

# Changing Plans

by Patrick Sarver

*The cancellation of DécorExpo in Atlanta, as a result of the events of September 11, put a dent in the plans of framers and manufacturers this fall and left a number of people making alternative plans. PFM talked to industry people throughout the country to see how the show's cancellation and other economic factors were affecting their businesses. Here is a sampling of what they had to say.*

**Michael Murphy, President,  
Michael Murphy Gallery, Tampa,**

**FL:** “We would have gone to Atlanta. Even though there were some concerns about flying, I felt very strongly that we not let the terrorist attack changes our way of living. I know it was a hard decision and a very costly one, but I still wonder if it was the right decision. I don't think canceling Atlanta is affecting our ability to do business this fall, though, or that there will be any long-term effects from it.

We were considering buying a couple of \$14,000 saws and a \$20,000 laminator, but now we're taking a wait-and-see attitude on that. And instead of seeing new lines at the show, we'll have reps coming here with their samples. We're also going to fly some people down to a supplier in another part of Florida. I also think [this] could push Las Vegas into a much bigger show. We will go to Vegas show, just not with as many people.

“The biggest disappointment for me was missing the education and the face-to-face meeting with vendors. We were taking five people. It was a stretch for me, but I felt like it was a strong show and not that far from us, which makes it much more doable than Las Vegas or New York. It's hard to quantify that, but my sales staff would have been rejuvenated from seeing the newest things

and talking to people in industry.

“Overall, we are way down because of the events of September 11. We were headed into a recession, and September 11 pushed us there faster. Normally, we would be ramping up for the season. Instead, we're a little under breaking even every week. Come spring, I think we'll be back to normal, but we could have a rocky season. We carry high-end framing and art, and our clients were definitely affected. But I'm optimistic that this will be a short-term process and we'll weather it just fine.”

**Skip Luberto, Owner, Quality Saw  
& Knife, West Babylon, NY:**

“I think they made the right call by canceling the show. Nobody wanted to fly. And business is kind of secondary to what's going on in the country. Exhibitors like me still lost a tremendous amount of money, not just in lost revenue but also in expenses. And I only had two small booths. I had also put together a big ad campaign in conjunction with the show in Atlanta, and I've had to stop advertising now because funds are tighter. My concern now is what's going to happen with the frame show in Manhattan in March.”

**Merrill Grayson, Owner,  
Picture Perfect of Nora Corners,  
Indianapolis, IN:** “The canceling of the show won't impact my busi-

ness much. I signed up for five education classes, and I planned on doing a little bit of buying—the typical year's supply of hardware and such. I also intended to look at computer mat cutters. I just need to sit down and play with them hands-on a bit before deciding. So now I'll just put off buying one until next year. As for hardware and supplies, suppliers are running their show specials anyway and have mailed that information. I'm not sure that the cancellation is going to impact retailers. The impact's going to be on the small exhibitors, people who generate sales from the show.”

**Derek Vandenberg, Owner, Frame of  
Reference, Bigfork, MT:**

“My primary goal for Atlanta was to buy a computerized mat cutter. We looked at one last year and were going to look again now that we've finished remodeling our shop. We certainly would have bought moulding and mat board and things like that as well. Instead, we have put the computerized mat cutter on hold until Las Vegas. Most vendors are pretty good about sending their new sample lines. But we're not going to be buying box quantities of moulding to gear up from Christmas. We're very tactile, and I want to see things and touch them before I buy them.

“The impact on our business from canceling the show was mini-

mal. Rather than buying new stuff, we're going to work really hard instead at selling what we've got and try to increase profitability by not spending as much. Since we go to Las Vegas, the education wasn't as important to us, either. But I was just appointed to the board of PPFA, and we were looking forward to the discussion about joining the PMA. Instead, we'll do more of that by e-mail and phone. The thing that I'll miss the most, perhaps, was Atlanta was going to be our vacation this year.

"I think events in general have had more impact on our business, which has been slower because of September 11. We're located in a fairly tourist-based economy, and a lot of our customers are upper-middle and upper-class tourists. This year, the buyers that normally come in September never showed up. The fairly well-to-do traveler without children, who we normally see this time of year, is just not making an art purchase.

If September 11 pushes us into a recession, based on everything that I understand, businesses like art and picture framing tend to do fairly well comparatively. In a recession, people don't spend hundreds of dollars on dinner or don't buy new cars; they spend a lot of time at home. People look around their houses and say, 'We need something on that wall.' So I feel pretty optimistic."

**Edd Pratt, Sales & Marketing Manager, Wizard International, Mukilteo, WA:** "Like many companies, there was concern about flying into Atlanta, but no one here indicated that they were not going to go. We had three products we were going to show: new DaVinci software, free

mat cutting software, and our rental program. DaVinci, our printing process, has new additions to the software that we were excited about showing. That won't happen until the next trade show. We had a free version of our mat cutting software that we were going to give away at the show. We were hoping that when people used the software, they might be more inclined to give our rental program a try. Our largest month for replacing mat cutters is September.

"We were in the process of taking on a nationwide distributor group. Since the show was canceled, we have brought on many of those distributors. That's not a direct result of the show, but we are emphasizing it more now. We'll be running specials through those distributors that we may not have done before to get some business that we lost.

We're also emphasizing the distributors because our junior rental program is aimed at a different group of framers, small shops that may not be able to even get to trade shows to see computerized equipment. We're visiting them with a portable demonstration unit showing our computerized mat cutter."

**Curt Brey, Director of Marketing, Fletcher-Terry, Farmington, CT:** "For us, not having the show was a big blow because we had a planned a major introduction, a new Internet service called FramerSolutions. While it is doing very well via advertising, not having the Atlanta exposure is certainly missed. We also planned to preview a software upgrade, version 3.0, for the F6100 mat cutter.

"We've been scrambling to figure out how to get the same level of information out to the same number of people. We'll be creating a num-

ber of campaigns involving advertising and direct mail and expanding our trade show exposure through the second quarter of next year. We've more than doubled our presence at the West Coast show in Las Vegas, for example, and doubled our educational sessions there as well. We'll also have a bigger presence in Orlando and in March in New York.

"So I don't see any long-term effects from this. The industry is strong enough to miss one show. It won't have a national effect. The economy has a tenfold greater effect than the cancellation of the show. Economic and world affairs will determine what really happens for everyone. If the economy were like it was at this time last year, the Atlanta show really wouldn't matter."

**David Garrett, President, Bendix Moulding, Orangeburg, NY:** "I do wish they hadn't canceled the show, although I know it wouldn't have been that strong. I didn't want the attack to affect people's lives. I wanted to make a stand, to go on in as normal a fashion as we possibly could. I had planned to introduce an entire new line of moulding at Atlanta. Now, I'll have to send out my salesmen to do the marketing. What I could have accomplished in three days at the show will take me 30 to 45 days in the field, showing the line to everybody and getting an idea on which direction it should take.

"As for losses from the show itself, I'm not sure what we're going to be refunded. But I will be able to recoup my sales with my salesmen on the road. Sales will come in, just later. So the first month or two, there will be an impact. Long term,

*(continued on page 133)*

(continued from page 74)

I don't think there will be much.

"I talk to a lot of people in the industry, and most of them are in the same situation. They were making major introductions for the fall, and all those introductions are being delayed or done in a more haphazard way now. So I am also seriously considering attending other shows, using those dollars I would have spent on Atlanta at other locations.

"Business fell apart in September. I live in New York, and the effect was immediate and horrifying. We had a terrible month, the worst I can ever remember. There had been a softening in our industry since April, but there was a severe downturn due to the attack. We do business all across the country, with sales affected from New York to California. People were not interested in buying frames for about a two-week period or so, but it's starting to come back now."

**Neil Bartlett, Vice President of Sales, Universal Moulding,**

**Los Angeles, CA:** "We go to Atlanta to generate as much distribution of the new product lines as we can at this time of the year and to sell everything. Atlanta is always a good show for writing orders, and canceling it has slowed down the process of distribution and getting people to see the

product. Obviously, the quantity of the business we do at the trade show is not going to be there this year. That's the biggest impact.

"Instead, we're actively doing more mailings and additional advertising in magazines. And we think it's going to place more emphasis on the Las Vegas trade show in January. But I think it's a bit too early to say if this will have any lasting impact on the business or not.

"Beyond the show, September 11 slowed things down in certain segments of our business. If you deal with commercial or hospitality environment, there is nervousness in the market. People who were going to do projects in October have put them back to January. Everybody's seeing what's going to happen over the next few months. We haven't had any orders canceled, but there have been one or two projects we were involved in that have been delayed for a few months. And despite everything, September was still a good month for us."

**Ron Berich, Vice President of Sales & Marketing, Arquati Co.,**

**Carrollton, TX:** "We introduce our new fall collections at the Atlanta show, and this year there were 36 items. Without the show, we weren't able to formally unveil those products to our clientele. So we are doing more

advertising and a direct mail campaign along with our salesmen making more direct contact with customers about the new line. But there were no immediate effects on the business from the cancellation. Most people we do business with can view our products on a regular basis year-round through our national sales force. Time will tell how successful we are at that. I do know the sales staff will have to make more calls to introduce our fall collection. The biggest unknown is the people we missed that we don't know about who would have attended the show.

"What little decrease we experienced in sales was related to September 11 and not to the cancellation of the show. We had about a week to 10-day period after September 11 when there were fewer orders in general. Prior to that, the economy had started a slowdown. At the retail level, it does appear that business was off before September 11 and was still off afterward. In the last week and a half, though, it has turned around and business is getting back pretty much on par. Our business is up for the year, so we're fortunate. With the little downturn in September, we just missed our goal. But I do believe there is a recovery in our business and it is going to continue." ■