



my take

Not all shows are created equal

As March nears its close, so, too, does show season. The grueling road trip begins for many with the Shaw and Mohawk regionals in early January, followed by Carpet One/Flooring America, Surfaces, Abbey Carpet, CarpetsPlus/Color Tile, Fuse Alliance, FCICA and who knows what else I'm failing to mention. NWEA, Starnet, National Floorcovering Alliance and FCA Network are all that remains next month. It's not uncommon to engage a conversation with someone on the manufacturing side lamenting that he has been to 17 shows in the first two months of the year, or another who sighs that he hasn't been home in two weeks. Home-cooked meals become mere memory.

For me, 17 shows greatly exceed my early 2018 itinerary, although I can say I have adorned about eight name badges so far this year. I've seen innovative products, listened to some impressive speakers and probably interacted with hundreds of individuals. Each event is top shelf, but what most are not is remarkable.

Some of you may be familiar with a book written by Seth Godin called "The Purple Cow." It was a *New York Times* best seller in 2003. Basically, the premise surrounds transforming your business by being remarkable. Godin says the key to success is to find a way to stand out—to be the purple cow in a field of monochrome Holsteins. And remarkable does not necessarily mean great; it means doing something or being someone that will be

"remarked" about repeatedly.

Surfaces is always remarkable, if only for its sheer size, importance and bevy of new products. The retail group and regional events are impressive, but only the products and/or speakers change from year to year. In fact, in the absence of product and programming, there might not be many discernable differences between them all. Think Delta, United and American.

CarpetsPlus seems to be the exception. This group is just different. Let's be clear here; I am not saying they are the best or better than any other group. I'm saying they are remarkable because there is a lot to remark about.

First is the energy on the part of Ryan Dunn, co-COO and vice president of sales. Ryan is a rah-rah kind of guy, a former semi-pro baseball player who currently coaches kids on the side. That may not be for everyone, but it certainly works for members. They respond to him.

Second is the family feel amongst members and management. There could be many reasons. Most of the members are one-store, family businesses with husband and wife, or parent and child, involved. They all seem to relate to one another, including management, a team that consists of Ron Dunn and Jon Logue and their sons, Ryan and Kevin. Heck, Ryan was even carting around his son, 14-year-old RJ, as the future generation.

And third is just the little things. Every group has a Gold Rush, Steals and Deals,

whatever, where manufacturers offer specials, usually on the eve of the regular trade show. But CarpetsPlus hosted its Rush Hour vendor showcase outside, against the backdrop of the Tucson Mountains, providing a completely different environment than the traditional ballroom setting. One vendor told me he sold more at Rush Hour in two hours than he did during another group's entire trade show. What's more, rather than serve what I would call typical buffet dinner fare, CarpetsPlus provided buses for members and vendors to go downtown and dine on their own in groups, to network off site.

Last but not least, management put its money where its mouth is when it comes to member inclusion in key decisions. The Dunns and Logues actually had a vote by show of hands as to the location of next year's convention. Austin, Texas? Tepid response. Vegas, a few days before Surfaces? No response. Hollywood? Silence. Hill Country in San Antonio? Resounding applause. Guess where the 2019 convention will be held.

At the end of the day, not all groups are for everyone. CarpetsPlus targets a certain type of retailer. There are close to 400 of them these days. And judging by the few with whom I was able to spend time, it was well worth the investment.

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