

Giving Up Gravity



The one constant in daily life is the relentless increase in our personal choices. Be it the mustard section at the grocery store or shoes at the mall; Americans define and differentiate themselves through the consumptive options they embrace. Outdoor Retailer has always reflected this trend and

has now evolved to become a huge galleria of outdoor expression.

The old Outdoor Industry was based on fear. Would your jacket be waterproof and warm enough to keep you alive in the fierce alpine weather? Outdoor products were aimed at the top of the

mountain and peddled to the masses, who wore it around town as part uniform and part costume.

The emerging Outdoor 2.0 is based on fun. The new mantra is, “Will this purchase make me happy?” Community, comfort, and convenience are at the absolute forefront of sales presentations. Customers can see themselves living a normal life with this product; it has morphed to fit into their ideas about self-expression, value and lifestyle.

The choices available at Outdoor Retailer are broader and deeper than ever simply because there are a lot more fun based products out there to dream-up than the 10 Essentials of yesteryear. Accessories for a campsite barbeque with friends are more interesting and accessible to a wider audience than models intended for a forced bivouac on a high peak.

Today’s OR is full of sandals and sundresses, little plastic picnic gizmos and anything made with webbing and wool. Alternative sportswear celebrates the urban/outdoor connection without apology while technical fabrics transition seamlessly into big city apparel. The huge spectrum of textiles and the endless expressions about what can be made from them, gives the show unexpected design depth and provides the inspiration to fuel an ongoing process.

Increased choice has raised the creative bar.

The Outdoor Retailer Show is no longer about mountains and climbers and all that. Now ORSM defines

Americana from a different point of view, one that is both experiential and collective. The industry has left behind the snobbery that came with its hard-man-climbing origins and now projects a new sense of inclusiveness. The culture and community of Outdoor 2.0 is connected by simple experiences; be it at a festival, in a yoga studio or on a stand up paddleboard, this group is just happy to show-up and DO something with their friends. Outdoor really just means active and social.

This change has made the OR Show much, much, better. In addition to tons more product, a bigger vision of what “outdoor” means has grown to include kids and non-profits and education and politics. In the past, the tradeshow was human sized, small enough to be dominated by few personalities and a handful of companies. Today, no one can get their arms around the Show, it has grown past ego and brand and into a much larger realm. Spending a little quality time together is the shared value system echoing in the halls now.

Malcolm Daly, founder of climbing gear company Trango, made the call about mountaineering almost 20 years ago. “It won’t last,” he said of the emerging outdoor trend, “Because, carrying a pack up a hill isn’t any fun ...gravity never takes a day off.” ●

(Disclaimer: Ironically, this shady Mr. Gray thinks avoiding a whipper is still a climbing term. It goes without saying that his opinions are not necessarily shared by the publisher, or anyone born after the 55 MPH national speed limit.)