



# Trade Show Industry Comeback Set In Stone

World of Concrete Paves the Way for Other Trade Shows



Photo by J. Ludwig

(ABOVE) Trade Shows Are a Go. World of Concrete opened with much fanfare, including a ribbon-cutting attended by industry leaders, elected officials, and in typical Vegas fashion, lots of sparkle.

(RIGHT) A WOC Celebration. Back together and it feels so good.



## BY ANDREA DOYLE

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**W**hat was the secret behind the success of the World of Concrete (WOC), the first trade show to be held in the West Hall of the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC) when it was there June 8-10, just a week after Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak lifted the ban on large gatherings? Collaboration.

The industry came together to support this bellwether gathering, with Informa Markets taking the lead.

The stakes were high and the pressure was intense as all eyes were on the WOC,

the first major trade show to be held in the United States since the start of the pandemic. The timing was opportune, as COVID-19 cases in the U.S. were down in June as more Americans continued to get vaccinated.

“2020 was a tough year as the entire events industry came to a screeching halt. To pull this off, we needed some of our team members to evolve into other roles. They had to step up and step out of their comfort zones, and I can’t be prouder of what they accomplished,” Nancy Walsh, Informa Markets’ President, North America, shared with

*Trade Show Executive* on-site during a short break she took to chat with us. She worked shoulder to shoulder with her team and was in Las Vegas to welcome the tens of thousands of members of the concrete, construction and masonry industries who converged on the convention center for this vital show. She will be returning to Las Vegas countless times this year as WOC opened the floodgates for other Informa keystone events.

WOC marked the opening of LVCC’s West Hall, a nearly \$1 billion investment, as well as the Underground Loop built by Elon Musk’s Boring Co. that transports

people around the LVCC in Teslas in two minutes, reducing the time for what is typically a 25-minute walk.

The 1.4-million-square-foot West Hall is impressive, featuring contemporary design and 600,000 square feet of exhibition space, including 328,000 square feet of column-free space — the largest column-free exhibition space in North America. The addition of the West Hall brings the total meeting space to 14 million square feet and makes the LVCC the second-largest facility in the country.

After Sisolak announced a reopening plan in March, Informa put the wheels in motion for this June show. There was no time to waste, as what would ordinarily take a year to plan had to be accomplished in only three months.

Typically held in January, this June show featured more than 650 exhibitors across 300,000 nsf of exhibit space, smaller than usual as this is the busiest time of the year for masons and contractors. “The pent-up demand was huge, and those in attendance were serious and here to do business,” Walsh said.

In January 2022, WOC will return to its usual time slot. The June show opened with much fanfare, including a ribbon-cutting attended by industry leaders and elected officials; and, in typical Vegas fashion, featured lots of sparkle.

“World of Concrete is grateful for the support of all the participating exhibitors and attendees who braved the heat of a June event, and paved the way for an even larger and stronger return in January 2022,” Jackie James, WOC Group Director, said. “We would like to thank them, along with our cosponsoring associations and media partners who supported this endeavor throughout a very challenging 15 months leading up to this important industry event.”

The show operated at previously approved limits of 80 percent capacity and with extra-wide aisles to help with social distancing. Temperature screenings awaited at the entrance and hand-sanitizing stations were found throughout the center. With health and safety and the show’s theme in mind, the aisles were not carpeted revealing polished cement.



Energy Abounds. The Las Vegas Convention Center was bustling during WOC.

### Safety First

“In addition to the recommendations provided by the CDC and Clark County, we surveyed our customers to understand what additional safety measures were important to them, to ensure that we are doing the right thing by our community,” Kevin Thornton, Senior Vice President, Operations, Informa Markets, said. “As the first large-scale trade show to return to the U.S. market, we understand we have a responsibility to prioritize the safety of our participants, and I think we have done a good job of following expert guidance in a facility that equally values safety and customer experience.”

Samantha Moore, CMP, CEM, Senior Director, Meetings and Education, American Bakers Association (ABA) and

Assistant Secretary, International Baking Industry Exposition (IBIE), flew to Vegas to support the WOC and industry peers. She is the operations and planning lead for IBIE, the Western Hemisphere’s largest baking industry trade show — jointly owned by ABA and the Bakery Equipment Manufacturers Association (BEMA) — and the grain sector’s most important event every three years at the LVCC, and is gearing up for her September 2022 show.

“A highlight for me was seeing the industry rally around WOC as a whole. They were not the first to meet; many organizations have had smaller expos and meetings for months, but the size and the type of event in Las Vegas was a first,

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# The Show Must Go On

Las Vegas, a city that glitters day and night, demonstrates to the rest of the world that the show must go on. As trade show executives and attendees converge on Las Vegas, they will find a city emerging with new venues and attractions. From CAESARS FORUM, Allegiant Stadium, Resorts World Las Vegas, The Expo at World Market and Area 15 to the Las Vegas Convention Center's expansion, reinvention is the norm, and that didn't stop during the COVID-19 shutdown.

In true Las Vegas fashion, openings are filled with pizzazz. Sir Richard Branson and his colorful entourage opened the new Virgin Hotels Las Vegas with an event that included a show headlined by Christina Aguilera.

Even the opening of a new restaurant has Vegas flair. Award-winning chef Bobby Flay was helping in the kitchen when he wasn't taking photos with patrons who were on hand for the opening of his new Italian restaurant in Caesars Palace — Amalfi by Bobby Flay.

He visited our table, sharing his passion for Italy and its cuisine. "You should be filling your table with fish, pasta, salads, appetizers," he said. "Desserts include Bobby's Pistachio Sundae, what I eat at the end of every night."

Allegiant Stadium, the \$1.9 billion, 65,000-seat, state-of-art domed stadium with a translucent roof and home of the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders, was built with groups in mind. There are more than 10 versatile spaces that can accommodate groups as large as 65,000 attendees. Allegiant is as unique as the city it calls home, with highlights including a 95-foot Al Davis Memorial Torch and sliding doors that open to the Las Vegas Strip. Raiders memorabilia abounds, as do pieces that pay homage to Sin City icons including the Rat Pack, Elvis, Marilyn Monroe and Evel Knievel.

Boasting more than 315,000 square feet of space, The Expo @ WMCLV has come on the scene as Downtown Las Vegas' largest event venue.

Area 15 is the world's first purpose-built experiential entertainment complex that sprawls over 50,000 square feet and includes immersive activities, bars and dining.

Branson was excited about Virgin Hotels Las Vegas, Curio Collection by Hilton, and for good reason. This new property features 1,500-plus lifestyle chambers and suites in three towers; a 5-acre pool complex that includes VIP-style cabanas and daybeds, along with a beach club; more than 130,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space that can accommodate groups of up to 10,000; an outdoor event lawn and a 4,500-person theater.

On June 24, Resorts World Las Vegas, a \$4.3 billion integrated resort that brings together three premium Hilton brands under one neon-clad roof — Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Conrad Hotels & Resorts, and Crockfords LXR Hotels & Resorts — with 3,500 total guest rooms, 250,000 square feet of meeting space and a 5,000-capacity entertainment venue opened to much anticipation. A shiny red tower with 40 restaurants and bars, Resorts World also features a street food market, seven pool experiences and a shopping mall with a giant LED glove.

"This is Hilton's largest resort in the world," Kelly Knowlen, Executive Director, Sales Engagement and Special Events of Hilton, said. "Plus, it's the first facility to have all three brands under one roof and the first hotel to open on The Strip in 10 years."

Up and down The Strip, tried-and-true resort favorites have new attractions that trade show attendees shouldn't miss. Wynn Las Vegas has an all-new Lake of Dreams show, a multimedia experience that blends colorful puppetry, an immersive soundtrack and state-of-the-art sound and lighting to Wynn's signature water attraction.

Last year, Wynn Las Vegas unveiled its new 430,000 square foot meeting and convention expansion. Unique to



Turning Heads. The \$4.3 billion Resorts World Las Vegas opens; Creativity abounds at Virgin Hotels Las Vegas; Elon Musk's Boring Company's futuristic tunnels transport visitors around the convention center campus.



Reinvention Vegas Style. The Venetian Resort's reimagine pool deck; LVCC's new West Hall; Venetian Cabanas impress; Virgin Hotels Las Vegas, Curio Collection swings open its doors.

the expansion are a 20,000-square-foot outdoor pavilion with an adjacent 20,000-square-foot lawn, a 2,500-square-foot hospitality lounge featuring a state-of-the-art, 72-foot-by-9-foot LED video wall, and a remarkably engineered 83,000-square-foot pillarless ballroom — the largest at the resort and one of the largest in Las Vegas.

Wynn and Encore Las Vegas consist of two luxury hotel towers with 4,748 hotel rooms, suites and villas. The resort features 20 dining experiences, 11 bars, approximately 560,000 square feet of meeting and convention space, two showrooms, two nightclubs, a beach club, and recreation and leisure facilities including the recently renovated Wynn Golf Club and 18-hole, 129-acre championship golf course.

The Venetian Resort showed off its reimaged pool deck during the

Meeting Professionals International World Education Congress. The closing night celebration and MPI Foundation Rendezvous party was the first celebration held here. The 5-acre rooftop pool deck spans The Venetian and The Palazzo hotel towers and includes 11 pools and eight spas.

The Stella Studio is a new multifunctional venue in The Palazzo tower that features more than 8,000 square feet of space that is highly customizable to meet the needs of small to midsized groups.

Circa Resort & Casino opened at the end of 2020 as a part of the Fremont Street Experience. It features 777 rooms and suites, a multitiered pool amphitheater and the longest indoor bar in Nevada.

Another exciting development in the city is the underground tunnel that transports trade show attendees around

the Las Vegas Convention Center in Teslas, created by Elon Musk's Boring Co. These futuristic tunnels transport passengers throughout the convention center campus 40 feet underground in less than two minutes, covering a distance that can take up to 20 minutes or more to walk. Plans have been announced to expand the system throughout the resort corridor with tunnels leading to resorts, including Wynn and Resorts World.

The Loop isn't the city's only step into the future. Taking shape is the MSG Sphere at The Venetian, a \$1.8 billion next-generation entertainment venue slated to open in 2023. This globe-shaped venue will boast the largest and highest-resolution LED screen on Earth, and will surround the audience in an immersive environment.



Walls Built and Torn Down. WOC tore down the metaphoric walls keeping trade shows at bay, so it was ironic a highlight was a bricklaying championship.

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and a real indicator that the expo and meetings industry is coming back,” Moore said. “I had the opportunity to meet with some of my Freeman and mdg partners — friends who I have not seen in months, who are so integral to my show. It was so great to sit down and catch up but also get some business done, all while sitting in the new food court in West Hall.”

WOC was a barometer for many. “Having the World of Concrete convene and have a great show was a major indicator of progress and meeting safety,” Moore said. “I felt very comfortable as a fully vaccinated attendee with the measures they took to ensure our safety. I liked the wristband concept for temperature readings.”

## WOC Marks Comeback of North American Trade Shows

“Hopefully, this show goes down in history as the beginning of revitalization in North America,” Tommy Blitsch, Director of Trade Shows and Conventions for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, said. “We’re appreciative that Informa is dedicated to Las Vegas. They could have pulled the plug, but didn’t.”

Steve Hill, president and CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA), echoes Blitsch’s appreciation. “I am so thankful that Informa went out on a limb with us and made the decision to go ahead with World of Concrete in the midst of a pandemic,” Hill said. Ironically, three decades ago, Hill owned a concrete company that worked on the Mirage in 1989. “To think that I attended my first World of Concrete in 1982 makes me realize how full circle this is. Over the past 15 months, this entire industry had completely disappeared in Las Vegas. That

meant tens of thousands were out of work, and \$11 billion of economic impact a year was completely gone.”

WOC was more than just a concrete show. “This is our rebirth,” Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn Goodman said during the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Charlie McCurdy, CEO of Informa Markets, emphasized the depth of the opening of this trade show. “The widespread and lasting impact this pandemic has had is far-reaching both personally and professionally, and being here today is a testament to humanity and is a beacon of hope for the return of conventions,” he said.

The WOC show has ranked in TSE’s Gold 100 a staggering 13 times and has made the Fastest 50 on three separate occasions. Its 2019 show, the last show ranked in the Gold 100, ranked 13th with 773,885 nsf, 1,504 exhibiting companies and 60,338 attendees. Its 2008 show was a TSE Gold 100 Grand Award winner for Most Innovative Practices.

Even though the amount of time Informa had to plan WOC was compressed, innovations abounded. One of the most talked-about transformations was the WOC digital badges. QR codes were sent to attendees with directions to save in an app such as Apple Wallet. The reasoning behind digital badges was part of Informa’s commitment to sustainability, better data for customers, and health and safety, as there was no need to cue up at a registration desk. But exhibitors commented they missed the ability to see who they were talking to with a glance.

“The pandemic shifted human behavior. Things shouldn’t be the same as we come out of this crisis, and this is just one example,” Thornton said. “It’s important to evolve and innovate.” He

added that Informa is committed to continuing with digital badges even when health and safety are less of a concern.

As American Bakers Association’s Moore explored the show floor, she chatted with many exhibitors about their experiences navigating the new space. “It came up again and again how much they missed the badges. Citing it was cumbersome to scan phones for lead retrieval, let alone have some idea who they were talking to. I also found it time-consuming to have to wrangle the phone and find the QR code to get scanned into the halls. I love badges for that reason. I do understand that the decision was made earlier in the process, and it was too late to change once the news broke of Las Vegas lifting restrictions, and I bet they will be back for future shows,” Moore said.

The key to continued success in the trade show industry after the COVID-19 shutdown, according to Rick Simon, President and CEO of United Service Companies and Chairman of TSE, is making attendees feel safe. “Trade show executives must not only make people safe but must make them feel safe. Remember, safety is a primal instinct,” Simon said.

WOC did a great job of achieving that goal, according to Simon. “The protocols will be with us forever, and will always be evolving,” he said. Electrostatic spraying and temperature checks may evolve, but hand sanitizing stations are here to stay with air purification being the next frontier. To ensure the health and safety of attendees and exhibitors, GBAC STAR facilities like the LVCC are ideal because they have the tools to prepare, respond and recover from any outbreaks. “As a GBAC STAR accredited service provider, we feel very comfortable advising and servicing all of our customers,” Simon said.

No matter the nuances, WOC marks the beginning of a long-awaited revival of trade shows that is encouraging for not only Las Vegas, but the entire U.S. economy.

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