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QUIETLY CONFIDENT



Footfall was subdued at this year's Manchester show, but exhibitors once again found the event conducive to quality time with buyers

The 2010 Manchester Furniture Show enjoys tremendous goodwill from the trade and traditionally offers a less hectic atmosphere and perhaps a more committed approach from buyers that sets it in useful contrast to other UK events.

The exhibition space at this year's Manchester show looked trim and stylish and included a new extension of the show space to an additional floor of the building, which organisers say was created to cope with extra demand – three exhibitors have already re-booked for the space at next year's show, so its debut made a decent impression.

It was the main hall of the show that was the centrepiece, however, with exhibitors reporting mixed fortunes, but with mostly positive overall impressions of the event. Word at the stands had Tuesday as a surprisingly strong day for

business, with Sunday making less of a splash than anticipated for some exhibitors.

Bob Walker of Ecofurn said of the show: "Over the years, it has grown in my opinion into a cabinet show which makes it a great showcase, as you are not overcompeting with all sorts of products such as upholstery, divan beds and so on. Even though they are represented, it's not overpowering like the NEC can be."

Despite a patchy attendance, Malcolm Nix of Old Charm was one of the exhibitors who reported good results: "We felt attendance was down, in terms of our end of the market – however, we did more business out of the show than we did last year, so we're very pleased with the result."

New products also met with interest from visitors to the company's stand.

"We showed three new additions to existing ranges which were all well received," Malcolm said.

Peter Holdich, operations manager of Carlton Furniture also reported low attendance but good responses to new lines from visiting buyers:

"A brand new designed stand attracted a lot of interest – we also went against our tradition and launched a brand-new walnut range called Malmo, which for us was always a risk to break away from solid oak, which we are known for. However, the level of interest and orders taken was superb."

Part of the reason that Manchester has gained an increasing profile on the industry calendar is the presence of major names at the show. Originals, part of the Willis & Gambier group, made a slick showing at Manchester with an expansive

display of its key ranges including Normandy dining and Hudson bedroom.

Willis & Gambier managing director, Mark Symes, was on hand to observe how the brand performed in Manchester and commented, like others, on the event's positive atmosphere. "We were very pleased to be able to meet with our key customers in such a pleasant and entertaining environment," he said.

Whilst the perspective of seasoned UK industry figures

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told one story, it was also interesting to hear the reaction of newcomers to the show. Marco Magni, global sales director of Italian mattress firm Relaxsan, which began trading directly in the UK this year, said:

"Although the number of visitors appeared to be quite low, the quality of the leads we collected was great. But more importantly, we were there as a corporate presence because it was the beginning of our direct entry in the UK market."

Meanwhile, Morgan McCarthy of The Sleeping Zone described this year's event as "Superb", particularly praising the helpfulness of the organisers.

Speaking as one of the team behind the show, Laraine Janes commented:

"We were very pleased with the outcome of the Show bearing in mind the tough times facing retailers," she said.

"Attendance was on a par with last year with exhibitors reporting surprisingly good sales. More than half the Show is already re-booked for 2011."

In addition to the main show halls, exciting off-site exhibitions were running nearby by manufacturers including upholstery company Lebus – which took rooms in the nearby Midland Hotel to show off its latest ranges.

Karl Walker commented:

"We had a brilliant show – one of our best at Manchester. It just reinforces our belief that our current strategy of well-designed, competitive products, backed by strong customer service and quality suits our customer base. This is clearly indicated by the substantial increase in the number of floor models our customers purchased," he said. ■



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