

AREA

Spring 2020



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dear Colleagues,

I am honored and humbled to have been elected president of the ORIA, whose mission is to work vigorously on issues important to our industry. My commitment will be to continue those efforts and proudly carry the torch that has been passed to me from our previous presidents.

We are at the start of a new decade with a new set of challenges. It will require resilience and proactivity to turn them into opportunities and excel. Ongoing global concerns are impacting our industry, directly and indirectly. These include Chinese tariffs and changes in India's trade status. More recent challenges include the Coronavirus that is disrupting the flow of goods and creating travel concerns for buyers. Our biggest challenge is to maintain the current high level of consumer confidence that underpins our market until these headwinds abate.

The ORIA's efforts will be enhanced by our strong new partnership with the IMC. The benefits were already apparent in the staging of the recent very successful January markets. In addition, the IMC is launching a new digital innovation division (IMC_di), the B2B e-commerce platform that will offer vendors new ways to reach new buyers, capture leads and grow sales.

Without question, the rug industry has changed tremendously over the past several decades, evolving from a handful of companies importing one-of-a-kind hand knotted pieces from a limited number of countries to a select group of retailers into a dynamic, consumer-driven, major home-fashion category.

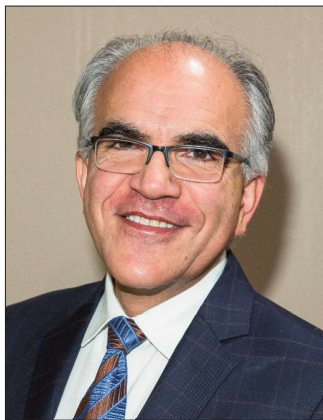
More recently, technology has taken over offering vendors a single integrated digital platform that enhances and extends the physical markets, connecting hundreds of thousands buyers and sellers and opening new business opportunities for customers.

The challenge is how to find a balance between the "digital" ways and the "personal" (traditional) ways of conducting business. To sell our product, consumers still need to "touch and feel" in order to

appreciate the quality and what it takes to make a handmade rug. Oriental rugs were once considered "heirlooms" to be passed down from one generation to another whereas today the younger generation relies on technology, computers and social media to find affordable area rugs they can use for a few years before replacing them with something new.

On the plus side, ours is a BIG industry with a wide variety of consumers with different tastes, preferences and appreciations. There is a market for genuine Antique Navajo rugs as well as for a polypropylene machine made Navajo-inspired rug. Our challenge is to tell each of OUR own unique stories to our customers, no matter how small or how big. We must also develop creative, innovative ideas and products tailored for different markets (Atlanta, Las Vegas, High Point, etc.) and advertise in multiple industry publications to keep the readers informed and educated as to the unique qualities of handmade rugs ... this most functional of art forms.

Wishing everyone a healthy year with great success and prosperity in 2020.



Kami Navid

President - Oriental Rug Importers Association, Inc.

CALENDAR & INDEX

events

DALLAS DESIGN WEEKApril 13-17
Dallas, TX
(800) DAL-MKTS/www.dallasmartcenter.com

**INTERNATIONAL HOME
FURNISHINGS MARKET**April 25-29
High Point, NC
(336) 888-3700/www.imcenters.com

HOSPITALITY & DESIGN SHOWMay 5-7
Las Vegas, NV
(508) 743-8502/www.hdexpo.com

**INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY
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NEOCONJune 8-10
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www.neocon.com

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LAS VEGAS MARKETJuly 26-30
Las Vegas, NV
www.imcenters.com

Auctions

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Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds
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Strong Order Writing And Exciting Updates At Winter 2020 Markets



Strong order writing, trendsetting new product introductions and major industry updates drove excitement at the winter 2020 Atlanta Market. The January 14-21, 2020 market saw buyers from every US state and more than 60 countries sourcing a broad range of gift and home décor merchandise in more than 4,000 showrooms and temporaries. At the market, International Market Centers (IMC) celebrated the debut of its new Atlanta Market brand, the opening of the remerchandised Open Year Round home décor collection, the announcement of a new lifestyle collection in Building 2, and the launch of a wholly owned, standalone digital division, IMC_di.

“The buyers were placing strong orders with new and established brands, filling seminars and learning opportunities, and fully engaging with market events,” said IMC CEO Bob Maricich. “IMC added fuel to the excitement by announcing multiple updates that will push the company and its markets into its next era of success.”

The new IMC_di team leadership team—Senior Vice President Brandon Ward, Senior Vice President Max Fraser, Senior Vice President Alex Fraser, President Eric Dean—and IMC CEO Bob Maricich toasted the foundation of the new division at the January 2020 Atlanta Market Kickoff Party.

Atlanta NEXT Makes an Impact on the Market

IMC’s strategic remerchandising of the 130 Open Year Round home décor showrooms to five contiguous floors as part of Atlanta, NEXT Phase 1 had a positive impact on the market. The 35+ showrooms that signed new leases, relocated or expanded their footprints opened at the winter market to a great



reception from buyers.

“At this market it is so much easier to source home décor,” noted interior designer Diane Hewitt. “I really appreciate the reorganization of the floors and look forward to shopping at AmericasMart year round.”

Social Media Growth and Online Activities

This winter, IMC primed buyers for new product discovery both before market and on campus with new and interactive online tools. New product discovery and the sharing of market experiences drove increased buyer and exhibitor to interaction with Atlanta Market’s social media channels. The market’s Instagram account @AmericasMartATL gained nearly 5,000 followers during the market week and logged more than 730,000 impressions and more than 4,100 mentions.

Designer Amie Freling-Brown of Meme Hill Studio in Rochester, NY posted “There’s nothing to get your creative juices flowing like a few days at AmericasMart. Meeting amazing brands, getting inspired by speakers, seeing all the upcoming trends,



AROUND MARKET



catching up with friends and so much more.”

Buyers connected with product trends in the weeks leading up to the market via the new IMC Market Snapshot program that previewed products on social media, on the AmericasMart website and in buyer emails.

At market, the Shop the Show influencers Tiffani Thiessen, Katie Stauffer of the Stauffer Family, Brian Patrick Flynn, Paloma Contreras and Liz Marie Galvan shared favorite market finds and moments on Instagram and presented a series of cooking demos, seminars and meet and greets.

IMC_di and the Digital Evolution

IMC is entering into a new phase of its business following the launch of IMC_di at the Atlanta Market. The new stand-alone division will enhance and extend the market experience through the development of an integrated channel-agnostic B2B commerce platform including a marketplace, marketing and sales automation software and smart showroom tools. With the announcement of the new division, IMC also announced its acquisition of two innovative technology companies, RepZio and Pharos, who will provide technical and industry expertise to accelerate the launch of the new digital platform.

More than 500 market attendees joined with IMC in celebrating IMC_di at the market kickoff party where they were shown a video outlining the new platform. Overall positive reaction to the announcement shows the desire for buyers and sellers to connect throughout the year.

“We’re very excited about the IMC_di announcement and see a lot of good things coming out of it,” said Bryan Williams, executive vice president of Crestview Collection. “RepZio has been a part of our business for the last 10 years; we were one of their very first customers. With that, we’ve been able to see them grow and we know how they work, so we see how the future can be really bright.




Eventually we'll be able to integrate the two programs which will help us in order writing, making the visit for our customers a little quicker, a little more seamless. With all three markets we are in—Atlanta, High Point and Las Vegas—we're looking forward to integrating these into one, cohesive platform. So we see this being a great opportunity."

Additional information about IMC_di will be available in the coming months with plans to fully launch the tool by the end of 2020. Visit IMCenters.com/IMCdi for more information. The Summer 2020 Atlanta Market is July 14-20, 2020. For additional information, visit AmericasMart.com.



IMC UNVEILS INNOVATIVE B2B DIGITAL PLATFORM



A New Way Of Uniting Vendors And Buyers

In January, International Market Centers (IMC) launched IMC-di, a new business-to-business e-commerce division. It will offer vendors an integrated digital platform to help them reach new buyers, capture leads and grow sales. For buyers, the company's aim is to allow them to transact in-person or online through one integrated account.

"We've been listening to our retail buyers for three or four years, to understand ways we can better serve them," says Brandon Ward, the new division's senior vice president. "We invited our vendors to panels to share what we can do to help them grow their business. We've explored how the retail buying environment has been changing, through formal and informal research. Consumer behavior has made its way

into the B2B buying journey. Consumers see that endless array of products on Amazon, and also shop whenever they want. That's having an impact. The role of shows is changing—buyers may start online and complete the buy at the show, or vice versa. We want to help them to explore the merchandise wherever and whenever, for the great brands we have relationships with."

IMC believes the show experience will always be crucial. "Most buyers need to touch and feel, see colors and patterns in person—even if they know they want to re-order. We want to help bring buyer and seller together, year-round. That flexibility and connected experience is what we'll offer," notes Mr. Ward, who formerly led IMC's digital division.

BY CAROL MILANO

To create its new division, he reports, “IMC quickly realized that to go towards digital and e-commerce, we needed partners who know the industries we serve. First and foremost, we looked for knowledge and expertise in the unique, complex rules and routines of the home furnishings field. For instance, products come from overseas and domestic sources. Each retailer may see different pricing.”

For IMC_di, IMC acquired two prominent technology companies, Pharos and RepZio, which have been serving the industry and attending IMC and other shows for more than ten years. “Their software and apps are already there. Literally hundreds if not thousands of people are using their software,” explains Mr. Ward. Pharos provides integrated sales, marketing and commissioning software. RepZio, a business-to-business sales solution and digital marketplace, helps wholesale vendors and buyers connect and transact.

“Our industry is in need of easy-to-access tech solutions that reduce friction. IMC’s ownership and stewardship will enable us to make that software solution a reality,” says Eric Dean, Pharos founder and president of IMC_di. “IMC’s physical markets and web platforms already deliver a global and highly-engaged audience. After watching this need develop in the industry for more than 20 years, I’m excited to have the talent and resources to realize this vision and fully address the opportunity in the market.”

Max and Alex Fraser, RepZio’s founders, are senior vice presidents. “Our mother was a sales representative in the decorative home furnishings industry for 20 years. Almost 10 years ago we developed RepZio to help her on the road and at market,” says Alex Fraser. “Reps often tell us that we’ve made their work easier and helped them to be more successful. We’re delighted to partner with IMC and very excited to expand our software tools and solutions at IMC_di,” Max Fraser adds.

Innovative New Services

The new division will allow buyer and vendor to be connected, whether online or at a show, says Mr. Ward. “Our vision is to give a validated buyer a single account, to use to log in to register for shows OR shop on digital platforms.” IMC’s research showed that the time buyers spend at shows is constrained, so “The more we can offer them an efficient show experience, the better. No other market company has the range and scope that we have. A huge buyer base attends our shows (Atlanta, High Point, Las Vegas). So unlike other digital platforms, we don’t have to start from creating a buyer base. We have it already: they come to our shows. We can connect buyers to exhibitors and makers—and provide access to buyers year-round, beyond just the market weeks,” he explains.

Recognized and trusted in the industry for its excellent shows, “IMC also has great resources we can bring to the table,” Mr. Ward says. “We try to be more than just the show: we want to help year-round. New things are the next logical step, which is what led to IMC_di. RepZio and Pharos—two small, highly effective companies—now benefit from having our resources. To innovate, IMC is bringing digital tools that connect to the market. Many vendors recognize that IMC will help them with the challenges of e-commerce, and business-to-business space. Retail buyers will be able to buy more efficiently and intelligently.”

Besides supplier and buyer benefits, IMC_di products will bridge physical and digital sales, and work in harmony with multi-line sales agencies to provide seamless commissioning execution. Together with Mr. Ward, the executive team has over 75 years of experience in wholesale markets, software development, B2B commerce and customer-centered digital innovation.



MERCHANDISING

Current Services

Many IMC tenants said they'd like to make a showroom "smarter," and accessible year-round. "That means, when a vendor invests in space, and really exhibits at market, they are looking for that investment to have year-round value," Mr. Ward observes. "We especially listened to home décor vendors who want to showcase their showroom year-round, in 3-D visuals on IMC's website. That's especially valuable for buyers who couldn't get to the show, or attended but want to see the product again." That's why, for instance, on IMC's Las Vegas marketplace website, they created a new Directory of Exhibitor Showrooms. It features ample imagery, including actual products that vendors have in their showrooms. A vendor can upload images as new product arrives. Then, buyers can see each vendor's showroom, year-round, by taking a "digital tour" of it. "Vendors may want to show only their previous catalog, others want to present only new products, and some would like to show their entire inventory. We recognize that vendors may bring new products to a show but would like their other products visible, as well," says Mr. Ward.

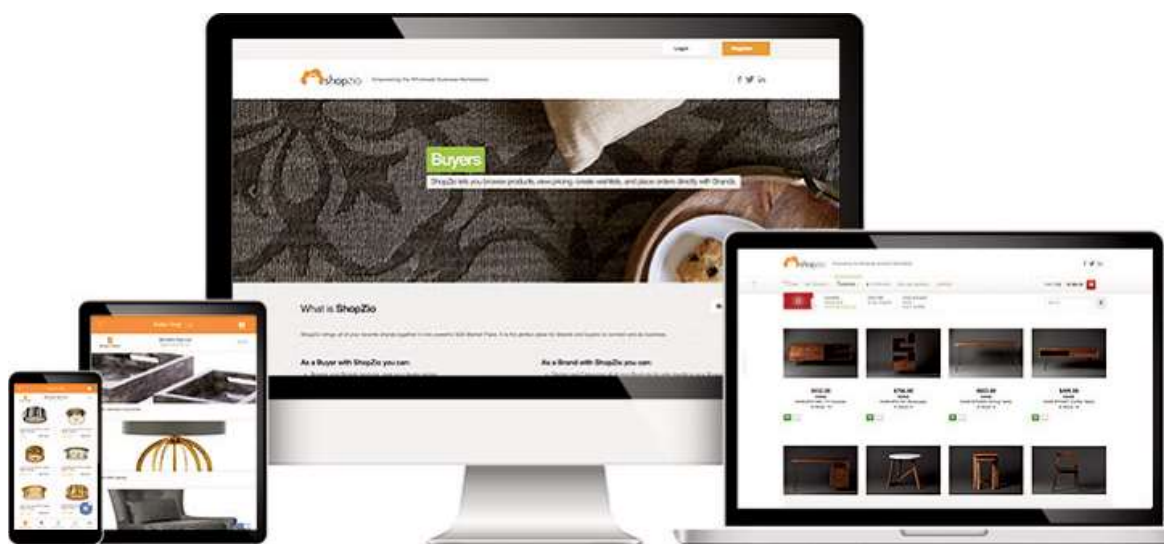
Currently, buyers can submit inquiries

straight from the Las Vegas Market website to vendor, and get direct follow-up. "In IMC's marketing efforts, we see several three million unique buyers a year. We want them to come to markets, and also direct them to individual vendor websites. We think that will also encourage buyers to come to the market and get to know a vendor better." The Exhibitor Directory is free for the digital showroom.

Time Frame

"Especially for many home furnishings and rug vendors, tools available today include a RepZio app for iPad that allows sales reps to capture orders in and out of the showroom. They also have a digital marketplace and offer B2B e-commerce websites for many of their vendors. The Pharos suite of sales and marketing tools is used by hundreds of gift and home décor vendors at our shows. We plan to inject more resources into both of these industry-leading organizations, to help them expand their business and enhance their products," says Mr. Ward.

IMC_di also plans to launch new products by the end of 2020. "We'll offer vendors a new type of digital marketplace, a new means to connect with more buyers on line and year-round," he explains.



While digital directories continue on the Atlanta and Las Vegas websites, “with the digital marketplace’s new e-commerce capability, buyers can place orders online, from the digital showroom of each vendor. If a buyer is ready to place a re-order from IMC’s digital platform, that will be a fresh, time-saving option. If they still want to visit the showroom to see the product and work with the rep, the digital marketplace will also make it easy for them to register for Market and get to that showroom.”

IMC_di’s staff will also develop new tools and products that help vendors and buyers be more effective and efficient at Market. For example, to create an account in a showroom, buyers must often fill out forms online. “What if we make it possible for that buyer to transmit information from badge to order-writing app?” asks Mr. Ward. “When it’s faster to create the account and do business, both buyer and sales rep save time and have a better Market! Vendors often tell us that they don’t want to miss an important buyer who comes to visit. But showrooms can be crowded, with lots of transactions and celebrations and reunions happening all at once. For buyers, it’s challenging to visit dozens of showrooms and see a lot of new product. Maybe a simple notification could help with that missed connection. We want to offer better digital tools to help buyers remember what they’ve seen and make smart buying decision.”

Home furnishings vendors who would wel-

come visibility to IMC’s buyer base through their new digital marketplace can start to on-board to IMC-di as early as August, whether or not they exhibit with IMC. (Current exhibiting vendors will receive a discount.) The staff will consult with individual vendors to develop their digital showroom, by organizing vendor product data and content. “We’ll build a best-in-class digital platform by hiring the best-in-class digital team! It’s a huge transformation for IMC and IMC-di to invest at this level and create this type of opportunity,” Mr. Ward affirms. “It’s really exciting.

Summary

“We’re recognizing that a digital platform and digital tools are important, and we’ll offer that ability. IMC has been fortunate to help many retailers deal with the challenges of e-commerce. Now, we can help not only the retailers, but the vendors!” summarizes Brandon Ward.

Founded in 2011, IMC owns and operates 20 million square feet of physical markets in Atlanta, Las Vegas and High Point. The IMC_di team of about 47 includes engineers, experienced developers, and software marketers. Over the next year IMC_di will hire another 50 to 75 full time employees specializing in solution-based product development, hands-on customer success, and user experience.

For more information on IMC, visit <http://imcenters.com/>.



Brandon Ward



Eric Dean



Alex Fraser



Max Fraser



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