

Success at D&M Tools – ‘The Tool Show’ 2018 leaves critics eating humble pie

FREE entry, free parking, free show guide, free prize draw – I wonder what brings in the crowds?

Recently, I have heard quite a few voices in the tool trade warning of the imminent demise of tool shows. The usual suspects are blamed – online shopping, austerity and shrinking wallets. Then along comes the busiest spate of trade shows in the year and the doomsayers seem to have it wrong.



D&M Tools is celebrating its 40th year in 2018 – a massive achievement in a highly competitive industry. It is also the 18th anniversary of ‘The Tool Show’, reputedly the UK’s largest display of branded hand

tools, power tools and machinery. For me though – I just like its buzz and a chance to chat to tool users, both professionals and amateurs alike, who know a lot about tools.

The D&M Tools show seems to be able to attract upwards of 10,000 visitors from all areas of the tool-using spectrum. Many of these visitors leave carrying tool cases, boxes and bags – a sure sign of good deals and cracking products.

The secret to a good show

There is no doubt that Organiser Paul Dowding has become increasingly savvy in the use of social media to advertise, inform and attract the visitors. Paul said: “There was an even larger area of outside space used for demos which often do a better job of selling tools by showing rather than telling. We encourage demos wherever they are appropriate for this very reason.”

Regarding the social media side of D&M, if my email inbox was anything to go by, I had reminders from D&M every couple of days as well as regular tweets. The value of a good customer database is also clear – and a good show will attract them. However, all the social media would count for nothing if it wasn’t for the products themselves. It really helps to have some clear open spaces, inside and outside the main hall, where exhibitors can demonstrate equipment. Internet shopping may be cheaper, but for some users (and I am one of them) there is no substitute for handling the tools and

trying a few simple tasks with them.

Record Power’s sponsorship of the Woodworking Live Event, with its series of lectures and demonstrations, drew in large audiences with many questions and comments for the expert demonstrators – all well-known in their own fields of woodworking. For many the opportunity to turn a pen under the expert guidance of a member of the Surrey Woodturners – for free – was not an opportunity to be turned down.

A skilled demonstrator can also answer questions, try more demanding tasks and explain the workings of things in a simple manner, which is something I find more engaging than watching a YouTube advertising video. You may not buy, but you will most likely have a few thoughts on how you use your tools, and how that could be improved. I find the Veritas range of planes strangely tugging at the strings of my wallet.

Dealers’ deals

For deals, suppliers have to be on board because the cost of a stand at a tool show, along with staff commitment, is considerable. Lots of tools have to be sold to make the sums add up. So the deals have to be just. Again, Paul acknowledged the amount of work he personally had to put in to ensure the deals were suitable and right. This clearly involves some sharp negotiations with suppliers, and often results in wafer-thin profit margins. The balance is always trying to forecast if the number of items sold will justify the skinny pricing.



■ PAUL Dowding, Show Organiser



■ WERA showcased their impressive range of tools



■ MILWAUKEE dazzled on their stand, offering an indepth tour of their products

Having 40 years of business to celebrate, Paul chose to offer 40 top deals. Many of the most popular deals are power tools, either single tools or very popular combo packs.

There were still a lot of mains powered tools in there too, such as lathes and bandsaws. Even though I have enough routers, I felt tempted by the Trend T5EB router at £99.00 – I paid more than that for my first router 25 years ago.

For the pros, there's the Trend T10EK: at £239, it's for more experienced tradespeople and provides an open invitation to get routing with one of the UK's top routing brands.

The Metabo SXE 450 Turbo Tec Random Orbit Sander is a trusted and reliable machine, and at around £120, it's a bargain. Rail saws of all kinds and price points are another classic deal candidate. Somehow the temptation of a plunge saw, a couple of rails, a pair of clamps

and a carry case seems like a good way to improve the accuracy of fitting work at a very keen price.

Some winds of change

With over 10,000 visitors and record numbers of tools sold at the 2018 show, Paul says he still has to have a period of reflection and a number of debriefs with staff and suppliers before he books the venue for next year.

Increase of security

The downside to big visitor numbers is there are opportunities for canny and opportunistic thieves to make off with the often very attractively displayed items. In the last three years, a number of suppliers have talked to me about theft from shows as a growing issue. Sometimes the thefts are for compact and valuable items like battery packs, but there have been cases of tools stolen quite blatantly. As a result, these issues were pivotal in Paul's reflections on last year's show, which



■ FEIN display: power tool specialists

spearheaded his decision to spend a considerable sum of money on security.

He had people patrolling the show, guards at entrances and in the car park. The latter were not only to watch out for thieves from the show, but also keeping an eye on the many visitors' white vans – some no doubt with tools on board.

A couple of suppliers bringing in the vast amount of stock needed for this show had their vans targeted beforehand, so clearly, there is a much wider issue of security to be considered.

Despite some of these downsides, in our post-show discussion, Paul still has an enormous enthusiasm and energy – not to mention lots of new ideas – for D&M Tools – The Tool Show 2019.

41 show deals maybe?



■ THERE were practical demonstrations and workshops for all visitors

