

Country Music Television Presents ... *the GICC*



WHEN IT COMES TO COUNTRY MUSIC, it doesn't get any hotter than Rascal Flatts. The Nashville trio has a broad following of both pop and country music fans and was already a multi-platinum act after its first two albums. Then came the September 28 release of "Feels Like Today," which immediately zoomed to No. 1 on both Billboard's Top Country Albums and the all-genre Top 200 Albums charts, a feat accomplished by only one other group, the Dixie Chicks.

Rascal Flatts

What made the album such an instant success? Was it because the one-hour special on the group, *Total Release Live*, that aired on Country Music Television the evening of the album release date was filmed at the GICC? Okay, maybe that's stretching it a bit, even given the exclamation of Don Lepore, the producer of the show, upon first sight of the GICC: "We walked into the lobby, and 'wow!'"


"Rascal Flatts wanted to do the show in a college town and an area where they had a broad fan base," said Lepore, explaining the search that led to the GICC as the backdrop for the show. "It was down to Atlanta; Madison, Wisconsin; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Austin, Texas."

Once the band decided on Atlanta, in part, at least, for its proximity to Nashville, Lepore hired a "feature film location scout" who showed him a number of traditional venues — nightclubs, theaters, concert stages — before suggesting a visit to the GICC. Out-of-the-box thinking might be expected for a film for music TV, but when the location guide proposed a convention center, well, it just seemed a little too conventional to Lepore.

"He told me there was a lot of interesting art in the lobby, so I agreed to take a look at it." And thus, the aforementioned "wow!"

Besides the art, it was the architecture of the building that captured Lepore's imagination, and the resulting scenes in the show capitalize on the angular and swirling forms and designs of the GICC. So up with the stage, in with the cameras, and hang lights from the steel girders that support the cloud-like shapes that make up the GICC ceiling. Then bring in the crowd for a three-hour shoot, and following a couple of weeks of editing, bam! The GICC is costarring with the hottest band in the land.

"This was done with blazing speed," Lepore noted. "We usually have more time to prepare and finish the piece, but we had to get it ready for the debut of the album. That put a lot of pressure on everyone. A lot of times in these situations, people at the location get nervous and put a lot of restraints on you, but the GICC people were just eager to help. They worked really hard for us."

Not exactly the conventional approach. But then again, the GICC continues to prove that it's not your typical convention center. 

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— Don Lepore, producer, Country Music Television



Rascal Flatts onstage at the GICC.



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Everything's Coming up
ROSES for Wholesalers

Floral Expo 2004

fLOWERS AS FAR AS THE EYE COULD SEE, and the fragrance of fresh blooms filled the Georgia International Convention Center exhibit halls October 28-30 during Floral EXPO 2004. Dazzling colors and mixed floral scents created a veritable bouquet for the senses as wholesale distributors walked the aisles to find new flower varieties and colors, traditional favorites and a wide selection of floral supplies and services.

"The wholesale distributors come to meet with their current suppliers, primarily growers from around the globe; to find new resources for products; and to see what new products have emerged over the past year," pointed out Tina Brown, the director of education and meetings for Floral EXPO's sponsor, the Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association (WF&FSA).



"They also attend to learn, so they can teach their customers, largely retail florists, how to use products in the best ways and how to market to consumers." Hence, the 2004 show offered a host of new features, including professional sales training sessions each day before the opening of the trade show and a variety of exhibitor product demonstrations on the trade show floor.

According to Brown, the floral business is thriving, and wholesalers are actively looking for ways to boost business and profits in an increasingly competitive market.

"Most importantly," Brown noted, "wholesalers want to be able to introduce new products, new ideas and creative solutions to their customers."

For that reason, the show goes to great pains to remain exclusive to wholesalers. No retailers allowed. As such, there is virtually no on-site registration, "only a few additional people from companies that were pre-registered." And anyone seeking admittance who is not a member of the association must demonstrate proof of his or her wholesaler status.



Floral EXPO 2004 organizer Tina Brown surrounded by the stars of the show.

"Another benefit of the GIC is that we were the 'big fish' in the pond. We didn't have to compete with another larger group in the building. [The show provided] a comfortable atmosphere with a lot of networking opportunities."

—Tina Brown,
Director of Education and Meetings
WF&FSA



2004



All photos © Warren Bond Photography

Wholesale distributors have a chance to meet with exhibitors from around the globe.

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Floral EXPO appeals to owners of and buyers for mostly small-to-medium-sized businesses, many of which are family-owned. They are hands-on operators whose time is precious and who spend cautiously — two of the most important reasons why WF&FSA chose the GICC for its 2003 and 2004 shows.

“The GICC was a great venue because of its proximity to the airport. And with free shuttles to and from the airport and a transportation package from the hotels that included free shuttles to and from their properties and the GICC, it made it very easy and cost-effective for our attendees,” Brown explained.

It was equally easy to produce the show with the help of the GICC team members, Brown added.

“We’re an intimate show [354 booths], so another benefit of the GICC is that we were the ‘big fish’ and didn’t have to compete with another, larger group in the building. When an attendee met someone somewhere in the building, it was likely they were both in the floral industry, which created a comfortable atmosphere with lots of networking opportunities,” Brown concluded. ☞

face to face

Interviews with exhibition and meeting industry experts



Michael Bandy
PRESIDENT,
TRADE SHOW EXHIBITORS ASSOCIATION

Focus on Exhibiting

RECENTLY, TRADE SHOW EXHIBITORS ASSOCIATION (TSEA) announced the sale of its annual trade show, TS2® (The Trade Show About Trade Shows®) to National Trade Productions (NTP), the firm that had been managing TS2 since 2000. The news was received with surprise, and then roundly applauded as an effective way for TSEA to re-focus its resources on member recruitment, services and education. As such, it also reflected the industry-wide trend of channeling resources to where they can produce more measurable returns.

Recently, *A+* editors spoke with TSEA President Michael Bandy about association and exhibition trends.

A+. How will selling TS2 impact the future of the show and the association?

BANDY. NTP’s budget for the show was limited to what we had to spend. Now they will be able to invest as needed. They have already doubled the attendee marketing budget. We’re still developing the content of the show, members will still get attendee discounts and other aspects of the show will remain intact. We’ll now be able to devote our time and budget to our core activities, like developing new services and enhancing member education. That will be good for the entire industry: exhibitors will be more successful at shows, and that will lead to increased show participation.

A+. Your move mimics what is going on with exhibitors. Do you see increased pressure on exhibit managers to demonstrate a return on their employers’ trade show investments?

BANDY. Decisions on where and how to exhibit used to be a function of the marketing department, but more and more, procurement and accounting are getting involved. While some companies want you to show a direct return on investment, most at least want a process in place for reaching qualified leads and following up.

It is clear that the pressure is on, and there is resolve among exhibit managers to exhibit smarter. Many are looking for savings by cutting back on freight and weight. They’re using more modular structures, a lot of fabric and lighting. And they are more selective about shows, moving into vertical programs where they can participate more in smaller regional shows.

The member survey we just completed (in conjunction with *Tradeshow Week* magazine) shows that only 12 percent of members are completely confident they can demonstrate a return on an investment in a show, but 68 percent said they were moderately confident.

A+. What else did you learn from the survey?

BANDY. I think it was important to see that budgets were up (\$1.3 million per surveyed corporate exhibitor). They had really declined in recent years. The average budget percentage spent on space, which had climbed to 44 percent, is back in the 30 percent range. They’re spending the additional amount on things like promotion and training, the kinds of things that will help them exhibit more successfully.

The experience level of the exhibit manager has also increased, up to 11 years on average. It had never been more than single digits. That experience is good for the entire industry.

A+. Where does TSEA stand on the value of show audits?

BANDY. The audit can be a tool to get a snapshot, an honest profile of the value of a show to an exhibitor. It can help you determine if the right buyers are going to be there. As such, it can help a manager build a case for the company’s participation in a particular show. We’ve been promoting audits right along with IAEM (International Association of Exposition Managers). We participated with IAEM in the development of audit content and have an audit tool kit on our website.

A+. What other initiatives is TSEA focusing on?

BANDY. We’re working on our certification program. Today we have about 150 members who have earned the designation of Certified Manager of Exhibits, and we have about 500 currently in the program. We are conducting a study in conjunction with Bowling Green University, the results of which we should have by the end of 2005, to identify the core competencies needed by exhibit professionals. That will give us a blueprint for fine-tuning our educational program. ☞

For more information on exhibitor education and other TSEA programs, visit the association’s website at www.tsea.org.

focus



By Hugh Austin
GICC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Imagine ...

From the GICC's
executive director

IMAGINE ATTENDING THE NEXT BIG SHOW AT THE GEORGIA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER AND GATEWAY COMPLEX IN FIVE YEARS. It will be a brand new experience in convenience and efficiency! A new standard of convention!

You'll book your flight into Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, and if you're arriving on an international flight you'll deplane at the brand new Maynard Holbrook Jackson, Jr. International Terminal, a beautiful glass and steel structure designed to welcome the international traveler to our global city.

You'll retrieve your bags, travel via the underground people-mover to the main terminal and transfer to the new automated people-mover (APM) serving the GICC and the new CONRAC (consolidated rental car facility) just west of the airport.

Following your two-minute ride, you will disembark at the Convention Center Station and continue on to one of five luxury hotels connected to the APM and the

GICC. You will check into your hotel, walk to the convention center to register for your conference or trade show, then travel on the APM to get your rental car to begin your Atlanta adventure. Or venture out into the area immediately around the Georgia International Convention Center and Gateway Center to explore exciting restaurants, shops, spas, fitness centers, live music venues and more.

Imagine all of this done within the space of an hour versus the half a day or longer it takes at most convention and trade show destinations!

Plans Revealed for GICC HOTELS, AIRPORT and PEOPLE-MOVER

The October 29 cover story of the *Atlanta Business Chronicle* announced the intentions of a Dutch billionaire developer to build "the first major convention hotel at the Georgia International Convention Center."

"Plans are also in the works for the hotel and convention center to be connected to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport via an offshoot of the airport's automated train system, said John Fentener van Vlissingen, chairman of Netherlands-based conglomerate BCD NV." Van Vlissingen, who has invested extensively in commercial real estate in Atlanta, told the *Atlanta Business Chronicle* he "owns enough land to build six hotels" at the GICC.

The article also detailed plans for expansion of the train system, or "people-mover," and a new car rental complex that is also adjacent to the GICC: "Hartsfield-Jackson plans to have the new line of the airport's automated people-mover up and running by 2008 ... also plan to begin construction this winter on a 75-acre, \$535 million car rental complex. The Consolidated Rental Agency Complex (CONRAC) will house all car rental agencies attached to the airport, and will be one of the two stops (the GICC & hotels being the other) along the train extension."

Keep reading A+ for all the details on the development of the hotels, the people-mover and CONRAC. A+

As we anticipate the future, we can't help reflecting back on the past — the first year and a half of operations at our new facility. We give heartfelt thanks to all of the clients, patrons and staff who have supported us.

We have explored and developed new markets and new concepts during this short time here at the fabulous new GICC.

One of our biggest challenges came when we hosted over 40,000 motorcycle enthusiasts for a week last summer. The food and beverage and facility challenges were immense, but we tackled them and conducted a safe and successful event that is still talked about throughout the world of motorcycling.

We played host as a sound and video stage for the hottest new musical act out of Nashville, Rascal Flatts, who used our south lobby as the backdrop for their CMT 60-minute special, *Total Release Live* (see lead feature, this issue).

In November of last year we helped AirTran Airways celebrate its 10th anniversary, featuring the gourmet creations of Proof of the Pudding for over 3,000 AirTran employees. The smooth sounds of jazz keyboardist Brian Culbertson got everyone to *Come On Up* as he played selections from his new CD of the same name.

These events and a host of meetings, banquets and trade shows have set a firm foundation for the GICC to lead the way in new and exciting uses of convention centers worldwide. We thank you for those opportunities, and we look forward to the most exciting of futures. A+

culinary arts

There's More to a Good Party Than GREAT FOOD

YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO HEAR IT FROM A CHEF. BUT ACCORDING TO GICC EXECUTIVE CHEF CHRIS GATTI, GREAT FOOD ALONE DOES NOT A GREAT PARTY MAKE.

"Whether you're at home or at a venue like the GICC," the chef offered, "there are simple and, in most cases, inexpensive things you should consider that not only complement the food but will make your event more enjoyable and memorable."

Chef Gatti recommends the following:

Light it up. You can have a beautiful food presentation and the finest linens, silver and glassware, but if the room is too dark or the lighting is dull, they won't show well. Even many of the most popular public venues have inadequate or ineffective lighting. So consider contracting a lighting supplier to brighten up the location. A few pinspots in the right places make for a much more dramatic setting, not only for the food but in other parts of the room or house.

Spread 'em out. Ever go to someone's house for a party and everyone winds up in the kitchen? Well, the same thing happens in public areas. People tend to congregate in one spot. Encourage smaller gatherings and more individual conversations by setting up drink or buffet

tables in various locations around the room or home. For example, put a champagne table up against a wall with an interesting piece of hanging artwork. Chef Gatti often positions buffet tables near the original paintings and mobiles around the pre-function area of the GICC.

Serve up something different. Instead of using standard white plates, the usual chaffing dishes, etc., find or buy some more imaginative, captivating pieces. It can be what you serve on or in, or it can be the garnish or decoration. For example, Chef Gatti recently presented a duck breast on a bed of banana leaves. If your event is themed, select pieces that reinforce the theme. At a recent heavy equipment trade show at the GICC, hors d'oeuvre trays were placed on the flat areas of a tractor trailer truck.

Sing to them. Hire an entertainer, like a pianist, harpist or a full band. A strolling magician is a compelling diversion. A character actor for a theme party adds entertainment value.

Parting gifts. A party favor as your guests enter, at their table or as they depart makes the evening more memorable. It can be something related to the party theme, a table setting or a tasty dish. At a recent GICC banquet featuring Greek food, Chef Gatti gave each parting guest a gift box with a piece of particularly tasty baklava. Planners of corporate events like gifts that bear the company logo. A+



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