



## THE ENVIRONMENT OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

By Tiffany Marshall

What does your exhibit say about your company? Not the graphic messages per se, but the overall look and environment of your booth? Because, let's face it, engineers may read the fine print, but there are others who will form an opinion based solely on what they observe as they walk past. What will be their first impression? Malcolm Gladwell wrote a book entitled *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. In it he examines the power of the first impression. "If we are to learn to improve the quality of the decisions we make, we need to accept the mysterious nature of our snap judgments." Whether or not we recognize the weight of first impressions, exhibit marketers need to acknowledge the power behind "snap judgments".

Does your exhibit structure communicate strength, beauty, statistics, frugality, simplicity, fun, luxury, creativity, or reliability? Or does it say cheap, busy, disorganized, apathetic, stand-offish, generic, cold, or status quo? Take the following exhibits, for example. You can't read the fine print or talk to the booth staff, but you get a first impression. What is it, and why? Notice your reaction to texture, angles, curves, lines, colors, theme, and overall appearance. What does the booth staff's body language communicate? What kind of environment has been created? What does that environment say about the company it represents?



As with art, the perception of an exhibit is subjective. Who are you trying to reach? Does your target audience appreciate art or numbers? Comfort or efficiency? Fun or professionalism? At the same time, if your exhibit blends with the rest of those on the show floor, are you accomplishing your purpose? Industry shows can sometimes collect homogenous exhibit looks. What would make you stand out from the crowd while still communicating your company's goals? What's the advantage of standing out versus blending in?

When you're designing your exhibit space, consider both your set-up and the first impressions. If the set-up is easy but the impression is less-than-desirable, it is worth the effort? On the flip side, if the set-up is more complex but the impression is outstanding, your effort may pay off.