

# WWD

## VEGAS TRADE SHOWS BET ON WOMENS

Even as new competition heats up the Las Vegas trade show circuit and women's exhibitors try to overcome the historical premise that the market is geared toward men's wear, event organizers are bullish that retailers will flock to the upcoming August editions.

From Aug. 18 to 22, more than a dozen trade shows are vying for the time and dollars managed tightly by buyers who travel not only from the western states, but also from Japan, Mexico, Canada and other foreign countries.

"There's a bit of confidence I didn't see two years ago," said Christopher Griffin, vice president of WWDMAGIC. "For most people, the feeling is the worst is behind us. There's definitely a sense of optimism out there."

A triangle of trade is emerging in Las Vegas. Advanstar is hosting WWDMAGIC, FN Platform, Sourcing at MAGIC and WSA@MAGIC at the Las Vegas Convention Center and also Project, ENK Vegas, Pool Trade Show and MAGIC Men's at Mandalay Bay. Over at the Venetian and Palazzo hotels, Modern Assembly is launching as a new umbrella covering AccessoriesTheShow, MRket, Capsule, Stitch (formerly Moda) and two new entries to the city, Agenda and Liberty Fairs. WomensWear in Nevada is maintaining its post at the Rio Hotel.

The inauguration of Liberty is highly anticipated because of its heritage and focus. Sam Ben-Avraham, its founder, also started Project in 2003 before selling the contemporary and denim-centric show to Advanstar two years later. In addition to offering joint registration with Agenda, which also operates its namesake show in New York and Long Beach, Calif., Ben-Avraham said Liberty plans to sponsor a Made in USA sourcing section and offer exhibitors a 45-day free trial of an online shopping and order processing system called Nuorder.

While men's makes up the majority of the 250 brands at Liberty, 20 percent of them are dual-gender labels. Some of the brands catering to women include Mackage, Cheap Monday, Pendleton and Isabel Benenato, which is participating in a Las Vegas trade event for the first time.

"A huge percentage of stores that attend the Las Vegas market are small specialty stores that buy both men's and women's," Ben-Avraham said. "I have built my entire show around the needs of the community, so if there comes a time when they ask for a women's-only option, we would be open."

Many top women's brands have opted to wait until Coterie, which generally starts a week to a month after the Las Vegas expo, to unveil their new collections.

"Women's is still tough for us in regards to timing," said Edina Sultanik Silver, co-owner of New York-based BPMW, which produces Capsule. "Some of the brands aren't ready to show spring [product in August]. We're getting some people who are bringing immediates or holiday [collections]."

Comprising 40 percent of the 200 brands expected in the next Capsule show, the women's lines include Black Crane, Henrik Vibskov and Christine Alcalay. Sultanik Silver added that last season Capsule hired women's retail specialist Jess Hemenway to coordinate relations with retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue, Harvey Nichols, Anthropologie and Shopbop.com.

"She works with buyers on a one-on-one basis to make suggestions and introductions to brands she thinks the buyers would like to work with," Sultanik Silver said.

To help buyers scout for emerging brands, Business Journals Inc., the Norwalk, Conn.-based owner of Stitch and AccessoriesTheShow, is introducing new programs at both shows, which are expanding their space by 20 percent to accommodate more than 800 lines combined. Stitch is highlighting Italian manufacturers of leather jackets and handbags from Sicily, whereas AccessoriesTheShow is unveiling Designer Lab, a venue for brands that have been in business for one to two years. Plus, Modern Assembly's policy to have all six shows open on the same day at the same hour could boost attendance.

"We think there will be some positive crossover traffic between ourselves and Liberty, and Liberty and Agenda, and ourselves and Capsule," said Britton Jones, Business Journals' president and chief executive officer.

Strength in numbers is also promoted on the Advanstar side. While Project will no longer house a women's-specific section — ENK Vegas is displaying all the women's brands — it is featuring 47 dual-gender premium denim brands, including stalwarts such as Hudson Jeans, AG Adriano Goldschmied and J Brand, and first-time exhibitors like Raleigh. To support the important denim market, Project is moving a new premium denim section to the front of the show. It's also transferring an offshoot of the ongoing Blogger Project organized by Marcus Troy with bloggers covering only the jeansmakers.

"The premium denim brands are really busy," said Tommy Fazio, president of Project. "The bloggers will help them to reach the universe."

One way to reach buyers and consumers is by employing a guest fashion director. WWDMAGIC is bringing "100 Unforgettable Dresses" author Hal Rubenstein back after his debut last February. Scheduled to be at WWDMAGIC during the first two days of the show, Rubenstein is pulling his favorite pieces across all categories and displaying them on mannequins for a Q&A on trends. He's also curating the fashion show for WWDMAGIC.

"He was well received by both buyers and brands [in February]," said WWDMAGIC's Griffin.

Other changes at WWDMAGIC entail the integration of ENK International, which owns WSA and ENK Vegas, following its acquisition last year. WSA, which specializes in fast-fashion and private-label footwear, moved its August dates to coincide with the other Advanstar events. To be held in the Las Vegas Hotel, WSA is adjacent to Sourcing at Magic, which is transferring to the Las Vegas Convention Center's North Hall from the South Hall. The WWDMAGIC categories that used to be in the North Hall — including White, Heart of Prêt, contemporary and dresses — are shifting to the second floor of the South Hall, directly above FN Platform. The space and layout for WWDMAGIC in the North Hall are exactly the same. The young contemporary and junior sections remain in the Central Hall.

“What we found is the number of scanned-in buyers from FN Platform that were in North Hall was over 40 percent,” Griffin said. “We see an opportunity to make it easier for the buyer. We either make it simple for the buyer or we’re not doing our job.”