



MICHELE BELL

Chickens and Fish Heads and Bongos, Oh My...

As research for this issue’s cover story on how suppliers can find good factories to partner with in Asia, Rich Fairfield, ASI’s publisher, and I went to China in October to visit some factories and experience what you all do or have done in the past when looking for just the right vendor for your business.

At one factory, in an area that made Beirut look like Beverly Hills, there were chickens strutting around a lone porcelain toilet outside behind the building; at two of the factories, there was eerie, repetitive muzak, and Mao-like signs posted on the walls with sayings like, “Productive workers are happy workers.” Which, if nothing else, explains why I’m moody.

At the second factory, the very sweet Chinese girl who was our guide asked Rich and I to take off our shoes and put on flip-flops – which were clearly used. As I threw off my Prada shoes and muttered under my breath, Rich, who is a much more, go-with-the-flow, “isn’t this a neat new experience?” kind of guy, not only slipped right into the funkified flip-flops but asked to keep them. “I like these – they’re so cool,” he said enthusiastically to the young Chinese girl as she turned to a co-worker and said something in Chinese that I have no doubt was, “crazy American.” Trudging behind in the ill-fitting, nasty flip-flops, mopping my brow with antibacterial wipes because it was hotter than Hades and the factories don’t have air conditioning, and sighing loudly and petulantly every time Rich jauntily turned around and called after me, “how you doing back there?” I felt for all of you who’ve gone through or are going through the process of trying to find just the right factory with whom to do your business. It’s undeniably a hit-or-miss, time consuming, laborious process that can be extremely costly to both your finances and your company’s business reputation if you pick the wrong one.

The good news is that the third factory we visited, Scorpion Precision Industry Co. Ltd., in Zhongshan, was like an oasis in the desert. Housed in a palatial new building with central air, no less,

I loved it the minute Rich and I arrived – and not just because there was a French flag flying outside. The owner, Georges Ouang, spoke perfect English and was extraordinarily knowledgeable, gracious and forthcoming. So gracious, in fact, that when he served Rich and I lunch that included fish heads, he noticed that I wasn’t eating while Rich dug right in. Though I tried to be polite by telling him I had just had a big meal, he smiled, went to the kitchen and cooked me chicken flavored Ramen noodles. If it wouldn’t have been wildly inappropriate, I would have kissed him.

Georges is featured in my cover story on finding the right factory (page 40) because, having owned his business for 20 years, he’s got some great advice to save you the time, energy and expense of looking for factories in all the wrong places.

Also in this issue we have coverage of new items and trends from the Global Sources Gifts & Home Products Show and Kenfair’s Gifts & Premiums Show (page 62) that were held in October. The Global Sources Show is relatively new, and attracted different manufacturers who can’t get into the Kenfair Show due to a lengthy wait list and space constraints. Consequently, it seemed to have more new, interesting and unique products.

Though I will say that the Kenfair Show did have some exhibitors whose offerings drew tons of traffic. And despite the fact that some people think it’s us Western heathens who are catering the sin buffet and shredding society’s moral fiber, two of the most crowded booths at Kenfair were Asian companies offering imprintable stripper poles – complete with TV monitors showing strippers demonstrating the merchandise – and bongos. Though none of the U.S. suppliers I saw in Hong Kong seemed to come across these booths, they were there. Ask Ron Ball, ASI’s vice president of supplier sales. Like a homing pigeon, he found the strippers in five minutes flat.

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