



Believe it or Not: (Some) Shows Grow *Two consumer food shows report rampant growth in tough times*

By Stephanie Gorbin

In an economy where many show managers are thrilled to be able to report their shows are flat – not growing, but also not shrinking – it begs a question: Are there any shows that actually are growing?

The answer, of course, out of a pool of thousands of shows, is yes.

Two that are doing amazingly well, and have the enviable task of contemplating how to manage that growth and serve attendees, are **The Metropolitan Cooking & Entertaining Show** and the **San Diego Bay Wine & Food Festival**.

“We’re completely maxed out in our space,” said Ken Loyst, who produces the San Diego event with his business partner Michelle Metter. In 2007, he added, the show had 6,000 attendees. But at the Nov. 12-16 show, which was held in several outdoor locations in San Diego, that number grew to 9,000 attendees.

The Metropolitan Cooking & Entertaining Show has experienced a similar attendance draw, according to Carla Warner, director of marketing and programs.

Founder and CEO Denise Sullivan Medved launched the inaugural show in 2006 in Washington, D.C., Warner said, because of Medved’s success with *The Tiny Kitchen* cookbooks and her interest in cooking and entertaining.

Medved is not new to the tradeshow industry; she sold her interest in the **GovSec, U.S. Law** and **Ready!** Conference & Exhibition series in 2005, before pursuing the food-related series of shows.

About 7,500 people attended the first D.C. event, Warner said. In 2007, that number increased 66 percent to 12,500. And, even with the economy the way it’s been for the past year, the most recent show, held Nov. 8-9 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, had a 44-percent increase in attendance, with more than 18,000 people at the event.

In fact, the show had done so well the past three years in D.C., Warner said, that, in 2008, the company launched another edition in Atlanta, which also had about 7,500 attendees. This year, a third edition will launch in West Palm Beach, Fla., along with the D.C. and Atlanta shows.

“It’s an opportunity for people to focus more on home,” Warner said. Attendees have the opportunity to watch chefs from high-end restaurants demonstrate how to make dishes – and then the attendees can go home and replicate the meals themselves with-



out the high cost of a restaurant, she added.

Both shows pointed to marketing as the reason for their success.

“We do really well with e-mail in certain areas,” Warner said. The show has a template of the types of marketing that work in D.C., and then, she added, they fine-tune it to the new geographical areas.

For the San Diego Bay Wine & Food Festival, Metter said being creative with the marketing budget is what has helped the event.

“We’re always looking for ways to mitigate our overhead,” she added. “We have a very small marketing budget with this event.”

How Loyst and she have made it work, Metter said, is by partnering with brands that find reciprocal value in the show, such as Orbitz, which offered a discount to the festival for customers booking travel in the area, or American Express, which offered packages to its members.

“We’re always looking for ways that we can get creative to attract a national audience to our event that doesn’t mean money out of our pockets,” she added.

More of a problem for both shows isn’t growing the events, but managing that growth.

Warner said after the bustle of the D.C. event last year, “Atlanta was sort of a breath of fresh air.”

This year, the D.C. event has the potential to host more than 20,000 people. “It’s amazing to think we might have to cap (ticket) sales,” she added. The show also might move into a bigger space at the convention center to allow for the increased number of attendees.

The San Diego Bay Wine & Food Festival isn’t looking for more space, but is looking to manage growth in a different way – by raising ticket prices.

“What we’re selling is a luxury experience,” Metter said. “When you start to add bodies to an event, ... it’s very difficult to continue

delivering on that product.”

Loyst said ticket prices for the tasting event will increase from \$100 to \$125 for general admission and from \$150 to \$200 for VIP admission.

“We don’t want to have a zoo,” he added. “We’re trying to limit the participation to make the experience better.”

Despite a little bit higher cost for this year’s event, Metter said it’s the economic condition that played into the decision.

“It’s important to make sure, given the economy, that we’re meeting and exceeding those expectations,” she added.

At The Metropolitan Cooking & Entertaining Show, the economy also is playing a role in ticket prices – by keeping them low.

Warner said general admission for all the shows has been \$20 in advance (\$10 for children ages 4-12), which will continue this year.

“We obviously need to take that into consideration ... that times are tough,” she added of the economy’s role.

However, celebrity chef presentations are an extra charge, ranging from \$24.50 to \$74.50, depending on the recognition level of the chef. For example, tickets to another feature of the event, a VIP luncheon with the Food Network’s Paula Deen, sell for \$100, but people need to act fast.

“Those sell ... like hotcakes,” Warner said. “They sell out in two weeks.”