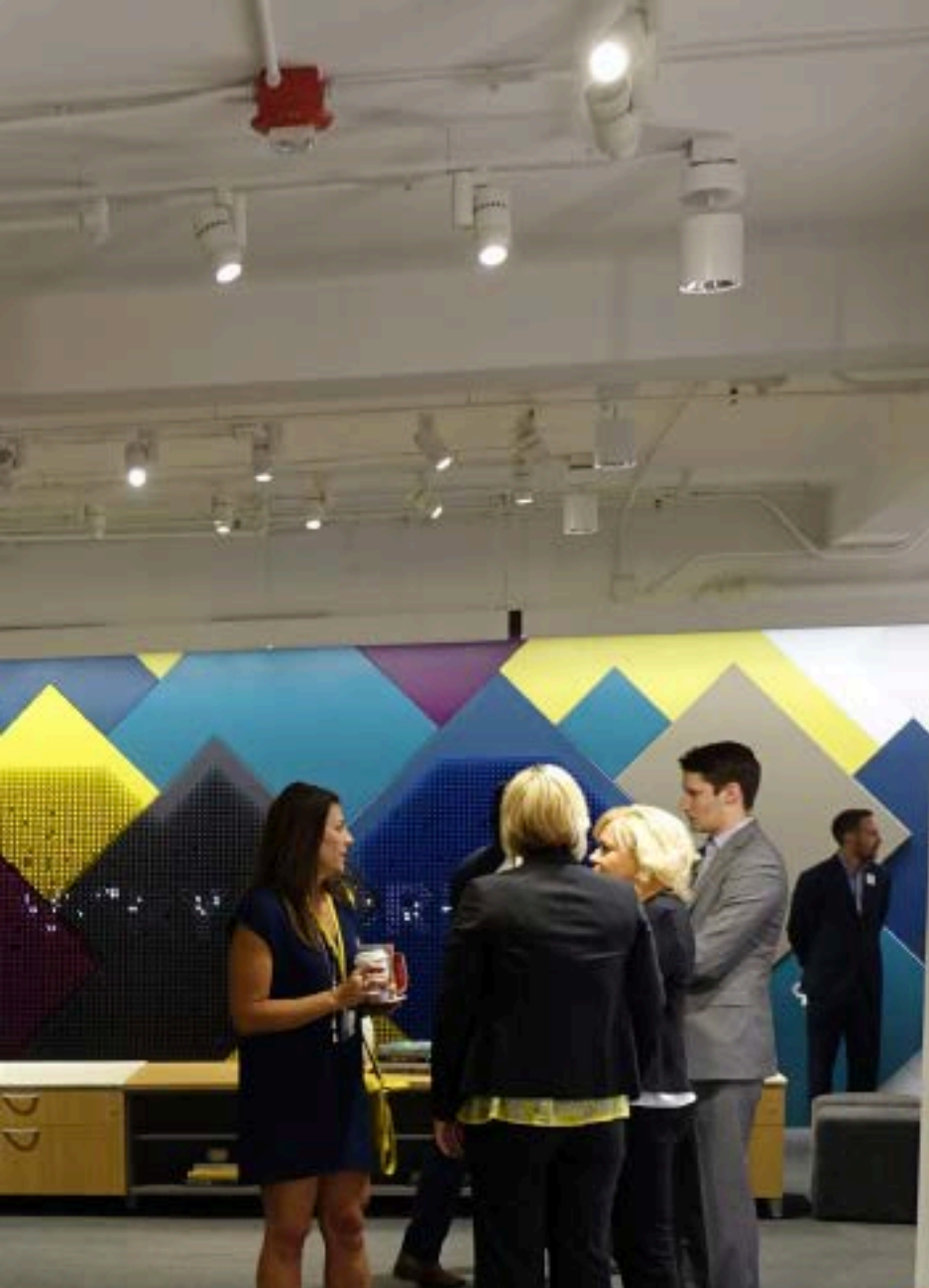


EXIT





NeoCon 2017: What We Liked (and didn't)

The Business of Furniture staff covered a lot of ground at theMART in Chicago. Innovative products and spectacular showrooms were everywhere. We visited more showrooms and talked to more people than we could possibly list. So don't feel left out if your company, product or executive isn't listed. There was a lot to see and too much to mention.

Words by Business of Furniture Staff

Shown: HON Showroom during NeoCon

Picking the **best** (and worst) of NeoCon is impossible. The show is simply too big and too important to assign awards based on brief showroom visits -- but we still want you to hear our impressions of the show.

The Business of Furniture staff covered a lot of ground at theMART in Chicago. Innovative products and spectacular showrooms were everywhere. We visited more showrooms and talked to more people than we could possibly list. So don't feel left out if your company, product or executive isn't listed. There was a lot to see and too much to mention.

The Best of NeoCon? In our opinion, it is the people we see at the event. They're not a product that is forgotten in a few years time.

Here's our attempt to sort the good, the bad and the ugly from NeoCon 2017.

WHAT WE LIKED

The Stupendous Seventh

If there is one thing the BoF staff unanimously praised, it was the quality and diversity of products (and more importantly, ideas) found on the seventh floor. It's not like this is the first year the seventh has become a must-attend area of the show, but it is the first time it was so broadly good from top to bottom.

"These are innovative manufacturers dipping their toes into NeoCon," said one BoF contributor. "I respect everyone on that floor and admire their investment in the future of the industry."



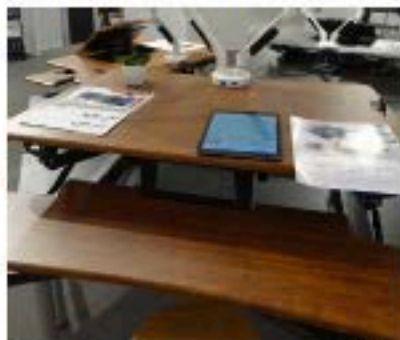
OM's Werksy chair

Getting to see the evolution of companies makes the seventh floor fun. It is a pleasure to watch OM evolve and grow. If you missed the new Werksy chair (available early 2018 or sooner), it is worth looking up.

Just a few years into the show, Maars wowed with its wonderful wall products on seven. And companies

like Formaspace, which is new to NeoCon, are already bringing great new products to the event.

The seventh floor also included companies that are disrupting the industry. Ignore Loctek at your own peril. The brand is making serious inroads with its products that turn static offices into height-adjustable ones and help us stay healthy at work. It is a brand worth watching.



Loctek

The floor was a hub for emerging technology

in the industry. Not long ago, Configura could be found on seven trying to convert the industry to its CET Designer software. Now it is one of the industry leaders in space design software.

SnapCab was a very pleasant surprise that caught the eye of many. The brand integrated new materials and technology to provide solutions for the office with modular pods in a variety of shapes and configurations that provided conversational privacy while minimizing distractions. With its DNA coming from a furniture craftsman, the potential architectural styles and designs are endless.

EMAGISPACE was another seventh floor surprise with DNA from television. Noel Maxam, an Emmy-award winning Hollywood director, developed a sustainable building block concept for interior spaces. This disruptive concept changes built environment conversation around the way we think about interior spaces. Components such as connectors, doors, windows, trim and finishes include a revolutionary wall-cladding system. You can even source your own finishes. It is like traditional building materials only faster, more affordable and sustainable. Its modular product solutions also provide integrated technology completely installed.

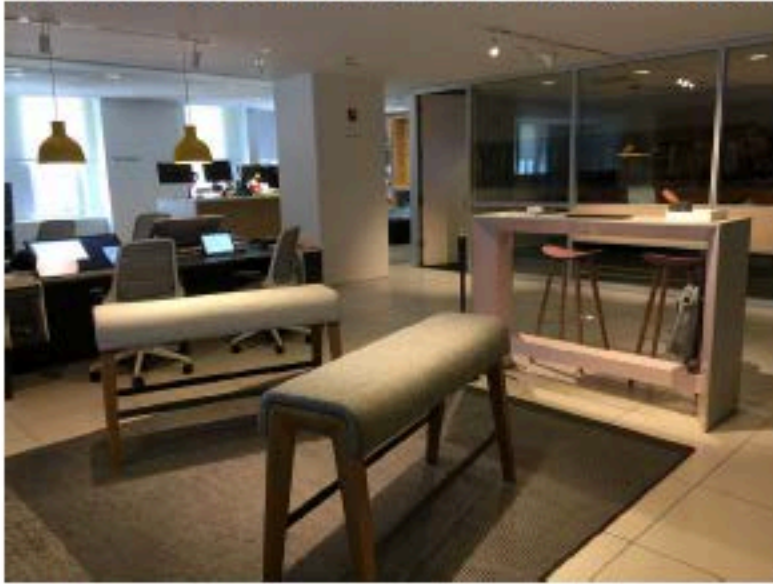
Showrooms That Shined

The largest companies in the industry get the largest crowds at NeoCon because most of them have spectacular showrooms. BoF staffers agree Teknion continues to have one of the most refined, beauti-



ful showrooms at theMART. It does a great job of conveying the company's brand — refined, stylish, hard-working, cutting edge.

Some BoF contributors liked what they saw at Steelcase. "Walking into the Steelcase showroom, it was clear that the focus was on creativity and inclu-



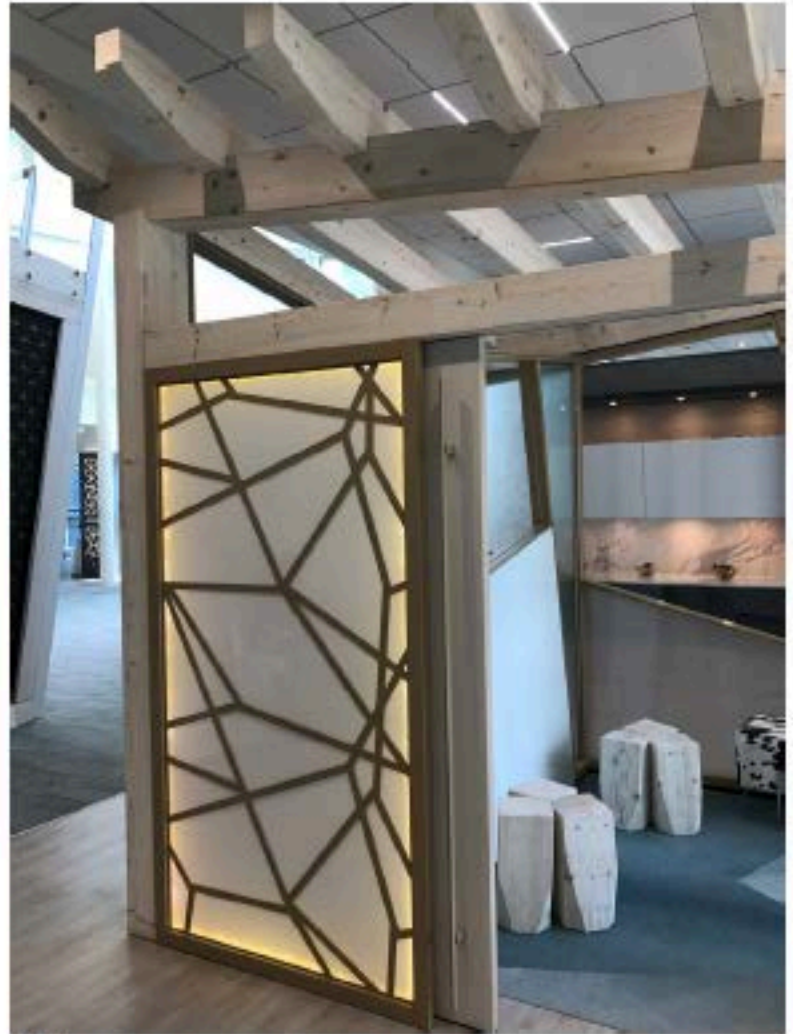
Steelcase

sive collaboration. It did not hurt having a partner like Microsoft to help focus and influence the technology tool engagements in teaming areas and flexible workspaces. It provided an environment that had furniture solutions working with technology to provide a creative climate without limitations."

Though not in theMART and not officially part of NeoCon, we all agreed a trip across the street was worthwhile. From bottom (Trendway) to top (DIRTT), 325 N. Wells looked great and was filled with interesting products.

DIRTT was simply spectacular, BoF staffers agreed. "The minute the elevator door opened to their floor you knew you were about to see and experience something special. The energy was electric and the enthusiasm from their team was contagious. The showroom design reminded me of a high-end designed office that was turned into daytime nightclub. It was reminiscent of the first year they opened in theMART years ago.

"DIRTT clearly gets the importance of technology for its success in the built environment. Incorporation of the different technologies including VR helped to complete the future visualization capabilities that are coming soon. They showed that



Dirtt

they intend to own enclosed room environments."

Allseating's space also is worth noting. The showroom was modest, but the company let its great new products shine. Allseating has invested heavily in smartly designed products, which was immediately clear when entering the space.

HON also is worth mentioning. Instead of trying to be something that it is not, HON showed what they do best: Make (increasingly) stylish, rock-solid furniture at a reasonable price. Ignition 2.0 was one of the best chairs at NeoCon, improving on the



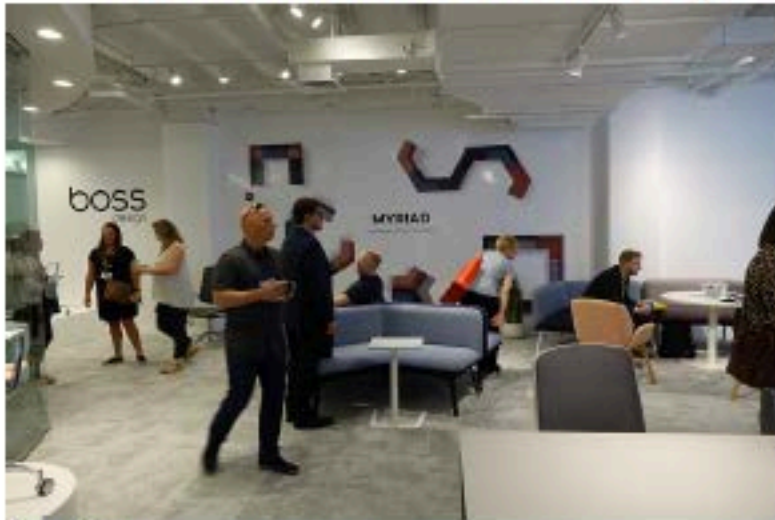
Group Lacasse

company's already good Ignition chair with new features and options — all at a lower price point. Groupe Lacasse falls into the same category — a company

with a showroom that really reflects its brand well.

We love Stad, and we love how Groupe Lacasse used color to unite its space. If you missed the OFS space, you missed one of the most cohesive, cool spaces at NeoCon. The brand continues to impress from its design to quality.

The best new showroom was from Boss Design.



Boss Design

The British office furniture maker proved it belongs with the big boys on the third floor, and its space was mobbed from the start of the show Monday to the moment it ended on Wednesday. Kudos to Wolf-Gordon as well. It's hard to imagine a company that cares more about the importance of design at theMART than Wolf-Gordon, from its showroom to the sculptural space on the first floor.

We found other companies that used their showrooms as aspirational spaces to give attendees a glimpse at what we could expect from them in the future. We loved the 9to5 showroom and how the company created excitement not only for the products it has, but for its direction in the coming years.

The Event and the Look of theMART

For a 49-year-old, NeoCon is pretty sexy. At the BIFMA breakfast, theMART's Byron Morton said programming, attendance and the appearance of the building have never been better. We agree. The show has regained the title of "Most Important Office Show in the World" and not just by chance. TheMART staff worked hard to get the old building in shape. The great new addition of Marshall's Landing was mobbed the entire show. The Grand



Grand Staircase

Staircase that connects the first and second floors became a real hub with people lounging in the space throughout NeoCon. The floors and bathrooms were clean, even the elevators seemed to be moving efficiently this year. Congratulations to theMART for another great NeoCon. We can't wait to see what next year's 50th anniversary will bring.

MIXED BAG: A FEW THINGS WE DISAGREED ON

West Elm

Some of us believe West Elm is making a dangerous shift toward the mainstream office furniture market with its Conduit office system. Don't get us wrong: Conduit, designed by Gensler, is a really nice new product. It provides integrated power distribution and space planning flexibility to create different work zones, from individual workstations to meeting tables. But some of us think the product marks an alarming move toward typical office products. Conduit is a nice system, but doesn't really fit the West Elm Workplaces brand. On the other hand, Haus creates varying levels of visual and acoustic privacy in a mini houselike setting. This product by Q Design is the kind of disruptive product we expect from West Elm.

The Third Floor

It was truly a disjointed dog's dinner, in spots brilliant and refreshing, in other spaces tired and boring. We were split on this floor, with some BoFers praising the diversity of what could be found there

and others slamming it for going in so many crazy directions. Here's a comment from one BoF contributor: "The past couple of years our experience with the way showrooms in general greeted you and hosted discussions is disappointing. The climate and feel is not as positive as other areas of theMART. Some of this is due to the large traffic volumes and the larger manufacturers with their attention to dedicated distribution. That is understandable, however, you only get one chance to leave a first and lasting impression. We felt like we were taken for granted."

Another contributor: "Three of the showrooms



Herman Miller

on the third floor Herman Miller, Haworth and Steelcase, are very special in theMART and to the industry, however I noticed this year all three



Haworth

manufacturers had different faces in their showrooms than they did last year. Then I realized that

they'd all been poaching each other's sales people. Maybe those three manufacturers should change their entrances to their showrooms to have revolving doors."

STUFF WE DIDN'T LIKE

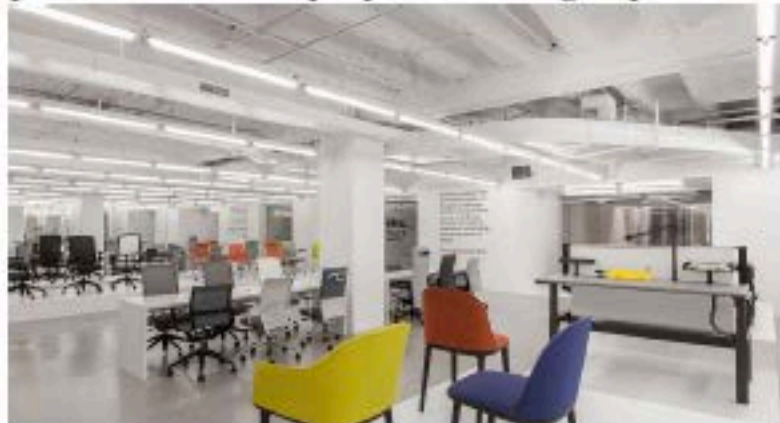
With so many ideas floating around theMART, there are bound to be a few stumbles. Look, we get it. A lot of work goes into NeoCon and the products that come out at the show. Not all of them are good ideas or right for the market. So here are a few things we didn't care for at this year's edition of NeoCon:

Herman Miller LiveOS

It's not that we didn't like LiveOS, Herman Miller's product to manage space and office assets and help workers do their jobs better. We just don't think it is quite developed yet. And we were surprised LiveOS was being touted as a new product. After all, Convia did just about everything LiveOS does now. Herman Miller killed that project nearly a decade ago. LiveOS has potential. We like how the sensors let your desk know when you stand up, automatically adjusting the height. But we'd like to see office technology focused more on the user than the facility manager tracking the use of the office.

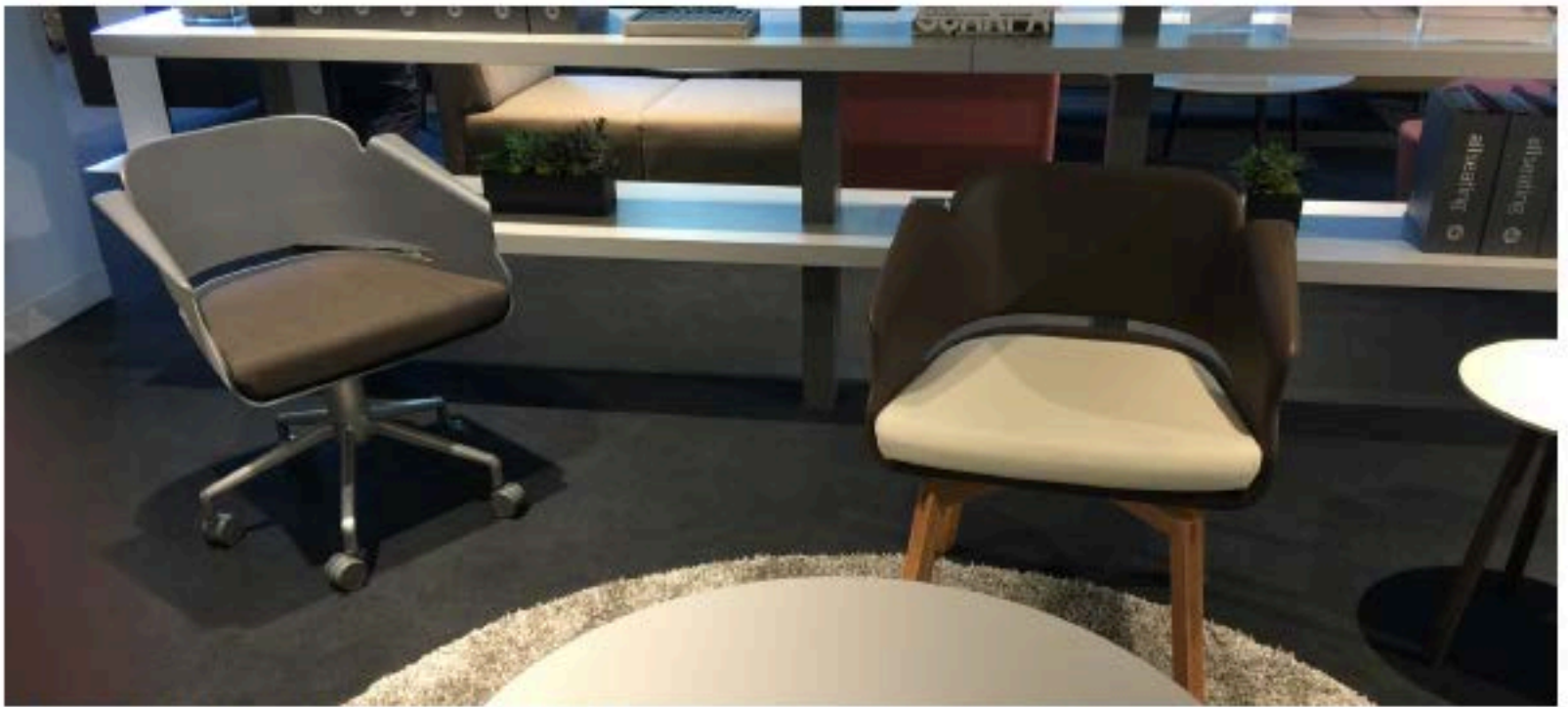
Vitra Showroom

Last year, Vitra showed its products in a jungle, a space filled with plants and life. This year, it appeared as if the company was showing its products



Vitra

in a sterile operating room. We understand the product should be the star of the show, but come on



Allseating showroom with Carl Magnusson's new Lyss chair

Vitra. You design your corporate campus with care. Do the same with your NeoCon showroom.

Other companies had problems with their showrooms as well. Though Knoll's showroom was nice, the focus up front was so different than it was last year it left us scratching our heads. Should we think of Knoll as an IKEA competitor (last year's showroom) or a fan of Tom Dixon's metal look (this year's showroom)?

Humanscale's QuickStand Under Desk

We get the idea that designers want a clean work surface. So why not put the guts of the company's QuickStand under the desk? It seems like a good idea on the surface, until you have to drill a large hole in your desk to accommodate it. Instead of solving the problem, it shifts the problem to a different spot — under your desk instead of on top of it. And dollar for dollar, wouldn't it be cheaper and easier just to buy a new height-adjustable desk?

Meaningless Awards

NeoCon showrooms are beginning to look like the dress uniform coat of a Soviet Union general at the height of the Cold War — filled with meaningless metals they probably didn't earn. Nothing against the Halcon Halo conference room furniture. Nice product, for sure. But it's got to be hard to judge a

competition when you spend five cursory minutes with each product.

Searching for Prophets

One BoFer wondered where all the "prophets" have gone. "For all of the enthusiasm I felt in the showrooms and hallways, I can explain none of it. I found very little to hold on to. I spent Monday afternoon walking 10 and 11, and couldn't help but think to myself that there were a lot of people trying to impress others, but with what I don't know. I walked back to seven and could feel the difference in the vibe. Physically. It amazed me. That is probably just me, but although I needed to visit the main floors, I really didn't want to. This industry has been wandering in the wilderness for a very long time, and we seem to be more lost than ever. Hoping that changes soon."

Personal Hygiene

It's fun to see our favorite manufacturers not washing their hands after leaving the washroom. We stopped shaking hands this year. Take care of your breath, too. This year we were greeted by a sales rep in a showroom, and they had the worst bad breath. If there is one habit we can take away from Donald Trump it's that everyone should have a box of Tic Tacs in their pocket. **BoF**