

DISPATCHES

CGTA GIFT SHOW: BUYERS OUT IN FULL FORCE



By Erica Kirkland
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The crowded aisles at the Spring 2010 CGTA Gift Show had jaws dropping up and down the aisles. With the current economic situation being what it is, exhibitors really had no idea what to expect. Imagine their delight when the parking lot filled up and retailers showed up on mass ready to write orders. And exhibitors didn't disappoint - there were plenty of new products to go around.

During a networking dinner which the Canadian Gift & Tableware Association (CGTA) hosts on the Saturday night before every show, the past and current CGTA

Retailers of the Year in attendance were ready to stock their shelves for spring after "good" to "best-ever" fourth quarters. Nancy Boudreau from La Crème Décor in Guelph and St. Jacobs, Ont., was looking for "Girls Night Out" themed giftware and barware while kitchenware retailers Jill Wilcox of Jill's Table in London, Ont., and Fred Pritchard from Golda's Kitchen in Mississauga, Ont., were on the hunt for new housewares and tabletop products in general as their customers ramped up at-home cooking and entertaining. Exhibitors were on the same wave length. On the show floor, suppliers responded with a slew of new products in this category. Fondue sets from **Trudeau** with fun and modern graphics caught my eye along with fabulously stylish aprons and fur wine bottle collars from **Candym Enterprises**.

While home entertaining may be trending up, some retailers at our "Meeting of the Minds" get-together mentioned a drop in home décor sales. Dianne Acheson of Acheson's Gifts & Decorative Accessories in Orangeville and Harriston, Ont., said that many of her customers have already bought a house full of accessories and/or simply don't want any more "stuff." On the other hand, Sandra Asta of Crafted Décor in Streetsville and Oakville, Ont., said her customers were willing to buy large furniture pieces as long as they had unique selling propositions. In contrast, functional and giftable home décor items, including vases and candles retailing for under \$20, were noted good sellers.

For many retailers, fashion accessories are taking the place of home décor. The items are functional - which is very important to consumers right now - fun, affordable and a great way to update a wardrobe, not to mention an ideal cash-counter item. From fashion readers, purses and scarves to purse organizers and jewellery, retailers at the "Meeting of the Minds" noted the growing importance of this category and swapped information on best-selling products. On the show floor, **Artizan** did a fabulous job of stopping buyers in their tracks by demonstrating the many ways their fashion accessories could be worn. Products included a one-size-fits-most cardigan and a bendable necklace which can be used as a hair accessory or boot adornment. As owner Robin Barre noted, one-size-fits-most clothing is a great item for gift stores to carry because most don't have the space to incorporate dressing rooms.

Back at our networking event, retailers shared the lessons they had learned from the past year. Stasia Nawrocki from Dansk Gifts in Edmonton said the recession helped her zero in on the products most important for her store and customers - gifts. "People may not be buying for themselves, but they'll always need gifts for birthdays, anniversaries, weddings and other special occasions."

Focusing on sweet-spot price points (identified as items retailing for under \$20 and up to \$50) was another way retailers weathered the economic storm. In addition, determining and focusing on bestselling price points within each product category was a valuable piece of advice offered by Karin Vermeer of Vermeer's Garden Centre in Welland, Ont.

Now that the show is over and everyone has returned to their stores eagerly awaiting delivery of new products, the focus is on spring and summer selling. I'd love to know what innovative marketing, merchandising, events and advertising campaigns you have up your sleeves to attract customers in the slower spring and summer months. Drop me a line at erica@cgta.org. I'd be delighted to highlight your ideas in the March/April edition of *Retail News*.