***ITMA 2003, The NEC, Birmingham***

**Introduction**

ITMA (International Textile Machinery Exhibition) is one of the largest trade exhibitions – and the largest single sector trade show – in the world. Staged every four years, ITMA is a peripatetic exhibition – travelling around venues in Europe. Until recognizing the facilities on offer at The NEC, Birmingham, the only countries assumed capable of staging the event were France, Germany and Italy, who have shared the show for the past 30 years.

ITMA 2003 ran from 22 to 29 October 2003. Over the 8 days of the event, 1275 exhibitors took part from 40 countries, with the show having an overall attendance of 125 500 visits from 129 countries. To give some idea of the magnitude of the exhibition, the show used all 21 exhibition halls at The NEC and required every piece of mains cable, with extra supplies being brought in from London, Manchester and Glasgow, while more than 2500 articulated trucks were required to deliver all the exhibition stands and display material.

**Why the NEC?**

Co-ordination between The NEC, the Airport and Rail station ensured a seamless journey for visitors. An event like ITMA needs a massive supporting structure, which is where The NEC comes into its own. There are currently close to 75 000 bed spaces within 1 hour of The NEC (30 000 within 30 minutes), from 5 star to quality budget, guest houses, self catering accommodation and even some private homes. A specialist web site was created to assist visitors through online booking facilities, while a close partnership with the Birmingham Convention and Visitor Bureau meant that considerable positive feedback about Birmingham and the West Midlands region as a destination, with almost half (45 per cent) of visitors surveyed said that they are likely to bring friends or family back to the area in the future, with pop superstar Christina Aguilera performing at The NEC Arena on Saturday, October 25 and Mariah Carey appearing three days later.

**The organizer**

ITMA 2003 was organized in-house by The NEC organising division Centre Exhibitions, on behalf of show the owners, industry body CEMATEX (Comite´ Europe´en des Constructeurs de Machines Textiles/European Committee of Textile Machinery Manufacturers). CEMATEX is made up of eight

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member associations from the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. Other key markets represented at ITMA include Turkey and China.

**The exhibitors**

ITMA 2003 used the whole of The NEC site – 200 000 square metres of space. The tenancy covered 38 days – 22 build days, eight open days and eight breakdown days. The exhibition was clearly international, including 1275 exhibitors from 40 countries, with the top 10 exhibiting countries (in order of space taken) being as follows:

1. Italy

2. Germany

3. Switzerland

4. Spain

5. Belgium

6. Turkey

7. UK

8. France

9. USA

10. Austria

In terms of space taken, 78 per cent of exhibitors came from the CEMATEX, with the greatest increase in exhibitor numbers (compared to ITMA 1999) from the following non-CEMATEX countries: Turkey (from 33 to 61 exhibitors); India (from 41 to 86 exhibitors) and China (from 10 to 28 exhibitors). The largest product sectors were Dyeing and Finishing, taking 33 per cent of the total space, followed by Spinning (24 per cent) and Weaving (17.7 per cent).

**The visitors**

Despite the perception of economic and political concerns, visitors to ITMA 2003 travelled from all over the world, with an average of over 15 600 each day of the show. Analysis revealed that 64 per cent of the visitors came from Europe, and over 24 per cent from Asia/SE Asia and the Middle East. The top visiting countries, after the UK, were Turkey, Germany and Italy, with the breakdown of visitors shown below:

1. UK 15 per cent

2. Turkey 7.82 per cent

3. Germany 7.49 per cent

4. Italy 6.55 per cent

5. Pakistan 6.03 per cent

6. India 5.09 per cent

7. France 4.82 per cent

8. Belgium 3.87 per cent

9. Spain 3.45 per cent

10. USA 2.78 per cent

11. China 2.69 per cent

Most visitors came for the Weaving Sector (18 per cent), followed by the Spinning Sector (15 per cent) then Dyeing and Finishing (12 per cent), although a large percentage of the visitors (20 per cent) were involved in more than one sector. For the first time, ITMA 2003 introduced a separate sector for non wovens.

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**Unique features**

Despite The NEC’s wealth of experience, the demands of a show the size and scope of ITMA required a wealth of innovative approaches. This was the first ITMA, since the first show 52 years ago, to have an industry forum addressing the strategic issues that face the textile machinery field. It was also the first to fully embrace the opportunities presented by the Internet, and to endow the exhibition with an element of showmanship and ‘pizzazz!’

Additionally, a radical approach was implemented for developing relationships with customers, with a decision to make the exhibiting process simpler by supplying as many services as possible through a single source, equipped with multi-lingual staff. Working alongside service suppliers, this dedicated team was able to liaise directly with exhibitors, presenting a ‘one-stop-shop’ for exhibiting queries. The feedback from exhibitors suggested that they welcomed this approach as a way providing cost effective and simplified solutions.

**Key moments**

The ‘Forum’ (a conference that discussed the key business issues facing the industry) was a first for ITMA. Previous events had only run conferences addressing technical issues; never before had the event seen such high profile and significant presentations. The opening session was particularly interesting as the topic was the impact of China joining the World Trade Organization in 2005. The consequences will affect the whole business world not just the world of ‘textiles’. The event was attended by the Chinese Government Minister for Textiles who engaged in a ‘full and frank’ debate with a high profile industry lobbyist from the USA, addressing such issues as ‘dumping’, tariffs, and unfair trading practices.

Remember John Betjamen’s poem The Night train, which accompanied a famous film about the Royal Mail trains? Or those old films you see of Lancashire cotton mills all thundering away churning out fabric. Well, the same image was created within the exhibition halls used to display weaving equipment, where, for 20 minutes in every hour the dozens of huge looms all began operating at once. It was a powerful visual and audible experience that really did conjure up the industry at its most dynamic.

Watching the machines turning out a full Axminster carpet – 6 metres wide – at the rate of 2 metres a minute is really quite mesmerising. For the technical amongst you, that’s 14 000 threads on the weft and a warp introduced with shuttles (mechanical, water jet or air jet) all moving so fast you cannot see it.

**Business and economic impact**

As the UK’s largest ever international exhibition, ITMA generated an estimated £85 million for the West Midlands economy in visitor spending, according to research undertaken by KPMG, which also found that the show supported the equivalent of more than 1500 full-time jobs. To place these figures in context, this represents the largest impact of any single show The impacts of events 61 ever staged in the UK – activities at The NEC Group each year generate spending of more than £1 billion, and ITMA alone represented an additional 8 per cent to the figure during 2003. Total spending within the UK, as a result of ITMA, is estimated at £110 million. The KPMG study also found considerable positive feedback about Birmingham and the West Midlands region as a destination, with almost half (45 per cent) of visitors surveyed said that they are likely to bring friends or family back to the area in the future.

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ITMA helped Birmingham International Airport (BIA) break performance targets. In October 2003, the airport handled 881 709 passengers, an increase of 11.4 per cent on the previous year, and its busiest October on record. During the event, BIA also handled more than 100 special charter flights along with larger aircraft on scheduled routes to deal with the exhibition traffic. Most exhibitors (63 per cent) and nearly half of all visitors (47 per cent) flew directly into Birmingham International Airport as their gateway into the UK. ITMA was also the first major test for the Monorail link, which connects the airport directly with Birmingham International station and The NEC. It transported – without a problem – more than 22 000 people during the show.

As might be imagined, there were a few nerves amongst exhibitors at the thought of ITMA running in the UK for the first time, however, these proved to be completely without foundation. Feedback from exhibitors in every sector has been extremely positive, with reports of a considerable amount of business being done during the show. Indeed, 60 per cent of all visitors were of Director level and above, and this clearly was an important factor in the quantity of orders being placed during the show.

It is clear from the above case study that ITMA was successful on a number of levels. Major exhibitions, such as ITMA, clearly have a range of impacts which organizers have to manage effectively to maximize the positive effects and ensure that the exhibition meets all exhibitor, visitor and stakeholder requirements. ITMA demonstrated the ability of The NEC to organize and host exhibitions of this scale, while also demonstrating the positive benefits of working with a range of partners from across Birmingham and the West Midlands. After ITMA, The NEC was recognized for its work in bringing international visitors to the region for ITMA 2003, with The NEC Group also recognized for its commitment to language and communication at the National Language for Export Awards 2003. Knowledge, skills and experience developed from ITMA will help The NEC move forward as one of the major European exhibition centres and it has illustrated the potential of The NEC, Birmingham, the West Midlands and the UK as future host for large-scale international exhibitions.

**Questions**

1. From the case study, identify the main stakeholders in ITMA.

The NEC, the Airport and Rail station. Birmingham Convention and Visitor Bureau.

2. In evaluating the impacts, what are the long-term benefits to Birmingham of hosting the Show? 3. What factors contributed to the success of the Show?

There was considerable positive feedback about Birmingham and the West Midlands region as a destination, with almost half (45 per cent) of visitors surveyed said that they are likely to bring friends or family back to the area in the future.

A close partnership with Birmingham Convention and Visitor Bureau meant that visitors were able to reserve a variety of quality services. The ‘Forum’ (a conference that discussed the key business issues facing the industry) was a first for ITMA. Previous events had only run conferences addressing technical issues; never before had the event seen such high profile and significant presentations.

The decision to make the exhibiting process simpler by supplying as many services as possible through a single source, equipped with multi-lingual staff.

All these factors contributed to the success of the Show.

4. The case illustrates the impact of the external environment on the event itself with rail disruption causing a reduction in target numbers and a change in transportation. What other issues from the external environment may impact on the Show? What strategies could event managers implement to minimize the impact of such issues?

The decision to make the exhibiting process simpler by supplying as many services as possible through a single source, equipped with multi-lingual staff. Working alongside service suppliers, this dedicated team was able to liaise directly with exhibitors, presenting a ‘one-stop-shop’ for exhibiting queries. Although, it was received with positive feedback, using a source for a multitude of services might affect the quality of the services as well as derailing multiple services if one fraction of the service provider is affected.

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