I RARELY—in fact, before now, never—hear a trade show exhibitor crow about the leads. However, with the NAMM Show 2018 in Anaheim, CA, January 25 through 28, that’s what I heard Elmer Veith of Total Structures do—twice. He’d point to the list on his smart tablet, and chortle about the quality of the leads. These were people with budgets and needs that his products could fill—and they had decision-making power in their companies. Elmer was perhaps the most vocally happy ESTA member exhibitor at the show, but almost every member I spoke to counted the show as an unqualified success, or was pleased enough with what they experienced to plan to be back next year with a bigger booth. Only one ESTA member answered my “Will you be back next year?” with “Maybe.” None said, “No.”

The NAMM Show in Anaheim was immense: 2,000 exhibiting companies showing about 7,000 brands to 115,085 registered attendees. As a trade show for the National Association of Music Merchants, the show has been mostly about musical instruments and sound equipment. However, the Anaheim Convention Center opened a new building, making more space available, so NAMM reached out to ESTA, PLASA Media, and Timeless Communications to fill the space. This also expands the market to include the other equipment and services needed to put on a concert—“Event Technology.” It’s a path that Messe Frankfurt started on a couple decades ago when a little staging section, Prolight + Sound, was added to one of the Musikmesse halls—to great success.

Germany is not the United States, and Frankfurt am Main is not Anaheim, but NAMM this year felt like a good fit for our industry. Marnie Styles of Ultratec Special Effects was very happy with the support she got on site for setting up her booth: She found that when something couldn’t be done “right now,” that didn’t mean later that night. It meant within an hour. When the people at the Columbus McKinnon booth found they were in the dark because
other exhibitors had asked for the general lighting to be turned off, NAMM staff had additional directional lighting hung from the catwalk to provide the needed illumination at no charge to CM. I still haven’t heard a trade show exhibitor crow about how inexpensive a show is, but the ESTA members who mentioned the cost of their booth and labor to me felt that they had received good value for money. Besides, as Mark Ravenhill of German Light Products mentioned, the money an exhibitor pays to NAMM goes back into the entertainment industry—our industry.

The effects/staging/lighting part of the NAMM show was consolidated pretty much in one end of Hall A, so my visiting ESTA members did not require me to wander past a couple thousand booths. It was still a bit of a walk, but a booth-sorted list helped me. I wandered from booth to booth, to see what ESTA members were showing for this market, with my main question being “What are you showing for the people here?” Some vendors had a clear answer, others did not, but everyone was interested in this market—a very large group of people they had not seen at other trade shows. Below is a report that I can piece together from my notes and product literature and make some sense in the space allotted.

Joe Calzone at the Calzone Case Company booth said the product they were promoting for this market was the Slam Latch Rack. It has a 19” rack inside for electronic and power distribution equipment, but the selling point is that the doors front and rear swing open and then slide into side pockets inside, getting them completely out of the way and also making them impossible to lose at a gig—an important feature for this market. The product name comes from the closing: pull the door out of the slot, swing it—Slam! and it’s latched.

Proceeding up the aisle I came to Mega Systems, Inc. They had several new things, but I was most interested in the Drama LED Z 50, a 50 W LED luminaire less than a foot long and putting out 1,850 lumens in the warm-white version and 2,679 lumens in cool-white. The CRI spec for the warm-white is a good number, and it looked good on my hand, too. Control is local or via a little DMX512 interface box that mounts on the yoke. Mega Systems also showed the Lumen8 line of small lighting controllers. Guillermo Cabada told me proudly that all the sheet metal work on the three controllers is done in-house in Texas.

Altman Lighting’s white booth showed Pegasus and PHX stage luminaires and the Gallery line. The latter is a very clean-looking...
architectural line, which at other trade shows I had largely ignored because it’s . . . architectural. However, Tim Bachman said this was the featured product for NAMM, and it makes sense. These are not luminaires for garage bands, but they would work well in night clubs and restaurants for accent lighting and also for lighting small performance spaces—a jazz trio in the corner. Output is very good considering the 50 W input for the light engine, and the color rendering specs are excellent, whether expressed in CRI, CQS, RE, TLCI, or TM-30-15. Control can be via mains dimming, local dimming, 0-10 V, DMX/RDM, or DALI.

Look Solutions showed a range of fog machines, but the one my conversation with Nathan Kahn focused on was the Cobra 1.8 because of its quiet output. It’s a 1.8 kW machine with six nozzles. Multiple nozzles usually means lots of fog, but in this case it means quiet fog: good output without a loud hiss, which is nice when the music is quiet. It’s a smart machine, too, allowing you to set what it does when you run it high for longer than the heater can sustain—shut off, taper down, or just never produce more fog than it can continuously—your choice. The output can be trimmed, so ganged machines will put out the same amount. Control is via DMX512, Art-Net, and more.

The Group One Ltd. booth turned out to be an Avolites booth (one of the product lines Group One distributes), where the Titan Quartz and the latest AI media software were the stars. The Quartz is a complete, full-featured control desk, with on-board processing (no additional PC needed), and a 12.1” screen, in a compact package 42.5 cm wide, 46.5 cm front to back, and 19.5 cm tall. It weighs 8 kg, way-more than a house cat, but you could run a show with it sitting on your lap, thus taking up only one seat in the house. It handles 16 DMX universes from the desk or 64 universes via Titan Net.

H & H Specialties and Littlite were not contiguous, but their booths weren’t far apart, and my “What’s new?” question got contrasting answers from them. H&H Specialties showed its line of curtain and scenery tracks, good for this music market, but the new thing was the free give-away: a small, battery powered LED task light, with a magnetic end and a side-emitting source. Stick it on a fly system lock rail or some other ferrous rigging part and a broad wash of light dispels the dark so you see what you are doing with an arbor. In contrast, Littlite’s news was that their ANSER LED task lights are now end-emitting, not side emitting, as the older incandescent models were.

“End-emitting” was the Littlite pitch, but the ANSER power specifications indicate sophisticated electronics to me. The units come with a 12 V power supply, but they’ll run from a USB port with a connector adapter, or any DC current source with a voltage from 5 to 28 V. The power specifications suggest that the dimming is not a simple rheostat: current draw is 300 mA at 5 V, dropping to 180 mA at 12, and then to 90 mA at 24 V, running from a total power consumption of 1.5 W at 5 V to 2.1 W at 28 V. CCT is 3,100 K, and CRI is 92. This is way-better than a clip-on lamp with blue gel, which
makes a cue list with colored warnings almost unreadable.

Cosmic Truss and German Light Products shared a 20’ by 30’ booth. The new GLP units were the impression S350 and the JDC1 strobe, with the impression being the newer. It’s a 350 W white-LED moving head unit, with framing shutters, two gobo wheels (one of 10 fixed gobos, the other with seven rotating), CMY color mixing and a ten-color wheel, two frosts, rotating prism, and a 7° to 50° zoom range. Lumen output specifications were not available (and still aren’t on the GLP website as I write this), but the quality of the light is excellent. It’s a fairly cold 6,000 K, but the CRI is 96 and TLCI (Qa) is 97. The JDC1 is a panel of LEDs with 216 high-brightness white ones in a line down the middle, flanked above and below by 1,320 RGB LEDs controlled as 12 large pixels. It’s a blinding effect or eye-candy. The Cosmic Truss end of the booth showed the Stage Deck CT, a less flashy but perhaps more generically useful platforming system. It conforms to DIN 15921 but exceeds the minimum rating by supporting 750 kg/m² (ten of me standing on a square meter). The “what’s new” pitch was that the corner sockets have been redesigned so that they will securely hold 50 x 50 mm or 60 x 60 mm square legs, or round tubing. Nominal 1.5” schedule 40 pipe will fit nicely. German Light Products is now a distributor for SNAP, the cable clip pictured in my Prolight + Sound story in the Spring 2017 Protocol. With a grip range of 48 to 51 mm, it will fit neatly around a Stage Deck CT tubular leg.

Doug Fleenor Design had no gag product (e.g., no DMX coffee pot), but it did feature a product apropos the music market: the DMX512 to Microplex interface. The unit converts DMX512 to Sunn, ETA, NSI, Leprecon, or Lightronics versions of Microplex, a multiplexed analog protocol. Each of those has slightly different timings; jumpers are used to configure the Microplex output and set what happens if the DMX signal goes away. NSI developed the Microplex protocol in the 1980s as a low-cost way of controlling dimmer packs with microphone cable as the connecting medium—perfect for the local-band market. The 1980s were a long time ago (Do you remember the invasion of Grenada?), but I can find things for sale online today that speak Microplex.

I saw theatre consultants looking up at the PDP Connector Strip, overhead in the Light Source booth. It has been renamed since NAMM as the “Megabatten Connector Strip” but it has the same specifications. It’s a schedule 80 aluminum pipe with pockets milled in the wall every 16” to hold a NEMA 5-20 receptacle and a five-pin XLR for DMX512 data distribution. The Megabatten is ETL listed per UL 1573 as a connector strip, and will hold a load of 30 lb. per linear foot when supported on 8’ centers. The DMX data line needs to be fed from a Light Source DMX splitter or e-DMX node within 5’ of the input end of the batten. The Megabatten is designed to be shipped as connector strips commonly are now: folded into a zigzag package with the wiring pre-installed from section to section, ready to be straighten out on-site. One section slips into the next and locks into place with flush-fitting set screws.
The largest booth in Event Technology area was the Chauvet DJ booth, about 70’ by 30’, judging from the trade show’s map. It was flashy and busy, but I looked at static luminaires: the EVE E-100Z and EVE E-50Z, two warm white-LED profile spotlights with wattages indicated by their model numbers. They’re small and light (12.6 and 9.3 lb. respectively) with good output. The spec sheet for the E-100Z shows 15,100 lux at 2 m when zoomed to a 14° spot. That’s an extremely short throw, but at a more reasonable 8 m throw that would be a little less than 1,000 lux, about 90 footcandles, which is at the upper end of the useful range per the Century Strand “Spotlight Selector Guide” of 1971. Control is stand-alone, via DMX512 over a three-pin connector (a common connector in the mobile DJ market), or wirelessly with a D-Fi transceiver that plugs into a USB port on the back of the luminaire like a thumb drive.

Across from Chauvet was Area Four Industries America, in a 30’ by 30’ booth, showing products from the venerable US brands of James Thomas Engineering and Tomcat, along with brands more recent to North America, such as Litec and Milos. Brand identity in Area Four is fluid: I have a business card from a Tomcat/JTE Eastern Region sales person stapled to Litec product sheets with notes about Milos products scribbled on them. In any case, there were interesting things to see, the big ones being the Litec Libera and the MyT Folding Steroid truss. The zig-zag “4” booth structure was composed of Libera FL76 ladder truss frames with a few diagonal bars to keep the cells square. It looked quite complicated, but wasn’t. The MyT Folding Steroid truss shown was big black unit 1.367 m tall, 0.879 m wide, and 3.111 m long. Like most trusses, its volume is mostly air. If you remove a few braces, it folds flat, losing over half its volume. It’s assembled with no welds, so parts can be replaced easily. ("Steroid" suggests strength, but only if you don’t look carefully into the functions of steroids as a class.) My scribbled Milos product note is about a crowd barrier, made by Milos but marketed in the US under the Tomcat brand name. It will support a 300 kg/m (2.94 kN/m) horizontal force at the top rail of the wall, which is about four times the rating for an audience guardrail per ICC 300-2012.

Elmer Veith was chortling over his leads at the Total Structures booth because his company was launching the Pointman Revolution Hoist line, which fit beautifully the needs of people coming into the booth asking about speaker line array rigging. Total Structures had a fairly large booth, about 20’ by 20’, with lots of space to display the Pointman Revolution Hoist line, with different models to cover working loads from 333 kg to 5,000 kg. The major selling point was easy maintenance, but a few interesting technical details were thrown in, too. Inevitably, if I hung around the booth, someone would try to tell me about the lift chain, which has a square profile and a manganese phosphate coating. The profile is designed to make the chain stronger with lower self-weight than round chain; the coating has lubrication properties and makes the chain pretty close to matte black, which I think could be aesthetically useful. I suspect that the chain was the easiest thing to explain; the other
features were hidden inside, such as the sealed, no maintenance gear box. The parts that drive the transmission that are driven by it have been designed to be easy to inspect and repair—or to change for different performance. For example, the motor uses a modular rotor and stator design so speed changes can be made simply and quickly. Total Structures was also showing the latest load cell monitoring system from Motion Labs. They will measure loads up into the tons, but they also are sensitive enough that Elmer Veith could pull on a load cell shackle and get a meaningful reading.

Now I am out of space, and I have not mentioned every ESTA member that showed at NAMM 2018. Event Technology was a small section of the very large show, but ESTA members were a large part of that small section. For many of our members it was an experiment, with small booths and a small sampling of what they have to offer, simply to see what the NAMM crowd might find interesting. Now they have a much better idea, and will be bringing more things—and certainly new things—to the show next year. What might those be? We’ll find out when the NAMM Show returns to the Anaheim Convention Center, January 24 – 27, 2019.