

FINDING A MATCH AT NAB2001

by Laura Hellstern and Miguel Olivares

U.S. Commercial Service

Eric Leventhal, International Relations Manager for Verestar, a global communications solutions provider, has flown into Las Vegas to attend the giant National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) annual trade show. Forget the droves of Elvis impersonators, the acres of slot machines, the hotels that offer a high-tech experience of

ancient Egypt. Leventhal is here to make sales. Hopefully lots of them.

In a city famous for its floor shows, the curtain is about to go up on his. And there's a lot riding on how well he does.

Because booth and related costs at major U.S. trade shows can be substantial, exhibitors are motivated to make sales on the floor. Product demonstrators put their best foot forward, sales managers and reps walk the floor, and

staffers wait nervously at the booth — all hoping the right customers will come along.

But even the most experienced trade show hands sometimes need a little help putting interested buyers in front of them and what they have to sell. Exhibitors at the National Association of Broadcasters NAB2001, including Verestar, were glad to have the U.S. Department of Commerce's Commercial Service play the role of matchmaker by providing a steady stream of qualified buyers from a number of foreign countries.

Assisting more than 30,000 U.S. companies exhibiting at 28 major U.S. trade shows each year, the U.S. Commercial Service and its International Buyer Program (IBP) recruits and qualifies buyers, distributors, licensees, firms interested in joint ventures, and franchisers. The IBP also typically co-hosts one or more International Trade Centers at shows, where exhibitors and attendees meet, receive export counseling from U.S. Commercial Service trade specialists, or just relax in a comfortable setting conducive to talking and doing business. Among the 113,000 attendees at NAB2001 were 19,032 international



Photo courtesy of U.S. Commercial Service

Developers of the NAB2001 Global Matchmaking Reception included (L to R) Southern California District Export Council Chairman Mark Matsumoto, International Buyer Program Project Officer Miguel Olivares, and Dan Bjerck, Trade Specialist and Information Technology team leader for the U.S. Commercial Service.

visitors from 144 countries, many of whom were escorted by U.S. Commercial Service personnel.

According to NAB's Director of Attendee Services Justine McVaney, "The contributions of the IBP and the U.S. Commercial Service domestically and overseas are critical to our success in reaching the wide scope of international buyers." McVaney says the key to getting more international buyers to attend shows in the U.S. has been the Commerce Department's knowledge of the buyer community in many of the world's top markets for broadcast and related equipment. "The truth is, with the advent of the Internet, more and more businesses are finding it easier to do business around the world," she said. "We need to provide our exhibitors and attendees more of what they need in today's global economy."

In addition to more international visitors and an elaborate business center, NAB2001 and the Commercial Service included a Global Matchmaking Reception on the evening before the opening day of the show. A kind of trade show within a trade show, the Global Matchmaking Reception brought 39 U.S. convergence technology companies and their tabletop product displays together with more than 460 international buyers in an informal setting outside the show floor commotion.

This was the first time NAB has offered such an event, which was developed by Commercial Service trade specialists and by Southern California District Export Council (DEC) Chairman Mark Matsumoto. The councils are groups of businesspeople throughout the United States, whose members are appointed by the Secretary of Commerce to promote exports by U.S. firms, especially small and mid-sized companies.

By having tabletop displays rather than typical trade show booths, small businesses were for a night on the same

level as much bigger firms. "The reception provided an excellent opportunity for U.S. companies to capitalize on the presence of international buyers at NAB" commented Dan Bjerk, the information technology team leader for the Commercial Service. DEC Chairman Matsumoto added, "We'd been seeking a mechanism that would give both multinational firms and small businesses equal footing and a captive audience at mega trade shows such as NAB."

NAB's McVaney said that the Global Matchmaking Reception is a welcome addition to the show because its focus is business networking. "It was an additional opportunity for NAB to help create buyer and seller interactions that might not have happened on the show floor," she said.

Verestar's Leventhal was enthusiastic about the reception. "It was an opportunity to bring together potential customers from more than 20 countries in a casual forum, where we could socialize and find out if there was symmetry between our companies." He said he established business relationships with about seven overseas firms, and signed an agent at the reception. Other participants were equally happy. Said Bob Boster Vice President of International Business Development for ENCO Systems, "It was the best \$500 we spent at a show."

In addition to the reception, Commercial Service trade specialists are at work throughout the show evaluating U.S. exhibitors' overseas sales potential and discussing marketing trends and opportunities. The trade specialists live and work in the same markets as the international buyers attending the show. "Any company selling internationally would be foolish not to take advantage of these meetings," said Leventhal. "The commercial specialists have a great depth of knowledge about international markets."

At NAB2001, 36 U.S. companies held 228 meetings with commercial special-

ists from 14 countries. An additional 26 companies held more than 100 meetings with commercial specialists in their NAB 2001 booths.

The disassembled booths are hardly out the convention hall doors before new ones arrive to take their place. Pompadors back in place, Elvis impersonators brace for another influx of conventioners and exhibitors in this desert Oz. Back in California, Eric Leventhal is hard at work with his new business partners in several different countries, communicating via email, sending proposals and working toward final agreements. "I anticipate some excellent sales as a result of the Global Matchmaking Reception," he said. "And I'm looking forward to the next time I can exhibit at a U.S. Commercial Service-sponsored show." ■

For more information about the National Association of Broadcasters, visit www.nab.org. For more information about the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Commercial Service and the International Buyer Program, visit www.export.gov. For more information on the District Export Council, visit <http://sites.usatrade.gov/dec/dec.html>