



ON THE ROAD AGAIN

In a recent discussion about trade shows with an industry friend the conversation turned to what he called the "caravan" shows of the '60s and '70s. Groups of local manufacturers' agents would, by informal agreement, arrange hotel meeting spaces in the smaller centres

of interior and northern BC. Local contractors and wholesalers appreciated the fact that the world came to them and attendance was great.

More recently the concept of the trade show has been hotly debated, and as a result we have seen the emergence of an updated version of the caravan show in the form of the one-day, regional trade show. Without a doubt the CIPHEX Roadshow on November 9, 2005 was a successful incarnation of the caravan concept. According to the Canadian Institute of Plumbing and Heating, the show owner, the event attracted over 350 attendees.

Jeff Blair of Barclay Sales was involved in five booths and felt that both the number and the quality of the attendees was good enough to bring him back to the next show. According to Blair, "The seminars were full, and as each ended we had a steady stream of people coming through our booths. The food and beverage service lent a social aspect to this show that you don't see at some of the bigger shows."

In regard to the venue, Richard Lacey

of Canadian Aqualine said, "The smaller displays made for a more informal atmosphere. Keeping the displays small levelled the playing field instead of allowing big-budget displays to dominate the space."

There were some recurring themes resonating throughout the seminars and exhibits. Interest in labour saving products (as a response to the growing shortage of skilled labour), green products and energy saving products was universal.

Tony Testini of American Standard said, "Last year, I did an internet search with green homes as the keywords, with just over a million references showing up. Recently, I did the same thing and found over 31 million references. There is a greater awareness of the LEED program and green building initiatives generally. The growth in interest in water conservation products was mirrored in the growth of new high performance toilets and other water saving technologies on display at the show. With this being the first plumbing and heating trade show in Vancouver in many years, people were seeing a good number of these products for the first time."

The same themes played out in the Wet Head hydronics displays with high-efficiency boilers and energy saving controls front and centre. During the hydronics round table session, the evolution of the hydronics market in North America was discussed. It was agreed that the hydronics business is being affected by:

- Growth in the installation of "hybrid" systems that combine both HVAC and hydronics;
- A consumer desire for greater energy efficiency in systems;
- Cost reductions in technology and the emergence of smarter products; and
- Adherence to new installation standards and requirements for contractor and designer certification and the influence both have on training needs.

There was also discussion of what the industry needs to do to grow the hydronics market. The most recent Radiant Panel Association member survey showed that 76.4 per cent of radiant floor heating systems are installed in residential projects. With this in mind, the panel discussed who the customer really is and who is best positioned to reach them, the manufacturer, the wholesaler or the contractor?

To summarize, it seems that less is more in that the smaller venue contributed to a successful event where a good number of people shared an enjoyable day talking business with old and new friends.

■ *Mark Evans is a 20-year veteran of the plumbing and heating industry. Reach him by e-mail at writemarkevans@hotmail.com.*



1. Leo Vaillancourt of Watts Industries, shown here, led an open panel discussion on hydronics along with Mark Evans of Danfoss, and Bill Johnston of BCIT.

2. Visitors had the opportunity to discuss practical solutions to sales, specification, design and installation challenges with 62 exhibitors.

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