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INDUSTRY Q&A

NAVIGATING TRADE SHOWS: — TIPS AND TRICKS

What's your number one priority when attending an exhibition and why?

SE | I love dedicating time to doing it all, however, for me personally, the number one priority has got to be networking. I have been attending CEDIA Expo for four years, and I have gotten the chance to meet the most spectacular people. This results in not only having personal contacts with manufacturers, system integrators, and other industry leaders, but I have the honour of calling some of them friends. We keep in touch beyond trade shows and share ideas, resources, and the occasional drink.

AB | Priority number one is ALWAYS education. That being said, the delight of being introduced to new technology is a close second.

SR | As head of procurement, my main priority is to meet up with

manufacturers and distributors. Not only is it an opportunity to build and improve communications and relationships, but I can catch up on ongoing projects, discuss upcoming projects, and make new contacts. I also see exhibitions as an opportunity to see the new technologies available.

How do you budget your time properly?

HD | I always budget my time around the training schedules. I then look at the exhibitors whose products I'm most interested in. But above all, I always seem to find lots of time for food and coffee.

SE | Months before the actual show, I schedule meetings with the people and brands I want to see and use the CEDIA website to manage the sheer number of courses I look forward to taking during that short period of time. I always leave the last day to walk around the show floor.

AB | When I have training classes scheduled, then my time in between and after classes will be spent researching new tech and networking. If I'm not attending training, I schedule the first half of my day(s) to acquaint myself with new tech and industry partners. I then use the remainder of my time for every other possible invention that catches my eye — lighting, furniture, recliners, etc. The goal is consistent — keep your eyes peeled for any potential business idea.

MR | I avoid pre-arranging any meetings or booking educational sessions during a show floor event. They put a spanner in the works, and you have to plan your day around them. I feel that systematically zig-zagging my way up and down every aisle is the most effective way to get around. That way, you never miss anything or anyone. You may spend more time at some stands than others, but it balances out as you skip past irrelevant stands and



Hemant Daya (HD)
Dayatech, Australia



Sherrie Edward (SE)
Archimedia, Egypt



Ankur Bhatt (AB)
Sound Sense, India



Mike Ranpura (MR)
Smart Life AV, UK

eventually cover the whole show before it finishes.

EC | I build a plan for what stands I want to see, including the actual order I will see them in. I'll then set aside time to meet with other dealers for coffee, lunch, or dinner, and plan to attend at least a couple classes on improving my business.

Are there any tools you find personally useful for time management?

AB | I prefer to use the iPhone calendar app. It is simple yet effective and provides me with event and meeting scheduling/reminders.

MR | You won't see me without a watch on my wrist. Google Calendar is sufficient enough to quickly put appointments in on the fly and a simple Notes app to keep track of things to action after the event.

SR | I find that having an app with the exhibition map and the stand location by manufacturer is key. It saves time as it allows me to plan my route, mark off the interesting stands, and makes getting from one meeting to another more efficient.

KC | We create a WhatsApp group, so we can all stay in touch while at the event.

What's the strategy for staying in touch with the home office? Do you set aside time to answer those emails?

HD | Anytime we attend a



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conference, it means traveling to a major city, which means our home office is thousands of miles away, as we are based in a remote area of Far North Queensland, Australia. The easiest methods of contact are good old-fashioned phone calls and messaging. We are also looking at using Microsoft Teams and other CRM apps for all messages, calls, files, customer connects, and so on.

SE | I usually do that during my downtime. It can be difficult, especially with the time difference between the different countries. I get most of my emails/communications done outside of the trade show hours. Jet lag can come in handy when its 3 a.m. and you can't sleep.

AB | With the way our business works, there is never a way to schedule a fixed time to respond to emails/queries from the office. I must manage as the need arises, and hence, need to stay connected 24/7. I do this in two ways — by having all email pushed to my phone

and have the mobile number I use in India activated for international roaming.

MR | I tend to let clients and partners know beforehand that I'm attending a show or event, if it's likely they will get in touch. Emails do not get checked until the evening, and if someone calls, I either call them back after the show or take the call if it's important.

SR | I always allow a little break of 10-15 minutes between meetings to check emails and return phone calls to the office. For exhibitions that are over a day, I use lunchtime to network and catch up with work emails.

MF | One of the things I constantly work on as a leader is to improve my ability to delegate. I have an awesome team at home that takes great care of all important issues while I'm overseas or even when



Sandra Rogers (SR)
Smartcomm, UK



Manuel Fernández (MF)
TrendHouse S.A., Argentina



Karen Chugg (KC)
Intelligent Abodes, UK



Eric Crawford (EC)
The Loop, Boise, ID USA



I'm attending a convention locally. I do check emails for urgent issues three times a day when I'm away — early in the morning, at noon, and before dinner. If anything requires my attention on the spot, my team will reach me on my mobile at any time 24/7.

What are the main trade shows that you attend during the year, and why?

HD | I attend CEDIA Expo and lock that into my yearly schedule first. Then it's an order of priority based on what my schedule permits. I then focus on Integrate, local industry events from the Master Builders Associations and the Chamber of Commerce, and assisted technology exhibitions, including ARATA.

SE | CEDIA Expo and ISE. Our company mainly focusses on residential projects. These two shows offer a wide variety of manufacturers, courses, ideas, training, and experience in that field, and it is where I find all I look for to constantly improve myself, my company, and our clients' lifestyles.

AB | CEDIA Expo, ISE, and

CES for training, new tech, and networking. We have made long-term business deals/relations with many contacts at such exhibitions.

MF | During the year, we try to attend CEDIA Expo, ISE, CES, and InfoComm. The reason is very simple — they present all the innovation in the industry, and at the same time, we have the possibility of getting in touch with different people to expand the quality of the services we offer by learning from our colleagues' experiences. We also like to attend local construction events. The main reason is to have a close understanding on the need of our potential and current clients. Of course, one of my personal favourites, are events like CASA FOA that

face design from the point of view of construction.

What makes CEDIA Expo different from other trade shows?

HD | I find CEDIA Expo is the main event that brings together the most relevant information for our business. It's where I am most energised and can immerse myself into the industry with amazing people and like-minded businesses.

SE | The thing I love most about CEDIA Expo is that I feel it is more focussed, compact, and generally has a great vibe to it. The CEDIA education that

Build out a walking plan so that you are not doubling over the same path.

is offered during the show is also one of the things I look forward to while I am there. It offers a wide variety of courses that cater to all different aspects of our field.

AB | The training, of course.

MF | I believe that the main difference that CEDIA Expo has with most of the trade shows that we attend is that the attendees feel something in common with each other. Somehow, you feel part of the same family or community where you can meet incredible people, who in another area, could be inaccessible. The warmth you feel during the show and the peripheral events makes you feel very comfortable and very welcomed.

EC | A focus on the custom channel. There aren't other products like cameras, fitness gear, car audio, etc.

Staying hydrated and fed seems obvious, but it can get away from folks. Any strategies here?

HD | The strategy for keeping replenished is easy — coffee and cake at every opportunity! I find that with so much coffee, I also need to keep a bottle of water on hand to keep hydrated.



We rarely have downtime at these events, but the socialising in the evening is usually fun!

SE | I walk around with a water all the time, but every time I walk into a stand, I am offered drinks and snacks. It's a very welcoming effect and makes going thirsty at these shows very hard.

AB | To be honest, thirst and hunger take a back seat when I'm doing what I love. When I attend a trade show, it becomes worse. Sad but true!

MF | Set an alarm every two hours to get 11 ounces of water and, if necessary, bring your own bottle. Avoid energy drinks and coffee. Those drinks will keep you awake for a short period of time, but will dehydrate you, causing fatigue and you to lose your attention span later in the day. Having a protein bar is key to keeping my energy levels balanced if it's been a good amount of time without having a meal.

KC | Most of the exhibitors

keep us hydrated, thankfully! We tend to be hearty eaters at breakfast, which keeps us going most of the day until our evening meal.

EC | I carry protein powder, trail mix, apples or bananas, and granola bars for while on the floor. The food has to be something I can eat or drink in a couple minutes while walking between stands. I also always start my day with a good "attempted" low carb breakfast from the hotel.

If there is any downtime, what do you do with the R&R hours?

HD | At every exhibition, I think there will be some great downtime for me to just chill. The reality is that the connections you make at these events keep you out all day and night! Due to flying from Australia to the U.S. for CEDIA Expo, I now travel a few days earlier to make sure the jet lag stays under control. I'm pretty sure that my previous routine of six coffees a day in order to stay functioning is not sustainable if I want to be in this industry for the long haul!

SE | That part I enjoy the most. I usually stop by the CEDIA stand or meet up with other industry friends to discuss what we've seen and what's new. We share stories on our





experiences and offer to help each other moving forward by sharing resources or expertise.

AB | Downtime? With the way the trade exhibitions are these days, multiple days are not even enough. There's just so much to see and learn.

MF | I always try to have downtime and what I do is to listen to relaxing music and meditate, even for half an hour. This really helps me focus. If it's my first time in town, I try to experience the local culture and food.

KC | We rarely have downtime at these events, but the socialising in the evening is usually fun!

Everyone's Fitbits log lots of steps at these things. What's the preferred footwear?

MR | Trainers are preferred or casual shoes with good soles. You tend to be on your feet all day, so uncomfortable footwear is the last thing you want to be thinking about.

SR | Definitely FLAT, comfortable shoes, every time. I keep the heels for the evening events.

EC | Comfortable shoes are obviously critical, so I stick with running shoes on casual days or wing tips with arch supports on the formal ones. For events like this, you just need to suck it up. It's only a couple of days.

Are you carrying a backpack or bag? What's in it?

MR | I tend to carry a messenger bag filled with a few business cards and a spare pen. As the day goes on, the

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bag fills up with brochures. By the end of the day, you've done a gym workout with the amount it weighs.

KC | I carry the minimal to avoid achy necks/shoulders — so usually just my phone and business cards.

EC | A backpack with my laptop, business cards, log book, a show floor map with desired businesses highlighted, presentation materials, snacks, and a water bottle. I try and keep my pack light to keep me strong for the day.

Any other tips or tricks you'd like to share?

SE | Enjoy and make use of the show in every shape and form. There is a lot to see and a lot of people to meet. Not to mention the courses to take advantage of. But definitely plan ahead and always leave room to enjoy the wonderful stands various companies have set up. Also, stop by the innovation area for new and developing companies and technologies.

AB | Try to get a floor plan and map of all participants and chart out the stands that you MUST go to, followed by those you WANT to go to.

MF | Speak with everyone. Shake a lot of hands and bring a LOT of business cards. Keep your mind, eyes, and ears open.

EC | There is way too much on the floor to stop and see every stand. Look through the exhibitor list before ever going to the floor (hopefully you've also been building that list throughout the year) and highlight the stands/companies you plan to see. Build out a walking plan so that you are not doubling over the same path. Allow one to two hours to investigate new products on the floor that could improve your business.

