

## **PNBA Fall Show Production Emphasis: Should It Be Changed?**

At least six years ago, the PNBA Board formally identified for staff the two highest priorities of the Association as (1) the Fall Show, and (2) the Holiday Catalog. Staff accepted those priorities and set out to implement internal organizational changes to assure (as much as possible) that our activities were best aimed at making those two programs most successful.

I considered the changes that we made to be management decisions and did not ask for the Board's approval to make them, working on the assumption that the Board would let me know if we seemed to be heading in the wrong direction. Generally speaking, the Board has praised the progress of the shows and the holiday catalog, so I have had no reason to worry that our operations were not what the Board wanted.

The Board should know, however, that how we are handling the show is radically different from how any of the other regional book associations are handling their shows, and why. This doc is to help explain those differences, so that the Board can determine whether or not our emphasis is what you actually want for PNBA's future.

First, we made the conscious decision that the key to the success of the exhibits is the participation of the independent reps. It became very clear to me at least ten years ago that Random House, for instance, was going to make decisions regarding their show participation based strictly on the monetary value of the shows to their corporate needs, using their overall sales through the "indie channel" as their prime determinant. I assumed that that emphasis would eventually be matched by the other major corporate publishers, and that, no matter what prices we charged for exhibits nor how many hours our exhibits were open, their presence at the exhibits would decline as their sales continued to shift on line. Therefore, I sought out the advice of our independent reps to help determine exhibit prices (keeping them as low as possible) and whether or not to retain our two-days of exhibits, which the indie reps said they NEEDED to collect the orders they must receive in order to get the support of their publishers.

Second, we recognized that, even if their publishers were not particularly interested in exhibiting at the show, more and more authors were eager

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to meet booksellers, in hopes of jump-starting their authorial careers with store appearances. The authors' enthusiasm for using the shows to provide those meetings soon seemed to be matched by the booksellers' similar desires to use author visits as a way to lure customers to their stores. Therefore, we have steadily increased the number of authors who are asked to participate in the shows, and to provide those authors with more than just a basic signing, but, whenever possible offering them a chance to meet booksellers in a less formal, more relaxed atmosphere, where issues like store appearances might more easily be discussed.

Perhaps because of these primary emphases, PNBA now has the largest exhibits of all the regional book associations and features more authors at our shows than all but one other regional association. (About thirty of that association's authors are featured as panelists at their "educational" sessions, something that I find ridiculous, and would never suggest we do.) However, our decisions have meant that we pay more for our exhibit space (for three days use), more for our break-out space (for all the parties), and more for food & beverage for our events than any of the other regionals do. A lot more staff time is also necessary, for show prep, author selection, author/publisher correspondence, show program production, show staffing and onsite author hand-holding, all of which also mean more costs to PNBA.

Therefore, PNBA staff has much less time to devote to outside travel, production of other non-show events, and involvement in other programs and entertainments than the staff of the other regional associations. For instance, PNBA's executive director no longer attends the BEA, but sends our holiday catalog coordinator (and Marketing Director) to the show as our representative. This allows our executive director to continue working on author selection at that very important time of year, and also saves PNBA money that we can spend on show events, bookseller scholarships to the shows, etc.

On the other hand, because they have a lot less work to do in producing their fall shows, many of the other regional association directors have time to produce "trunk shows" several times a year, which bring sales reps together with booksellers to hear their group sales pitches. Other regional directors also produce special educational events for their

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members at various times and in various parts of their territories, to help provide meeting opportunities for their members. Some associations even produce and financially support special trips to NYC for their members to meet with some higher-level publicity and marketing directors at some of the major publishers, to make those publishers more familiar with the stores and to raise the publishers' awareness of the value of those stores. Many of the other regional associations, for instance, are producing full-day educational sessions, many with accompanying author events, at a spring meeting this year in conjunction with the ABA regional Forum in their areas. I have not suggested PNBA's doing that because of the time crunch that doing so would put me in, and because I don't believe that such productions could be done within our budgetary restraints.

My decisions about the emphases taken with the fall show have meant that I now work on that show almost all year around, and don't have enough time to produce other events for PNBA. That is why I am asking you now to discuss and decide whether or not you would rather the Executive Director find ways to reduce the work load of the fall show, in order to allow the Association to consider whether or not we might produce other events for our members throughout the year.

I am of course very happy to answer any questions that you might have about this request, how we process the show details in the office, or what problems we might expect if we do change our emphases for the show production. I believe that dealing with these issues is an extremely important necessity in determining the best course for the future of the Association.

Sincerely,

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