



Small business expo shrugs off recession

Exhibitor levels on par with last year despite challenging economic times

by Maria Slade

The same number of exhibitors as last year has turned out for the Bizzone Business Expo, opening at the ASB Showgrounds in Auckland today.

Over 200 organisations in the small business support sector will hang out their shingles at the event.

Organiser Sarah Trotman said exhibitor numbers were steady despite the challenging circumstances.

She said half of all exhibitors returned for another year. "We're probably dealing with that 10 per cent of business owners that really are quite fired up and nothing will beat them around the head."

Bizzone will also run in Wellington in July and Christchurch in August, with a total of over 300 exhibitors over the three events. Around 4000 visitors had registered and a total 13,000 were expected, the organisers said.

It costs exhibitors between \$2800

and \$10,000 plus GST for a stand, depending on the amount of space they want.

This year's theme was "smart marketing", following a recent survey of business owners which showed that support and marketing, and cash flow, were the key issues they faced in the current environment, Trotman said.

Bizzone's next move is to offer a virtual exhibition space.

The online expo starts from today but will be launched officially in August. Trotman said it would complement the physical expo. Half of visitors to the expo purchased something while they were there, but of those that did not most said they would within two to three months.

She said the online expo had been a big investment, but one that was "absolutely worth making".





BEHIND THE SCREENS: Warwick Grey is keen to show small business owners how they can benefit from IT.

PICTURE / GLENN JEFFREY

LONG-TIME EXHIBITOR OFFERS SOUND ADVICE ON TECHNOLOGY

Hewlett-Packard has been showing at the business expo since it started.

Marketing manager Warwick Grey says small business owners will not get the right advice from a retail computer store and they do not necessarily know

where to find appropriate resellers.

"It was really the buying behaviour we were wanting to change by focusing on a place where they could come."

A survey HP conducted with Auckland University business incubator

The Icehouse found small-medium-enterprise owners were so busy running their businesses they did not bother to learn how IT could help them.

They would normally only buy computer equipment when they took

on a new worker or something broke.

"Most of their experience is with some IT guy that just comes in and fixes things when they need him."

Grey says being at the expo to get in front of these people is "like gold".