

Glimmer Of Hope

Retail Mood Bright At NY Gift Fair

BY LISA COWLEY
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NEW YORK— Tabletop and housewares vendors exhibiting at the August New York International Gift Fair, held earlier this month at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, here, saw a break in the doom-and-gloom retail mood of the first half of the year and at January's fair. Independent retailers emanated optimism and were ready to buy for fourth quarter, said suppliers.

According to Laurie Cohen, vp/sales for MoMo Panache, **continued on page 13**

"There has been more serious buying. What's nice is you didn't get the 'woe is me' [at this fair]. It's nice to see some optimism. People are coming here to write because they need product." She predicted that the independent market will be the first to rebound after the recession. "People don't have to [use gas] and drive to the mall when they can walk down the street [to their local stores]," she said.

In the first half of the year, many retailers curbed their ordering, choosing to stick with leaner inventories in light of dire economic predictions for the year, noted suppliers. However, they seem to have loosened up some for the upcoming fourth quarter.

"The independents were very nervous in January. They seem to be more comfortable ordering for the holiday season. I have been pleased with the traffic," said Don Brown, vp/Block House, noting that he had about eight to 10 California retail accounts writing large orders at the show. "It's the best attended show I have seen for the fall," he added.

However, suppliers noted that while some retailers were placing orders, others were still staying cautious, opt-

ing to pick up catalogs, assess their needs and placing orders at a later date, closer to the season.

"People are waiting longer to re-order and are watching their inventory," added Susan LaGreca, director of Aladdin Specialty Sales for parent company Pacific Market International.

Quick Shipping

As a result, speed to market is a major factor for exhibitors anticipating strong fourth-quarter ordering. "Retailers have become more realistic and have been planning out their budgets," said Shannon Grassis, sales coordinator for Slant glassware. She expected more orders to be written within the next month for fourth quarter.

For smaller vendors, the ability to ship orders or reorders quickly could be to their advantage. While Abbiamo Tutto was "writing orders nonstop," according to Donna Territo, president of the tabletop company, because "[retailers] aren't buying too deep at the show, they like the comfort level of being able to reorder quickly." She added, "Their first question is, 'How quickly can you ship reorders?'"


Suppliers also found that value had a big role in retail order decisions at the gift show. Unique, functional products with attractive pricepoints were key, said vendors.

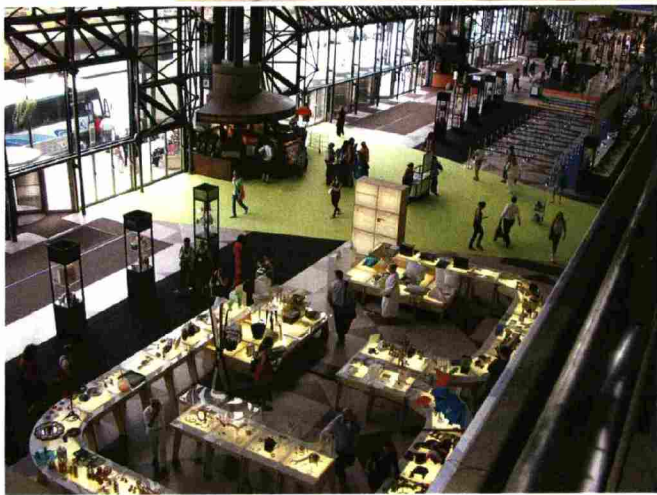
"Retailers are looking for novelties, especially in these challenging times. We are focusing on new collections," said Iris Rademacher, director/international sales for Reisenhel.

Richard Murphy, director/sales and marketing for Oggi Corporation agreed, noting that Oggi's business has been up for the year. He reasoned, "Oggi has always been value-priced, value product-posi-



tioned and the market has responded to that. Consumers are thinking that way, so buyers are looking for good product that is priced right," he said.

Aladdin's LaGreca added, "In this economy, consumers are still looking for individual indulgences, and fashionable and functional product at a good pricepoint." 



Traffic was bustling at the recent New York Gift Fair, and more importantly, vendors said, retailers were writing orders.

