

Sole Commerce Celebrates 10 Years

BY JACQUELYN LEWIS

NEW YORK — The 10th anniversary of ENK International's Sole Commerce trade show was a poignant milestone for its organizers.

When the event got under way at New York's Javits Center last week, alongside the Coterie apparel market, both staff and exhibitors remarked that the show held a significant meaning not only because of its growth over the past decade but because it was originally set to debut in September 2001, shortly after the terrorist attacks.

"It's a very emotional anniversary for everyone involved," said Maria Carvalho, director of Sole Commerce.

Roughly 250 shoe exhibitors attended last week's event, a significant jump from the 50 brands that participated in the first year.

"This [year's show] was one of the best ever," said Elyse Kroll, founder

and president of ENK. "It was easy to shop and it was well merchandised. The footwear was exactly where it should have been."

David Kahan, president of ENK Footwear Group, noted that the show continues to focus on creating a complete buying experience for retailers looking for high-end footwear and apparel. And attendance, including international buyers, has increased steadily.

"What Sole Commerce represents is the best intersection of commercial fashion footwear and apparel," Kahan said.

Michael Abrams, founder and president of Pantha Imports Ltd., which represents brands Biviel, Morenom and Ratón, said he was initially reluctant to move to Sole Commerce from Coterie, but it has proven to be a success. "It worked out great," he said. "You pick up customers you would have never have seen [at a footwear-only trade show]."

At this year's Sole Commerce, customers were out in full force despite recent economic jitters.

Mary McKenzie, owner of Mari Max on St. Simmons Island, Ga., said she placed orders for Pedro Garcia and Paul Mayer/Attitudes styles, primarily because ballet flats and shoes that easily transition from day to night are important for her business.

Robyn Stevenson, business manager for the Canadian retailer Robert Simmonds Clothing, said her store had carried footwear for years, but recently added Cole Haan and Nine West shoes. "You have to have [footwear] to sell the clothes," Stevenson said.

Racquel Nosworthy, owner and merchandise manager for Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Nos boutique, was on the

hunt for styles for spring and fall, and would keep inventory numbers about the same going into those seasons. "I'm looking for newness," she said. "I'll replace [brands] that aren't selling well and continue with the ones that are."

Nelson Pichardo, owner of Red Carpet Shoes in New York, said he was ordering time-tested sellers such as Vince Camuto. "[But] I'm also adding new things — sexy styles," he said. "We've been a little challenged [by the economy], but we are open to new additions."

