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CONCERNS AND CAUTIOUS CONFIDENCE

Steve Kahane looks at business and market trends in North America

NASMA recently held its fall executive forum meeting in Irvine, California at the corporate headquarters of Roland DGA. More than 20 senior executives and owners from the leading manufacturers in the North American print industry participated. Here are some of the highlights from the meeting.

All participants were increasingly optimistic about their businesses and markets. In a quick and very general survey, everyone indicated that sales in 2010 were up from 2009 and, next year, everyone expects further growth. Two-thirds of the companies indicated that their marketing spend increased this year whilst more than three-quarters of the group plans to increase its marketing spending next year. Given the experience during the recession, companies to this point have held off hiring and buying equipment. But that is expected to change next year as participants begin increasing headcounts and capital

spending, albeit cautiously. The new normal in North America appears to be mostly steady but slow and challenging growth.

During the business round-table discussions, several issues seemed to be on everyone's mind. First and foremost, material availability and supply chain management are challenging everyone at the moment. Second, margin pressures remain as print customers work to regain their bottom lines. And third, what is the role of screen-printing in an increasingly digital world?

The keynote speakers expanded on these issues and gave their views on where the market is heading. Tom Butler, owner of Ink Throwers, one of North America's largest screen-printers, talked with us about his business and the screen-print market in general. Tom noted that the 'big box' retailers have shortened their supply chains over the past several years, bringing a lot of printing back to North America.

But expectations from the major retailers are very high in terms of pricing, delivery and response. Screen-printing remains the 'go-to' technology for high volume printing.

Frazer Chesterman, FESPA Managing Director, and Marcus Timson, FESPA's Sales and Marketing Director, spoke with us about the growth in the digital marketplace and FESPA's plans for its upcoming shows – in particular, FESPA Americas. FESPA sees considerable growth ahead for graphic printing. Screen-printing will remain an important market segment, but attention is shifting to digital printing where there is a faster pace of innovation. FESPA plans to highlight wide-format, in particular, at its upcoming FESPA Americas show in Florida. While there are many challenges ahead, the good news from the meeting is that manufacturers are excited and are once again looking to growth and the future. ■

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