

The Blues Brothers Go to Vegas



SG Companies (also known as S. Goldberg) was a shoe and footwear manufacturer that was the first company to acquire a license for footwear. Back in the '50s, the company, under the leadership of Bernie Leifer, then the president of SG, licensed ROY ROGERS and the rest is history! In the good old days of licensing when licenses were cheap (and royalties were reasonable and we could make money) and success was a “real success”, Bernie had the foresight to spot the winners — just to name a few, POUND PUPPIES, POKEMON, POWER RANGERS, TELETUBBIES, BRATZ, and many more.

Bernie recalls that while he was the chairman of LIMA, he came up with the idea of bringing the BLUES BROTHERS to the Licensing Expo. At the time, it was a very popular film starring Jim Belushi and Dan Aykroyd playing brothers Jake and Elwood Blues, who together make up an R&B band. As a spoof, Bernie and Charles Riotto dressed up as the BLUES BROTHERS and had an uncanny resemblance. The video of them running through NYC jumping in a cab was shown to the licensing community at the Awards Ceremony. It was quite hysterical.

The best story I remember was when we were all celebrating at Mandalay Beach after the awards ceremony during Licensing Show. Bernie was hanging with his team and several others. Danny Simon came along to say hello to Bernie and the team which gave Bernie a challenge. Well, that is one thing you just don't do to Bernie because he will always come out on top and win. Suddenly, Bernie tackles and pins Danny in the sand. It was quite funny, and everyone enjoyed a good laugh.



Danny Simon's Ode to the Licensing Show

The year was 1990, the place, New York City's Javits Center, the time June, the event The International Licensing Show, the weather – miserable, hot and humid, with intermittent showers.

The Licensing Show has finally made to the big leagues – the Javits Center! Not a hotel ballroom, nor the now-defunct, dungeon-like Coliseum at Central Park, we are showing at New York City's main venue for conventions. Albeit the basement of the Javits Center, but what the hell. It was still the Javits Center.



As we begin the process of booth building, the friendly folks working there stopped by, perhaps to drop-off a welcome basket? Make sure that we didn't need anything? Nope to both, just a "friendly warning that you can't be doing what you're doing." That's someone else's job. Not born stupid, I quickly realized that I needed to draw upon the power of former Presidents. Two Jacksons cured the problem, and we labored on.

Didn't we order power for the booth? According to the form, there should be an outlet just over there. A hike over to the electricity stand and a chat with guys there confirmed that power was on the way. By the third same conversation, however, it became clear that a little incentive was required – this time a pair of Hamilton's.

As the show started to take shape, it became very noticeable that the room, one of the basement's four sections, might be just a bit too large. With a ceiling height that was a speck lower than the entrance to outer space and nothing in the room standing above 8 feet, with only three rows of booths, it was becoming evident that perhaps the room was a bit too large. By the end of the day, this observation was confirmed.

There we were. Three rows of hand-wrought booths running from the front to the back of the hall with ample space on either side of this rather voluminous room. In the confines of a hotel ballroom, the show seemed so much larger. With its very user-friendly three-row layout, a leisurely stroll, including a few stops to kibitz, about 30 minutes was ample time to cover the entire show. Here in this subterranean cavern, it was now clear that perhaps the planners had over-reached.

Today, with the Licensing Show's multi-level booths, intersecting lanes of letters and numbers and main isles sprinkled with couch-festooned rest areas, it is easy to forget the show's humble beginnings and the efforts of so many to build a world-class trade show.

