-alike and TSE’s Carri Jensen, the real thing, enjoy a bit of clowning around during the opening reception at Harry Caray’s Italian Steakhouse & Bar. Irene Sperling makes a better fashion statement with her own red specs.
Summit Sessions
The summit featured fast-paced sessions on best practices, case studies and issues facing show managers. Organizers of the fastest-growing shows shared the strategies and tactics that made their success stories possible.

Keynote Speaker was Contagious
Jonah Berger, assistant marketing professor at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and author of best-selling book *Contagious, Why Things Catch On*, opened the Fastest 50 with a thought-provoking presentation on the science behind social communication.

How do you get exhibitors and attendees talking about your show? “There is a formula to engineer content to make it more viral or talkable,” said Berger. “You can craft contagious content. The key word here is craft.” Make people feel like insiders, he advised. “If people feel like they have access to a secret, they will want to share it,” said Berger. “People want to talk about things that make them look good.”

How do you turn customers into advocates? “Activate your community,” said Berger. “Give them something to talk about by finding your inner remarkability,” he suggested. “What makes your show surprising, novel or interesting? Think about how you can get just one person to tell someone else about the conference or event.”

Another way to get people talking about your brand: Make the private public. “If it’s built to show, it’s built to grow,” said Berger. He offered the example of the Apple logo on the back of its computers and its use of white headphones when the standard was black. In addition, he cited the use of colored lanyards for VIPs and other attendee groups at *South by Southwest*.

Inside Scoop: An Insider’s View of SXSW Interactive Festival
Hugh Forrest, director of the *South by Southwest Interactive Festival*, discussed how he has been able to grow the event from 5,000 attendees in 2005 to 30,000 registrants in 2013. “Markets are conversations,” said Forrest. “The more you converse with your audience, the stronger you are.”

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One way he creates a dialogue with his customers is through the show’s “Panel Picker.” The community submits ideas about nine months before the event, and the online community votes on the topics. “It gets people talking about the show in July and August when they normally would not be,” said Forrest. For this year’s March show, 3,500 ideas were submitted.

“My job is really about community management,” said Forrest. “Let the community pull you. They know better than you do.”

For example, he said his staff is in the process of writing 200 feedback letters to registrants who completed a post-event survey and were unhappy with some aspect of the event. “We are receptive to their critiques,” he said. “Community management is very, very difficult, but it’s worth the effort. You can turn detractors into advocates.”

Ready to Buy? Sell? Hold?
Greg Topalian, senior vice president, Reed Exhibitions, discussed what he looks for when evaluating shows to buy. “We are looking for good topline growth,” he said. “Have a clear growth plan, and tell me why you think your show will grow. Don’t assume the buyer will know.”

Ty Bobit, president and CEO, Bobit Business Media, talked about his recent sale of the Hot Rod and Restoration Show to National Business Media. He decided to sell the show because it wasn’t growing and it didn’t offer synergies with the other shows in his portfolio. “The sale has freed up resources within our small company,” he said. “We have launched three events in the last five months.”

One key issue to consider: whether to go directly to the buyers or use a broker. Since the sale price for the Hot Rod and Restoration Show was comparably lower, Bobit decided to go direct to a strategic buyer with other complimentary properties. Reed Exhibitions works with brokers and buyers. “From the buyer’s perspective, we prefer working directly with the sellers so we have the opportunity to connect with them,” said Topalian. “But a broker can be a real benefit to a seller, and they will keep the sale moving on a timeline.”

Topalian also announced that Reed has recently approved an “angel program.” [More details will be published in a future issue of Trade Show Executive]. The company will be looking to make financial investments in small shows and businesses. “We want to offer resources or staffing to help smaller events grow,” he said. “I’m really excited about this new program.”

Strategies of the Fastest 50 Growth Leaders
Moderater Phil McKay, president & CEO of nGage Events, and a panel of industry leaders, discussed what they are doing right now to keep their events on the fast track.

How did Hanley Wood Exhibitions’ International Pool | Spa | Patio Expo grow exhibit space by 27.2% and exhibiting companies by 13.2% in 2012, despite the fact that the show serves an industry that sells luxury items? “We’ve become a more sales-centric organization,” said Dana Teague, group director, Hanley Wood Exhibitions. “We’ve empowered the sales teams. They have the ability to earn more income, and we send account executives out into the field now.”

She also said Hanley Wood is signing multi-year agreements with some anchor exhibitors. “You will lose some margin because you will have to freeze prices,” she said. Co-location is another strategy Hanley Wood is employing to grow events. For example, Hanley Wood’s Kitchen & Bath Industry Show will co-locate with the International Builders’ Show to create Design and Construction Week in Las Vegas beginning in 2014. In 2015, Design and Construction Week will expand further with the addition of Hanley Wood’s SURFACES and StonExpo/Marmomacc Americas.

Other show organizers, such as Advanstar Communications Inc., are focused on growing by expanding online opportunities. For example, MAGIC launched Shop the Floor, which features virtual showrooms for exhibitors, earlier this year. “It’s geared toward b-to-b now, but our hope is to expand to b-to-c,” said Leslie Gallin, vice president, FN PLATFORM, which grew attendance by 32.3%, exhibiting companies by 21.3%
How Did You Do That? Organizers share the tried & true as well as the unconventional in the session, “Strategies of the Fastest 50 Growth Leaders.” Left to Right: Advanstar’s Leslie Gallin, Hanley Wood’s Dana Teague, Messe Frankfurt’s John Gallagher and nGage Events’ Phil McKay, moderator.

At the Summit. Fastest 50 honorees Rich Prausa (L), Association of Equipment Manufacturers, and Joe Martin, Texas High School Coaches Association (R), flank EXPOCAD’s Susie Wilson, during the Fastest 50 Summit.

Quest for Excellence. Questex CEO Kerry Gumas shares his triumphs and challenges with moderator Bob Dallmeyer and the Fastest 50 delegates during Power Lunch.

Fastest 50 honorees Rich Prausa (L), Association of Equipment Manufacturers, and Joe Martin, Texas High School Coaches Association (R), flank EXPOCAD’s Susie Wilson, during the Fastest 50 Summit.

Food for Thought. Food Processing Suppliers Assn.’s David Seckman listens intently to keynote speaker Jonah Berger on the techniques for crafting contagious content about trade shows to increase word-of-mouth and social media transmission.

A Meeting of the Minds. Fastest 50 delegates reach out to Messe Frankfurt’s John Gallagher (center) to further pick his brain after his thought-provoking presentation. From L to R: a2z’s Wayne Crawford, Messe Frankfurt’s Malin Lager, National Retail Federation’s Susan Newman and onPeak’s Michael Howe.
and nsf of exhibit space by 24.8% for its February 2012 show. “If we can engage consumers, it is better for all of us.”

John Gallagher, president and CEO, Messe Frankfurt USA, said the “Tulip Club” has been successful at bringing key buyers to Texworld USA (Winter Edition) and keeping them there longer. The show offers complimentary car service to and from the event, lunch and refreshments, and a private lounge for VIP buyers only. Texworld USA (Winter Edition) grew exhibiting companies by 10.2% and total attendance by 22.5% in 2012.

Power Lunch
Kerry Gumas, president and CEO of Questex Media Group LLC, was the on-stage guest of Trade Show Executive columnist Bob Dallmeyer.

Gumas discussed how he was able to successfully navigate Questex through bankruptcy and reposition the company. “It’s a complex and costly process, so if it’s necessary to pursue such a process, it’s important to select the right advisors — legal and banking — who can function well as an extension of the team,” said Gumas.

He told Dallmeyer and the crowd that the next 10 years will be an exciting time in the industry, but he warned there will be continued pressure on pricing and the total cost of participation. “We are already seeing bundled pricing and dynamic pricing replace fixed pricing in many shows,” said Gumas. “This trend will accelerate as organizers seek to deliver more services as part of bundled models.” (See page 34 for the complete interview.)

Is the U.S. Convention Center Model Broken?
Moderated by TSE editor-at-large Danica Tormohlen, a panel discussed the changes afoot in the longstanding relationship between show organizers and convention centers owned by cities that are urgently searching for new revenues.

“There’s been a lot of talk in recent years about whether the current convention center model is sustainable going forward,” said Tormohlen. “Can convention centers continue to operate as loss-leaders in their communities?”

“The short answer is no,” said James Rooney, executive director, Massachusetts Convention Center Authority (MCCA). “The traditional model of operating a convention center at a loss with the premise of bringing outside dollars into a community is not sustainable.”

MCCA has invested $500,000 in a strategy and product development team to explore new revenue streams for the three convention facilities that MCCA manages. “Nothing is off the table,” said Rooney. “That may mean creating, executing and partnering on trade shows, or that may mean developing new products and services to provide alternate revenue streams.”

Mark Zimmerman, general manager of the Georgia World Congress Center (GWCC), said the Atlanta-based facility is renting space in the short term for movie production and has signed longer-term agreements to house the College Football Hall of Fame and the Junior Achievement Discovery Center on its campus. In addition, they are partnering with show organizers to launch events.

David Audrain, president & CEO, Clarion Events North America, discussed his partnership with the GWCC to launch the Atlanta Foodservice Expo in October. “They are waiving some of the costs for rent and food & beverage,” he said. “GWCC is sharing in some of the risk, but they will also share in some of the revenue.”

Tony Calanca, executive vice president, Advanstar, said he doesn’t have a conceptual objection to venues producing events. “But it may impact my decision to hold an event there,” he said.

Burning Issues
Moderated by Kevin Johnstone, a panel of industry leaders discussed some of the
top issues facing the industry, including economic impact, government regulations and aging convention centers.

When asked if facilities have the infrastructure needed to meet the demands of today’s exhibitors and attendees, show organizers said Wi-Fi in convention centers is the biggest issue. “We receive a lot of complaints about the cost, speed and consistency of the Wi-Fi,” said Robbi Lycett, vice president, conventions & conferences, for the Biotechnology Industry Organization.

Lycett said more exhibitors and sponsors are asking for help in locating very targeted groups of attendees. While the show’s business forum facilitates 25,000 meetings for exhibitors and attendees in a separate space off the show floor, exhibitors are also requesting more events on the show floor. “It’s given us the opportunity to produce customized events for them at the show,” she said.

Liz Crawford, show director and senior marketing director, Nielsen Expositions, said her company is focused on measuring the “net promoter score” for exhibitors and attendees. “We ask them on a scale of 1 to 10 if they would recommend the show to others,” she said. “Our plans and goals are based, in part, on those scores.”

On the contractor side, package pricing for exhibitors continues to be a trend, said John Patronsiki, executive vice president, Global Experience Specialists (GES). For example, IMTS offers custom block pricing, which includes not only freight but also unloading and assembling. He noted that a number of organizers are looking at variable pricing for exhibit space. “We can provide data on traffic, density and dwell time in a particular area of the show floor to support that,” said Patronsiki. Ethnometrics, a division of GES, uses video technology to measure and evaluate key metrics in face-to-face marketing.

Stay Tuned
Nominations for the 2014 Fastest 50 will open later this year. Trade Show Executive is currently accepting RFPs from cities interested in hosting the 2014 Fastest 50 Awards & Summit.

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