

## SPECIAL REPORT

# Trade Show Guide

Chock-full of must-see reasons to attend, the August round of trade shows offers a comprehensive industry overview of the latest Spring '13 trends from established players and the latest crop of up-and-comers.

By Mary Avant and Lindsay McGregor

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inventories and receive orders in a matter of days—all at a low price. “That’s what OffPrice allows a lot of stores to do—move goods in and out quickly,” Krogulski states. Made up of more than “130,000 square feet of opportunity,” the show features everything from men’s, women’s and children’s apparel; accessories and a growing footwear segment. Krogulski reports that footwear now takes up almost 7 percent of the floor space.

For the August edition, OffPrice will move to the first floor of the Sands Convention Center, and Krogulski warns that attendees will have to work around construction. To ease their navigation, OffPrice is incorporating tools and maps that let buyers see the selling floor layout prior to the show. “They’re going to want to spend a little time getting familiar with the floor plan so they know where they’re going,” he suggests.

In addition, OffPrice will be expanding upon its “Connection” program, which launched in February and is designed as a “match-making” service to connect retailers and exhibitors that have similar audiences, interests and profiles. “We use it to help retailers mingle and make more use of their time by networking before the show,” Krogulski says. The Connection program will also feature an educational component, in which attendees can learn about topics like using social media to market their stores and introducing e-commerce.

Krogulski says OffPrice has a lot to offer footwear retailers that are interested in incorporating other categories into their product mix. Likewise, footwear brands and manufacturers can capitalize on the show’s expanding segment. “Footwear was a natural fit for the show because a lot of our retailers are smaller shops that carry more apparel and maybe wanted to try footwear but just didn’t know where to find it,” he says.

## ENKWSA: FAST COMPANIES

David Kahan, president of ENK Footwear Group, is the first to admit that ENKWSA—which takes place on Aug. 7-9 at the Sands Convention Center in Las Vegas—isn’t the show for everyone. “But for those in the [fast-fashion] industry—affordable fashion chains, boutiques who buy affordable fashion, chains who carry private-label footwear, and design and development teams from the branded footwear companies—this is the show focused solely on your segment of the business,” he declares. While the show will continue to feature exhibitors from all corners of the sourcing world, there are some changes underway for the upcoming August edition.

First, Kahan says there will be a new section dedicated entirely to young, small and emerging resources, as well as an expanded men’s footwear zone. It will also increase the scope of the contract manufacturing area, which will have its own hall in the convention center and will cover all elements of the supply chain, including factory direct suppliers, materials and design resources. ENKWSA is also growing its seminar series and will present a seminar by Lineapple, one of the leading Italian leather materials groups, who will discuss upcoming footwear trends.

With representatives from more than 35 countries around the world—including factories from China, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, India and more—the show will celebrate with an Olympic-themed opening-night reception. Kahan says ENKWSA attendance is expected to grow and that February’s upbeat mood gave terrific momentum for the upcoming event. “As challenging as the economy may be, the fashion end of the business—especially women’s—is always driven by exciting products,” Kahan notes. “Our exhibitors continue to bring great new styles, dynamic new colors and, most importantly, quick-to-market capabilities that capture trends so that retailers can meet consumer needs as they happen.”

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industry is unique as brands drive consumers to stores, but once they enter it’s up to retailers to convert the sale. And how that store’s brand is perceived plays a huge role in that conversion. “The salesperson has to explain the products, get the samples from the back, fit the person properly—they can have tremendous influence on that customer,” he offered. Martinez added, however, that most retailers negate that responsibility. “These days you’re lucky if a salesperson walks over to you; they are not schooled in the product and they don’t know their assortment,” he said.

Martinez said protecting and investing in that in-store experience is the best way to compete with online retailers. “The tactile experience of trying on shoes is immediate, but you also need assortments that are hard to replicate online, a well-trained staff and an environment that gets people to come back,” he said. “You have to make it feel like they are visiting their friends when they come into your store. That need for human interaction—be it telling a joke or talking about politics—are reasons to go into stores.” Martinez added that while it may seem mundane to industry members, plenty of people love shoes. “Where can they go to get exposed to know all there is to know about shoes—the leathers, the fit, the benefits, etc.?” he proposed. “Consumers love learning about that stuff; they tell their friends about it and it brings them back into your store.”

Along those lines, Martinez warned about falling into the trap of offering the same products as everyone else because it becomes an unwinable price war as there’s always someone else willing to sell it a little cheaper. Besides, he noted, that’s not why consumers go into stores any more; now if they want to buy something cheap they shop online. “When it comes to shoe shopping, there is a lot more consumers want than just the lowest price. And we have to embrace that dynamic and differentiate ourselves aggressively,” Martinez said.

Part of that requires keeping the merchandise fresh and updating on a regular basis. “Consumers have become innovation junkies,” he noted. “They want to see freshness all the time.” What used to be twice a year brand updates have become six times a year in many instances. The same rule of thumb applies to store displays and fixtures, another area that Martinez said needs improving. “You wouldn’t see Broadway plays if they used the same staging for every one, would you?” Martinez asked the crowd. “You control the scene and you can make a product look new by creating a new environment.” He added, “Too many stores look drab and boxes are piled everywhere. Your business would be better if you excite that customer and tap into their innovation-hungry minds.”

Tarek Hassan, co-owner of The Tannery in Boston, offered his insights on how to be on the cutting-edge, starting with the ability to be microscopic in one’s approach to detail without losing the human touch. Studying reports and spreadsheets, Hassan warned, will only get you so far. He advised interacting with customers as often as possible. “You have to become intimate with their thoughts and concerns and what they find meaningful,” he offered. “If any separation creeps in between you and your customers, it will lead to misinformed buys.” Hassan likened The Tannery’s approach to that of special-ops: being nimble and precise enough to turn on a dime to meet the changing demands of customers.

Gradia of Hawley Lane Shoes, based in Norwalk, CT, talked about how family-focused independents can adapt and thrive in a challenging retail landscape. Advice included focusing on what makes your store unique, always planning ahead, following through and thinking outside the box. Gradia noted, “The days of meeting with a particular rep on a seasonal basis are over.” He also stressed that a successful May Event can involve just taking home one great idea. Last year, it was a \$10 gift card that Hawley-Lane adopted. On the back of the card was a promotional code that allowed employees to get a gift when used. “In addition to being a way for employees to earn extra revenue, the card promotes the business offsite and 24/7,” he said.