

FIM CONFERENCE CHANGES APPROACH: NEW SPONSORS AND MORE FOCUS ON TECHNOLOGY

THOUGH stumbling in recent years, the annual Financial Investment Management (FIM) conference, recently hosted in New York by Flagg Management Inc., regained some ground this year. By recruiting six blue chip sponsors, including Bloomberg L.P., Bridge Information Systems Inc., Factset Data Systems Inc., Reuters, Standard & Poor's and Thomson Financial Services Inc., Flagg Management was able to increase the exposure the show received this year. However, it was the increased emphasis placed on technology that show organizers are hoping will generate even greater turnout in the future.

Since its inception in 1985, the FIM conference has been exclusively sponsored by the 5,000 member New York Society of Security Analysts, a New York-based affiliate of the Association of Investment Management & Research. However, looking to expand its influence in the marketplace beyond the membership of the Society, show organizers explored other avenues. "We expanded the sponsoring participation to include these six major exhibitors, and we have put their resources to work," says Russel Flagg, president of Flagg Management and FIM show producer.

According to Flagg, although the continued support of the Society remains critical to the success of the show, the six sponsors provided opportunities previously not available. "We felt, while this is in no way intended as a criticism of the Society, that it is somewhat of an academic and professional organization," says Flagg. "But, they don't necessarily have the resources or the horsepower to do some of the things we felt were necessary to expand into the marketplace beyond the membership of the Society."

The result of this marketing strategy: 2,300 attendees passed through the exhibition hall at the New York Hilton at the FIM show this year, including 450 participants in the conference. That's an increase over last year's attendance, which Flagg places at just under 2,000.

While the six high-powered sponsors did their share to get people in the door, some felt it was the changing focus of the show that will bring them back. According to one exhibitor, who requests anonymity, over the past few years the show has stumbled. "Our firm, like many other firms, didn't even participate last year because we felt the quality of the show had gone down significantly," says the exhibitor. However, the exhibitor says that the show is markedly improved, and attributes that to the increased emphasis placed on technology. Flagg says both exhibits and conferences offered this year were purposely designed to have a heavier technology-oriented content than in years past.

Flagg says that he recognizes there was clearly room for improvement over shows of the past few years. "I would agree with those who say there was a drop-off. Two or three years ago, the conference was more focused on investment strategy and didn't deal much with technology. I think in hindsight that was probably a mistake," says Flagg. "Investment management strategy, which is a worthwhile subject, should take a backseat to what is happening in the technology arena. That seems to be where we are going."