

# ROOTS

# 'Focus' Was On Sales, Marketing

For decades, hosiery manufacturing companies were just that ...manufacturing operations. Kayser-Roth Hosiery, Burlington Hosiery, and Hanes Hosiery Mills had full-fledged sales organizations and were sending products to a global marketplace in the post-World War II days. But they were the exception.

In the 1980s, mass merchants and discounters were gaining steam and manufacturer-to-retailer relations were soon to be the norm. Small and medium-sized companies, about 85 percent of the industry, had catching-up challenges.



Steve Labat, men's hosiery buyer for Belk Stores, listens intently as a retail panel discusses growing trends in sales.

In 1983, John Moretz, then vice president of Moretz Hosiery Co., assumed the presidency of the Catawba Valley Hosiery Assn. (later the Carolina Hosiery Assn.) He urged the CHA marketing committee to develop an event that would help manufacturers understand the challenges and trends in the domestic market. Thus began the annual marketing event in Hickory NC known as "Focus."

Initially, the January events were timed to follow "Hosiery Week" in New York when hosiery showrooms were featuring fall presentations. Retailers, it was assumed, could come to Hickory following the New York meetings.

Sports figures, a super model, and CEOs of major retail chains were involved in the presentations. Some workshops featured designers, research specialists, and trends experts. A highlight was the panel of retailer buyers from department stores, discount chains, specialty stores, and nontraditional outlets--all providing insight into issues that involve sales of hosiery products.

The "Focus" event became one of the most popular programs for the hosiery trade association. Sponsorships from leading suppliers kept the event affordable for companies of all sizes. Attendance for the two-day event averaged 300 management and marketing executives, and networking was as important as the presentations.

Each year, the "focus" changed ...from brands to technologies to consumer attitudes, to research and development, and ...yes ...globalization. Speakers and panelists were recruited by the marketing committee to bring a perspective on the theme for the meeting.

The committee was always experimenting. One year, greige mills were invited to set up booths. Another year, the opening dinner featured foods from five continents (Antarctica and Australia excepted).

The Focus series ended in the late 1990s prior to the merger of the CHA into THA.

Two years ago, THA discontinued its marketing event in December. Relationships between manufacturers and retailers had been encompassed by more rigid paradigms.

However as manufacturers now seek to diversify their customer base, some recall the information they gleaned from the Focus programs. "We got advanced warning about issues we were going to be dealing with in the future," a North Carolina executive reflected.



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*Jim Halvorsen, left, of Clayson Knitting and moderator for the 1994 retailer panel, chats with Chris Scherm of Kids R Us, and Mary Halvorsen.*



*Margaret Scott, left, of Carson Pirie Scott, Chicago, a retail buyer, and Kim Smith, right, of Kayser-Roth Hosiery, enjoyed networking.*



*Joe Ettore, center, president and CEO of Caldor Stores, was the keynote speaker at the 1994 Focus. He is seen with Jim Good, left, president of Red Hill Hosiery Mill, and Bob Jackman of Neuville Industries.*



*Kareem Al Jabar, the basketball legend, spoke at the 1993 Focus, thanks to Moretz Inc. which used Jabar as a spokesman. From left are Jim Good, Red Hill Hosiery, Denise Yow, then of Kayser-Roth Hosiery; John Moretz, president, Moretz Inc.; and Jackie Rhymer, Clevenger Knitting Mills.*



*Eric Smith of E.G. Smith Socks pushed manufacturers to think out of the box and wear fashion socks. But most of the hosiery executives who joined him on the stage of the 1993 Focus were sticking with conservative socks. Smith insisted marketing had to be more creative to generate growth.*



*Enjoying the 1995 Focus reception were, from left, Michael Clevenger, Clevenger Sox; Don Burn, Catawba Sox; and Tracy Puckett, Maple Springs Laundry.*



*Over 300 people jammed into the opening gala for the 1989 Focus which focused on brands.*