

Brazilian Talent, International Standards

FICOC consolidates its position as the largest event in the Latin American Christian marketplace, says Omar de Souza, of *Consumidor Cristão* in São Paulo, Brazil.

FICOC is... the second greatest Christian trade show in the world.”

These words could be taken as an overstatement, if said by the organizers or by some enthusiastic exhibitor or visitor. But Jim Powell, international director of CBA (the Christian Booksellers Association), knows exactly what he is saying.

In conversations with André Santos, president of Brazil's evangelical booksellers association, known as ANLE, Powell confirmed what everyone suspected—the Christian Consumers International Trade Show, which took place in São Paulo for the second time in September 2003, is surpassed only by CBA's Annual Convention in the United States.

Statistics

The numbers support Powell's assertion. About 31,000 visitors—including 3,000 people who got in without badges—passed through the gates and corridors of the Expo Mart Center to see what 120 exhibitors were showing. EBF Eventos, the company in charge of

FICOC, counted more than 4,000 buyers from distribution channels including chains, independent booksellers, and others. There were 5,300 denomination leaders present to celebrate the 10th anniversary of São Paulo State Pastor's Council. About 1,000 students and 200 teachers of Christian-oriented schools of São Paulo attended one day. In addition, some of the country's largest newspapers, radio and television stations announced the event.

FICOC had over 50 seminars, trade meetings, and musical shows. Christian singer Ana Paula Valadão Bessa's first book, *Adoração diante do trono* (Worship before the throne), was released by publishing house Diante do Trono. They sold over 2,000 copies of her book at the event. The title topped the bestseller list released by *Consumidor Cristão* magazine.

“FICOC 2003 surpassed expectations in all aspects: media, results, visibility, business opportunities, training, special events and so forth,” says Eduardo Berzin Jr., president of EBF Eventos.



The diverse crowd attending FICOC 2003 surpassed expectations.

"All suppliers did very well and were impressed by the audience," he added. "ANLE seminars helped to show that booksellers are still very important to the Christian marketplace."

Measurable results

Berzin estimates that approximately U.S. \$3.5 million worth of business was conducted at the event. This is a short-term projection.

"We expect thrice this sum will be traded in Christian products in the next 12 months because of business started at FICOC," he says. "No other Christian trade show in the world, outside of the United States, achieves the same results."

This may be a surprise to readers not familiar with Brazil's Christian market. Of its 165 million population with a Roman Catholic majority, 18 percent are evangelicals. There are more than 50,000 evangelical and historic protestant churches in Brazil, including small communities spread over the nation's territory. Literacy is higher among these groups than in the rest of the population. There are more than 150 Christian publishing houses; 60 of these companies are organized as the Brazilian Christian Publishers Association.

FICOC's success helps topple myths. "The Christian market is strong in Brazil," says Berzin. Some might believe it is still only an emerging market, but "they are changing their minds," he adds. "They're realizing that there is no sin on working with a professional

approach, even when you're talking about Bibles or devotional books. We can be more effective on spreading the good news of the Gospel if we become more effective in business."

Partnership

FICOC's partnership with

ANLE was key to its success. "It was important to offer new resources to bookstores," says Berzin. This event saw the introduction of ANLE/FICOC awards for outstanding booksellers and suppliers. "We can see the prizes will be a target for many next year," he adds.

Berzin hopes to boost international participation next year. While companies such as DaySpring Cards and the Latin division of Word Records, were present at the 2003 event, along with international ministries, such as CBA, "we are sure that there will be many more expositors and visitors in 2004," he adds. In fact, almost

all the 2003 exhibitors plan to take part in the 2004 event, scheduled September 21-26 in Center Norte, a bigger air-conditioned space closer to downtown. Brazilian Christian publishers and booksellers who did not attend last year are already making reservations.

"FICOC showed the Brazilian evangelical community how important it is to get together to achieve the target of spreading the salvation message," says Berzin. "The name of Jesus Christ was loudly proclaimed." ♦



TRADE SHOW TIPS

Eduardo Berzin, president of EBF Eventos, speaks to InterLit about the logistics of the 2003 FICOC.

InterLit: What worked to make FICOC a success?

Berzin: In 2003, we chose a better space—much better than 2002. The companies had enough time to make public their new products. Booksellers and other visitors had enough time to schedule their trips to São Paulo. We were very careful to meet all visitors' needs in short-term basis. Because of the high attendance and the media interest, we worked much more, but we were also more effective. The Brazilian Bible Society, the official cultural supporter, and Line Records, one of the greatest recording companies in Brazil and also the sponsor of FICOC, played an important role in organization. All the exhibitors that sowed with us had their chance to harvest.

InterLit: How did the exhibitors respond?

Berzin: Almost all who showed their products in both FICOC events felt better and more comfortable in 2003. As organizers, we witnessed the effort to offer the best to the visitors, and they got it. We're still hearing good comments about the tradeshow, as well as good suggestions to improve the event in 2004. For example, we missed a good sound system inside the pavilion. But this problem will be solved next year, since we're moving to a better place.

InterLit: What are your plans for the 3rd FICOC?

Berzin: So far, we're evaluating all suggestions, but we had to make some decisions. For example, we had to move FICOC from Expo Mart to Center Norte, that offers more space and resources, and is also closer to downtown São Paulo. The cost will increase, but as we're doing this all under prayer, we don't have to fear. God will take care of everything. May His will be done.

—Omar de Souza