

Case Study



SISO Deeper Dive: Case Study on FDIC International

Clarion Events North America produces its largest trade show of 2021, attracting nearly 24,000 fire industry professionals to FDIC International in Indianapolis

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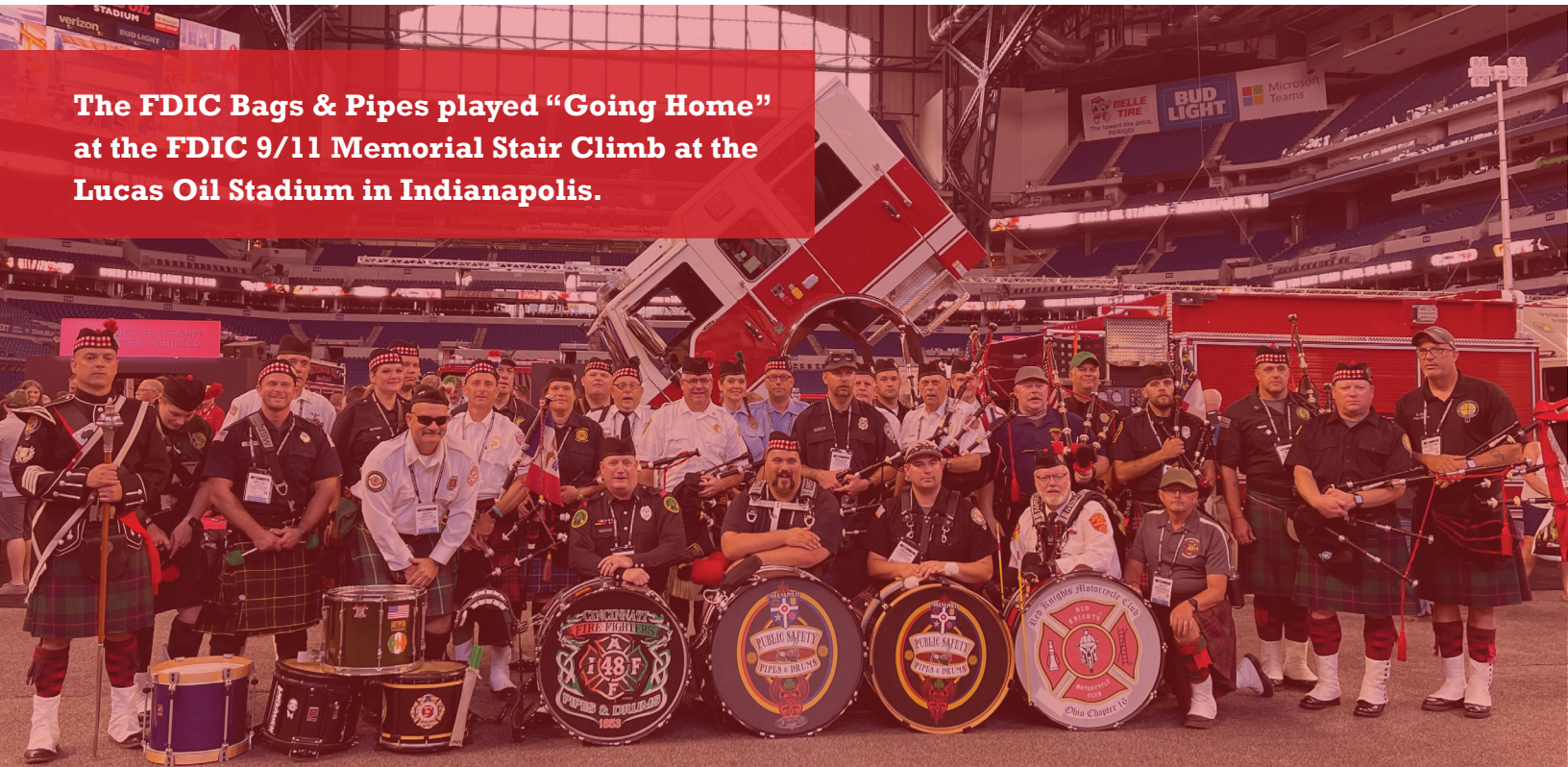
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The FDIC Bags & Pipes played “Going Home” at the FDIC 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb at the Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.



Overview

Not everyone can work from home during a pandemic, and that includes firefighters. Fire departments want and need training and instruction, as well as access to the latest products and newest technologies to fight fires, and FDIC International has delivered that experience to the industry for 90 years, until the pandemic made that impossible.

After not being able to gather as an industry in-person since April 2019, nearly 24,000 registered fire professionals attended FDIC International 2021 for training, conferences, workshops, business meetings and exploring the exhibit hall. Leaders from the largest U.S. fire departments, including New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, came together to learn, network and share in Indianapolis.

After postponing and eventually canceling in 2020 due to Covid, the 2021 event was planned for its typical dates in April but was postponed to August due to the pandemic. FDIC International opened Aug. 2 in Indianapolis as the Delta variant was beginning to surge. Find out how the Clarion team safely and successfully produced its largest trade show of 2021.

[Watch our on-site video interview with Greg Topalian, CEO, Clarion Events North America.](#)

Gathering and paying tribute

With the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 approaching, thousands of firefighters,

industry professionals, families and the Indianapolis community were finally able to gather again on Aug. 6 at FDIC International in Lucas Oil Stadium to remember and pay tribute to 343 firefighters from the FDNY who gave their lives while trying to save others.

“We do a tribute to 9/11 with a stair climb, where the firefighters finish the climb for the firefighters who didn’t make it on 9/11,” said Eric Schlett, Senior VP - Fire & Rescue Group at Clarion Events. “They wear a patch with one of the fallen firefighters. That’s really a moving experience. We were able to continue that, which we were happy about.”

After a two-year hiatus due to Covid, FDIC International 2021 hosted the [FDIC 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb](#), which funds the programs provided by the [National Fallen Firefighters Foundation \(NFFF\)](#) to support the families of local fallen firefighters and the FDNY Counseling Services Unit. Each participant in the climb pays tribute to a FDNY firefighter by climbing or walking the equivalent of the 110 stories of the World Trade Center, and it has become an emotional homage

Show Dates and Location

FDIC International

Aug 2–7, 2021

Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium, plus outdoor exhibits and events in the parking lot and on the street.



In August 2021, FDIC International attracted nearly 24,000 attendees and 650 exhibitors in 360,000 nsf.

during the annual fraternal gathering.

In the home of the Indianapolis Colts, civilians and firefighters looked on quietly as audio recordings of 911 calls from that day played through the stadium's sound system. With an American flag draped across and held up by two firetrucks with ladders that reached toward the ceiling of the domed stadium, a chaplain said a prayer, and the FDIC Bags & Pipes played "Going Home."

In attendance were the four people who started the stair climb, and they witnessed 300 participants who registered to climb 2,200 steps on a Friday afternoon.

Q&A with Eric Schlett

Schlett has worked on FDIC International since 2000. Clarion acquired FDIC International in 2018

with its purchase of PennWell.

Cool things to see: On the show floor, [IDEX demonstrated the HURST Jaws of Life](#), the latest iteration of its extrication tool. "If you've seen a roadside accident where firefighters are cutting up a car and extricating someone, IDEX demonstrated that in an enclosed, structure right on the show floor," Schlett said. "They put a firefighter in there and one of their training officers, and they're teaching folks how to properly extricate someone from a hybrid car, because that's different than a standard vehicle."

What was new: "FDIC added an Innovation Lab, where companies come in and give presentations on the show floor. We recorded those presentations so they can have exponential reach for those firefighters who couldn't make it," Schlett said. Located on the stadium floor, the Innovation Lab featured tech presentations by companies like AT&T, Verizon and BK Technologies.

Networking: "The brotherhood and sisterhood of firefighters is always something that's amazing to behold. The fire services are very fraternal. While some activities were curtailed because of Covid, The Fraternal Order of Leatherheads hosted Fool's Bash on one night, and the Union Firefighters gathered for an outdoor party with music at the Union Hall in Indianapolis."

Matchmaking Lounge: In 2019, Clarion introduced its "Match" program at FDIC International. In 2021, Clarion ramped up the program. "It's a concierge level of service where we ask buyers who they want to see, and they specify by the type of product they

want or the brand specifically. Then we match those individuals, off the floor, but still on-site, in a private room so they can have meaningful discussions. They don't have to go through 650 to 800 different vendors to get to the one they want."

Communication is critical: "The strategy has been to reach out and be in constant communication. It's been months of having regularly scheduled meetings and talking to our community. At the end of the day, we need to talk to our customer, our firefighter customer. We did that through outreach."

Health & Safety

The Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium continue to safely welcome events that comply with the standards and the guidance of the state and local health departments, but no special permits were required to hold FDIC in Indianapolis.

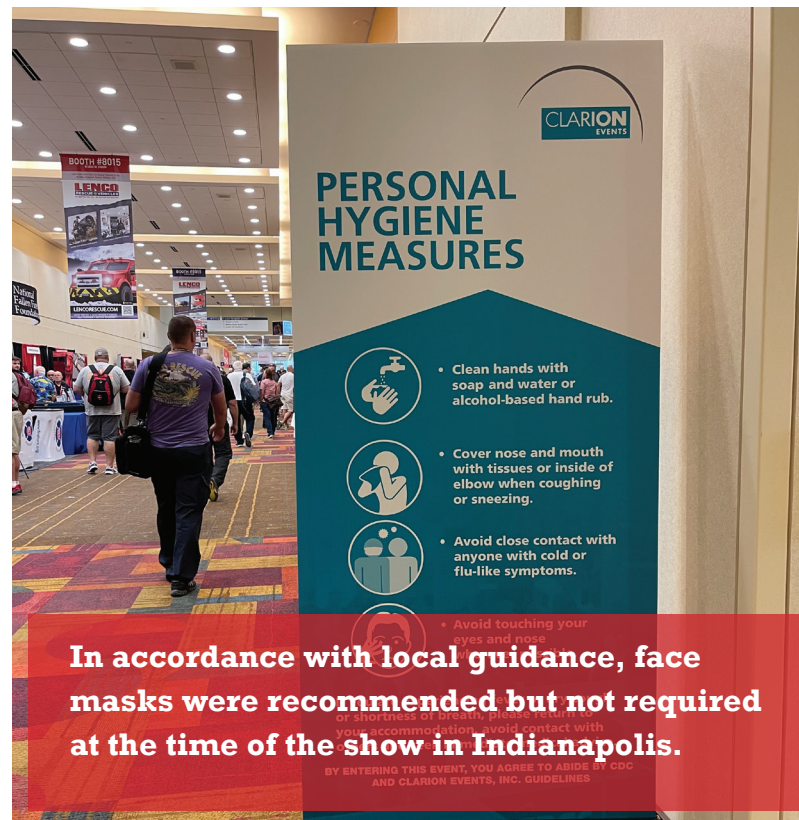
"We made access and egress from a limited number of doors," Schlett said. "We made sure that the touch points were all cleaned regularly. There were sanitation stations all around. We made a strong effort to show the community by posting signs to be safe and be responsible."

"What was critical was listening to our customers," Schlett said. Before moving forward with the show, Clarion contacted its customers several times via surveys and phone conversations throughout the decision-making process.

How did Schlett and his team make the final call?

"I give credit to our marketing team who has done a great job getting insights from our customers to get a temperature check on what everyone was thinking," Schlett said. "In the end, 70% said not only do we want to have an event, but also we need to have an event." That gave the Clarion team the confidence to move forward with the postponed August show.

At the same time, that also meant 30% of its audience was not ready to return to in-person. "We understood that, so we're trying to help them in a different way with doing some elements remotely. But for the customers who want to be here, we are giving them the assurance that we're taking safety measures and following CDC, local and state guidelines. We're in compliance, and that has given people reason to feel confident that



we can do this,” said Schlett.

In accordance with local guidance, face masks were recommended but not required at the time of the show in Indianapolis. “That’s what the CDC is doing, and we have to give people the option to be able to do whatever they feel most comfortable with,” Schlett said. “We know that many of our constituents are vaccinated. Not that we’ve asked, but they’ve shared that. Naturally we don’t want to have anybody feel compelled to come if they’re nervous about it.”

Venue Matters

“Since investing \$7 million in health and safety upgrades inside the Indiana Convention Center in July 2020, we’ve held more than 300 live, in-person events, trade shows, meetings — safely welcoming more than 800,000 attendees,” said Chris Gahl, Senior VP of Marketing and Communication for Visit Indy.

The health and safety enhancements included hospital-grade filtration systems, contactless faucets and toilets, increased hand sanitizer stations, Plexiglas shields at information desks and food and beverage stations and more.

“The National Confectioner’s Association’s Sweet & Snack’s Expo was held in June 2021 with 7,000 attendees,” Gahl said. “In September, Gen Con returned with 34,000 inside the center. In October, the National FFA held its expo in Indy with 50,000. In December, the city hosted the Performance Racing Industry’s trade show with 70,000 attendees.”



Exhibitors: In their own words

SISO interviewed exhibitors on site, and several themes emerged:

Decision makers in attendance. “After 2020 canceled and 2021 delayed, we were a little afraid of what the results would be, but the crowds have been awesome. The people who came to the show are truly the people you want to be having discussions with. They are the decision makers and influencers,” said Michael Cheek, Marketing Manager, Fire Segment, Drager. Drager has more than 15,000 employees in more than 190 countries. In 2020, the company generated net sales of EUR 3.4 billion.

Compare products against competitors. “One of the most important values of a trade show is

that attendees can see us and our competitors at the same time and make their own decision,” said Cheek. “That’s what we are encouraging people to do ... asking firefighters to stop and try on our SCBA (self-contained breathing apparatus). We know if they try ours on and then go to the other booths and try it on, they will notice a difference.”

As safe as possible. Despite the pandemic, the manufacturer of medical and safety technology products took two booths, one was a 90- by 50-foot booth and the other was a 30- by 60-foot. “All employees were briefed on what they needed to do, and everyone had the option to come or not come,” said Cheek. “We have hand sanitizers, and the booth is sanitized nightly. The tables and products are wiped down between people. We made a great deal of effort around that, and our goal was to be as safe as possible. We are so glad to be back. This show went tremendously well, and I’m so impressed with the crowds.”

Building relationships with loyal customers. FDIC International was the first and last show since the pandemic for National Foam Inc., a manufacturer of foam concentrate, foam proportioning systems, fixed and portable foam firefighting equipment, monitors, nozzles and specialized Big Flow pumping solutions. “Two years ago, I met a fire chief at the show and showed him how our product works,” said Dave Hoffman, Regional Sales Manager, National Foam Inc. “He said ‘this looks great, but I want to try it.’ Later he did some fire testing, and it worked. Shortly after, I received a large order, and they have become a loyal customer.”

Jumped on prime space. “We took a booth at

the last minute because we got this prime space on a main walkway near one of the biggest suppliers,” said Damon Lewis, VP of Fire & Business Developments, Fouts Bros Inc., a family-owned business that was founded in 1952 in Georgia. He said the company typically exhibits every other year or so, but when the opportunity for this space opened up the company decided to make a quick turn. His only concern: “It will be a challenge because there will be two shows in one budget cycle.”

Pleasantly surprised by traffic. “We were pleasantly surprised by the traffic,” said Lewis. “We were definitely worried about it, but I think the traffic is as good as it has been in the past. We did a lot to prepare in a short period of time in terms of marketing. We have a new truck that is marketed to volunteer departments. We sold 24 last year during the pandemic. We are up to 52 this year and hoping to double that to 104 next



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Reconnecting with customers and friends.

“We set expectations low, but we got good quality leads,” said Joel Konecky, VP of Sales of SVI Trucks, a fourth-generation, family-owned business headquartered in Fort Collins, CO. SVI specializes in crafting custom emergency vehicles for agencies around the world. “It’s great to reconnect with some of our customers and friends. Everyone was ready to get out.”

Set up for future sales. “It’s quality over quantity. In addition to FDIC International, we sent two sales guys to a show in Charlotte before this,” said Konecky. “The numbers were down, but we were one of the only rescue trucks there. They were so busy they didn’t even break for lunch for three days. We don’t have a lot of new products to show because of where we are with build times. Our goal is to make connections and get quality leads. We are set up for future sales for the next year. It was a challenge to get trucks to show that were ready to deliver. On time delivery has been challenging. Our trucks show well when they are full of tools that firefighters are going to use.”

Attendee Experience

Here are highlights from attendee interviews on site:

Access to new products. “This is the pinnacle of fire service conferences and events,” said Jason Krusen, Deputy Chief of Planning & Professional Services, Charleston, SC Fire Department, which responded to 18,037 calls in 2020. “It’s

a purchasing and decision makers conference because you have access to so much product.” His department sent four people to the show, compared with nine in 2019, due to Covid and budget cuts.

Looking for product knowledge. “From a vendor standpoint, this is the show where the executives, designers and engineers are in the booth,” said Krusen, who has attended FDIC International for 12 years. “If I have a question about how or why a product changed, there’s someone who is knowledgeable and can answer my questions. I come here because I know the people with the answers will be here. I prefer to talk face-to-face, not over Zoom or a phone call. I can say I have problems with your products ... we can talk on the show floor, over a drink or in a quiet hallway.”

Networking with peers. “I’m participating in the matchmaking program this year,” said Krusen. “It’s great to have networking time with my peers. If I have a problem, I can ask them what they are doing.” Others agreed. “It’s always good to meet other firefighters from all over the country,” said Jay Settergan, Battalion Chief, Indianapolis Fire Department, who has attended the show for 27 years. “It’s a little different because of the pandemic. It’s also a different time of year, but the classes and networking were great.”

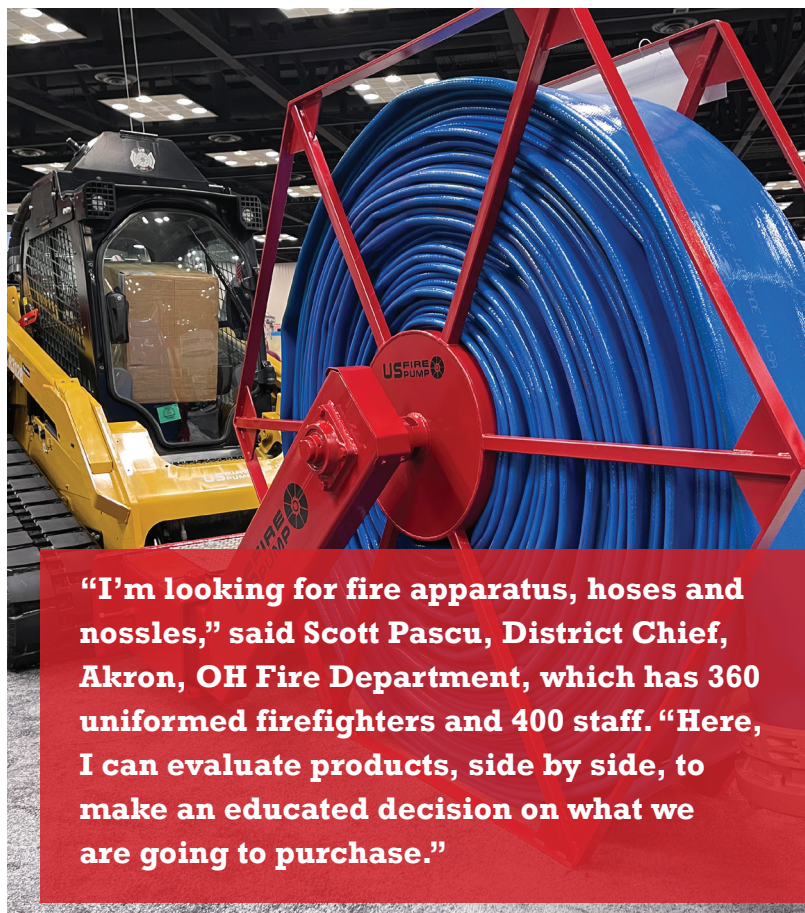
Budget to spend. With [a total budget of \\$39 million in 2020](#), Krusen said the department is looking for new SCBAs. “It’s a big-ticket item because everyone in the department has to have the same one. We can’t phase it in. The wholesale change will cost about \$2.5 million.”

Maximizing time through matchmaking. “We are looking for new tech to make data-driven decisions, so we can spend more time on task,” said Scott Pascu, District Chief, Akron, OH Fire Department, which has 360 uniformed firefighters and 400 staff. He participated in the show’s matchmaking program. “It has been incredible.”

Evaluating products side by side. “I’m looking for fire apparatus, hoses and nozzles,” Pascu said. “If you do one, you have to do the other. We are looking at replacing thermal imaging cameras because ours is 10-year-old tech. The manufacturer isn’t advancing the product, so we are looking at a new product that’s more up to date, user friendly and compact. Here, I can evaluate products, side by side, to make an educated decision on what we are going to purchase.”

Top-notch instruction. “The show is worth my time because there are top-notch instructors,” said Tom Sheridan, a volunteer with the Henry County, IN Fire Department. He drove to the show. “I’ve attended before. I’m looking at new products, like trucks. I’m getting some new ideas.”

Looking for new tech to save lives. “The trade show has been awesome, and there are great instructors for the classes,” said Robert Arens with the Chicago Fire Department (CFD), which employs more than 4,500 uniformed firefighters and paramedics. In 2021, the CFD had [a total budget of \\$738.3 million](#). “My goal is to gather information to take back to my department, participate in training and check out new products to further enhance our department.” The coolest product he saw? “A mobile intensive care unit.



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We are always looking to upgrade. Technology changes, so we have to change.”

What’s Next

[FDIC International](#) returns April 25-30, 2022. Since August in North America, Clarion has held a number of in-person events, including [Anime NYC](#), Nov. 19-21, 2021 at Javits Center in New York; [Anime Frontier](#), Dec. 3-5, 2021 at the Fort Worth Convention Center in Texas; and the [Grand Strand Gift & Resort Merchandise Show](#), Dec. 5-8, 2021 at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center.

[View the full calendar of 2022 Clarion events.](#)



Show Highlights

- 23,597 registered fire industry professionals in 2021, compared with 30,000 in 2019
- 650 exhibitors in 360,000 nsf in 2021, compared with 805 exhibitors in 420,000 nsf in 2019
- 40% of 2021 attendees did not attend FDIC last edition in 2019
- More than 70% of FDIC attendees are involved in making purchasing decisions for their department

"In the end, 70% said not only do we want to have an event, but also we need to have an event."





About SISO – SISO members include companies, corporations and other for-profit entities that own, produce or provide full-service management of “face to face” trade shows, consumer shows, expositions, conferences and events. SISO membership is a combination of large corporations and small entrepreneurial enterprises that do business around the world. SISO’s almost 200-member companies produce thousands of events around the world. SISO’s Mission is to meet the common needs of our members by providing peer networking opportunities, education, industry information, streamlined business processes and best practices in the industry.

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