

2020 FALL TRADE SHOW: NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS

The Show Report for the 2020 PNBA show is below.

Because this was the only virtual show we have ever done, comparisons of this year's numbers to prior years must be set in context, and direct comparisons may not be possible or may not show what they first seem to show. I will do my best to provide some context and an indication of what conclusions can be drawn.

Overall, considering the constraints we were under and the amount of time we had to make adjustments, the show appears to have been a success. However, participation numbers were down almost across the board, despite the fact that the barriers to participation (notably the time and expense of travel to the venue and be away from stores for multiple days) were lower than ever.

The drop-off in numbers as compared to prior years and the very low numbers of people who have since taken advantage of the recordings produced during the show are strong indicators that the overall membership is not ready to move away from in-person gatherings just yet and that recording in-person sessions for later use is likely not of enough value to members to be worth the time or expense of producing viable video at an in-person setting.

Staffing of the Show:

The amount of time spent AT THE SHOW by staff/volunteers that were actively engaged in producing events is compared to the most recent shows in the table below:

Year	# of Staff	# of Shifts	Ave. Hrs/staff	Total Staff Hours			
				Day 1	Day 2*	Day 3	Show
Ave: 2014-2019	26	86	17.9	183	160	112	458
2020	5	23	24.4	-	-	-	122

*Day 2 hours do NOT include time author escorts spent working the feast (initiated in 2004), which would add about 100 more person hours (counting all of the helpers).

Explanation and observations:

- I made some significant changes to staffing levels and the way we divided the work for the 2014 show, which resulted in fairly stable numbers for the years since, so the top line in this table is a good reflection of what putting on in-person shows has looked like since then.
- All of the numbers in the table reflect hours spent DURING THE DAYS OF THE SHOW, and do not include any hours spent prior to or after the days of the show.
 - Not surprisingly, since we did not have to sort books or work with 20 authors at a time in events, the virtual format was possible with far fewer bodies (there are single days in-person where we need 20+ people onsite at one time), resulting in far fewer total hours worked.
 - One tradeoff came in hours needed BEFORE the show—normally the bulk of those are spent by Brian, Larry, myself, and George doing drayage. This year George was sidelined and I spent fewer hours in show prep, but Amber and especially Grace put in many more hours before the show getting ready.

- I believe Emma also put in many more hours before the show (and AT the show) than is customary for an Education Committee Chair. Had she not done that there would have been MORE total staff/volunteer hours, as we would have had to bring in at least one other person to manage those events and they would not have been up to speed at the beginning.

Participation in Author/Meal Events:

This year we had far fewer authors pitched to us than we have had in recent past years. (About 115 instead of about 170). However, because of the virtual format and the limitations of time we were able to accommodate only about 40 authors instead of the 100+ we have had in recent years. (For example, the format made the two dessert parties, which normally accommodate 40-45 authors in total, and the Feast, which normally accommodates another 20, impossible to put on.)

Despite the reduced number of pitches, in the end we were able to offer slots to another stellar lineup of authors. The events were well-received and we got positive feedback. However, attendance at the events was down significantly, as can be seen below:

Year	Comparison of Attendance at Meal Events						
	Day 1 Lunch	Day 1 Dinner	Day 2 Break	Day 2 Lunch	Day 2/ Feast	Day 3 Break	Day 3 Lunch
Ave. 2014-2019	155	152	171	123	171	153	100
2020*	94	55			50	58	72

*These numbers include ALL attendees at an event—including speakers. The meals on the 2020 line are those that were roughly equivalent to meal events that we held in the past. In 2020 they may not have occurred on the show day that they did in the past. (e.g., Kids’ Table was actually Day 2, etc.) The meals correspond as follows:

In addition to the events in the table above, in 2020 we held a couple of additional meal events:

- PNBA Family Dinner had 68 attendees.
- Keynote Lunch with Rashad Norris had 52 attendees

Observations and Comparisons:

- The period of 2014 to 2019 was chosen for comparison for a couple of reasons, including that it matches the time-period for the staffing comparison above, and because with the exception of the last day lunch the numbers have remained relatively consistent during that period. (Most have gone down but come back up to about where they were; some have spiked up and settled down; others have remained fairly constant.)
- No single author or meal event had as many attendees this year as the event with the LOWEST attendance in 2019. (7-Coming Up had 95 people in 2019.)
- The two events that did the best were the Authors on the Map Lunch—which has been one of the perennial favorites and was the leadoff author event for this year’s show—and the 2021 Teaser, the last author event of the show.
- The one event that was significantly new in format, the PNBA Family Dinner, did quite well also by comparison to the other events, outperforming the breakfast and dinner events that were more closely related in format to traditional offerings.
- Despite heavy promotion, the video recordings of these events have not boosted exposure in a meaningful way. As of the end of November, a couple of the recordings have not been viewed at all and most have less than a handful of views each. We know that at least SOME of these views have been publishers/publicists viewing the performance of their authors as well as staff checking links. (See notes on recordings at end of report.)

Attendance at Seminars and Break-out Sessions:

In recent years we have cut down from about 22 sessions/events on Education Day to about 15. This year, by using the same counting methodology, we had 12 sessions/events (spread across four days). The major difference was that this year, with only ONE exception, none of these events was run concurrently with another.

The sessions we ran this year, with attendance numbers, are presented in the table below. (Note that these figures are counted slightly differently than they have been in the past. In prior years we have taken two or more counts during each session, and applied the average as the attendance figure. This year that was not possible, so the counts are the total number of individuals that signed on through Zoom to attend an event—even if they were there only momentarily. The result is that by comparison these figures will tend to be just a bit higher than they might have been using the more traditional counting method.

Day/Time	Title	#
1/11:30	The Power of Small	69
2/9:00	Hand Selling at a Distance	71
2/10:30	Launching Online in Plague Times	21
	Selling Online in Plague Times	48
3/9:00	Disaster Preparedness	27
3:10:30	Virtual Events Programming	76
4/10:15	Staff Management for Career Booksellers	35
4/11:45	Bookselling as Activism	45
1/3:00	Rep Picks	120
2/2:00	Rep Picks	104
3/2:30	Rep Picks	109

- With a total of 12 (including a lunch not shown in this chart), this year we had the lowest number of education/seminar events (including Rep Picks) that we have had in one year since I started keeping records on this in 1997.
- This was also the first year in all of those years that we did not run education sessions (and Rep Picks) concurrently.
- While some of the sessions this year out-performed many individual sessions we held in the past, it needs to be remembered that there was competition during sessions in prior years, which will have reduced attendance at individual sessions. Even with this caveat, there were clearly some strong performers this year.

Based on the same method of counting the table below compares this to previous years.

Year	Location	# of Events	Participants
Ave. 1997-2013	N/A	18	590
2014	Tacoma	21	745
2015	Portland	22	760
2016	Tacoma	21	790
2017	Portland	16	820
2018	Tacoma	16	780
2019	Portland	14	690
2020	Virtual	12	775

The numbers in this table need to be taken with a significant grain of salt. These figures include attendance at THREE distinct types of events. Comparing each to prior years gives a more accurate picture:

- Education Sessions: As noted above, overall attendance at Education Sessions was DOWN compared to recent years. Between 2014 and 2019 there tended to be between 100 and 150 people in EDUCATION SESSIONS at any given hour. (Usually spread between 4 concurrent sessions). In 2020 we had a low of just 27 and a high of 71 attending sessions that were running independently.
- Lunch session: The numbers up to and including 2019 include attendance at a lunch session, which was usually “Authors on the Map,” but in 2019 was Rep Picks Lunch. Attendance at that event averaged over 150 in the years 2014 to 2019. This year the Keynote lunch attracted just over 50.
- Rep Picks: Prior to 2019, Rep Picks was always done CONCURRENTLY with education sessions. In 2019, the attendance at each count was between 16 and 32 people. Those figures were always added to the attendance figures for the four education sessions that ran concurrently to give an average of 120 to 180 people in SOME session at any given point during the day. This year, with no concurrent sessions, attendance at Rep Picks was 120 on the first day, 104 on the second, and 109 on the third (including the Reps themselves). These were the only times during education/seminar periods where total attendance even approached figures from prior years.

In the table above, Rep Picks numbers alone account for a boost of more than 200 attendees over what might have been expected had the Rep Picks run concurrently with education sessions this year as they have done in the past.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that while several of the education sessions out-performed the average when concurrent sessions are run, overall the attendance at education sessions was DOWN in the virtual format.

Another conclusion that appears supportable is that Rep Picks might be something we could get higher attendance at if we did not run it concurrently with education sessions. However, we would need to be careful to NOT displace revenue-generating events (such as author meal events) or time on the exhibit floor. Given the booksellers strong showing for Rep picks and relatively weaker showing for some of the education sessions, some version of what we did in 2019, where we reduced the number of educational sessions and did Rep Picks as the lunch the first day may be warranted. (The 2019 attendance figures for that session seem to support that idea.)

Recordings:

Many years ago (we're going back to the 1990s here) we tried recording live education sessions. This was very expensive to do onsite—it takes special equipment run by professionals to get quality that is worth trying to listen to or view later. Our experience then was that LITERALLY NO ONE ever requested the recordings for later listening/viewing.

This year, with the Zoom format, it was easy to record all of the education sessions and author events. We did that, and announced repeatedly during the show that the recordings would be available later. We also announced through numerous formats over an extended period when the recordings were available for viewing.

The technology makes it possible to track how many views each session has, and who is viewing.

An analysis of the views of the recordings as of the end of November, almost 2 months after the show ended, yields a few observations:

- There were just over 100 views of ALL of the recordings posted.
- However, a number of these views were repeats by the same individual—i.e., many people logged in and viewed portions of the same video more than once. When repeats of the same viewer are removed, there were only just over 50 views.
- The number of individual viewers is even lower than that, as many viewers watched more than one video.
- About 70 percent of the viewers were publishers or publicists, and only about 25 percent were booksellers. (The remainder are librarians.)
- Recordings of author events were viewed between 0 and 9 times each, and overwhelmingly most of those views were by publishers and publicists and not by booksellers.
- Recordings of education sessions were also viewed by very few booksellers.
- Booksellers viewed Rep Picks sessions slightly more consistently, but still only a handful of times.

Overall these numbers do not support the expense or trouble entailed in recording sessions at a traditionally formatted in-person show.

Applicability and thoughts for future shows:

Given the state of the world in 2020, we had little choice but to put on a virtual show this year. Given what we had to work with and the time we had to do it in, we should be proud of what we accomplished.

However, both in terms of how we are serving our membership, and in terms of revenues, what the online version showed us is that our world is not ready to completely replace the in-person experience with fully online tradeshow. Overall attendance was down significantly, attendance at most individual events was down (with Rep Picks being a shining exception), and participation by publishers was down.

We also know that going back to exactly what we did in the past is probably not possible. We did learn a few things that will be helpful for future in-person shows, and will look to begin incorporating those things in future years.