

Chairman's Letter

Focusing on Cause, Not Effect

At the PPAI board meeting in Dallas, your board of directors made one of the toughest decisions of my tenure. It was voted that, as of PROMOTIONS WestSM in Las Vegas, wheeled carts will no longer be allowed at our trade shows given that viable alternatives are made available to those who legitimately need them. Of course, wheelchairs and motorized carts (Amigo type) will be permitted for those persons in need of them.

We made this potentially controversial decision for three specific reasons:

1. The percentage of individuals claiming special needs at The 1999 PPAI EXPOSM (8.6 percent of the attending distributors) far surpassed the number of similarly disabled individuals as a percentage of the entire population. In fact, only 29 of the more than 800 people who asked for wheeled carts in Dallas provided government-issued disability certificates. This would seem to suggest that some people were asking for wheeled cart privileges for other than medical reasons.

2. The view of our membership, as expressed through the Distributors Committee, Suppliers Committee and Conventions Committee, was that the proliferation of wheeled carts had become a hazard. On several occasions in the past, the board of directors has received requests from committees

that wheeled carts be severely restricted or eliminated from the show floor to prevent potential accidents.

3. Better alternatives to wheeled carts are available. PPAI is vigorously working to ensure there are alternatives for handling catalogs and materials at the shows, but I'd like to speak on this third point in detail, because the issue is not really wheeled carts.

If people who do not have a disability are using wheeled carts, it is only a symptom of the real problem—the inefficient way that supplier information (catalogs, flyers, etc.) is transferred to the distributor at our shows. With the explosion of technological alternatives it seems almost backward that someone would walk for miles through a trade show carrying (or carting) 50 pounds of paper.

So let's not place the blame solely on those few who use carts. We should also blame suppliers who haven't pioneered electronic forms of catalog distribution and fulfillment, who take weeks to ship out catalogs after a show, or who simply forget to send them. We should fault distributors who haven't pushed suppliers to provide online or CD-ROM catalogs, and who don't trust suppliers to fulfill catalog requests at shows.

Finally, we should hold our Association responsible for not providing viable alternatives like warehousing and fulfillment of supplier catalogs. As long as people have the option of wheeled carts, we don't have to deal with the thorny issue of alternative forms of catalog distribution. Well, it's time to stop avoiding the problem.

Your board, committees, staff and, I'm sure, our membership remain profoundly sympathetic to those with physical challenges that hinder their ability to work our trade shows. They are members too, and we will find ways to accommodate their special needs.

But we have also listened to the membership through our committees and have exercised leadership on this issue. Staff is vigorously exploring a variety of alternatives for both PROMOTIONS West and The Expo 2000SM in Dallas. It's time to face the future. Who knows? This decision just may drag us, kicking and screaming, into the information age.



Michael Woody

BY MICHAEL WOODY, CAS

PPAI CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

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