VIEWPOINT



Issues that needed an umbrella: enter the EOG

National trade associations are not uncommon within the outdoor industry, they exist to promote the interests of their members in many countries, such as the UK, Sweden, Germany, Norway and the USA. But in an increasingly international business setting, what happens when the issues to be looked at transcend national boundaries? Who will represent the companies if the EU decides to bring in legislation that negatively impacts on what has become a large industry? Who is focusing on the subject of International trade shows? How can the increasing threat of counterfeiting be dealt with? These are some of the questions that led a group of nineteen of the world's largest outdoor brands to get together just over a year ago to discuss the founding of a European outdoor industry association. The companies involved were:
Arc'teryx, Berghaus, Columbia, Deuter, Ferrino, Helly Hansen, Jack Wolfskin, Lafuma, Lowe Alpine, Mammut, Meindl Odlo, Patagonia, Petzl, Salewa, Schoeffel, The North Face and Vaude.

The result: The European Outdoor Group is an organisation that is registered in Switzerland with an elected council and officers. The stated objectives of the group are:

- To provide a common voice for the Outdoor Industry ensuring effective interface between industry and consumers, the media and government
- To secure an accessible and well organised European Trade Fair and promote it as the premium showcase for the industry
- To facilitate networking amongst its members
- To deliver relevant cost-effective services for its members

What next?

So the EOG was founded and set about tackling the first of its major challenges, the ever-thorny issue of trade fairs.

Ten years ago the German industry association (Fachgruppe Outdoor), dissatisfied with the services provided by ispo, the only major international trade show of the time, decided to break away and form their own summer show, which became Outdoor Friedrichshafen. This caused a substantial rift in the industry with some companies supporting Outdoor, some ispo and some shouldering the increased cost of exhibiting at both! The situation has rumbled on since then with 'Outdoor' growing slowly, but with no real resolution to the issue of two competing trade shows. International exhibitors have grumbled about the difficult location of Outdoor, the poor communications, lack of adequate hotel capacity and, above all, the fact that the show was predominantly German in nature. The first action the EOG took was to decide as a group to focus attendance on Outdoor for the August 03 show. The result was a significant boost to the show's success whilst, simultaneously, attendance by outdoor companies at the summer ispo declined markedly. At the same time the contract between the show authorities, Messe Friedrichshafen, and the German industry association was due for renewal and this was an ideal opportunity for the EOG to intervene. Negotiations were conducted with the Fachgruppe Outdoor with the result that it agreed to hand over control of the show to the EOG. Both Messe Friedrichshafen and Messe München were invited to pitch for the new contract and both presented exciting plans for the development of the Outdoor show. The competition was extremely close, but with the ultimate aim of creating a uniquely individual, stand alone show, the decision went in favour of Messe Friedrichshafen. As part of the agreement, the show authorities have undertaken to improve many of the issues that were felt to be a problem, such as access, local transport, hotel accommodation, etc. Clearly these things will not happen overnight, but there is a clear plan of action to improve things over the coming two years. There is also a strong commitment to drive the international aspect of the show and we expect to see increasing numbers of international visitors over the coming shows.

Resources

To date all the work done by the EOG has been on a voluntary basis, but it is clear that for it to fulfil its mandate an infrastructure needs to be put in place and a General Secretary appointed to run the organisation. The EOG is now actively looking to fill this post with someone who has experience of working within the international outdoor area. Once this takes place the organisation will be able to move forward and develop services that benefit the interests of the outdoor industry as a whole. There will be a drive to publicise the benefits of membership and the future looks bright for a joined up, coherent and well organised European industry.

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