

Popular Culture Events

Once More, With Passion



While some consumer shows struggle to stay viable in this drag of an economy, some remain strong, defying the odds and even growing in attendance.

Representing various segments of the hobby and interest marketplace, these events boast enthusiastic audiences so devoted to their pastimes they're willing to spend discretionary income, no matter how limited, to attend.

Add to that the entertainment value these shows provide and many so-called "passion events" are not just surviving, but thriving.

Such is the case with Reed Exhibitions' portfolio of pop culture events, shows that have demonstrated tremendous growth because of an avid community of fans.

According to Greg Topalian, senior vice president of Reed Exhibitions and head of its "launch pad" incubator business development team, Reed's foray into this segment began three years ago with the launch of **New York Comicon**, an annual event for comic book and pop culture enthusiasts held at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.

As the largest and fastest-growing event of its kind, the show continues to increase in popularity year after year, with attendance surging from 33,000 in 2006 to 77,000 at the most recent event Feb. 6-8, Topalian said.

"I was a comic fan and thought this was the sexiest category of the publishing industry," he added. "It wasn't part of some grand strategy to create a group of pop culture shows. We just thought we had a good idea."

The overwhelming success in New York has resulted in a sister show, the **Chicago Comic & Entertainment Expo**, scheduled to launch April 16-18 at McCormick Place in Chicago.

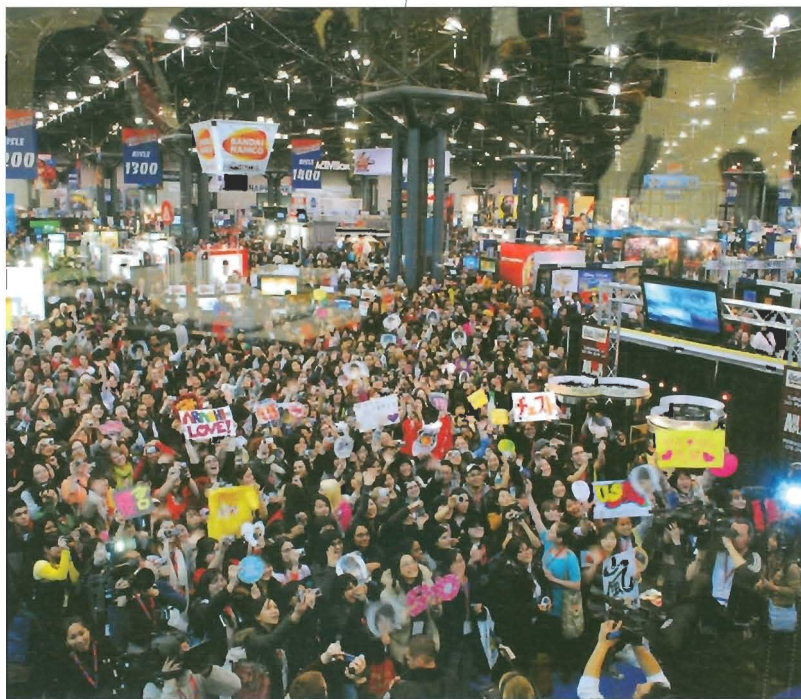
But Reed didn't stop at comics.

After the launch of New York Comicon, the company moved into another vertical segment, with the **New York Anime Festival** in December 2007, also at the Javits. With such a strong following for

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Japanese animation, Topalian said the event continues to grow, from 15,000 attendees in 2007 to an anticipated 20,000 at the next event, Sept. 25-27.

In addition, he added, Reed recently has entered into two partnerships: one with **Penny Arcade Expo**, also known as PAX, a leading event for the consumer video game industry, and another with Las Vegas-based Zuffa, owner of the Ultimate Fighting Championship. What has resulted are more show launches: **PAX East**, an East Coast counterpart to the existing Seattle-based show, set to debut March 2010 at the John B. Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center in Boston, and the **UFC Fan Expo** will launch July 10-11 at Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas.



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Seventeen-year-old **Anime Expo** is the largest and one of the oldest events for Japanese animation in North America, according to Liyin Liang, 2009 convention chairwoman. Produced by the non-profit Society for the Promotion of Japanese Animation, the event attracts thousands of devoted fans from all parts of the world.

Held last year at the Los Angeles Convention Center, the event drew 43,000 fans and is expected to meet, if not exceed, those numbers when it returns July 2-5, Liang said. This year, signs of growth remain positive, with pre-registration 29 percent above what it was last year at this time, she added.

"It's the one time during the year these young people can express themselves to their full desires and be around people who will understand their passion," Liang said. "That's a big attraction."

Outside of shows devoted to cartoon characters, arcade and video games, another segment that remains vital focuses on the outdoor lifestyle, specifically hunting and fishing.

John Bunge, president of Iowa Show Productions, said his **Iowa Deer Classic**, held annually at the HyVee Hall & Vets Auditorium in Des Moines, Iowa, had record attendance of close to 20,000 in 2008, growing to 25,000 this past March and expanding in size from 100,000 square feet to 160,000 sq. ft. The 12-year-old event has remained vital for one simple reason, Bunge said: the mystery and pursuit of the big buck.

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