

# Trade Show Executive

NOVEMBER 2020

News, Views and Tools for Trade Show and Event Executives

## ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE:

Our preview of the virtual and in-person program at this year's Expo! Expo!

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## CEIR PREDICT:

Sizing up the future when clear metrics don't exist

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## UPDATE FROM K-STREET:

Meet the advocacy force behind Go LIVE Together

### Ron Walden

*U.S. Group  
Vice President of  
Strategic Partnerships  
and Activation  
Reed Exhibitions USA*



THE TIME IS  
NOW

< COVER STORY



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Ron Walden, U.S. Group Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and Activation, Reed Exhibitions USA — Acknowledging the industry's gap in diversity and inclusion is the first step and then devising strategies to close that gap are essential to success, according to Walden, Reed's newly appointed Global Executive Sponsor for Race.

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COVID has not only damaged the economy but prevented the industry from gathering annual performance metrics. Figuring out the future when the data doesn't exist pushed the organizers of CEIR's Annual Exhibition Industry Outlook Conference to present things differently.

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Activism and education jump start the legislative process to get back to business for the event industry.



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The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted millions of businesses across the globe, especially those fighting in the live-events industry. Read what's on the minds and in the hearts of many in the business aligned with the GLT coalition in this special TSE series.

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The show goes on for Expo! Expo!, the leading U.S. trade event for trade show organizers, as it develops a hybrid approach for engaging and connecting the industry.

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# Slow and Steady Return for Domestic Events in China

FRANCES FERRANTE, Senior Editor

**BEIJING** — The return of domestic live and hybrid events, along with positive hotel and airline trends, point to a slow and steady recovery of the MICE sector in China.

In Beijing, three-quarters of hotels are now open and reporting increasing demand from domestic MICE events, such as Design China Beijing 2020. One of the first live shows to return, it attracted 15,000 visitors and 100 exhibitors to the National Agricultural Exhibition Centre on September 23-26.

In other good news, the number of domestic flights is close to pre-COVID levels. Some popular tourist attractions have recovered, or even, surpassed levels of incoming tourists over the same period last year, according to Jane Jie Sun, CEO of China's online travel agency, Trip.com Group, which made the announcement at the 2020 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing in early September — the first major international trade event to take place in China since the pandemic.

Cultural events are also starting back up, with the 10-day Beijing Music Festival taking place October 10-20 and the city having just held its first festival, The Strawberry Music Festival — usually held in the spring — on October 5.

## The Latest from Shanghai

Meanwhile, in Shanghai, live and hybrid shows have been moving forward, with a summer highlight being a hybrid version of Shanghai Fashion Week. A total of 100



runway shows took place at city landmarks including Xintiandi, One East Plaza and Taikoo Hui. Among other industry shows, the 46th CIFF Shanghai 2020 wrapped up on September 10, combining forces with the Shanghai International Furniture Machinery & Woodworking Machinery Fair 2020, and bringing 1,000 exhibitors and 118,409 industry professionals to the Shanghai Hongqiao National Exhibition & Convention Centre. The 22nd China International Industrial Expo took place September 15-19 at the Shanghai National Convention and Exhibition Center, with 500 new technologies and products on display.

The Shanghai New International Expo Center (SNIIEC), which reopened at the end of June, reported a steady schedule of events for the remainder of 2020 — just 20% off in exhibitors and visitors from 2019. In late September, Tube China, a trade fair for the tube and pipe industry, attracted 221 exhibitors; while earlier this year, wire China saw 640 Chinese companies showcase a wide range of products. In combination, these two shows brought 36,552 buyers to Shanghai.

## Looking Forward

In early September, the World Conference on Tourism Cooperation and Development met in Beijing, with the focus on boosting confidence and recovery in the tourism sector, including MICE. Secretary-General of the World Tourism Cities Federation and Director-General of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture

and Tourism Chen Dong pointed to the investment in the Asia-Pacific tourism sector in 2019 as having reached \$120 billion and accounting for 38% of all global tourism investment. He was optimistic in his assessment that tourism will remain the most attractive sector for investment post COVID-19.

Secretary-General Chen and other tourism leaders are looking to 2021 for a continued increase in domestic live and hybrid events, followed by a return of international MICE business later in the year and into 2022.

Kris Van Goethem, Managing Director, Thomas Cook MICE China, reported that inbound MICE business is not expected to come back in the first half of 2021, “So we continue to focus on domestic MICE business with an eye on international companies based in China.” He sees planning for MICE business happening in the second half of 2021 and into 2022.

“We expect to see in 2021 a continuation of primarily online events and an increasing amount of hybrid events being launched,” predicted Pacific Asia Travel Association CEO Dr. Mario Hardy. “The physical event will merge with the virtual, and organizers will focus more on the engagement of audiences.”

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## Dallas Market Center Sees Successful September Total Home & Gift Market

FRANCES FERRANTE, Senior Editor

DALLAS — The successful late-September Total Home & Gift Market signaled a strong return to business, attracting 67% of the buyers it did in 2019. That was a 10% gain from the August show, which also exceeded expectations. Attendance by home and design buyers was 78% compared with the previous year, and attendance by apparel and accessories buyers was more than 90% compared with the previous year.

By all indications, the numbers are moving in the right direction, said Cindy

Morris, President and CEO of Dallas Market Center. “What was uniquely successful about September Market was the opportunity for buyers to take time to conduct serious business before the holidays and the new year. We saw an impressive number of buyers who may normally visit in the summer.”

Another positive sign, said Morris, is the number of new buyers who attended the show for the first time, representing 9% of the total attendance, who “made the decision to visit Dallas in order to find everything they need efficiently and safely.” Over the

last 90 days, Dallas Market Center has seen a surge in new buyer applications from across the Central U.S., and attendance from 47 states at trade events and open houses.

More than 90% of showrooms featuring gift and home, holiday and floral, gourmet and housewares products, as well as fashion, were open for the September Market, including more than 60 new and expanded showrooms.

Total Home & Gift Market took place alongside Dallas Design Week, which offers interior designers in-person sessions as well as online events featuring experts such as Patti Carpenter, Christina Garcia, Nathan Hejl and Roz Murphy.

Safety protocols during the event included mandatory face coverings and temperature screening, a Market FastPass for low-contact entry, hand-sanitizing stations, limited food service, and signage for social distancing. The facility used open parking, large entryways, multiple registration areas and escalators, and limited access to showrooms to keep attendees socially distanced.

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## Seafood Expo Asia Goes Virtual

FRANCES FERRANTE, Senior Editor

PORTLAND, ME — Seafood Expo Asia Reconnect, produced by Diversified Communications, will take place virtually November 17–19 with the goal of connecting providers of seafood with high-volume Asian buyers, including importers, retailers, food service vendors and distributors.

As in previous years, the event will include business matchmaking services and an education program focused on front-of-mind topics in the Asian seafood market. “We are excited to bring this online to continue to facilitate business in this market,” said Liz Plizga, Group Vice President, Seafood Group and Integrative Healthcare, at Diversified Communications. “We are also excited to present a great lineup of speakers for the conference program, which features seafood business topics and a focus on the latest seafood sustainability efforts

in Asia with a dedicated Seafood Sustainability conference track.”

Show organizers are targeting a smaller number of suppliers and buyers than they attracted to the previous in-person version, with a goal of 50 to 60 seafood suppliers and more than 150 buyers from the retail and food service sectors. Despite the smaller size, they see this move to virtual as an opportunity to amplify the show’s impact. “We have tested digital formats in many of the industries we serve,” said Plizga. “It has helped us to extend our reach and provide another touchpoint. We are evaluating future opportunities to complement live events with digital to increase overall engagement.”

The plan for this and Diversified Communications’ other shows — much like the



rest of the industry — is to be able to return to a live event in 2021. “We have incorporated virtual and digital offerings where it makes sense for the various business communities we serve,” she added. “For 2021, we hope to return to in-person events and we will continue to evaluate contingencies.”

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# RON WALDEN SAYS THE TIME IS NOW

## BY ANDREA DOYLE

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**I**f not us, then who? If not now, then when?" is a question civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis asked his entire life. It is also a mantra that guides Ron Walden, U.S. Group Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and Activation of Reed Exhibitions USA, as the company's first Global Executive Sponsor for Race.

"I am very passionate about this work, about social equity, racial equality, and to be in this position to help facilitate Reed Exhibition's commitment to this cause is energizing," Walden said. "With all of this support, all this direction, all this clarity around what we stand for and what is important to us as an organization; if not us, then who, and if not now, then when."

Walden's role will hold Reed Exhibitions (RX) accountable and responsible for all its race and ethnic minority initiatives and commitments the company has to the communities in which it lives and operates.

There will be a focus on talent, recruiting, hiring, training, mentoring, promoting and rewarding a diverse workforce. RX will also impact its events and how it organizes and executes them, ensuring that Black and minority businesses and voices are heard across all sectors and in all countries.

"This is a marathon, not a sprint," Walden said about the fight for racial

equity. "We have to make sure that we take advantage of what is happening now in terms of the exposure and energy behind it. It's a tipping point for some, but for others, we've been at this for a long time."

**ANDREA:** You are Group Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and Activation of Reed Exhibitions, USA, and you were recently appointed as the company's first Global Executive Sponsor for Race. Can you tell us about your new role, what impact you hope to make in it, and what your vision is?

**RON:** My new role as the Executive Sponsor for Race, to sum it up, is holding the company accountable to the commitments that we have made, internally and externally. What I mean by that is the company, and our CEO Hugh Jones, are taking this opportunity — and these initiatives that impact our people, the community and our business — very seriously. As the Executive Sponsor of Race, I had the opportunity to form a global committee of talented, smart, passionate, resourceful people to help facilitate the fulfillment of those commitments. My vision is for us to be successful. We have to be able to reach the goals that we have set. They have to be measurable, they have to be attainable, and we have to share and report back on them, internally and externally. If we're able to do that in a sustainable fashion long-term, then we will have achieved our vision.



**Walden and his DOGG.** Walden at last year's ComplexCon, a catalyst for creative collaboration, held in Long Beach, CA.

**ANDREA:** What is the most rewarding part of your position so far?

**RON:** I have been very impressed with the committee members I am working with. I sent out a call to action email to our employees within the organization, and we had over 80 responses from people interested in participating. It's a very diverse group from France, the U.K., Brazil and the U.S. They are not only smart and intelligent, but their passion is what stands out for each member. This is volunteer work for them. We had to make sure that these people were

**Ron Walden**

*U.S. Group Vice President of  
Strategic Partnerships and Activation  
Reed Exhibitions USA*





“ I don't think the industry will get it right until the industry looks more like the customers in the industries we serve. To do that, we have to acknowledge that there's a gap, and we have to come up with plans to close the gap. ”

stakeholders in this and have the passion to match because that's what it's going to take to get us through all this. And so the most rewarding part has been working with this group of people that I'm blown away by.

**ANDREA:** COVID-19 has impacted all aspects of the industry. How has it affected you and your role in the company?

**RON:** COVID has impacted me like it has impacted most people in the trade show industry. Events came to a screeching halt. There's been an opportunity for us to re-imagine the way that we're doing business. One of the obvious ways was to employ digital events to help us stay connected to our exhibitors and attendees and to make sure that we maintain a foothold in our markets.

**ANDREA:** How important is diversity and inclusion today?

**RON:** Diversity and inclusion is essential not only today. It always has been. I learned early on that diversity and inclusion is good for business. But there are a lot of other reasons why we should be doing this — to support people, our communities and the industry. A lot of creativity and innovation come out of this and, ultimately, the idea is for your business to look like your customers and the industries you serve.

**ANDREA:** One of your favorite quotes, from John Lewis, the Civil Rights icon, is, "if not us, then who? If not now, then when?" Is that a quote that has always resonated with you?

**RON:** It hasn't been until recent times that this has become something that I've gravitated towards, because for a lot of folks, race relations, discrimination and systemic racism is not new. What I think is new is the attention that we have, the platforms we have and the social media exposure we have. I feel like now, more so than ever, that quote applies.



**We are the Champions.** Morris Taft, childhood friend; Ron Walden; James Bicos, childhood friend; Attorney Joe Faucher, partner at Trucker, Huss are victorious at Carl Spackler Memorial Golf Tournament.

**ANDREA:** Do you feel the killing of George Floyd was a tipping point in race relations?

**RON:** I think for some, yes, but for many people, this isn't new. My wife and I were having a conversation about this. My wife is Canadian, and she is white. She is a lifelong advocate for social justice, but at one point, she was angrier than me. I explained to her that I had been through the Watts riots in the '60s. I had been through the '90s and Rodney King, and Ferguson in 2014, and here we are again today. I explained that this is not new to me, and I'm glad that she's angry. And so this is a marathon, it's not a sprint. And we have to make sure that we take advantage of what is happening now in terms of the exposure and energy behind it. It's a tipping point for some, but for others, we've been at this for a long time.

**ANDREA:** Do you feel the trade show industry gets it right, as far as diversity is concerned?

**RON:** I don't think the industry will get it entirely right until the industry looks more like the customers in the sectors we serve. To do that, we have to acknowledge that there are gaps, and we have to come up with plans to close them. And that's

what has me really excited about the work that the committee is doing here at RX with the leadership of our CEO as well as our country presidents. We have a clear plan that is well-resourced, and we believe it is attainable.

We look to share those best practices. We're not creating them in a bubble or vacuum. This is something that we are going to be sharing with the industry. This reminds me of when I worked for Nike, and Nike came up with patented technology for water sustainability during the manufacturing process. Nike decided to make that technology an open source to all manufacturers because it's good for humanity. Similarly, the work that we're doing, the best practices and the benefits that come out of them, we will be sharing with others in the industry.

There are basically three buckets we are working on — people, community and business.

With our people, it's about how we show up in terms of representation of the under-represented. That can be gender, race, etc. That's one piece. Community is another piece. And so we've made a commitment to donate X amount of dollars over the course of the next couple of years toward nonprofits that are aligned with our initiatives. And then business and what that means with regards to the exhibitors, the



attendees, the temporary workers and the industries as a whole that we serve.

**ANDREA:** When people talk about diversity in the trade show industry, what are some of the fundamentals they are getting wrong?

**RON:** That's a big question, and I will tell you the initial thought that comes to mind. Whose responsibility is it, and where do we start? I believe that it starts at the top, and it starts with leadership. Reed Exhibitions' most senior leaders are deeply committed to the fundamentals of diversity and inclusion.

You have to acknowledge that there is a problem, assess where you are in relation to the issues, identify the gaps, create actionable and attainable goals to close those gaps, provide resources to fulfill the plan, report on results and be transparent. And then ultimately, we want to be able to share their best practices with the industry.

**ANDREA:** What are other ways trade show executives can help with the social justice movement?

**RON:** There are a plethora of organizations out there that are available for people to join, and I can provide you a laundry list of them. Get involved outside of your immediate business. Get involved in the community. I think that's a good place to start.

**ANDREA:** Is there anyone who mentored you early in your career or helped you become the type of public servant you have become?

**RON:** This is personal, and I'm comfortable sharing. It has been my sponsor. On June 3, 2020, I celebrated my 27th year of sobriety. And I learned early on from my sponsor that we keep what we have by giving it away. And so inherent in that is the call to be of service. So that's the number one person that I would attribute that to.

I've also learned early on from one of my first mentors in the trade show industry, Joe Loggia, President and CEO of Advanstar and MAGIC. Most recently, one of my strongest advocates has been Hervé Sedky, who has been very supportive of the roles that I have, the opportunities that I've had to be of service, and particularly in this role.

**ANDREA:** How important is mentoring?

**RON:** I think it's super important. I recently read a quote from Richard Branson: "Train people well enough so they can leave. Treat them well enough so they don't want to."

I believe that mentoring helps develop strengths while it mitigates the weaknesses. And I think that this allows people to be the best iteration of themselves in our business and in the culture we're trying to establish.

**ANDREA:** How did you get started in this industry?

**RON:** I started as an exhibitor in the fashion industry. For years, I attended the MAGIC Fashion Trade Show, established some relationships and contacts there. The young men's streetwear markets were emerging. They reached out to me and offered me a job as a show manager. I worked as a show manager, then became a sales manager. I left the industry and then came back four years later as the Vice President of Sales for the MAGIC Trade Show.

**ANDREA:** What is your proudest accomplishment?

**RON:** The accomplishments I take the most pride in relate to teams and working with teams and development. I have always prided myself in being able to identify talent, to invest in that talent, and then to make sure that the people have the best opportunity to advance in the organization. When I worked at Nike, despite titles and roles, your job was always to find your replacement. And so a great deal of emphasis on your performance was put on your ability to develop and promote talent.

**ANDREA:** What attributes or qualities have you developed that have helped you become successful?

**RON:** The three things that I try to focus on is number one, being a good listener. I learned early on that you have two ears and one mouth, so we should spend twice as much time listening as talking. I try to keep an open mind. If you aren't open to other people's thoughts and ideas, you'll be left with your own; but if you are open, then you can factor in those other thoughts and ideas, and worst-case scenario, you can always default back to your own, right? But the more information you have, the better equipped you are to make the right decision, hopefully. And I'm fiercely competitive. I grew up playing sports and have been in sales all my life and have been very competitive in that.

**ANDREA:** How do you define success?

**RON:** As a journey and not a destination.



**Meeting of the Minds.** Left to right, Ron Artest, former Los Angeles Laker; Ron Frierson, Director of Economic Policy for Los Angeles; John Black, former VP of Public Relations, Los Angeles Lakers; Ron Walden.

## FAST FACTS

### When I was a kid, I wanted to ...

"Be Like Mike." This was a Gatorade ad campaign, and this ties back to my love for basketball and sports. When I worked at Nike, I had the good fortune of working on the Jordan brand.

### What I'd like to do when I'm not working is ...

Spend time with my family traveling and eating our way around the world, which, unfortunately, has come to a screeching halt, due to COVID-19.

### If I could change one thing, it would be ...

Everything. There's a story behind that. I've already shared that I'm in recovery. Part of what I learned early on was when they said, "Ron, this is really simple. You only have to change one thing." And I got excited because I can manage one thing. And when I asked what the one thing is, they said, "Everything."

### If I could have one superpower ...

I would choose the power to heal.

### What's on my bucket list ...

Travel. I've never been one to sit down and write out a bucket list, but I will tell you that I have lived a blessed life. And particularly, even before working for Nike, I've had the good fortune of meeting people and going places that I think would make it to other people's bucket lists. Then you add the time that I was at Nike and my love of sports and some of the opportunities and moments I had.

Now, it's all about travel. I have a desire to play the top 500 holes around the world in golf. I have a desire to eat at restaurants in different countries and experience different cultures. Everything for me is just around travel.

### The one thing that people would be surprised to learn about me ...

I'm shy.

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