

Deal-Making

New Conference Series Pushes Networking

At Retail Live!, retailers exhibit, and developers, owners, brokers and others stop by to chat

By Michael Fickes

In the retail real estate landscape, there aren't as many networking options as one might think. Even fewer if you narrow it down to those events that put landlords and tenants in the same room, along with entertainment, face-to-face meet and greets, and mutually beneficial educational sessions.

Meet Retail Live!. The brainchild of Stacey Gilham, senior VP leasing for Dallas/Austin-based Edge Realty Partners, Retail Live! regional trade shows appear annually in several locations around the country. This year, there are six events. Chicago and Los Angeles hosted shows in February and March. Still to come: New York, Austin, Denver and a newly announced show in Northern California.



Depending on the show, 70 to 100-plus retailers will exhibit. With the exception of a handful of sponsors, retailers are the only exhibitors. Property managers, owners, developers and other industry professionals work the floor telling retailers about their properties and project plans.

"There is no registration fee for retailers," said Gilham, founder and CEO, Retail Live!. "That's one of the benefits to retailers. To get into the show, however, retailers must send a decision-maker — not a broker — but an employee authorized to make decisions. That said, we encourage retailers to bring representatives from the brokerages that handle their business in the region covered by the show."

Retailers attending the shows are typically planning to enter or expand their presence in the regional markets surrounding the city where the show is being held. They want to see shopping centers and shopping center projects that fit their brands.

To make that easier for owners and developers, attendees receive a Retail Live! Trade Book upon arriving and registering at the show. The Trade Book contains each participating retailer's site specifications, areas of expansion and real estate contact information (including the broker's name if applicable).

Retailers put their specs and contact information out to hundreds of owners and developers that want the information. For less than a day's work, everyone gets what everyone wants.

No meetings except meetings of the mind: Retail Live! events aren't long enough for formal meetings. They offer old-fashioned networking opportunities that can produce meetings of the mind.

"We think it was great; got to meet with a lot of people face to face — definitely got a lot of deals started," said Bob Douponce, a VP with Party City, about the show he attended in Chicago.

The show's exhibition phase lasts three hours, from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Next comes the reception with food, entertainment and more networking — from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

This year's Chicago show treated attendees to a risotto bar, fresh vegetables, shrimp cocktails and martinis. "We want sponsors, attendees and retailers to leave feeling their time and money were well spent," Gilham said.

Retail Live! entertainers are typically nationally known — like Austin, Texas-based musician and artist Bob Schneider, who provided the entertainment in Chicago.

Coming soon: New York, Austin and CCIM. Retail Live! recently announced that the CCIM Institute will provide a three-hour educational session, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at future shows. "The next Retail Live! in New York City this July will offer the first CCIM educational sessions," Gilham said. "The details are being worked out now and will be detailed on our website soon."

The New York City show will take place on July 25 at the Marriott at Glenpointe in Teaneck, N.J., just minutes from Manhattan.

Austin will follow on Aug. 28 at the AT&T Executive Education & Conference Center on the University of Texas campus, minutes from downtown.

Exhibition tables have been filling up early. Interested retailers should consider registering four to six months before the show dates, said Gilham.

For information about registration, hotel accommodations and more, visit retailliveusa.com.