

Retail Live! Events Gather Momentum

Launched in 2012, the new format leasing events have taken off and are spreading to new markets this year.

— *Randall Shearin*



In 2013, Retail Live! is expanding to Atlanta, Miami and San Francisco. Other events taking place throughout the remainder of the year will occur in Denver and Los Angeles.

What started as a small networking event in Austin, Texas, in 2012 has now grown into a series of retail leasing events nationwide. Envisioned at first as a meeting where retailers could meet landlords and brokers without getting sidetracked with other events, Retail Live! was a hit with retailers.

“We wanted to remove a lot of the barriers that retailers and brokers see as obstacles to deals at traditional networking events: mainly scheduled meetings and programs,” says Stacey Gilham, founder and CEO Retail Live! and senior vice president of leasing for Austin-based Edge Realty Partners.

The first event in Austin in August 2012 drew retailers, brokers and developers from Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma. Among the first big retail owners to step up to the plate as sponsors were Simon Property Group and Cole Real Estate Investments. As the first event neared, participants began asking Gilham where the next event would be. Retail Live! quickly committed to events in Denver, Chicago,

Los Angeles and New York. In 2013, the event is expanding to Atlanta, Miami and San Francisco.

But for a handful of key sponsors, Retail Live! only allows retailers to exhibit at its trade show. Retailers don't pay to attend, but Retail Live! requires that retailers send corporate employees who are decision-makers; no tenant reps are allowed to man retailer tables without a retailer also being present. For that reason, the event quickly drew a reputation of having the go-to decision maker readily available.

“It is one of our differentiating factors: a decision-maker from the retailer is sitting at the booth and brokers who would typically not be able to get an appointment with them can walk up and get a face-to-face introduction,” says Gilham.

Retailers enjoy the show at no cost since they are the oil that makes the industry run. Attendees also like the intimate format where there are no barriers to speak with retailers and other attendees. The half-day format also works well for many. Another differentiator is the food

and beverage that doesn't stop from the moment the event begins. As well, live entertainment is a part of every Retail Live! event.

“Most attendees want us to keep this an intimate environment, and that's our intention,” says Gilham.

The events have been averaging 100 retail attendees and 300 to 500 other attendees. Retailer attendance is limited to the size of the venue, dependent on how many retailer booths can be provided. The event sizes are growing, but Retail Live! is tempering that by keeping the venues mid-size. For the second Austin event, to be held August 28, attendance is already 50 percent ahead of 2012.

“We are likely going to have to cut off registration for some events to keep them small,” says Gilham.

Other upcoming events include a Southeast event in Atlanta on September 26; Denver on October 9; San Francisco on October 30; and Los Angeles on January 30, 2014. **SCB**