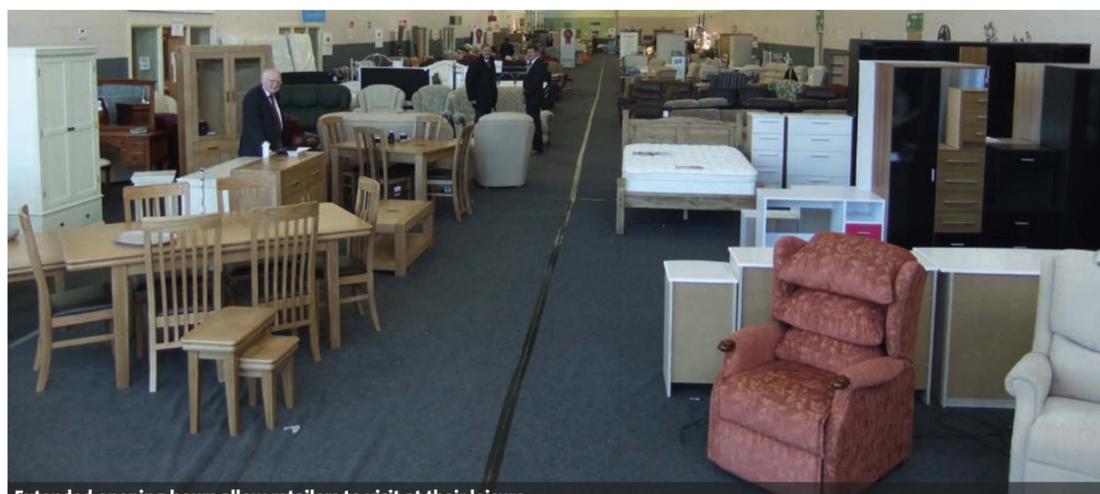


Organic Growth



The South West Furniture Show is attracting increasing interest

Cabinet Maker talks to Patrick Gulliford, chairman of The South West Furniture Manufacturers Agent and Representatives Federation, to find out why this years South West Furniture Show is set to be the biggest edition yet



Extended opening hours allow retailers to visit at their leisure

Rarely a week passes without Cabinet Maker receiving an invitation to a furniture trade show in some part of the world or another. And while these increasingly appear to be trying to out do the last in an effort to prove that they are the biggest and best the industry has to offer, we can't help but feel that many are all style and no substance. It's a little like eating a microwave dinner – superficially it looks fine, but deep down you can't help but question if it really provides any sustenance?

By contrast, a quick look over the exhibitor list for the upcoming South West Furniture Show reads rather like the ingredients of a hearty home cooked meal. A selection of established names known to be conducive to a healthy business, with no additives or gimmicks, just good quality product served in a manner that's easy to digest.

So when Cabinet Maker



The addition of show vans has added even greater choice

The essence of the South West Show is to be of assistance to all buyers whether they have large or small shops

spoke with show organiser Patrick Gulliford, the chairman of The South West Furniture Manufacturers Agent & Representatives Federation, we had to ask if he felt the event provides a more balanced, organic approach than some of its national and international contemporaries.

"The South West Furniture Show is a buying show for grass root buyers of the Independent trade, which is the foundation of our industry," says Patrick. "The majority of the exhibitors are manufacturing in the UK, which is something that should be supported more by the national exhibitions. Part of the event's appeal is that we don't have the pressure or the distractions national shows have, which makes buyers more relaxed and return to our show year after year."

Unsurprisingly, as more and more retailers are taking advantage of the show's emphasis on fresh, local produce, more and more UK manufacturers are clamouring to be a part of the event. So has there been a noticeable increase in demand for exhibition space at this year's show?

"Demand for exhibition space has been slightly higher this year than last year now that the increasing success of the show is filtering back to more manufacturers and suppliers. Because it is a well-run budget show it can be a good showcase for the smaller British companies who do not have the finance to attend a national show."

There is certainly no doubt that the format of the show lends itself well to smaller manufacturers, providing them with an exceptional platform upon which to reach a crucial buying region. However, that isn't to say that the event doesn't also attract many of



Focused on furniture. The South West Show doesn't rely on gimmicks

the industry's most influential names. Patrick reveals:

"We have a good selection of brands at the show including Sherborne, Alston's, Kingstown, and Celebrity who are some of the stalwarts of the show. But in addition to these we also have for the first time this year Lebus, and Mark Webster Designs adding to the list."

With more big name brands joining the fold, it is clear that the show is growing in stature. So given that so many other UK trade shows have seen some significant overhauls already this year, is the South West Show about to follow suit?

"We are keeping to the same format as previous years, as we believe there is no point in changing for change's sake and the feedback from our members supports this," Patrick tells us.

The feedback and opinion of members is something that has greatly shaped the evolution of the South West Show. Created by people with vast industry experience, specifically to help suppliers and retailers in the most effective way possible, The South West Show is tailor made to succeed. In fact, many of the



The show enjoys a relaxed atmosphere

subtle changes and additions to the event in recent years have arisen as a direct response from those who the show is targeted at.

"I firmly believe that shows organised by people in the industry that take guidance from members makes for a successful show as everyone has a part of its success. We meet our buyers day in, day out and rely on their feedback."

Amongst the changes that have been suggested and subsequently delivered upon by the show is extended opening hours, to allow buyers to attend the show without it impacting

on the running of their own stores. Discussing this Partick says:

"The essence of the South West Show is to be of assistance to all buyers whether they have large or small shops. Extended opening hours is a priority for a lot of buyers and helps to make them more relaxed. Nothing can be more frustrating for buyers than getting delayed and having to rush around an exhibition and sometimes missing that hidden gem of a company they may be looking for. Many people take advantage of our extended opening hours with Wednesday trading being the most productive."

Another aspect that has been warmly received by buyers and exhibitors alike is the addition of supplier's show vans to the proceedings. In addition to new products being displayed on the exhibition floor inside the Sedgemoor Auction Centre, more and more exhibitors have been bringing along show vans to display even more ranges and provide even greater choice. So will this be happening at the upcoming 2014 event too?

"Show vans have helped our agents enormously in maximising the use of available space. Additional show vans have been an incredible success previously and help add to the character of the show on a pleasant September day."

As previously mentioned it is becoming more and more evident that trade shows are feeling compelled to distinguish themselves in the eyes of their target audience. So as our conversation draws to a close we feel it is only right to ask Patrick how he feels the south West Show differentiates itself from the other events of the trade show calendar?

"As a show we distinguish ourselves by being held at the right time, in the right place and above all, by being a caring and listening show for all buyers, with no frills or unnecessary distractions," says Patrick, before concluding: "Our exhibitors want to sell, and our buyers want to buy."

Sounds like a recipe for success by any trade show's standards. ■