BRAND PROFILE: EMERALD EXPOSITIONS



Trade show organiser Emerald Expositions is responsible for events catering to industries as diverse as construction and drones. In the outdoor industry, it is best known for organising the biannual Outdoor Retailer exhibition, which will have a new home in Denver from 2018.

Emerald finds new home for industry gem

It has been a busy few months for trade show organiser Emerald Expositions. As well as searching for a new venue for the Outdoor Retailer exhibition, the event of most relevance to the outdoor industry out of Emerald's stable of more than 50, it has filed for an initial public offering and completed the purchase of the Snow Show from SnowSports Industries America (SIA). It now faces the task of successfully merging this event with the Outdoor Retailer Winter Market in time for the first combined show in January 2018, while also managing the transition of this new event and of the established Outdoor Retailer Summer Market to a new venue in Denver.

Farewell to Utah

Uncertainty over whether Outdoor Retailer would remain at its current venue in Salt Lake City, Utah emerged in February 2017 after the governor of the state, Gary Herbert, signed a resolution urging the administration of US President Donald Trump to change the status of the Bears Ears National Monument, located in southeastern Utah. Its current status as a National Monument means it is open to everyone for recreational use, but the proposed change could see the public lose their right to hike, camp and cycle in area.

In response to Governor Herbert's vocal approval for this move, a number of outdoor

The Outdoor Retailer exhibitions are an important meeting place for people across the outdoor apparel and equipment industry.

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2017 will be the last year that Outdoor Retailer calls Salt Lake City, Utah its home.

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companies announced their withdrawal from Outdoor Retailer and pledged not to return while it is held in Utah. The charge was led by Patagonia; chief executive Rose Marcario said it was clear that the state governor doesn't support public lands conservation and accused him of overlooking the economic benefits his state gains from outdoor recreational activities. She said his "blatant disregard" for Bears Ears and other public lands would prevent the brand from returning to the biannual exhibition while it calls Utah home. She expressed confidence that other outdoor manufacturers and retailers would follow Patagonia's lead and she was right.

Within a matter of days, Polartec and Arc'teryx turned their backs on Outdoor Retailer. Polartec said it had made the decision "in solidarity with Patagonia", while the president of Arc'teryx, Jon Hoerauf, insisted that the outdoor industry "has an obligation to protect the wild places that are important to our consumers". His brand pledged to donate the funds it would have spent attending Outdoor Retailer to the Conservation Alliance, an association that helps to protect areas of wildlife in North America and which has set up a Public Lands defence fund.

After these withdrawals, Emerald confirmed to *WSA* that it was "committed to exploring options for a new venue for the shows that aligns with the core values of our industry". It held a conference call with Governor Herbert in early February to discuss the matter but no resolution was forthcoming. The call involved officials from Outdoor Retailer, the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), Patagonia, The North Face and REI, but Emerald said afterwards: "Outdoor Retailer will not include the state of Utah in the request for proposal process for future show locations."

For its part, OIA called for its members to attend July's Outdoor Retailer Summer Market, which will be the last held in Utah, while it works to "find a more suitable venue for future shows". It warned that boycotting the show would have a "significant negative impact" on small and midsize brands, specialty retailers and non-profit organisations, and affirmed that the outdoor industry has a better chance of getting its voice heard if everyone pulls in the same direction.

Final destination

Speculation over the future venue for Outdoor Retailer was rife from the moment Emerald announced it would be leaving Utah; among the cities to be mentioned were Las Vegas, Minneapolis, Chicago, Indianapolis and Portland. Those with an interest in hosting the event were invited to submit their bids before March 31.

On July 6, Emerald announced that it had chosen Denver, Colorado as the new host for all Outdoor Retailer tradeshows from 2018 onwards. It gave no information about the specific venue in which they will take place.

"We received submissions from truly incredible outdoor cities - a testament to the strength of the outdoor community," said Marisa Nicholson, Outdoor Retailer show director. "Denver is the undeniable industry choice; bringing these organisations together and basing the show in a state that places such a high value on outdoor recreation is the best move we can make for the outdoor industry."

Outdoor Retailer said it had engaged with industry partners throughout the selection process in order to identify the best venue for the show. It explained that the move to Denver is "strongly supported" by the outdoor community that relies so heavily on the shows to

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conduct business, share knowledge and exchange ideas.

The outdoor industry's preference for Denver was made clear in June when a number of leading figures put their name to an open letter calling for Outdoor Retailer to be moved there. The letter was signed by Beaver Theodosakis, founder of PrAna, Kim Miller, CEO of Scarpa North America, Dan Nordstrom, President and CEO of Outdoor Research, Casey Sheahan, president of Keen Footwear, and Dawson Wheeler, founder of Rock/Creek Outfitters. It came in response to speculation in the US media that Emerald was giving serious consideration to Las Vegas as a potential venue, a move they oppose.

"As executive leaders of outdoor industry companies, with no direct economic stake in the result," the letter began, "we believe it's important to make a clear case that for the long-term health, and perhaps survival, of the Outdoor Retailer trade show, the process to determine the next home of the show must lead to Denver." It went on to caution that trade shows are "notoriously fragile" and listed several examples of established events that have fallen off the calendar. "Outdoor Retailer faces the serious threat of a rapidly changing retail landscape putting tremendous pressure on profitability," it warned.

Among the reasons the industry figures gave for favouring Denver were "the aggressive package of economic incentives" it has put together and its facilities, which they said are big enough to contain "a vibrant show of exhibitors that are truly relevant" to consumers. The letter described Denver as "unique on the current list of possible venues" because it has a central travel hub as well as the necessary "outdoor recreation assets".

Conversely, it insisted that making the decision to move the event to a larger venue in places such as Las Vegas for short-term economic reasons would raise serious questions over "the long-term viability of the show, both as a place where exhibitors have a strong incentive to participate and as a valuable asset for the show producers and the Outdoor Industry Association."

Snow business

Another factor that went in Denver's favour was the fact that the Snow Show, which Emerald acquired in May from SIA, has taken place there since 2010. The president of SIA, Nick Sargent, revealed the organisation's "premium membership almost unanimously voted yes" to the sale at a board meeting on May 24 in Utah. This came after the board of directors recommended that the transaction be approved. "This is an incredible opportunity for our members and the industry as a whole," Mr Sargent said. "A combined show means a more effective platform for our members to do business and a greater return on their trade show investment." He added that it will also mean one less winter trade show "in an increasingly congested trade show landscape".



Nick Sargent, president of SnowSports Industries America (SIA), is confident that Emerald's acquisition of the Snow Show will be good for the winter sports industry.

SIA

Under Emerald's ownership, the SIA Snow Show will merge with the Outdoor Retailer Winter Market. The first Outdoor Retailer + Snow Show, which will be part of Emerald's Sports Group, will take place from January 25 to 28, 2018 in Denver. It will mark the start of the transition of Outdoor Retailer exhibitions to their new home. The 2018 Outdoor Retailer Summer Market will take place there in July before the Winter Market takes up its new slot in November. Outdoor Retailer announced this move in 2016, explaining that the show would shift to earlier dates from 2018/19. It will take place in November 2018, instead of January 2019, and continue in this slot from then on.

During its announcement that Denver had been chosen to host Outdoor Retailer, Emerald gave no information about show dates beyond 2018. This means that it remains unclear how the calendar will look from 2019. If the combined Outdoor Retailer + Snow Show were to take the Snow Show's traditional place on the calendar in January and the Winter Market took place separately in November, Emerald would be offering two winter-focused shows in two months. The alternative, perhaps a more likely one, is that one combined show will be held each November, leaving the January slot previously occupied by the Snow Show empty. Emerald says it will release details about future shows in the coming weeks.

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