



End of the line for GDS

Serious doubts over the future of GDS, an important event for the footwear industry for many years, were first raised following disappointing attendance figures in July 2016. For the first time in its long history it had run from Tuesday to Thursday; the thinking behind this schedule was that it would encourage footwear retailers to travel to Düsseldorf to take part because they would be able to do so without missing one of their most important sales days, Friday. When the final tally of visitors came in at 12,500, it was clear that a more in-depth review was required.

Immediately after the event, Werner Matthias Dornscheidt, chief executive of organiser Messe Düsseldorf, announced a thorough consultation would take place "on the optimisation of GDS". When Kirstin Deutmoser, director of GDS, said "new impulses are key for the sector", the writing appeared to be on the wall. Nevertheless, Messe Düsseldorf's initial reaction was not one of panic. In September 2016, it revealed it would return to holding an Autumn edition of GDS each September, undoing a previous change which had seen it held in July. This had coincided with a similar move for the Spring edition, which came forward from March to February. The date changes were designed to breathe new life into the show.

Despite the initial positive news that GDS would continue, the organisers confirmed in January 2017 that the February edition of the show would be its last; they had decided it could no longer survive in its current format. "The sector has radically

When the curtain came down on the 123rd edition of the GDS footwear exhibition in February, it marked not just the end of the show for another six months but for good. From August 2017, it will be replaced by a new event, Gallery SHOES.

changed over the past few years and the pace has picked up again," explained Mr Dornscheidt. "The major event that GDS has been for over six decades no longer seems to be the right format for the current challenges within the shoe sector."

In its place comes Gallery SHOES, which will make its debut in August this year at the Areal Böhler estate, also in Düsseldorf. Messe Düsseldorf has relinquished responsibility for organising the event, with fair organiser the Igedo Company now in charge. Ms Deutmoser believes this change in ownership represents an opportunity for the footwear sector to start afresh. "The market is acting ever more dynamically and requires a completely new solution," she says. "This can only be successful if it can be fundamentally rethought without having to take existing structures and traditions into consideration." She

concedes that GDS was a victim of its own success, admitting it had struggled to live up to its own high standards from around the turn of the millennium, when visitor numbers peaked. She adds that this history became “a burden rather than a benefit”, prompting the need for a complete “re-boot”. She also highlights the impact of a changing retail landscape, reflecting that “trade shows are always mirror images of the market”.

Gallery shoes

“Just continuing GDS with a different framework simply makes no sense,” explained Philipp Kronen, managing partner of the Igedo Company, at the opening press conference of the final GDS, where further details about Gallery SHOES were revealed. “Everything has to be completely thought out again across all levels,” he added. Igedo emphasised that the new show will have a much more condensed format, aiming to offer those in attendance a quick overview of the footwear industry. Ulrike Kähler, who will serve as project director for the event, said it will allow international visitors to gain everything they need in just one day.

The first Gallery SHOES will take place August 27 to 29, around a month later than recent Summer editions of GDS and a little earlier than previous Autumn shows. It will run from Sunday to Tuesday, which Igedo hopes will bring back independent specialist shoe retailers. The organisers also plan to limit the size of the booths available. Alongside the lower costs that this brings, something especially attractive to smaller brands, it will also allow the focus to be shifted away from size and towards quality.

The exhibition space will be divided into five zones – premium, contemporary, urban, comfort and kids – with room for around 500 brands (this compares to the 600 that exhibited at the final GDS). Igedo says the fair will focus on “significant exhibitors” from the European footwear industry; brands from Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France and the Netherlands are expected to attend in August. It hopes to achieve a 65% share of international exhibitors. It will be dedicated to the medium to high-priced segments and will feature both new and established brands, with apparel companies also welcome. The organisers expect the majority of visitors to come from Northern, Central



Philipp Kronen, managing director of Gallery SHOES organiser the Igedo Company, believes there needed to be a complete break from the format of GDS.

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and Eastern Europe, and are hoping for between 8,000 and 10,000 at the first edition.

“A strong trade show is what drives the industry,” emphasises Ms Kähler. “Gallery SHOES provides information in a new design, with a new language and on an international scale.” She called for the footwear industry to unite behind the new concept: “We can only offer you a strong trade show if we all pull together in the same direction.” It remains to be seen whether her rallying call will be answered, but it is clear that it will be a tough task for Gallery SHOES to emulate the success of its predecessor. 🌀



GDS closed its doors for the final time in February 2017.