

The Office Exhibition, Dubai International Convention & Exhibition Centre,

3 – 5 March 2009

Dubai, with a population of 2.4 million of which 1.6 million are non-nationals and a GDP of \$71 billion is one of the seven Emirates in the UAE. Until last year, it had one of the fastest growing economies of the world. It is a favoured tourist destination for both business and leisure travellers and the venue for many major world class-sporting events such as the Dubai Desert Classic Golf Tournament, the Dubai Tennis Championships, the Dubai Sevens (Rugby), the Emirates Grand Prix (offshore Power Boat Championship), the UAE Desert Challenge, and the Dubai World Cup (the world's richest horse race).

This year's Office Exhibition was held a full month later than in 2008 because of the timing of the month of Ramadan and so the weather could have been expected to be considerably hotter. It was a scorching 95° in the previous week but show visitors had a very pleasant 64° to 75°, with a breeze. Summer temperatures can reach 130°! You knew you were in for a culture clash when the flight from Europe was "dry" and the onboard plasma screen display showed nothing for seven hours other than the direction of and distance from Mecca.

Arriving in Dubai after a year away, one was immediately struck by the tangled fretwork of cranes as well as the nearly completed Burj Dubai skyscraper by Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill which at about 2,684 ft and 162 floors, is expected to be the world's highest building when finished in December.



Burj Dubai (computer generated image)

The Office Show, Dubai International Convention & Exhibition Centre - March 2009

The exhibition had moved halls and was double the size of the previous year. The show complex, part of the World Trade Centre, occupied two of the eight halls on the site which also houses a large conference centre, two hotels, and the rest of the usual show paraphernalia of restaurants, (very expensive) cafes, shops and two prayer halls, one for men and one for women. Everything was very spacious, brand new and spotlessly clean. There were two other much busier unrelated shows being held simultaneously. Why do office furniture shows rarely produce any real buzz?



The Office Exhibition, Dubai

There were many more big names than in the past displaying their latest and best from Neocon or Orgatec – new to the Middle East markets – and many had spent serious time and money designing some very attractive, if simple stands.

Lower visitor numbers can be explained by the fact that Middle Eastern markets are generally quiet at the moment, hit by the same turmoil as everywhere although the situation varies from country to country. Demand in Dubai itself is down with many of the larger projects on hold. Abu Dhabi, Oman and Kuwait seem to be holding up better and the massive investments in Saudi Arabia appear to be paying dividends. Many of the exhibitors

The Office Show, Dubai International Convention & Exhibition Centre - March 2009

told a much sorer tale about their own home markets, with reports of some European markets being as much as 45% down, year on year.

The exhibitors fell neatly into two categories: manufacturers, mainly, from Europe and the US, and local dealers who frequently represented manufacturers but were also selling their skills and resources to those regional buyers and their advisors.

The show ran for three days, Tuesday to Thursday and attendance levels on days one and three was pretty dire. Visitor numbers on the Wednesday were more respectable but nothing to write home about. Overall, attendance was considerably down on 2008 and for the exhibitors in the smaller of the two halls who didn't see all those who attended, the cost to benefit ratio was particularly poor. Such a pity because there were some very good displays of the latest products from many of the world's leading office furniture companies and in many cases, visitors had the chance to talk to the top people in the exhibiting companies who, unlike with major world shows, often had time for some serious and valuable discussions.

North American exhibitors included Allsteel showing for the 6th time and featuring their new *Acuity* task chair. Scott Savage in charge of the region was convinced that success depended on a long term consistent presence in the market and at exhibitions.



Scott Savage and *Acuity* from HNI's Allsteel

The Office Show, Dubai International Convention & Exhibition Centre - March 2009

Steelcase were working with their local partner, Ishtar Decor and showing workstations, task seating and featuring their *Walkstation* which unfortunately broke down when the UAE Minister of Education HE Dr. Hanif Hassan who opened the show was invited to try it. It never worked again.



Walkstation from Steelcase

Teknion featured their green credentials rather than any furniture.



The Teknion stand

KI showed a wide range of products including the *Perry* chair from Charles Perry as well as steel storage and workstations



KI stand featuring the *Perry* chair.

Nucraft had a large, busy stand and reported some good enquiries.



Nucraft stand with some wood based workstations

Many major German, Spanish, British, Portuguese and Italian companies were gathered together in their national groupings supported by their trade associations and employing common stand designs. This helped the visitor easily understand some of the national styles and trends and compare designs, finishes and presentation. The Italian manufacturers have traditionally been very successful in Middle Eastern markets.

The Spanish group were particularly effective with stunning displays from Forma 5, Actiu, Permasa, Bior and several others.



Forma 5 from Spain



Actiu from Spain and their *Arkitek* line



Part of Italy's Unifor's large stand



Michele Perini's Sagsa company from Italy, and their *Milano Lunga* range

German seating companies were particularly well represented by Sedus, Wilkhahn, Interstuhl, Koehl and Girsberger amongst others.



Girsberger and their new *AL3* swivel chair from designer Thierry Aubert

The most interesting stand was from the Portuguese company Levira who had arranged their workstations on a bright white 45° slope, viewable from all sides; it looked stunning.



Levira from Portugal and their slopey stand.

Vitra's display, which included the *Vegetal* chair from Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec receiving its first international showing, attracted considerable interest from local dignitaries and they reported brisk trade.



Vegetal chair from Vitra



Vitra's stand attracted local interest.

British manufacturers were in abundance, with stands from Boss Design, Bisley, Eurotek and Silverline amongst many others.



Brian Murray of Boss Design, UK, with some customers.

Turkey was well represented by Koleksiyon, Nurus, Tuna, Burotime and others. Their beautifully designed products compared well with those from the US and Western Europe. The stands were large, attractive and impressive and they attracted quality visitors.



Koleksiyon's *Quo Vadis* range



Nurus' U Too system

And finally, it was interesting that the larger companies, whose ranges cover a wide price spectrum, chose to display their brightest, newest and best rather than the lower spec and priced ranges which are popular in the Middle East.

For visitors, this was an excellent show with very good facilities, a wide selection of companies and products and could be viewed in a single day. For exhibitors, the show was perhaps less satisfactory.

© John Sacks
JSA Consultancy Services
www.jsacs.com
March 2009