



FOREVER YOUNG

In an effort to attract a new generation of members, Association for Creative Industries mastered a rebranding of both the organization and its annual conference. Here's how they pulled it off with flying colors.

By Anna Dunn



A mime, a Dixieland band, and Visit Phoenix President and CEO Steve Moore walk into a trade show. This unlikely trio opened the first-ever Creativation show to much fanfare in January at Phoenix Convention Center, where Association for Creative Industries (formerly Craft and Hobby Association) nailed the rebranding of its annual trade show from MEGA Show to Creativation, and of the association as a whole. Behind the name change is a push to appeal to a younger demographic of manufacturers, retailers, designers, emerging businesses, influencers, bloggers and creative professionals.

Andria LaJeunesse, vice president of events and education at AFCl, shared with Connect how the team executed an association rebrand and launched an all-new annual conference that this year attracted 338 exhibitors and more than 3,000 attendees from 54 countries.

Who attends Creativation?
We support the entire creative industry. That's one of the reasons for the name change: to encompass everybody. Our buyers range from small mom-and-pop scrapbook stores all the way up to Michaels, Jo-Ann, Hobby Lobby and more. Those people come to buy and fill their stores for the entire year. Our exhibitors are the manufacturers.

What was your first step in the rebrand?
We hired agency [Verse Brand Strategy] to help us through the process and identify what changes needed to be made. We knew we needed to revamp not only the show, but also the association as a whole. They did interviews with members at our trade show last year and with former members to get a better understanding of why they weren't getting value from the association anymore.

Why did you want to announce the association name change at the show?
We felt it would be best announced at the show once we [could] say we were committed to change. That's why it didn't come at the same time as the announcement of the new show name. When people walked into the show on the final day, everything was rebranded, including [staff]. We planned it so there would be buzz leading up to the party that night.

How did you come up with the name Creativation?
In a staff meeting one day we started throwing around names. We wanted the word "create" in there, and thought of "innovation," "destination" and "creation." I don't know who said "creativation" in the meeting, but everybody sat back and said, "That's it."

Where did the idea to transform the show floor into a city come from?
We came up with this city theme and asked ourselves: How do we implement parts of a city to achieve our goals? [Experiences] like the Edible Arts Shoppe and Art Studio are all interactive and fun, but they're also showing our retailers another

way to grow their business [and how to] implement new tools, techniques and products, which hits our goal of educating retailers on better ROI.

How does the rebrand tie into the overall goals of the association?
One of our main goals is to support the entire creative industry, and the name change was important to help relay that. Our new URL is afci.global. We have our U.K. partners and a chapter in Canada, but we want to go beyond that. Not only does the rebrand help increase our support of the creative industry domestically, but we can also reach out to our partners in Japan and Europe and really grow. The millennials, DIYers and makers out there are a huge, thriving part of our industry. The words "craft" and "hobby"

Models decked out in clothing, jewelry and accessories created earlier in the week at the Fashion Fusion Collaborative Challenge workshop rocked the runway at The Duce in downtown Phoenix during the Creativation After Party.



COLORFUL ELEMENTS
Town Square
As the first element of the city-themed trade show dreamed up a year before Creativation, Town Square came to life with colorful elements such as a living statue and a character artist. A magician greeted attendees at the entrance of the exhibit hall, and a food truck was used as a spot for attendees to get AFCl membership questions answered.

Plugged-In Park
Attendees exploring more than 119,000 square feet of exhibitor booths is enough to warrant a quiet space for them to recharge, and Plugged-In Park was just that. Picnic tables equipped with charging stations and topped with sponsor Crafter's Companion markers, colored pencils and coloring pages gave attendees a chance to unleash creativity during breaks. It also allowed the sponsor to interact with potential buyers as they tested out its products.

Splatter Room
Color and creativity collided at the 3M-, DecoArt- and Pinspiration-sponsored Splatter Room, where guests flung paint onto canvases and left with one-of-a-kind pieces of abstract art. There was swag too: 3M reps gave out samples of new products around the booth.

Maker Space
Attendees got the ultimate hands-on experience at the Maker Space, a make-and-take station combining traditional crafting with high-tech equipment and tools. Twelve creative industry brands partnered with AFCl in the space, hosting demos and 15-minute lessons from business and social media pros.

HAUTE PHOTOGRAPHY

BEST IN SHOW

- Supplier Booths**
Eileen Hull for vintage trailer/white fence
Sizzix for succulent sign and paper florals
Echo Park Paper Co. for balloons mixed with greenery sign



get lost in that; they make them think it's their grandma's association. Introducing technology in the Maker Space (see sidebar) is so important for us to keep growing and attracting a younger demographic.

What challenges did you face during the rebranding and how did you overcome them?
We had too many ideas. It was difficult narrowing down what was feasible and what would fit on the show floor. We are continually spot-checking the features we came up with to see if they're getting traffic, and if our partners are experiencing success. Our marketing team did a phenomenal job. [Verse Brand Strategy] contributed to that as well. We brought on some new people and did a lot more videos this year, so it was getting that message out and explaining that Creativation is not the same old trade show and conference.

What do you love most about the show floor?
I love how we truly made it like Main Street America. You have things people can relate to, whether they're in the industry or not. I like all the little pieces that make it feel like home. That was another idea behind the city theme. When you're a community of thousands of members around the

globe and you get together once a year, you want it to be a coming-home ceremony where everyone can't wait to see their best friends and give hugs.

How do you hope to continue buzz after the show?
There will be touch points throughout the year to remind [members] AFCl is changing as a whole, and Creativation is just a part of that. We also announced a new midyear event with our partners at Sierra Pacific Crafts. This gives us continual, year-round involvement with our membership. From a marketing perspective, we partnered with 11 influencers in the industry, mainly bloggers, from different segments of our industry—sewing, paper and craft. We're going to utilize them all year long to help us spread the word.

Have you noticed any positive trends as a result of the rebranding?
Our staff has never been so collaborative and excited about anything. The teamwork has been phenomenal. Minus your typical complaints about shuttle routes or concessions, everyone is so excited and positive, and it's more than we could have hoped for. Having people say, "Wow, this is such a great show. This is so different from last year. We can't believe you did this," is more rewarding than anything. ■