

# RIVALS TO PARTNERS

## Airport Wireless/Techshowcase, InMotion Team Up To Form Sound Balance

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By Pauline Armbrust

If collision theory could be applied to retail, the new concept being developed by **Airport Wireless/Techshowcase** and **InMotion Entertainment** will cause a major reaction, with all the right elements colliding to form an explosive concept.

The two companies, in some respects close competitors, have each taken the premium aspects of their businesses and teamed up to form Sound Balance. It is a concept that blends the best SKUs from the technology and entertainment stores as well as an infusion of eco-friendly electronic and entertainment accessories. So far, the concept will be introduced at three locations, one at **San Francisco International** (SFO) and two at **Miami International** (MIA).

"When you consider combining the resources, the experience and the minds of the two largest electronic retailers in the airport marketplace, it's not only

exciting, it's a very strong statement," says Jeremy Smith, president of InMotion. "We started getting to know each other about two ARN conferences ago, and our conversations continued on how we could work together. We wanted to find something that made sense to the airport community and something that would take the best practices from both companies. ... Because there is a movement afoot to be more eco-friendly and more demand for green products, we thought this could develop into an interesting component of our concept."

The store will be designed with a yin-yang flow, carving out three distinct physical sections.

"On one side will be the business-necessity-type of products like laptops and accessories. Then on the other side is the entertainment items you want to play with and have fun with," explains Ilene Berman, co-CEO of Airport Wireless/Techshowcase. "In the center of that universe, imagine a green oasis, which will have its own display tables that are focused on the green presentation. On the ceiling, you'll have an Earth globe shining down on that center-focused area. When you walk around the store, you will be guided over to the center of our universe and get a short education on better ways to promote sustainability, even if you're not purchasing anything. Then you can see how you can start with

some of the products we carry."

Berman adds that the store is not meant for gifts and such.

"It's meant for accessories and hardware for mobile solutions in business and entertainment," she says. "For instance, there are entertainment products like a DVD player or on the business side, a cell phone or a laptop, that can now be powered in several different ways that are much more eco-friendly, i.e. solar power or wind power ... you don't have to plug it into a wall."

A lot of the product offerings in Sound Balance will be made from recycled materials or able to be broken apart for recycling after use. There will be a special station for customers to bring in their cell phones for recycling, and the company will be working with the communities to recycle other things, as well, notes Berman.

"There's a whole different world out there when it comes to sustainability, which we'll be focusing on only for mobile and technology accessories and hardware," she says.

Some of the new product offerings are being manufactured exclusively for the airport stores.

"There are products we've designed for the traveler that you can only get in Airport Wireless, Techshowcase, InMotion and Sound Balance stores," says Berman. "That is really exciting to us because there are certain items we know of that will fit the airport traveler better than a non-traveler, but nobody is designing it for them. We're working with the manufacturers to design these kinds of focused products."

Berman expects the stores to cater to



*In addition to selling technology and entertainment items, Sound Balance will educate consumers on better ways to promote sustainability.*

the needs of several target customers in airports.

"From our experience, during a holiday, when the business traveler is with his wife and kids, we never do well [in Airport Wireless and Techshowcase stores]. The wife and kids typically don't want to walk into our stores. But InMotion has the entertainment side and families are in there buying and shopping like crazy. So what we've done by creating this yin-yang effect is allowed the store to pretty much hit every single demographic."

### Educating Consumers

The principals of the company are intent on being "responsible capitalists" and have delved into the sustainability field with sincere passion.

"People don't understand how quickly our environment is being destroyed, so we need to teach them about that," says Berman. "Both Jeremy's group and our group have been educating consumers on technology before the rest of the world has actually learned about it. This is what we do well: educating the traveling public. We will just be bringing another component into it."

She emphasizes that the partnership is not just looking to "ride the green train" but is very serious about the education process. Berman says she will be



attending an executive management program in San Francisco, Calif., where she will learn, along with other executives from around the country, about how to better promote true sustainability.

Additionally, the partnership's construction manager is going through the LEED certification program. A staff environmental engineer is working with sustainable materials that should be used and can be recycled. They are also working with groups in Colorado and California that are immersed in the sustainability movement.

"We're educating our staff to become as passionate about the green side as they are about technology. We know how to train on technology, which you can see by working with our employees," says

*Many items that will be for sale in the new stores will be made from recycled materials or able to be broken down for recycling after use.*

Berman. "We're going to get them to understand the whole green piece of it – and not for what they call 'greenwashing,' which is selling the product only on the green attributes; we want the sale to be based on what the products do, and then, 'Great, by the way it's green.'"

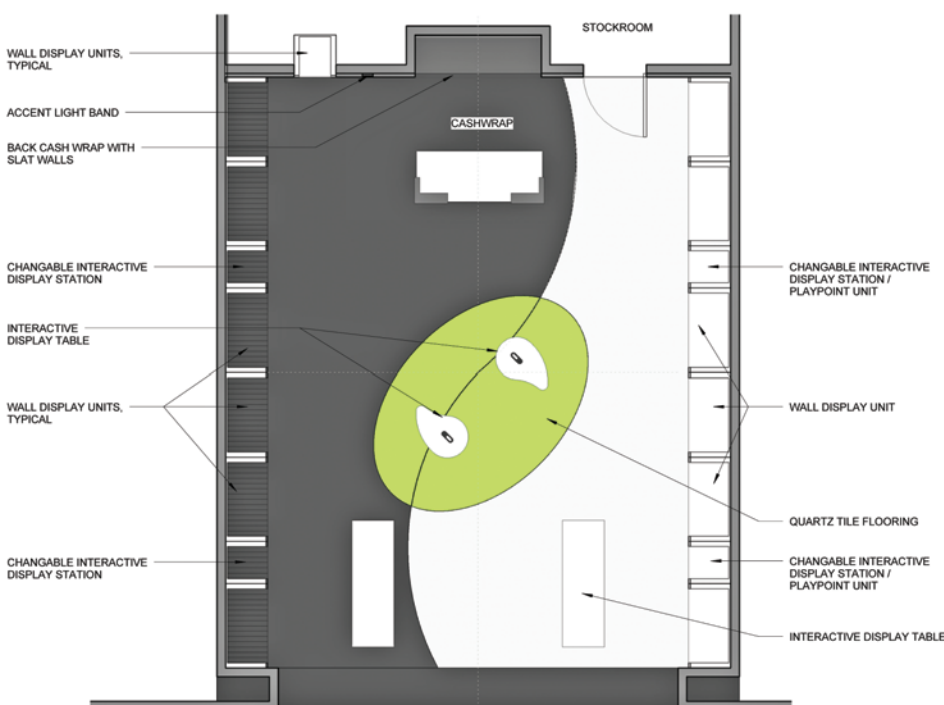
Consumers basically want to be responsible, according to Iris Goldschmidt, co-CEO of Airport Wireless and Techshowcase.

"They're only going to be responsible if they understand that they have to be," she says. "If given the choice the majority of people are going to buy a sustainable product if it's one similar to what they need. If I am offered a case that is made of wood pulp rather than plastic, which is not sustainable, and they're relatively the same price – which am I going to buy? Let me add that a wood pulp case doesn't look any different than the regular plastic ones."

Additionally, says Berman, consumers have become a lot more emotional and their purchases have become more thoughtful.

"When the customer goes in to buy technology, he cannot feel that he is going in and buying a luxury item," she says. "However, if he feels he is finding a better way to help the environment or help himself, that purchase goes from an 'I'm feeling irresponsible,' into a responsible purchase. That also will help to bring our numbers to pre-economic downturn numbers."

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*We'd like to hear your opinion about this article. Please direct all correspondence to Pauline Armbrust at pauline@airportrevenue.com.*