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>> [Back to the article](#)

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Trade show wraps up with strong numbers on its books

Visitors, exhibitors pleased overall, with \$18.9 billion in deals and 70 per cent of next show's space booked

By Karamjit Kaur

THE inaugural Singapore Airshow closed its doors to trade visitors yesterday with some strong numbers on the books - US\$13.4 billion (S\$18.9 billion) in deals sewn up and more than 70 per cent of exhibitors confirming they will be back for the next show in 2010.

Event managing director Jimmy Lau said he was 'most delighted' with the take-up rate for 2010, because the normal figure for re-booking when a show ends hovers at around 50 per cent.

However, the US\$13.4 billion in deals signed at the show was lower than at the Asian Aerospace in 2006, which clinched US\$15.2 billion.

But Mr Lau said 'watching numbers' does not tell the true story: It takes more than just orders for aircraft and parts, which are subject to demand and supply cycles, to determine if an air show is a success.

A more important benchmark in rating an airshow is the number of top 100 aerospace companies that are at it, said Mr Lau, 53.

The Singapore Airshow attracted 59 on the Forbes 100 list - a 'good' number, said Mr Lau.

How many bigwigs turn up is another factor, he said. For the Singapore Airshow, more than 200 official military and civilian delegations turned up - an increase from about 135 in 2006.

Among them were VVIPs: 21 airline chief executive officers and several transport ministers from around the region.

Industry experts agreed that aircraft orders are not the only gauge of a show's success. They noted that orders peaked in the years from 2004 to 2007 and that a slowdown is expected from this year as manufacturers turn to the business of filling orders.

The next cyclical peak is expected to come in the middle of the next decade.

Generally, visitors and exhibitors gave the show the thumbs-up.

They praised the ease with which they could go to and from the new purpose-built exhibition hall, thanks to the recently-built six-lane road.

Airbus chief salesman John Leahy said the absence of the 'typical traffic jams you get at other shows' was a plus, as was the sea-facing venue.

Mr Lau is an air show veteran and former president of Reed Exhibitions, which organised 13 air shows in Singapore under the Asian Aerospace brand before it left for Hong Kong because of a disagreement with the Singapore Government. He said that more than 30,000 visitors from over 100 countries and 7,000 exhibitors attended the show.

Though generally pleased, they had some complaints, he said.

For one thing, they said the planning could have been better.

There were too many conferences - at least five - in just two days, and the opening night should have been on the first day of the trade show instead of on the eve, when exhibitors were busy with last-minute preparations.

With contact-making a key part of such shows, some exhibitors were also disappointed they did not get to meet all the delegates on their wanted list.

The team will work hard to iron out the kinks, said Mr Lau, adding: 'We have two years to make sure we

deliver an even better show.'

The show opens to the public today and tomorrow.

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