

WSA Buyers Eye Bargains

BY WAYNE NIEMI

LAS VEGAS — Retailers at last week's ENKWSA show, held here Feb. 6-8, were on the hunt for deals.

While many buyers at the show were browsing fall product, most said they were still looking for sandals and other warm-weather footwear for spring and summer.

But no matter what season they were shopping for, price was top of mind.

Jeffrey Deutsch, president of Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Jeffrey's Shoes, said that even buyers in

"I think [the election] will help business because whoever wins will need to push the economy and make people feel more optimistic about where we are headed," he said, adding that he planned to keep spending flat for fall and was at the show to pick up lower-priced brands such as Dollhouse, in the \$20 to \$60 range.

Karyn Knobel, senior ladies' buyer for City Beach Australia, said she was shopping for colorful shoes with textured fabric uppers, but was being careful to not get too flashy in her choices. "Our customer is young, but she's not going to the Las Vegas club," Knobel said. "She's not conservative, but not over-the-top either."

The retailer said she would likely spend the same amount as in recent seasons, but, given the strength of the Australian dollar, that could result in buying more product.

"Our dollar is so strong right now," she said. "Three or four years ago, we'd have to pay a lot more for the same amount. So this helps us right now."

The organizers of ENKWSA said they worked hard this season to

the off-price market are searching for steeper-than-usual bargains in today's climate.

Deutsch said he was checking out spring sandals that were half off the regular wholesale price, and he had lots to choose from. "I'll end up buying more [compared with last year] because there are more deals out there," he said.

Jaye Stone, manager of Spirit Lake, Iowa-based Stones Throw Shops, also was still on the lookout for inexpensive sandals for spring to complement her apparel offering. And while she said her budget could increase, she's not encouraged by the macro-economy.

"I'm absolutely not [optimistic for spring]," Stone said. "I used to sell \$100 sweatshirts four years ago and we were making tons of money. But you can't compare it to how it used to be. Everybody is concerned about price today."

However, Arlo Slack, owner of St. Maries, Idaho-based Timber Country, said he felt fall and the upcoming presidential election might improve the country's mood, regardless of the outcome at the polls.

attract more factory-direct suppliers and fast-fashion exhibitors to offer buyers more lower-priced footwear options.

A number of overseas exhibitors said they were hoping the show would help pave the way for them to enter the U.S. market.

James Lien, a representative from Taiwan-based Grandwell Footwear, said that after growing in Europe for 20 years, the company was now hoping to come stateside with its factory-direct Sheen brand, which he said offered fashionable styles at an affordable rate. "Since we [own our factory] in China, we can offer a lower price," Lien said.

At the Cortina China booth, sales director Tim Vermeersch was selling the company's own brands, as well as its private-label services. And the executive said he was noticing a shift in the market.

"Retailers are looking to add value to their stores, and they want to buy better product with a name on it," Vermeersch said. "Price was more of an issue two years ago, now it's value."



ENKWSA attracted many off-price buyers to the show