

One trip, more business...

STUART JACKSON SUGGESTS WAYS IN WHICH A VISIT TO BRIGHTON NEXT MONTH WILL HELP YOU INCREASE YOUR BUSINESS

Trade Shows forever represent the best business opportunities of the year and this March (12th & 13th) sees The Natural Trade Show take place again at Brighton. This month, let's explore why it is in every independent retailer's best interest to be there.

Health Food retailers work in an industry that amounts to perhaps 1200 independently-owned shops and one major chain (Holland & Barrett). Our shop type is, therefore, widely dispersed throughout the UK, creating a business environment where it is possible to exist the whole year in our own little retail bubble, oblivious to both industry trends and market changes.

Although magazines and visiting representatives partly alleviate our seclusion, it would be naive to base a perception of the market solely on information brought by the media and employees of suppliers.

Visiting Brighton allows us to personally interpret news, education and the supply chain at first hand, while on a more tangible level, Brighton offers the best buying and relaxation opportunities of the year.

MARKET MOVES

Retail success is built upon offering modern consumers the products that they desire, trendily packaged, suitably merchandised,

supported by relevant information and delivered by an efficient service method. Trade shows bring all the parts of an industry together from top educators, legislators, suppliers, innovators and market experts to the receiving practitioners and retailers. It truly is a one-stop shop for all that a retailer needs to fulfil those retail success factors.

This year's Brighton show offers five seminar theatres with varying themes, from TV star Gillian McKeith's live cooking demos to Masterclasses and Keynote lectures presided over by top names such as nutritionists, broadcasters and authors, Michael Van Straten and Marilyn Glenville. Leave the exhibition armed with knowledge of hot topics and products for today's consumer.

Industry business experts such as Danny Wells will get you up to speed with market and service trends, while an unprecedented number of suppliers will be there to offer new product opportunities. It is an interesting exercise to look over the whole exhibition trying to spot widespread changes in design, branding and product that might signal consumer purchasing trends to come.

There are many enlightening features, including "The New Zealand Pavilion" located upstairs. In past issues I have highlighted the opportunity products from this part of the world offer for UK retailers.

The Infinity Food Pavilion (downstairs) will again showcase a multitude of food suppliers that don't normally attend our industry exhibitions. It's a chance to sample and 'talk product' directly with those food companies that supply to wholesalers.

THE NATURAL HEALTH WEEK

Brighton will provide a focal point for retailers wishing to participate in this new



The Natural Trade Show Brighton show floor.

initiative set to take place during the week commencing 27th March 2006. The Natural Health Week has been created to provide national media, consumer and industry attention on our market with an aim to drive more consumers into health food shops.

Retailers will be able to collect free merchandising packs at the show, find out more about what is happening, and suppliers will be offering special promotions in support of the week's consumer events.

FUN FACTS

Some retailers feel strangely guilty about the importance of relaxation. Part of the gain from trade shows is to have fun and recharge the batteries, so take advantage of associated events such as the free welcome drinks party on Saturday night and the main gala dinner dance on Sunday.

Never underestimate the value of networking with industry colleagues; it is a great way of finding out strategically useful news, breaking down trade barriers and gaining operational tips to take home and try out.

BUYING

Visiting a trade show is frequently perceived to be an expense, yet it is feasible to make the trip profitable in entirely financial terms. Adopt a proactive approach to the event and find out



Dr Gillian McKeith at The Natural Trade Show Brighton in march 2005

in advance which of your suppliers are attending, and which of those are offering a special 'show only' deal. Review each current supplier's range for new product additions, and prepare a larger than normal order to maximise the cash benefit of any extra show discount.

Since this is a rare opportunity to talk face-to-face with a number of suppliers, arrange similar orders for those not apparently offering a promotion and go equipped to persuade them to provide an extra incentive at the event. This may be extra discount or a stock offer such as "buy three get one free". Decide on any training investment that your shop requires and seek assistance from your larger suppliers towards that cost.

At the exhibition, colour code the catalogue into those suppliers already in use, those known to you but of no interest, and leave all others blank as unknowns. Reconnoitre the unfamiliar companies and code each in order of appeal.

Begin business proper by delivering the pre-prepared orders and set a goal that each supplier must offer something free, however small. Next, approach the potential new suppliers using the carrot of new business to again receive something extra.

By the show close, every exhibitor has been assessed and deals have been concluded that will directly pay back the cost of the trip while new products and promotions will benefit the store for months to come. There will also be much to gain in the future from having met suppliers face-to-face; it changes everything.

Take advantage of the free show training on business and nutrition. No retailer, however established, can afford to stand by and lose touch with market needs. The cost of attending can therefore be directly quantified against cash and product benefits attained, combined with the free maintenance of retail skills and strategic market knowledge.

BRIGHTON IS UNIQUE

The Natural Trade Shows, now in their fifth year, were launched when the independent health food retailer was under most threat from supermarket competition. The shows are and always have been, dedicated to independents and as a result every supplier exhibiting is there to meet and trade with health food retailers and practitioners. Brighton is a unique opportunity to visit an event where the health food retailer is king.

Although I have outlined a commercial approach to shows, it may be that a retailer's goal in attending is simply to take a break from the daily grind and enjoy the many ancillary functions of the event, and this in itself is a valid reason to attend. Be honest with yourself as to why you are there – it can be purely business, just plain fun or a mixture of both.

■ For more information or to register for the 2006 Natural Trade Show visit www.naturaltradeshow.com

SUMMARY

It's a choice: stay at home and keep doing what you have always done or get out into the market and meet your suppliers, trainers and peers face-to-face in order to learn, develop, grab opportunities and strike beneficial deals.



If you have any questions for Talking Shop or would like further information on Stuart Jackson's consultancy service, contact him on 0131 315 0303 or email stuart@forceofnature.co.uk or visit www.forceofnature.co.uk