

Q How did you come to acquire Abilities Expo?

A My partner, Lewis Shomer, and I are good friends who met in the trade show and conference industry, which is where we both come from. We'd reached a point in our careers where we decided we wanted to do something together, and when we heard that Abilities Expo might be available we decided to look into it. What we found was a conference that had been founded by Dick Wooten and his wife, Pat, in Southern California back in 1979 because he couldn't find the things he needed, so they wanted to bring everybody together in one place. Dick was a polio survivor who was in a wheelchair as a result, and his activism in disability rights led to a lot of related state legislation. The show had changed hands a few times over the years, and when we arrived on the scene we saw its potential and decided to get involved. We're a pretty small crew right now, but we believe in what we're doing, and we fell in love with the community we serve while we were learning about Abilities Expo.

Q Tell us how the show is structured, and the changes attendees can expect to see.

A The first show was held in Anaheim, and I think that Dick and Pat quickly realized they had a tiger by the tail, so they expanded to New Jersey and tried a number of other locations over the years. And you've seen that same attempt to find the best locations around the country with all of the owners, seeking sites that the most people could reach as easily as possible. Since we've taken ownership we decided to target New York, Anaheim, Chicago, and Atlanta, and we've made sure the venue at each location is accessible, which wasn't always the case in the past. To generate buzz in advance of each event we have invested heavily in radio, TV, and

print advertising, and we've engaged ambassadors in each area who are individuals with physical disabilities that actually live nearby and are part of the community, so they can spread the word about Abilities Expo and people can attend and learn about the latest equipment, materials, and resources that are available to them. One of those resources involves continuing education courses that anyone can attend, but that are especially helpful for health-care professionals. Those courses were once contracted to an outside company, and were even cancelled one year just weeks before the show, so we decided to take first-person possession of things like that to make sure it's done the right way. We will also be dropping the admission fee, because we don't want that to be an obstacle that might keep someone from attending who might benefit from the experience. Assistive technologies will play a more prominent role in future shows, and we're also considering the possibility of holding "mini events" in smaller markets that might draw 1,000 to 1,500 people, which would be great for people who don't live in or near the larger cities. We also want to broaden our scope a bit so that Abilities Expo reaches a larger community, such as those with vision and hearing impairments.

Q Apart from enhanced marketing, what are you doing to help exhibitors?

A In the past there was no means of capturing information, so the exhibitors had no way of following up with attendees who were interested in their products and services, and we've already addressed that situation by introducing advance registration, which provides us with contact and other information to help us do a better job. We're also working on offering information capture devices at each booth, so that attendees can just swipe their card through the machine to



receive additional materials. Right now we're able to capture that information from the health-care professionals who attend, who are issued cards rather than the wrist bracelets end-users wear, but we'd like to

“We’re a pretty small crew right now, but we believe in what we’re doing, and we fell in love with the community we serve while we were learning about Abilities Expo.”

extend that to everyone. More than anything I want everyone to know that we're passionate about this, and we'd like to hear from anyone who has suggestions about how we can do a better job. We aren't a corporate entity, I'm one of the people answering the phone, and constructive suggestions will always be appreciated. ☞

TO LEARN MORE:

(310) 450-8831 x130, dkorse@abilitiesexpo.com, www.abilitiesexpo.com