

From Planning Pressure to Peace of Mind: Association Forum's Partnership with SB

ASSOCIATION FORUM is the professional home for associations in the Chicago area. Founded in 1916, it serves as a vital hub for association professionals, providing education, resources, and powerful networking opportunities that strengthen the association management field. One of Association Forum's signature events is **Holiday Showcase®**, a premier two-day gathering that brings together association professionals and industry partners for learning, connection, and business development. With a dynamic exhibit hall, high-value education sessions, and a vibrant community atmosphere, **Holiday Showcase®** is designed to help attendees grow their careers and expand their professional networks.



THE CHALLENGE

As **Holiday Showcase®** continued to grow, Association Forum made a historic decision: transition the event from a hotel to a convention center for the first time in 37 years.

The move created new opportunities for scale, exhibitor growth, and expanded programming—and introduced an entirely new layer of operational complexity. Convention centers operate differently than hotels, with distinct labor structures, vendor access requirements, load-in procedures, and logistical considerations that require experienced event leadership.

Association Forum's internal team wanted to stay focused on delivering innovative programming, driving attendance, supporting exhibitors, and creating a standout member experience. Yet their time and talent were increasingly absorbed by the operational complexity of moving from hotel to convention center.

"We absolutely loved having [SB] supporting us this year as part of the Association Forum Team. They made a HUGE impact."

– **Artesha Moore, FASAE, CAE**
President & CEO

To successfully navigate this major venue transition while maintaining the quality and reputation **Holiday Showcase®** is known for, Association Forum needed a trusted partner to serve as an extension of their staff and confidently manage the added complexity.

THE STRATEGY

Association Forum outsourced their meeting planning support to SB Expos & Events. SB specializes in association conventions and understands the unique needs of member-driven organizations. Our team provides customized, flexible support tailored to each event's goals—whether that means handling logistics, exhibitor management, onsite coordination, or full-service meeting execution.

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With more than 30 experienced event professionals, SB offers the strength and resources of a full-scale team while maintaining the personal attention and responsiveness of a solo consultant.

As Association Forum prepared for Holiday Showcase®'s convention center move, SB worked closely with staff to anticipate operational shifts, manage vendor and venue coordination, align timelines, and ensure every logistical detail was covered. SB's extensive convention center experience provided clarity and confidence throughout the planning process.

THE RESULTS

With SB managing the planning and onsite execution—particularly the complexities associated with a new convention center environment—Association Forum staff gained the freedom to focus on the overall attendee experience.

Holiday Showcase® successfully launched in its new venue, exceeding expectations while maintaining the high standards attendees and exhibitors have come to expect. SB's support before, during, and after the event ensured that every detail was handled with care, creating an easy and enjoyable experience for staff, exhibitors, and attendees alike.



"As we navigated a significant transition, moving the event from a hotel to a convention center, we were deeply grateful for SB's guidance and support. This marked the first time in 37 years that the event was not held at a hotel, and we relied heavily on SB's extensive knowledge of convention centers. Their expertise was instrumental in ensuring a smooth transition and was truly invaluable to the success of the event."

– **Phyllis Scott**
Senior Director, Business
Operations

SB delivers events that create non-dues revenue for associations. You stay focused on your mission—we take care of the rest.

We ♥ Associations.