

IHA CENTENARY CONGRESS LONDON 2009

The IHA [International Hardware and Housewares Association] held the Centenary Congress in London from the 18-21 September.

The venue for the Congress was the Queen Elizabeth 11 Conference Centre in central London.

The British Hardware Association hosted the event which drew 300 delegates from the following 14 countries [United Kingdom, France, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, United States, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, China, Austria, Nigeria and Italy.

HRH, The Princess Royal [the Congress Patron] opened the Congress with a well prepared talk on the Hardware industry of the UK and the rest of Europe.

Mark Berrisford-Smith a senior economist with HBSC was our first speaker, presenting an economic summary of the UK and the rest of the world.

Whilst he considered the worst was over the recovery would take many years and some things would never be the same again.

He did note that Australia had got off lightly compared to most of the developed countries of the world.

Our next speaker was Stephen Robertson, Director General of the British Retail Consortium. The BRC represents 80% of the British retail sector with members such as M&S, Tesco, John Lewis and B&Q.

He informed us that the UK between 1995 and 2007 sales in the retail sector had increased 70% whilst the number of enterprises had reduced by 20%.

He surmised that in the future consumers would require, convenience, quality and simplicity.

Ethics will also become more important. There will be a demand for transparency.

Virtually all purchases will be influenced by the internet, whether it be:-

Online research

Purchasing

Delivery

Consumer reviews

In addition an era of frugality will replace the excesses of the credit boom.

With regard to the supply chain he asked “How can the Retailer take costs out of the Supplier” and “What does the Supplier have that the Retailer does not need”.

You may wish to reread those two quotes.

The following speaker was Peter Cullun, CEO and major shareholder of Towergate, a \$5.6 billion Insurance Broking and Underwriting business.

Some of his pearls of wisdom were “Make sure your distribution gets to the end user” “Reinvent the model every 3 years” “Hire the best people possible” “Emphasize cost control” and “Be customer centric”

The next presenter was Xavier Durieu, The Secretary General of Euro Commerce.

His talk was specifically aimed at the EU, you can see his notes on www.ih2009.com Follow the links under news.

Ben Phillips was the next speaker. He runs a group of 21 Cookware stores across Southern England.

A family business since 1985 the continued success he puts down to concentrating on what customers expect, high levels of customer service, and good value, which is not the same thing as low prices.

Today's customer, he says, wants to be delighted, entertained and tempted.

Ben said the guiding principals for Steamer are:

Location and size do matter,

The right product,

Some magic in the store,

Good people, those that believe retailing is a career not a job,

Stick with the plan,

Stay within your core product range,

Finally, work well with your suppliers, it should be a partnership.

Day 2 of the Congress saw our first speaker Matt Sexton of B&Q speak on the global and social demands of retailing and how B&Q were addressing their carbon footprint. Matt outlined their "One Planet Living" policy, which is about putting their house in order and helping customers put their houses in order.

He stated that if everyone on earth lived as they do in the UK it would require 3.1 planets to be sustainable. Interestingly the USA came out at 5.3 and China 0.9.

He went on to detail how B&Q were reducing their carbon emissions.

A look at the website www.ih2009.com follow the links under News will give you a list of their initiatives.

TOOLBANK is a large supply and distribution company of hand, power and garden tools, ladders, decorating and general hardware. Stocking some 30,000 products over 270 brand manufacturers with a value of \$100 million. They struck me as being a combination of ITW Proline and Danks or M10.

The talk by Simon Bicknell and Tim Strong gave an interesting insight in how you can increase sales by up to 30% by using your suppliers total inventory.

They produce a 750 page laminated book to be used in store at a kiosk. This allows the customer to view many more products than the store could possibly stock, which in turn creates special customer orders.

This concept they have now taken online, which allows for immediate ordering.

Our next speaker was Margaret Gooch of CALOR GAS. We were told that Calor give all their employees a reward statement. This details not only the wage that has been paid but shows extras such as bonus payments, health insurance, overtime, loadings, sick pay etc. This communication she stated had reduced employee turnover.

Calor has its own Sales Academy, the core values being performance, transparency, progression and learning to win. The benefit of this is that all people starting with the company know they are going to be trained into their jobs.

Another Calor initiative is their Talkback program. This is to encourage employees to provide the company with ideas. Ideas utilized are rewarded and the outcomes published to all employees. This encourages staff to give more ideas.

The company has been rewarded by simplifications to business, improved customer satisfaction, increased income and reduced cost.

Margaret's final words of wisdom were "Hire for Attitude and Train for Skill"

Billed as a Motivation Speaker, Phillip Hesketh started his presentation by stating he would not going to motivate anyone. People motivate themselves!
Well this started a very entertaining talk, with many pearls of wisdom.
People are only interested in themselves, their problems and their desires. If you want their full attention you need to remember that.
He also offered “People don’t care what you think unless they think that you care”.
He also said that you don’t persuade people you influence them.
He convinced us all the result in life was not important but the journey to get there.
And finally your reputation as a store keeper is the experience of your customer minus the expectation.
Get hold of his book “Life is a Game Beat the Odds.

The final speaker was Bill Lee MD of the North American Hardware Retail Association.

The NRHA is hosting the 2011 IHA Congress in Washington DC from the 13-15th July 2011, followed by the HRHA Conference 16-17th July.

Please put these dates in your diary, you missed a great Congress in London, don’t miss this one! Go to www.iha2011.com

The social side of the conference was superb.

Friday evening saw us visit the Tower of London for a viewing of the Crown Jewels followed by a Thames cruise and dinner dance.

Saturday afternoon off to Hampton Court to Henry viii old stamping ground.

Sunday night a black tie Gala Banquet at Whitehall Palace [where Charles1 lost his head]. We did not lose ours but they were a little lighter at the end of the night.

The final part of the Congress was a visit to GLEE Garden Trade Expo at Birmingham. That can be a tale for another time.

To end this report I want to say that Loi and I were proud to represent Australia and thoroughly enjoyed the experience at the Centenary Congress.

I look forward to seeing as many as possible at the 2011 Congress

ROD EVINS

PPRESIDENT

HARDWARE FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA