

Do you know how good it is?

Without a shadow of a doubt, the world's single largest boat and marine accessories show for the trade only is IMTEC, the International Marine Trades Exhibit and Convention. This event, held in Chicago every autumn for manufacturers to introduce new models ready for the following season, is claimed by the Chicago-based NMMA (National Marine Manufacturers Association) to be the marine marketplace of the world, with global impact which sets the course for dealers, distributors, representatives and other buyers from around the world.

There is no question that the show is an exhibition where the marine trades convene, but how international is IMTEC? And what can a foreign visitor expect to find at IMTEC that is not just from the United States and Canada? Well, the raw figures are deceptive.

Of the over 1,200 exhibitors of boats, motors, trailers, electronics, and accessories appearing in the IMTEC catalogue, only two per cent are listed with non-North American addresses. And this appears to have been quite constant over the past five years, even if the mix of foreign exhibitors changes from year to year (Table 1). The reason for this of course is that foreign exhibitors go to IMTEC to find US distribution, and once they've found it they pass on the IMTEC attendance to the distributor who attends to maintain/boost its dealer network.

IMTEC draws about twice as many European exhibitors as Asians, and the Latin Americans are scarcely represented at all. Among the Europeans, the marine industry representation at IMTEC mirrors what has been happening to the macro-economies in general: thus the Italians have now taken over from the British. In Asia, watch out for the Taiwanese, who are coming in in increasing numbers. Otherwise, statistically exhibitors from foreign countries are sporadic participants. There is a core group of just five firms that have exhibited at the show regularly for the past five years (Table 3).

Governments exert influence over international business in a number of ways, one of which is by supporting participation in trade shows. This year only Canada as a country with a substantial industry pavilion and the Italian city of Genoa supported their local

businesses at IMTEC. In the past, for example, the British DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) has helped UK companies. Its reduced support over the past two years explains the declining presence of the British firms at IMTEC.

It is also interesting to look at representation by type of business (Table 2). Not surprisingly, as at many shows, the majority of exhibitors

Taiwanese manufacturer of marine hardware. "IMTEC is better than a thousand faxes," says Piero Razeto, president of Italian hardware manufacturer Razeto & Casareto. Another Italian exhibitor has conquered Europe and wants to "attack America". David Alster of Azimuth, Israel, who is introducing a new GPS map navigation system, said: "I'm surprised with the international traffic — from Canada,

Europe, Australia, and New Zealand." Long-term exhibitor Britain's Whale Water systems/Munster Simms Engineering came from Ireland to launch a new water system, while the Greek marine accessories firm Lalizas intends to set up a distribution system for the eastern hemisphere. Boa Long

Industrial Company from Taiwan has been selling to an America firm in Seattle for the past 10 years and is now looking to work directly with more US customers. Also surprisingly, only one firm mentioned the need to maintain its existing distributor network.

Most firms claim their competitive advantages are quality and prices. For example,

IMTEC is unarguably the world's biggest and best-attended marine trade gathering. Yet, based on canvassed opinion undertaken by market researcher **Michael K Muth** at this year's event, more international visitors ought to be checking it out.

display accessories of various types and origins. The largest single-product group is probably to be found in the manufacturers of inflatables from the UK and Asia. The only regular direct foreign engine exhibitor, for example, is Tohatsu from Japan. There are no overseas trailer manufacturers at the show, which is not surprising given the high transport cost of trailers relative to their purchase price, and the fact that IMTEC has no foreign exhibitors of rigid-hulled boats.

The firms that exhibit at IMTEC are for the most part already experienced exporters. Around 74 per cent of their production is already being exported. With the exception of one Asian company which sources 80 per cent of its product in Thailand and 20 per cent in Malaysia, virtually all the goods sold by these firms originate in their home countries.

Reflecting the strength of the European presence, Europe appears to be the major target market for exports for these firms, where 54 per cent of their products are sold. Surprisingly, the US buys only half as much as Europe, at 27 per cent of sales. For two Asian firms this relationship is reversed. They sell twice as much in the US as they do in Europe. Even the Asian firms sell very little in Asia itself. Surprisingly, Latin America is mentioned by only one firm.

The reason foreign exhibitors go to IMTEC is primarily to find more American and international customers. Max Malavasi of Aquaman UK, a maker of waterproof cases, says: "It's the best show for the marine trade." "All the world comes here," says Jedi LC Chiang of King Snaps Industrial Corporation, a

TABLE 1

Number of foreign exhibitors by country

	95	94	93	92	91
Europe					
Belgium	—	1	—	—	—
Denmark	—	1	—	—	—
France	2	1	2	2	6
Germany	—	—	1	—	—
Greece	1	—	1	—	—
Ireland	1	1	1	—	—
Italy	6	8	5	1	1
Netherlands	1	—	2	1	2
Sweden	—	—	1	—	—
United Kingdom	3	5	9	11	12
Total Europe	14	17	22	15	21
Asia/Pacific					
Australia	—	—	1	2	—
Japan	1	1	1	1	1
New Zealand	—	1	2	1	1
South Korea	2	1	2	—	—
Taiwan	5	4	2	2	1
Thailand	1	—	1	1	—
Total Asia/Pacific	9	7	9	7	3
Other					
Israel	1	—	—	—	—
Venezuela	—	1	—	—	—
Total	24	25	31	22	24