



BUSINESS

## RETURN OF THE GET-TOGETHERS

BY GABRIEL ARTHUR

Before the pandemic, the international trade shows were becoming changemakers for a more sustainable outdoor industry. Can they regain their momentum?

In January 2020, the Sustainability Hub at ISPO Munich and the Ranger Station at Outdoor Retailer in Denver were the “places to be” for many at these trade shows. In previous years, the seminars and panel discussions had gathered mainly sustainability professionals from the industry. Now, CEO’s, marketing managers and representatives from influential NGO’s like Protect Our Winters flocked here. Similarly, the curated trend center Performance Forum – only featuring sustainable materials – at Performance Days in Munich, in December 2019, was the hot spot for visiting designers and product developers.

It was clear: the international trade shows had become arenas where sustainability was gaining attention and leverage.

And then we all know what happened.

The digital formats of shows and conferences during 2020 and 2021 kept these arenas afloat. Now, when the financially challenged trade shows are restarting – will they aim to regain the position as changemakers within sustainability?



**Jeanine Pesce**  
The Ranger Station Organizer  
Founder of This Is Range



**Arne Strate**  
General Secretary  
EOG



## Lessons from OR Summer Market

Among the first of the big shows to attempt a restart was Outdoor Retailer Summer Market in Denver. With a confidence fueled by increasing vaccination rates and the lower COVID-19 transmission afforded by the summer season, the show did go on as planned in August – albeit at a much smaller scale than usual. Here, The Ranger Station continued to serve as the gathering point of sustainability education and inspiration.

“I don’t think the focus has shifted away from sustainability because of the pandemic, and brands are still diligently working towards incorporating, or in some cases pivoting completely, to a sustainable model,” shares The Ranger Station organizer Jeanine Pesce, who continues to share how the conversation surrounding topics like regenerative, bio-based and farm-to-fiber in particular have picked up speed at this year’s show.

“If anything, the pandemic gave companies the opportunity to step back and take stock in their long-term sustainability strategy.”

## A different type of show in the making?

Yet not all were convinced it was the right time to return to the shows, whereby several notable exhibitors withdrew from OR Summer Market at the last minute citing concerns over the surging Delta mutation. These concerns would continue to grow as transmission rates again reached record levels in many parts of North America and Europe, and ultimately were a contributing factor to the decision to cancel the OutDoor by ISPO event originally planned to take place in October.

The European Outdoor Group (EOG) is the organization behind OutDoor by ISPO. And while EOG’s Secretary General Arne Strate is confident the show will eventually return, he shares that it will do so in a new form:

“First, I must say that the general concept for trade shows is changing,” says Arne Strate, who continues to explain that the 2022 OutDoor by ISPO will likely involve a mix of old and new formats.

“The traditional shows had products as their foundation. And while that’s important, there are more important things that need to happen on top of products at events where the whole sector gets together.”

“Sharing insights, starting up collaborations, bringing up pre-competitive issues on the agenda must play a bigger role. And here, we actually have a good benchmark: the Sustainability Hubs from the last trade shows.”

## A new Experience Hall

Jeanette Friedrich is the Head of ISPO Group, and assures that when visitors come to the first regular trade show, ISPO Munich in January 2022, they will feel that sustainability is one of the major themes, if not the major theme.

“Our plan is to create a new Experience Hall, where we will gather topics that we see as most important for outdoor and other industries, like sustainability, digitalization and more. Besides this new location for the Sustainability Hub, this topic will be seen and included in all parts of the trade show, also at exhibitors that want to tell more about their sustainability efforts.”



Jeanette Friedrich  
Head of ISPO Group



Lena Weimer  
Sr. Marketing Manager  
Performance Days

“One thing of great potential for our trade shows is the power to create one voice of the outdoor industry – which is essential when it comes to highlighting and addressing political decision makers.”



Sustainability Hub at ISPO Munich

## The Trade Show as Facilitator

Performance Days in December 2021 will be a “hybrid-event” that picks the best parts of the regular shows and combines with the new digital formats, explains Lena Weimer, Senior Marketing Manager.

“We made a commitment some years ago, that we not only want to showcase sustainable textile innovations etc. – we also want to facilitate positive change. Since then, we have given the topic much more attention than what our visitors and partners might have expected. For instance, our curated trend area Performance Forum only accepts materials that fulfil different sustainability criteria. And we clearly see that our more active approach has been very appreciated,” says Lena Weimer, before she continues:

“Even though our digital formats, like our conference “Sustain & Innovate” last year, have been successful, I can’t wait to meet people here in Munich again. We need the positive energies from when likeminded people connect, to create change together.”



*The Performance Forum and Performance Days in Munich.*

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