

Inside every horizontal show is there a vertical struggling to get out?

Broad industry shows encompassing all sectors of a 'horizontal' market often play on the sheer number of visitors as a key to attracting exhibitors. However, not all sectors of the show are necessarily targeting the same visitor groups, and exhibitors are not therefore always equally satisfied with the event. As marketing spend is scrutinised ever more closely, exhibitors are inevitably thinking more about the quality of contacts and return on investment at a show.

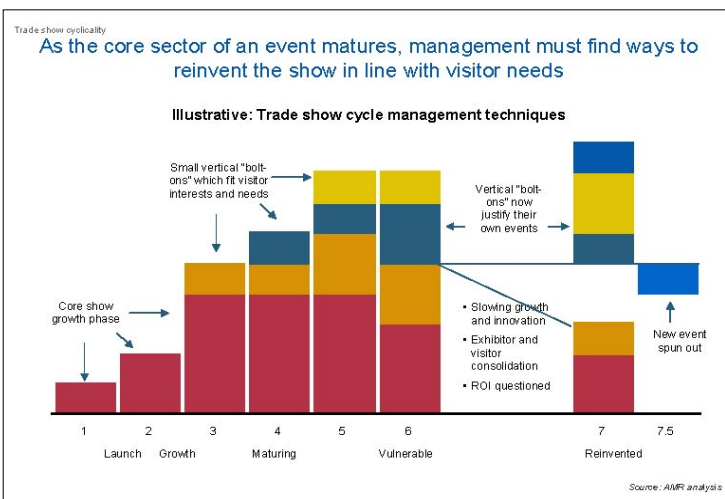
With management focus sometimes concentrated on the major stands at the heart of the horizontal show, underneath the surface there may be sectors that feel sidelined, particularly when the dominant core of the show has matured and it is the other sectors within the show that are in fact more dynamic, and more sexy.

the contractor audience. This used to be appropriate, but channels for bathroom furniture have been migrating from contractors to retail outlets, with increasing involvement of the consumer in the specification process. As a result, bathroom furniture exhibitors have understandably felt increasingly uncomfortable at a contractor show. If the management of the show had not tackled this mismatch, and begun to attract the new audience, then competitors will – and have launched verticals against the dominant show.

If this is evident in the UK, it is even more marked in emerging show markets. For example, looking at some of the shows in the former Soviet Union, some of the dominant horizontals are now starting to fragment. To continue the building show theme, until recently interior design in Russia was the domain of contractors. However, as disposable income is increasing, and consumers are starting to think more about interior décor, interior design specialists are beginning to appear. In the short term, the suppliers and buyers in this sector feel increasingly uncomfortable at the horizontal show and will demand their own vertical event.

AMR has conducted dozens of strategic reviews of major horizontal events. It is the nature of these reviews that we are often brought in late, only when a problem has become apparent. But we have seen that there are warning signs to look for and lessons for management in identifying and heading off any potential problem.

Show management teams know that they are rarely dealing with a single, homogeneous market. But to be on top of their show they need to understand in detail all the markets they are serving, monitor the show continuously, possibly treat it as a number of collocated events, and keep on top of every sector. The key question is whether or not the show is meeting the different needs of visitors and exhibitors in each of the sectors.



Too often, the extent of the problem only becomes apparent when the show starts to experience difficulties. By that time, it may be too late and a competitor has spotted the gap and launched a vertical against you and you've lost a key part of the event.

A good example of this phenomenon can be found in the building sector. The shows have naturally focused on delivering

The team needs to be close to the markets and in constant dialogue with exhibitors and visitors and also with industry experts, journals and associations. When talking to these people the right questions need to be asked. Even shows run by publishers who have very regular contact with the market can fall into the trap of not evolving the event with, let alone ahead of, the market.

Key questions and issues for the management team to think about include:

- Which market sectors are growing and which are declining? And why?
- Does our visitor message encompass all sectors or should it be segmented?
- How do the sectors differ by target visitors?
- Are exhibitors' needs changing by sector?
- Which are the most dynamic?
- What content will really draw the relevant visitors?
- Which exhibitors are key to attracting the visitors?
- Do the industry buying cycles differ by sector?
- Are there existing verticals by sector?
- What is the timing of other industry events by sector?

But it doesn't have to be a threat. By understanding what visitors and exhibitors in each vertical sector want, it should be possible to tailor marketing and the visitor experience to deliver improved results all round. In short you are ensuring that the show is keeping pace with developments in each segment.

Alternatively, if you discover a sector that feels sidelined by the core of the show, breaking it out as a stand-alone event might be an option. AMR has worked with one trade show organiser whose senior management are masters of incubating vertical shows within horizontals. Their market understanding was good enough and their relationships with exhibitors close enough to spot the evolving needs of sectors and use this to their advantage. Virtually the whole portfolio had grown from a single initial event with verticals being spun out as appropriate, each growing with time into a significant event in its own right.

AMR has unrivalled experience in understanding the needs of exhibitors and visitors at events. At the heart of our work is a strategic analysis of the market, segment by segment. We then ask a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions to assess

how the event fits in the market sector by sector, and how it needs to evolve to keep pace with exhibitor and visitor needs. In our experience, monitoring the dynamics of a major horizontal show sector by sector is vital for ensuring continued growth. You can analyse your own event, and even set up an early warning system to defend against competitive launches. You can also monitor sectors for appropriate spin-offs, and you can dissect someone else's horizontal show to look for launch opportunities. And if you are going to call on external assistance, don't leave it too late.



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For further information on AMR International and our work within the trade show sector, please contact one of the offices below, or visit our website

AMR INTERNATIONAL LIMITED
 MAINZER LANDSTRASSE 51
 60329 FRANKFURT AM MAIN
 GERMANY
 T: +49 (0) 69 24 00 86 0
 F: +49 (0) 69 24 00 86 16
 E: frankfurt@amrinternational.com

AMR INTERNATIONAL LIMITED
 ST GEORGE'S HOUSE
 61 CONDUIT STREET
 LONDON W1S 2GB
 UNITED KINGDOM
 T: +44 (0) 20 7534 3600
 F: +44 (0) 20 7534 3636
 E: london@amrinternational.com
 www.amrinternational.com

AMR INTERNATIONAL CONSULTING INC
 655 THIRD AVENUE
 SUITE 2500-05
 NEW YORK NY 10017
 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
 T: +1 646 465 5970
 F: +1 646 465 5988
 E: newyork@amrinternational.com