

Retail Merchandiser

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Monoprice and CEO Bernard Luthi aim to acquire more customers as the No. 1 3D printer brand in the world.

Global Domination

See what we captured at the New York City Wine & Food Festival on page 6, and find out about the NFL's recent product licensing efforts on page 40.

Get the scoop
on the Sports
Licensing &
Tailgate Show
on page 34!



TEAMWORK ATHLETIC APPAREL 36 | NFL 40 | THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS 46 | UCLA 50 |
AUBURN UNIVERSITY 54 | MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY 58 | TEXAS A&M 62 | SURF₉ 66

Sports & Licensing



“The vast array of product categories on display from exhibitors make the show appealing to a variety of retailers.”

– Nikki Puckett

Sports Licensing and Tailgate Show Preview

More than 2,000 attendees will gather Jan. 23-25 in Las Vegas. **BY NIKKI PUCKETT**

34 RETAIL-MERCHANDISER.COM November/December 2017



The 12th annual Sports Licensing and Tailgate Show takes place Jan. 23-25, 2018, at the Las Vegas Convention Center.

This year's show is expected to be the largest to date, and will feature an expanded educational program for retailers and be co-located for the first time with the ICLA Winter Symposium.

Products for Every Fan

More than 2,000 qualified retailers and universities are expected to be in attendance. Attendees represent stores of all sizes and range from specialty shops to department stores to mass-market retailers. The vast array of product categories on display from exhibitors make the show appealing to a variety of retailers.

Approximately 400 companies will exhibit, showing off the latest fan gear to expand the product offerings of retailers. Exhibiting licensees represent all professional and collegiate leagues and teams, and will showcase merchandise in every possible product category from toys and games to apparel, pet products and more. Licensors and agents that participate include IMG College Licensing, Learfield Licensing Partners, NASCAR, Fermata Partners, NHL, and the NBA and NFL Players Associations.

More than 70 new exhibitors have already signed up. First time exhibitors include: Alex and Ani, All Star Dogs, Badger Sportswear, Branded Custom Sportswear Inc./Nike, C&I Collectables, Campus Crew, Catstudio Inc., Charles River Apparel, CI Sport, Coopersburg Sports, Covo Drinkware, Dependable Solutions, DGL Group LTD, Epicurean Cutting Surfaces, Fan Brander, Gracious Living Corp, Greeting Pen Company, Groove Life, Hex Head Art, Hype & Vice, J.F. Sports

Canada, College Wallets- College Coolerz, Jardine Associates, Jerzee Art, Kotis Design, Landway, Lauren James, Let's Light It Up, Lokai Holdings, Nap Cap, Neil Enterprises and NEU Retail.

Additional first-time exhibitors include Nuboard Media, Otter Products, Ouray Sportswear/Holloway, Outugo Inc, Pennington and Bailes, Potter Manufacturing Co, Profile Ent., PROUD Athletics, 2Undr, Score! Designs LLC, Signature Announcements, Simple Modern, Sparta 2002 Designs & Promotions, Spirit Products Ltd, Sports Coverage Inc., Stahls, Strand Art Co, SWEN Products Inc., Tailgater Plates, Tailgating Specialties, Teamwork Athletic Apparel, The Life is Good Company, Timex, Tradition Ever Since, Tribal Inflatable Standup Paddleboards, U.S. Digital Media, University Frames Inc., Vive Le Fete Collegiate, WNA Inc. and Zags LLC.

Expanded Education for Retailers

A new lineup of educational sessions is in the works, with help from the International Licensing Merchandisers' Association (LIMA), the Independent College Bookstore Association (ICBA) and The Mann Group. LIMA will present trends in the licensing industry for 2018 and beyond, based on its industry survey data. The Mann Group and ICBA will focus on topics relevant to all types of retailers, including developing healthy supplier partnerships and strategies for assortment planning. All of these sessions are free to registered attendees and are designed to give retailers the tools they need to efficiently and effectively grow their businesses.

The educational program kicks off with the 2nd Annual Industry Breakfast and Keynote Speaker. The Industry Breakfast was introduced in 2017 when University of Alabama Athletic Director Bill Battle delivered the show's

first keynote address to a full room. The 2018 Industry Keynote and Breakfast is open to all attendees and exhibitors and will take place on Tuesday, Jan. 23. The keynote speaker will be announced in the coming weeks.

In addition to the SLTS sessions, the International Collegiate Licensing Association (ICLA) will host its Winter Symposium in the days leading up to the show. The ICLA Winter Symposium will consist of two days of educational programming and networking opportunities. Separate registration is required to attend the Winter Symposium. Visit nacda.com for more information.

Money Back on Purchases

The License To Buy Show Specials Program will be back in 2018. A favorite among exhibitors and retailers, this exclusive rebate program gives buyers money back on orders they are already placing at the show. Retail buyers are rewarded based on the number and dollar amount of orders placed with participating exhibitors. Last year more than \$3.9 million in orders were written across the three-day show with 98 participating exhibitors. The show gave back nearly \$70,000 in rebates to buyers.

Other show highlights include The Opening Night Party and the New Product Zone. The Opening Night Party is the official gathering of all attendees and exhibitors for food, drink and networking. The party will convene Jan. 23 in the Sports Lounge. The New Product Zone is a special display area that lets buyers preview exhibitors' latest products before they even enter the show floor.

Qualified buyers can register for just \$60 prior to Jan. 22. Visit www.SportsTailgateShow.com for more information or to register. 📄

Nikki Puckett is the marketing director at Emerald Expositions.

Sports & Tailgating



In choosing licensees, MSU looked at manufacturers' unique attributes and how committed they were to growing with the university's brand.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Going Green

Michigan State pared down its licensees in favor of stronger partnerships with companies committed to its brand. **BY TIM O'CONNOR**



Samantha Stevens,
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After 30 years of building one of the leading collegiate licensing programs in the nation, Michigan State University (MSU) decided to take a good look at its program and realized it was working with too many apparel makers. The university had 150 licensees with T-shirt rights alone. With so many hands on the Spartan logo, it was difficult to ensure every piece of clothing embellished with the MSU brand met the university's quality standards.

Over the past year, MSU has taken a new approach to apparel licensing by identifying manufacturers with strong marketing and business plans and solid retail relationships that were willing to go

above and beyond for the university. "We analyzed our program from every angle and worked to hone down our licensee base to those best-in-class companies that we felt were invested in MSU for the next three years," Stevens says.

In choosing its key licensees, MSU looked at what made each licensee different from others and what kind of commitment they were willing to give to developing and promoting new products as well as growing the Michigan State brand. "We want to see more of an investment in our brand overall so we know they're serious about the license to use our marks," Stevens explains.

By refining its number of licensees and empha-

sizing the partnership aspects, the university has ensured the best MSU products are reaching the right retailers to meet the needs of its consumers. "Now we are more focused on delivering better quality product for our MSU fans and making sure it's not just a race to the bottom where our vendors are undercutting each other," Stevens says.

Setting Standards

For college students, alumni and athletics fans, owning a piece of MSU gear is a connection to the school they love; a reminder of the friendships they formed, the campus where they lived or the team they support. It's a declaration of the shared experiences that bond the MSU community together.

The sale of each piece of MSU gear ends up supporting the school they love. After program operating expenses, every dollar raised by MSU's licensing efforts goes toward student scholarships and special programming, such as student events and concerts. More than \$6 million was raised for the university through licensing in 2016. "For us, it's more than buying a cool new T-shirt that comes out or the latest hat," Stevens says. "It's about supporting something bigger that's impacting others."



Because there is such an emotional attachment to the MSU name, it's important for the licensing department to protect the brand. When a licensee is developing a new product, it must submit art samples to MSU's licensing team for review and approval, giving the university control over where and how its name appears.



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Michigan State University

Those quality standards go beyond the design and production of the physical products. Licensees must sign onto MSU's labor code of conduct, signifying they understand the university's expectations for their factory conditions and treatment of workers. Additionally, every company using the MSU brand must disclose their manufacturers and carry the proper liability insurance.

In strategically managing its base of apparel licensees, MSU stuck with companies where there was an existing relationship. However, the university continues to investigate new potential partnerships and licensing agreements. The Sports Licensing and Tailgate Show, set for Jan. 23-25 in Las Vegas, is one of the best opportunities each year to find new licensees and connect with existing ones. "With hundreds of licensees across the country, it's impossible to meet with everybody all the time," Stevens says. "But with many top licensees in one location, it's easier to meet face-to-face and talk through plans for the MSU brand."

Strong Partnerships

The university collaborates with every licensee on MSU-branded products, but it shares a special partnership with Nike. The relationship began with five of the school's



MSU uses consumer and buyer preference data to understand market trends and develop better strategies.



athletic teams in 2001 and has grown substantially since. In 2014, Michigan State Athletics signed a 10-year, \$34-million deal, which included making Nike its exclusive licensee for performance apparel and replica jerseys. "It was really important to our athletics department that we showed our loyalty to Nike, and it's really worked out well for all of us," Stevens says.

The agreement has led to a bigger push within Nike for other MSU licensed gear, such as new college-branded footwear at the launch of every sports season. "Nike has always been a very strong partner with the university," Stevens says. "Now that we have an exclusive agreement with Nike, we see more product development for retail as well."

Understanding how to maximize its licensing potential takes a great deal more data and resources than what's available to a small two-person department within a university. In 2015, MSU began working with IMG College Licensing, a licensing agency that represents nearly 200 colleges, bowl games, athletic conferences and the NCAA.

One key benefit of the IMG College Licensing partnership is that it provides MSU a more comprehensive understanding of where products are being sold, who buys those products, and how to reach those customers. IMG, formerly named the Collegiate Licensing Co., utilizes its internal systems to track the sale of collegiate licensed products across a number of key variables such as product category, retailer and channel of distribution.

“It’s [consumers’] passion for MSU that drives their purchase of that merchandise.”

IMG also provides consumer data and buyer preference data through the company’s Global Insights team, which access industry resources like Nielsen, as well as market-specific information that is shared with its partner institutions. “We’re able to utilize their research team for consumer surveys and insights,” Stevens says of IMG.

That information helps colleges understand licensing trends and develop targeted marketing strategies. Earlier this year, MSU teamed with IMG to study the purchasing habits of Michigan State fans in the Chicago market. The study found that 87 percent of sports apparel purchases are driven by social media and that 75 percent of consumers make decisions based on what they see on Facebook. “Social

media helps us connect with Michigan State fans in a way they can relate to in order to help influence their purchase,” Stevens concludes.

The data has changed the strategy for promoting MSU-branded products. The university is now working with licensees to use lifestyle photography to advertise Spartan accessories and clothing on social media, helping customers envision how their favorite university fits into their everyday life.

“Ultimately, we keep our consumers at the center of licensing and marketing strategies, since it’s their passion for MSU that drives their purchase of that next piece of licensed merchandise,” Stevens says. “With each sale benefiting a greater purpose on campus, we want to continue to find better ways to license and market the MSU brand to provide those vital resources to the university.” 🍷

G-III Sports by Carl Banks

G-III Sports by Carl Banks is the leading Sports Licensed Fashion Apparel Brand in College and Pro Sports. As a Michigan State alum and Super Bowl winner, Carl’s vision of creating a true lifestyle brand can be seen on campuses across the United States. Carl’s latest success is the partnership with Tonight Show Host Jimmy Fallon to create the Hands High brand.



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Hands High is a lifestyle sports apparel brand that allows fans to celebrate the greatest moments in sports while looking and feeling their best. Created by Tonight Show host and sports fan, Jimmy Fallon, Hands High provides sports fans with a distinctive way to support their teams.

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HandsHigh.com

