



Business, Design & Development

Trade Show Focus: LAZR Los Angeles Sophomore Run

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4.12.2013

“LAZR is not just an interim show for mid-tier contemporary, women's fashion brands – its the whole industry. We're connecting consumers with the brands. It's going to be a very interactive event.”

- John Ruffo | Founder, LAZR Tradeshow

When: April 24, 25, 26 2013

Where: Cooper Design Space, Los Angeles, CA

Region: West Coast

Season: Interim, Holiday

There are plenty of trade shows today dedicated to footwear; concept shows, traditional shows category specific shows. But every now and then there comes a show that does something totally different than the others. This is where the new Los Angeles based, LAZR show comes in. A concept show that does something so totally different than any of the shows out there.

April 24-26 marks | LAZR's sophomore cycle |. This is my second time interviewing Mr. John Ruffo and being professionally versed in footwear as an independent and deeply passionate about this business, there is something to be said about branching out in order to bring something new to this industry. It is not easy. But with a new venue, new collections, increased number of vendors and a savvy direct-to-market concept - his is the show to walk.

Building A Community Through Shoes

Last-Report: Last Year you presented LAZR's Freshman debut atop LA Live in gigantic tent, Hollywood style. This year you came downtown and set up shop in the Cooper Design Space in LA's fashion district. Why the change of venue?

Ruffo: The change of venue is simply because it is a interim show and needs a more intimate setting and we wanted to have it in the heart of the fashion district. As you said it was our freshman show and we made some changes, we made adjustments and thought this turnkey operation at the Cooper Design Space would make it easy for us to concentrate on putting together our vision in this location and go back to LA Live in October where we started.

Last-Report: When last we met, You mentioned things like “Community”, “Made In Los Angeles”, and “The best kind of Co-Branding.” Care to elaborate?

Ruffo: Now that I've been in DTLA for over 2 years and working hard with city council I have joined the | CFA | and | Central City Association |. We all feel like LA is the destination and we are talking to people everyday about the revitalization of downtown Los Angeles and bringing the fashion

industry and Hollywood together. There's nothing wrong with New York, we really feel like LA is under-served.

Last-Report: Salesmen go where the buyers go in regards to choosing a show to present their footwear lines. Tell us about your strategy getting retailers over to LAZR?

Ruffo: We created this component in our show called, Match Making. And what we've done is work with the sales reps from brands and ask them who they want to see. Our retail relations team is working diligently as we speak to connect buyers and retailers with sales reps and brands on a day to day basis. One of the things we are doing is telemarketing and reaching out to them over the phone.

But more importantly, I have decided to go on these "road tours" and go visit stores directly and meet everyone and informing them of our mission. The sales reps like that idea as well because I can go back and report to them about account profile or some of the changes the stores may have been through. Because remember, these guys are carrying their brands for the West and the whole country and can't get out to these (stores) as often as they'd like to.

Last-Report: I read via facebook that reps from a the brand, Grey City will be making their way to LAZR. Your current attendee roster lists other new break out brands. What advise do you have for new brands thinking about showcasing at a footwear tradeshow like LAZR for the first time? And what advise do you have for those brands out there who wish to enter the Southern California market?

Ruffo: That's a great question because just yesterday I was having a conversation with a brand new exhibitor and they're asking me, "What can we do to have a successful show?" My advise is stay connected with us, we are not just renting floor space and booth packaging but we give a whole host of services that we provide for any exhibitor especially for newbies, like an account list that we curated to make sure it is very specific to their needs - again the match making. For someone like Grey City, I think LAZR is a much better experience for them in communicating to the retailer, which I do not think many others in the industry do.

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Last-Report: Your exhibitor list has changed a bit from last year. Does this mean that LAZR is ahead of its time or just settling into its target audience?

Ruffo: Its changing by the week , by the month. We have many brands that have been watching us and they're just waiting to see how we look and how were gonna turn out for a couple of show cycles, standing by to make sure we have our dates correct so it works for everyone together. Its like when a new restaurant opens, a lot of people won't go the first night but they know its gonna be a great place.

From my past experience in this industry, especially for a trade show person, I feel like we are way ahead of the curb. People are coming to watch our show for this next cycle because they are very interested in becoming apart of it. LAZR is not just an interim show for mid-tier contemporary, women's fashion brands – its the whole industry.

Connecting The Dots

Last-Report: We talked about how footwear has transitioned from a single category product to being merged with the accessories (handbags, scarves, hats, etc.) category. With that in mind, footwear is now apart of a dynamic category with growing subcategories (cellphone skins, laptop bags, etc.) and customers like to match one with the other.

Do you have any plans to incorporate fashion accessories in the show? Why? And are there any accessory exhibitors at this April show?

Ruffo: We have some accessory lines with us. We also have some ready-to-wear lines with us. And of course the footwear brands that we already do business with and are exhibiting, are bringing their accessories as well. We feel like it is a very important part of our future to include those types of categories.

Last-Report: Creatively connecting consumers to brands and building

consumer interaction is the future of all consumer product industries. Shoes have become such an overwhelming part of the consumer experience both on and offline. How important is it to create this type relationship and what does LAZR do to achieve this that other shoe tradeshows do not offer?

Ruffo: Just by us moving the venue over to the fashion district and having our show during the last Friday of the month connects us to the consumer (every last Friday of the month is sample sale day in the LA market). Its a good step in terms of the timing and being able to get that consumer when they are looking to buy things and touch them through branding direct from the exhibitor.

Vince Camuto is one of the brands that has taken on the responsibility from the sales reps and marketing team with having a marketing kiosk at our show to give coupons and discounts direct to the consumers. I think when you see our show this April and how we've done that – who knows how its going to turn out? Its an incubator.

Show Stopper

Last-Report: There are plenty of shoe shows to attend. Some may say too many. But always there is a gap for an audience that is just not reached. Some of our readers may be interested in show production in their respective regions or to create a show that fills a notable void, such is the case with LAZR. Tell us what it takes to produce your own independent tradeshow?

Ruffo: Oh, boy! You need to have the fortitude and the kind of desire to want to be successful. I think that's what it takes. It takes a lot of other things too. But you have to have the tenacity to stick with it.

Last-Report: Now for the fun part. Give us the run-down of schedule of events and happening surrounding the dates of the show and what attendees should expect and experience. Tell us what makes a show in Los Angeles so special?

Ruffo: Opening day is Social media day – social media and press will come to get a first look to whats coming for holiday.

A Grand Opening Night party at the Grammy museum's Target terrace over

at LA live. That will bring every on together and we'll have a lot of fun at that even.

Friday the last day of the show is our sample sale day. And that day we're connecting consumers with the brands. It's going to be a very interactive event.

Downtown LA has changed so much over the last 10 years. You can walk right outside 9th and Los Angeles or they call it the "intersection" down there and its such a great feeling to see how much our city has grown. LA is going to give us all the things we need to do commerce and conduct business without all the "What happens in Vegas, Stays in Vegas." We'd like to just get down to business and have fun at the same time but not being able to get to the booth in the morning because you were out all night - I think we're done with that. As a industry, I think we're ready. Los Angeles is ready.