

Connect2One at CAMEX — Two Shows in One

Connect2One (C2O), a division of Nebraska Book Co., is a buying group that serves the needs of its independent store members to ensure that they have the resources to be more profitable, effective and important to the college or university each member serves.

With Campus Market Expo (CAMEX) 2012 taking place March 2-6 at the Salt Palace in Salt Lake City, Utah, this will mark the 11th year that Connect2One has co-located with the annual show produced by the National Association of College Stores (NACS).

"It has been a tremendous benefit for Connect2One, our members and our vendor partners," Executive Director Mark Palmore said on the co-location with CAMEX. "In fact, we have signed an agreement with NACS to extend our co-location with CAMEX until 2017. We think that it is an extremely positive move for all parties.

"The great benefits to our members are a number of things — they don't have to attend another national show. They attend CAMEX and attend our Education Day and get the benefits of two shows in one."

He continued, "The other benefit is the opportunity for them to attend Education Day and learn firsthand all about the various programs we have through the presentations that [Program Directors] Paula Haerr and Michelle Johnson present, which greatly enhance their buying resources before they hit the show floor at CAMEX."

"Attending a trade show is very expensive on the vendor side," Haerr added. "Our vendor community has really appreciated having cut out an additional expense."

EDUCATION DAY

Each year at CAMEX, Connect2One hosts Education Day for attending members. Education Day features a full day of education sessions that are held prior to the CAMEX trade show. This year's Education Day is Thursday, March 1, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The night before the education sessions begin, Connect2One will host "Connect2One 101" from 6:30-7 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 29, for those attending Connect2One's Education Day for the first time.

"The orientation session gives first-time attendees the opportunity to learn a little bit about Connect2One and about what they're going to see on Education Day," Palmore explained.

Perhaps the most notable change to Education Day is the introduction of a new session that increases the number of in-depth review sessions from three to four.

The new session, "The Other Side of Supplies," runs from 8:30-10 a.m. During this session, Haerr will highlight vendors in the following categories — technology products, health and lab sciences, and distributor partnerships.

Haerr will also present the "Supplies In-Depth Review" from 10:15-11:45 a.m. She will highlight supply vendors, with emphasis on the top commodity comparisons, national trends, new products and the popular "Paula's Picks."

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"It was very difficult to complete the entire presentation in the time allotted," she explained. "We have a total of 60 vendors in the supply program, and we only had 90 minutes, which is not a lot of time for each vendor to present what is best about their program. Giving those extra minutes to the programs would let me give a more complete picture and

not rush through anything."

Palmore added, "We consider it a real positive move. What this shows is that we are constantly taking something that is basic information about Connect2One programs and about the value of Connect2One and constantly tweaking our Education Day to add more value to the day for our members and our vendor partners."

Johnson, program director for apparel, backpacks and souvenirs at Connect2One, will present the "Apparel In-Depth Review" session from 8:30-10 a.m. She will highlight her "Best Buys" from Connect2One's apparel programs, with a focus on the latest trends in garment styles, graphic designs and new products.

That afternoon, Johnson provides the "Gifts, Bags and Souvenirs In-Depth Review" from 12:45-1:30 p.m. She will review Connect2One's gift and souvenir programs, with a special emphasis on bags and backpacks.

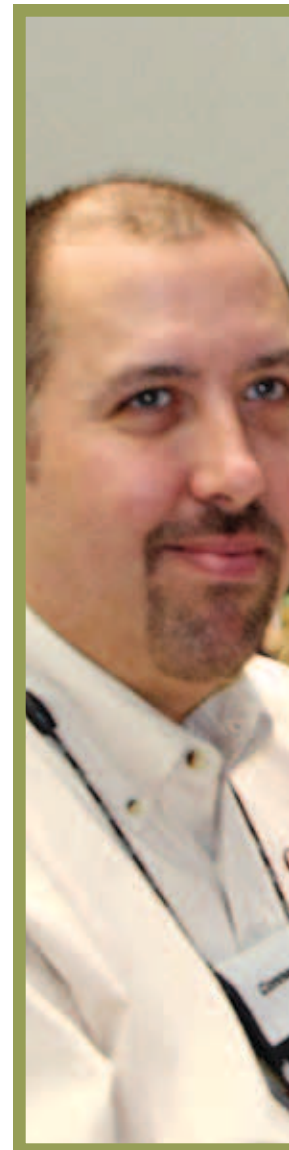
In other sessions of note, "Apparel Partner Insights" runs from 10:15-11:45 a.m., giving members the opportunity to hear what C2O's major apparel vendor partners have in store for 2012.

A session entitled, "There's More? You Bet!" takes place from 12:45-1:30 p.m. Palmore and Haerr will present the session that says there is more to Connect2One than apparel and supplies. They will provide an overview of other C2O programs and open up the floor for a question-and-answer session.

The round robin makes its second straight appearance on Education Day and is scheduled from 1:45-3:15 p.m. This format provides informal networking opportunities between C2O members and vendor partners on a 10-minute rotation. Topics related to store operations, store services, general merchandise categories and course materials will be addressed during this networking session.

Connect2One wraps up Education Day with its popular Idea Exchange from 3:30-4:30 p.m. C2O buyers will share their success stories during this session, and members are encouraged to bring or discuss an item that is a top seller in their store.

For the second straight year, NACS is



partnering with C2O to present a “What’s Hot” webinar on general merchandise. Haerr will present the webinar, which will be free and available on the NACS/CAMEX website beginning the week of Feb. 13, in time for buyers to prepare for what they will see on the show floor.

Haerr noted that the “What’s Hot” webinar would focus on general merchandise categories, including topics such as marketing trends — how college bookstores and national retailers are marketing their products — as well as color trends, decoration trends on apparel and supplies, fashion trends and technology accessories that are considered “What’s Hot” for Gen Y students.

Palmore noted that each year, C2O members who attend Education Day receive a goodie bag that includes a meeting T-shirt. This year, C2O members were allowed to vote on the meeting T-shirt, with the vote taking place on C2O’s Facebook page. The winning T-shirt will be supplied by New Agenda, a vendor partner of Connect2One.

PROGRAM CATALOG

Connect2One introduces its annual program catalog early each year prior to CAMEX, giving member stores time to research buying decisions and save money when placing orders on the show floor.

Haerr noted that as of press time, Connect2One was just beginning to receive vendor programs. Connect2One starts to solicit the vendor programs during the fall months so that the catalogs could be printed and delivered to buyers around Feb. 1.

“That helps the buyers to figure out who’s new, what the deals are and take a look at what they can anticipate at CAMEX,” she explained. “Getting the catalogs to the buyers early is very important.”

The catalog also includes the Connect2One/CAMEX show specials, so buyers can be prepared ahead of time to write orders when they get to the trade show, knowing that they are going to get better deals at CAMEX.

“When we surveyed our buyers, 75 percent of them pre-write orders and show specials to place at CAMEX,” Haerr said. “It’s part of a process — the catalog arrives, buyers start thinking about it, they attend Education Day and get more ideas to fine-tune those orders.”

Haerr and Johnson also place their popular “Paula’s Picks” and “Michelle’s Best Buys” ribbons on garments/products they select as being really special from each of Connect2One’s vendor partners, whether it is a new trend or a hot price.

Eighty percent of surveyed buyers said they were influenced to make a purchase based on “Paula’s Picks” or “Michelle’s Best Buys,” Haerr said. (“Paula’s Picks” and “Michelle’s Best Buys” will be featured in the January/February issue of College Store Executive).

ATTENDANCE

There is no cost for Connect2One members to attend Education Day. Palmore noted that an estimated 375 members participated in Connect2One Education Day in Houston earlier this year.

For 2012, member registration has been going “hot and heavy,” according to Palmore, with Haerr noting that as of press time, registration was up about 10 percent from CAMEX 2011. Approximately 130 vendors will be on hand in Salt Lake City.

“We’re really optimistic for a great day and great attendance,” Palmore said.

—CSE



Connect2One members who attend Education Day sessions learn how to make the most of their time on the CAMEX show floor.

(PHOTO COURTESY OF CONNECT2ONE)