



30 YEARS OF HIGH END® (FEBRUARY 2011)

THE JOURNEY OF A SHOW. A LOOK BACK.

The most successful European show for high quality consumer electronics and cutting edge hi-fi devices, developed from the bold ideas of a handful of pioneers.

How often is a good intention simply forgotten in the course of daily affairs? This is precisely what almost happened to the initial impulse behind the HIGH END Show:

Heavy snowfalls threatened to prematurely take the wind out of the sails of thirteen owners of small firms at the end of the year 1981. But the hi-fi heroes fought their way bravely through the snow - all the way to Alzenau in Spessart-Germany, where they intended to meet to determine new paths for their products and ideas.

The invitation was from Klaus Renner, a young engineer and freelance journalist with extensive knowledge of the audio industry and countless international contacts, who enjoyed a high reputation among the manufacturers and distributors of high-end hi-fi components. At that time he was planning his own magazine - a completely new platform for high-quality hi-fi devices. It was to be called "Das Ohr" („The Ear“) and was to be uncompromising and free of advertising.

But Renner's plans for an exclusive hi-fi magazine were not the only point on that day's agenda. There was also to be a discussion regarding the situation throughout the entire hi-fi scene.

An inside look at the hi-fi industry of that time (late 70ies and early 80ies) reveals how important it was to look for new ideas. In those days, there were two trade fairs setting the tone in entertainment electronics: the Berlin Electronics Trade Fair IFA (Internationale Funkausstellung), with its huge selection of devices ranging from television to video recorders, and the "Hi-Fi Düsseldorf" as the acoustic placeholder. Both were massive events, romping grounds for top brands. The audio selection in Düsseldorf, however, was supposed to be given a „new dimension“ in the future by video and films. Starting in 1982, the fair of the NOWEA organisers was to be called „HiFi-Video-Düsseldorf“.

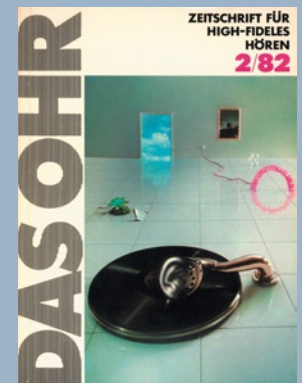
The small firms had the choice either to stay away or to enter only expenses and no gains in their order books. Many small manufacturers and distributors would have refrained from participating in the big shows, either for economic reasons or on principle. Since it wasn't possible to present music for the visitors in either the Düsseldorf or the Berlin convention halls, people simply stayed away.

These were the prospects faced by the group of hi-fi specialists that winter in Alzenau, when they decided: We are going to organise our own show for everyone who wants to hear good music. At the same time „HiFi-Video 1982“ was taking place, High End systems were being played for the first time on two floors of the Düsseldorf Hotel „Interconti“ (today the Scandic Crown on Golzheimer Platz).

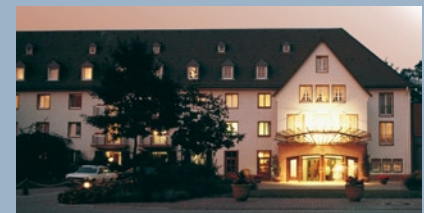
For the first time, visitors could enjoy true to life music played in living room type conditions while also chatting with the developers and manufacturers of the equipment about their common interest. The trade fair that came out of this had to have name, and since „HIGH END“ simply sounds better than „Hi-Fi“, it was an easy decision. More than twenty exhibitors participated in the first HIGH END® 1982 and the Alzenau group had good reason to believe that this was a project with a future.



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But the real test was yet to come – the HIGH END® number two. In 1983, the planners transferred their young convention to Frankfurt, since they wanted to avoid freeloading off existing conventions. Also, Frankfurt was the geographical centre of the country at that time (West-Germany), and in the English director of the Hotel Kempinski, Mr. Avenell, the High End protagonists found a bold, uncomplicated and unconventional partner, who was willing to offer his premises for a unique convention which had only taken place once in Europe.

The challenge was standing up to the media spectacle of the Berlin IFA, which took place again in 1983. Despite many pessimistic prognoses, the second HIGH END® was incredibly successful. The number of visitors nearly doubled; especially prominent were prospective buyers from outside of Germany. Even observers from the USA, England, Italy and France were amazed at what the Alzenau circle had accomplished in such a brief period: the concentration of the „state of the art“ at the same time in one place, compressed and clear.

Before the second, decisive trade fair, the group registered themselves legally as the “High End Syndicate for High-Quality Music Playback”. Its purpose was clear: Small companies which were already represented in the trade and could take care of their customers subsequent to purchase were to offer an exclusive „Specialist Display“. The number of rooms per exhibitor was limited to prevent large firms from renting entire suites. Emphasis was placed on product quality, not on financial power.

Tinkerers with individual machines were excluded from this music paradise, as were automotive and video products. In addition, only products whose manufacturers could be held accountable were permitted for the show. No-name demonstration models had to make do without price or supplier lists. What may have seemed like excessive caution certainly had its purpose. The strict regulation was intended to prevent individual companies from profiting from the HIGH END® without contributing to its success. Notable attempts at this were made. A few companies initially declined participation in the HIGH END®, but later arrived in the hotel lobby with their entire sales staff in order to take advantage of the trade fair’s success. Even today many firms which are not exhibitors themselves come to the HIGH END® – this has not changed over the course of two decades.

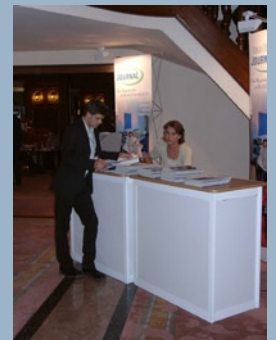
After only a few years in existence, the HIGH END® was regularly sold out in the Hotel Kempinski and therefore could not allow every company to make a presentation. Of course the HIGH END® was the object of some criticism, but mostly for superficial aspects such as the improvised presentations of some of the exhibitors.

All in all, however, the goal of the trade fair had been reached. Even the hi-fi magazines began to accept the project, including those who initially had nothing but contempt for the trade fair, referring to it smugly as the work of „unrealistic oddballs“. Some German specialty publishers even ignored the HIGH END® completely! All those who rushed to judgement have long since become prominent participants in the exhibition.

After the „Hi-Fi Video“ trade fair in Düsseldorf was cancelled due to lack of interest and internal quarrels, many big firms rushed over to the HIGH END®.



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As the HIGH END® became more and more successful, more and more companies wanted to exhibit there. What happened next was inevitable: The capacity of the Hotel Kempinski was soon stretched to its limits and the organisers were faced with the dilemma of refusing various potential exhibitors year after year, which naturally led to discontent. Unfortunately, the attempts to integrate another hotel in Frankfurt as an alternate exhibition location did not work out satisfactorily. The dilemma remained, since over the course of time the industry also saw technical product developments which could not be presented adequately in the small space available at the Hotel Kempinski. It was extremely difficult for manufacturers to present a multi-channel system with five or more speakers and impossible if they wanted to use a home cinema picture as well.

Anyone who has been an on site exhibitor for several years will be aware of many other problems that were faced. We will restrict ourselves to mentioning the muddy parking situation, the fact that exhibitors had to load and unload at parking site exposed to the elements, the electrical fallouts during the trade fair, the difficult traffic around the hotel and the many other hindrances that resulted from the hotel simply not being adequately designed to hold an event of this magnitude.

A new location for the show had to be found. But where were the suitable exhibition spaces in Germany and what must these premises offer?

Those responsible for answering this question – those in the HIGH END SOCIETY organisation who had to make a decision after weighing all the pros and cons - did not have an easy task. Of course, it was important to find a balance, namely to offer more facilities to bigger companies, as was previously the case, but not to neglect the smaller companies which are the exhibition's „bread and butter“ and which have significantly shaped the HIGH END® during the last 20 years. These small companies and manufacturers also had to be offered optimum exhibition facilities, in order for all the top products in the industry to be presented “under one roof”.

Under these circumstances, after viewing and examining all the potentially suitable localities, the decision could only be in favour of the M,O,C, in Munich (Munich Operating Centre), as it offered all facilities that the exhibitors and visitors would ideally require. In fact, it is almost tailor-made for our industry. Hence, the decision was not in favour of the city of Munich or the state of Bavaria.

It was a decision which favoured all of our exhibitors, who would now be able to present their products in an optimal environment, as well as our visitors, since a direct address at a trade fair cannot be replaced by an anonymous e-mail.

That HIGH END® was heading for the Isar river could be happily reported after the HIGH END® 2003. Since 2004 Munich has hosted the HIGH END® show, our well-known, popular and successful specialist trade fair, which sets the tone in Europe in the truest sense of the expression.

May this success continue long into the future!

Branko Glisovic
Managing Director

HIGH END SOCIETY MARKETING GMBH



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FACTS:

- The Show: HIGH END® 2011
- Location: M,O,C, Munich, Lilienthalallee 40, 80939 München-Freimann, Germany
- Duration: 19th – 22nd of May 2011
- Trade Day: Thursday, May 19th 2011 (only by pre-registration)
- Open: From 10am – 6pm
- Entrance fee
- Trade visitors: 20,- Euro with pre-registration (the badge is valid for all days)
- Public: 10,- Euro / day
- Show Guide: Up from April 2011 available
- Show-Organiser: HIGH END SOCIETY MARKETING GMBH
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