International Buyers from 130 countries descended on the 2019 SEMA Show, walking the aisles to find products that would resonate well with their customers back home and to see the latest trends in customizing. Networking with the more than 20% of buyers residing overseas features high on the list of priorities of exhibitors. Global recognition of their products from a panel of international journalists is a sought-after recognition and serves to assist companies in identifying promising export markets. The SEMA Show organizes a number of programs and resources to assist in making those connections.

This is part one of a two-part SEMA News story on the international programs and resources featured at the 2019 SEMA Show. What follows below are some highlights of the programs and resources at this year’s Show. An upcoming SEMA News article will feature the 172 companies winning Global Media Awards (GMA) at the 2019 Show, including the top 2020 GMA winner RSI SmartCap with eight awards. It was a favorite among judges from a diverse group of countries, including Australia, Canada, China, Peru and New Zealand. Also covered will be the second top vote getter, Factor 55, which won six 2020 GMAs, and judge’s comments about all the winning products.
SEMA held a Latin America session with buyers and enthusiast media from more than half a dozen countries in the region, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico and Venezuela. The buyers and journalists covered nearly every SEMA niche, including restoration, off-road, circuit and drag racing, as well as street-performance upgrades. The discussions focused on everything from online versus brick-and-mortar shops; the size of markets; and regional versus country differences and similarities. Obstacles to exporting to certain countries in the region (such as the high tariffs imposed by the Brazilian and Argentinian governments) were also discussed. In contrast, due to U.S. free-trade agreements, there are zero taxes on U.S. products in a number of countries in the region, including Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

Roundtable discussions held on Monday, November 4, on the Middle East, Australia/New Zealand and Latin America provided exhibitors with information on top markets, with insights into distribution, unique characteristics and trends. The sessions also provided an excellent networking opportunity, allowing exhibitors to meet with key buyers and overseas enthusiast media before the SEMA Show began.

Nearly 30 enthusiast journalists from 20 countries in Europe, Asia, Oceania, North America and Latin America served on the GMA panel. Armed with their extensive knowledge of their home markets, including trends and local terrain and vehicle mix. In addition to covering the Show for their publications, each was charged with selecting 10 products from the more than 3,000 in the New Products Showcase that they believed would best fit in their markets. The winners of the GMA had the opportunity to meet the journalists selecting them for international recognition at the International Happy Hour.

Exhibitors who ordered complimentary “We Export” signs could signal to the international buyers from 130 countries walking the Show that they were interested in exporting.

The day before the 2019 SEMA Show officially opened, exhibitors and key buyers and media participated in roundtables on three promising markets.
The Center for International Commerce (CIC) served as home base for visitors from outside the United States during the 2019 SEMA Show in Las Vegas, as well as a quiet place for exhibitors to meet with current or potential overseas customers. Among the resources available in the CIC were translators, private meeting rooms, a lounge area, complimentary Wi-Fi and refreshments.

The 16th edition of the 2019 International Happy Hour once again attracted about 1,000 attendees—exhibitors, international buyers and media—at the largest annual automotive specialty-equipment global networking event. The 280 GMAs were presented to exhibitors selected by a panel of nearly 30 international media, who each selected 10 products that they believed would best suit their markets.

Three SEMA member companies—Mickey Thompson Tires & Wheels, MW Company and Motorstate Distributing—received prestigious Department of Commerce Export Achievement Awards for impressive success in growing their export sales. Each of the companies participated in one or more of the 2019 trips that SEMA conducted to explore the potential of the specialty-equipment industry with markets overseas. The awards were presented to this year’s recipients at the 2019 SEMA International Happy Hour reception by Liz Clark, an official from the U.S. Department of Commerce. From left: Liz Clark, U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration’s automotive team leader; Robert Ledesma, international team lead, Motorstate Distributing; Darren Lane, B2B e-commerce and export sales manager, Motorstate Distributing; Ace Chatoo, MW Company’s regional sales manager/Middle East sales manager; James Lawrence, SEMA Chair-Elect and CEO of Power Automedia; and, from Mickey Thompson Tires and Wheels, Bill O’Roake, international sales manager, Caroline Perkins, credit manager, and Don Sneddon, advertising manager.