

Consultant Bill Griffin Attends China Clean Expo 2013

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Reported by Wm R. Griffin, President

Cleaning Consultant Services, Inc.

Hello from China. I've heard about the China Clean Expo for several years and always thought it would be a good learning experience. Being one who is willing to go to the ends of the earth to learn more about cleaning, I put it on my schedule and bought a ticket to Shanghai.

It took about 14 hours to get here from Seattle via Tokyo Japan on a sometimes bumpy, but otherwise uneventful flight. I know that airplane food has gone downhill over the years, but the mystery meat Delta served for dinner didn't look or taste like any chicken I'd ever eaten before. Luckily I wasn't very hungry.

Shanghai China is a big city, with 23 million residents. The air, water and streets are dirty, but the taxis are plentiful and cheap. People here seem to like Americans, several told me that they envy the freedoms we have and the guns we own. People in China don't get to vote and the police, who are everywhere, don't carry a gun.

The China Clean Show

I had a bit of a tough time getting in the door. Go here, go there and go back again, I was told by group of young people who didn't speak English, but appeared to be issuing a badge to everyone but me. I finally gave up and decided to watch the opening ceremony in the lobby of the convention center.

After about 20 minutes a young woman walked up to me and in English asked if I want to see her products. Sure I said, why not. It turns out Elaine Lee is a salesperson for a stone polishing equipment manufacturer and was trolling the lobby looking for potential customers. (I must have looked needy). It didn't faze her that I needed a badge and without missing a step she took me back to the registration counter. At first they give her the same go here, go there run around, but she doesn't put up with it and within minutes I got a badge and we were in the exhibit hall. Turns out GuangZhou Hongji Stone Maintenance Center who Elaine works for not only manufactures chemicals and equipment but also services stone floors in commercial buildings in China. We ended up swapping videos and compared notes over strong tea before I headed out to see other booths in the exhibit hall.

I walked the show floor for several hours before the jet lag started to catch up with me. Not wanting to hassle with a taxi I decide to walk back to the hotel, (maybe 2 miles) and by the time I found the hotel my feet were crying and the rest of my body was sore. A foot massage place was tempting, but I decided to pass on it, not knowing exactly what a foot massage involved, I was confused by the price list that ranged from \$5.00 to over \$140.00. I only have two feet and can't imagine paying that kind of money to for a foot rub.

The Exhibits

Several hundred booths with all kinds of cleaning products, chemicals and equipment filled the exhibit hall. In past years the Clean China Show as held in conjunction with the Annual Hotel Show, this year for the first time the cleaning show is in a separate hall and not part of the much larger hotel show. Several people mentioned that the number of attendees appeared to be smaller this year than at previous shows.

Attendance at the exhibits was good, except for late in the afternoon each day. I cut out around noon on the last day as I had seen enough, being I had visited every booth at least several times and all the good candy had been given away.

I did run into one person I knew at the show. Toni D'Andrea with AFIDAMP SERVIZI SRL who is sponsor of a number of international shows promoted under the Pulire banner, so we had a good chat before parting ways. I recognized a number of exhibiting companies, but most of the booths were staffed by local agents.

Reality

There is quite a bit of emphasis on environmental products at the show, but once you get out in the street or even into other parts of the convention center, reality hits home. Micro fiber cloths and flat mops are on display, but I never saw one in use, not even here in the expo hall. When it comes to cleaning, China has a long way to go when it comes to using the latest technology. The same appears to be true for China as a country. There are contradictions everywhere. You see unfinished modern buildings with the latest high technology and in the same block there are people using tree branches to sweep the street next to a maglev train station.

Seminars

Most everything was written and spoken in Chinese and the people at the registration booth didn't speak English so there was no easy way to communicate. Bottom line, there were several classes and events, but for me it was impossible to find them.

I was surprised at how few people spoke English in China, but with some searching and patience I was able to find people who could translate for me and answer questions, but this took time and once I figured out how to navigate the language barrier, the show was over.

Also surprising was the large number of young people attending the show, manning the booths and participating in expo. This is the opposite of what we see at home where most of the attendees are older white males, although we are seeing more women entering the cleaning industry in the USA. I didn't see a lot of innovation in the products on display, for the most part everything was pretty basic, and I suspect this will change over time. At this point, China's reputation for copying other people's products appears to be pretty accurate.

I spent some time talking with Mark Bevington, Chairman and President of NSS Enterprises, Inc. one of the few independently owned American manufactures of cleaning equipment in the USA. Mark explained that he sees the Chinese market as having a lot of potential opportunity for growth in the future, even though there is a lot competition from Chinese and European equipment manufacturers. NSS has been active in the Chinese market for about 10 years, but this is only the second time the company has had its own booth at the show.

There were a lot of recognizable name at the show, ISSA, HOST, Unger, Karcher, Nilfisk Advance, Tenant, Hako and a number of others. I was surprised and pleased to see BioKleen Products from Vancouver WA. represented by a Chinese distributor. BioKleen is manufacturer of green carpet cleaning products. Notably absent were such giants as Diversey and Ecolab.

Although there were a quite a few diamond polishing/grinding machines on display and a few resin disks and related products and chemicals for marble and other stone surfaces, I didn't find anyone who was displaying or promoting diamond impregnated floor pads.

Closing Comments

It was a good show. China has the potential to become a large and growing market in the future, but it certainly isn't there yet. High end markets in China include shopping malls, private clubs, high tech factories and stores that sell imported products.

I enjoyed meeting new friends and catching up with others I hadn't seen in a while. The exposure I got here gave me a much better understanding of where this market is presently and where it appears to be headed in the future. Considering the potential size of the market and the opportunities it will provide, China definitely deserves monitoring and if you are manufacturer with international intentions, I would certainly recommend establishing and maintaining a presence here.