



## SPECIALTY EQUIPMENT MARKET ASSOCIATION

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2021 ELECTION YEAR**

# **JIM LIAW**

#### **Part 1 – Personal/Professional History**

1. Please provide a history of your professional background and education (including professional development). Feel free to attach your resume and/or Bio. Describe the specifics of your current job responsibilities:

See below for résumé.

2. Indicate your historic and/or current involvement with automotive industry initiatives specifically, as well as other professional and philanthropic associations, societies and organizations you have been actively involved in. Please be specific about other boards (if any) on which you have served or are currently serving:

See below for résumé.

3. Please highlight specific career accomplishments including, but not limited to, patents received, product innovations, awards and recognitions, publications, marketing or business programs, presentation to business and/or industry symposiums. Share any and all significant or notable accomplishments:

Blackbook Motorsport Forum panelist–2017  
Race Track Business Conference Innovator of the Year Award recipient–2016  
FIA Sport Conference panelist–2016  
SEMA YEN Vanguard Award recipient–2014  
SEMA GEN-III Award finalist–2012  
SEMA Show workshop/seminar panelist–multiple years  
PRI Show workshop/seminar panelist–multiple years

4. Please mark each of the skill categories where you believe you possess a level of expertise:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motor Sports/Racing                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distribution/Logistics              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vehicle Shows/Auctions/Exhibitions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supply Chain                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Planning/Management                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicular/Product Design/Innovation | <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources Management                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Product Management                  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Business Management/ Development   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OEM Design/Technology               | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brand Management         | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Technology                           |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advertising              | <input type="checkbox"/> Data Management                               |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Marketing                | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet Utilization                          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify):                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations                    | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crisis Management                   | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regulatory Compliance               | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legislative/Lobbying                | _____  |
|  | _____  |

**Part 2 – Personal/Professional Attributes**

5. What are your specific areas of expertise? What unique skills or perspective do you think you could bring to the leadership of SEMA? What business or life experience do you have that prepares you to help shape the direction of the industry? What industry issues are you particularly passionate about?

My specific areas of expertise:

- Understanding of various facets of a business
- Fiscally responsible
- Understand and able to adopt new trends
- Strategical and tactical planner
- Creative problem solving
- Leading/managing large staff
- Team builder

Unique skills or perspectives I could bring to the leadership of SEMA; business or life experience that prepares me to help shape the direction of the industry:

Though the core of SEMA and its membership is part manufacturing and distribution, there are a large number of businesses that are integral to the operation and promotion of these core businesses, businesses such as media, agencies and events. I strongly feel that the most effective Board is one that represents the diverse membership pool. My experiences in the media, agency and event sides of the industry will help to broaden the Board’s perspective but also to bring additional ideas to the table.

SEMA-member companies are also made up of many small businesses. My time working for two small businesses, creating two small businesses and being one of the smallest businesses to be contention for the SEMA Board of Directors provides me with real-world experiences and leads to understanding the challenges these member companies face. I co-created Formula Drift more than 17 years ago with almost nothing; no wealthy family support, no bank loans, no private equity, no investors, just myself and my partner. We literally bootstrapped it and contended with the biggest names in motorsports (NHRA, NASCAR, IndyCar) for a piece of the motorsports pie. We were branded a fad that could not survive a couple of seasons. We proved that perseverance coupled with passion can go a long way.

My father is an immigrant. He left Taiwan (his family and a successful business) for America, not for better opportunities for him but for his sons. It was impactful for me to witness to his resilience, forging opportunities for himself before co-founding a company that provided him stability until his retirement. During his challenging days, he was importing low-priced sneakers and selling them to stores in the wholesale district of downtown Los Angeles. I remember vividly going to our Public Storage unit on Saturday mornings to box orders into large boxes that were usually 60–80 lbs., lifting them into our station wagon, then driving them to each store. Before that, we owned a donut shop for about a year. During many school breaks and Saturdays, we had to leave our house at 4:00 a.m. to get to the donut shop to prepare for the rush of food trucks picking their day's orders. His work ethic was foundational for me.

Industry issues I am particularly passionate about:

I am passionate about promoting the industry.

We are an industry that offers many opportunities in many fields, and much of it is unknown to “non-insiders.” This is important to pump new blood and new talents.

We are an industry that is attractive. Being involved with cars is just as cool and trendy as video games and smart devices. We have the marketing muscle and the celebrity/influencer power to reach deeper into the masses. If young people can get pumped up about exotic plants or limited-edition sneakers, making car culture relevant and cool can be turned up. This is essential to create new enthusiasts.

We are an industry that is dynamic. Learning about car culture via traditional and non-traditional media plus seeing car culture alive at a car show or at the racetrack brings it alive.

6. What would you say is/are your most notable achievement(s) to this point in your career? What are you most proud of?

My most notable achievement is that Formula Drift (FD) is still thriving after 17 years. Yes, we fought past naysayers, the Great Recession and a global pandemic, but the achievement comes in the form of the careers and opportunities we provided people (past staff, drivers, media, entrepreneurs) to thrive inside the FD ecosystem or use FD as a

stepping stone. We even provided economic infusion to each region we visited domestically and internationally.

I am most proud that with all the time commitments, many travel days and long work hours, I am able to still be as involved as I am with my family from drop-offs to field trips.

## Jim Liaw's Resumé/Bio:

### Experience

*November 2003 – present*

*president / Formula Drift, Long Beach, CA*

As co-founder and president, I created a completely new niche/genre for the automotive enthusiast segment in the United States, resulting in an economic impact of millions to the industry and regional communities over the course of 17 years. The company, small in nature and short of financial resources, still experienced huge growth, nearly tripling gross revenue from 2007–2019. The Sport & Series continue to be a cultural leader forging new ground in new technology, especially social media and engaging with youth.

My day-to-day role is to oversee the entire company/series. My primary focuses are on sales, business development, operations and administrative (HR, legal and finance).

*February 2017 – present*

*drifting commission member / Federation Internationale de l'Automobile, Paris, France*

Started serving as a charter member of the Drifting Working Group, an exploratory committee focusing on the sport of drifting. Later serving as an active member of the FIA Drifting Commission. During this time, I contribute to the new global sporting and technical regulations that the FIA looking to adopt and served as the Chairman of the Stewards for the first-ever FIA Drifting Intercontinental Cup.

*April 2016 – present*

*advisory board member / Pioneer Industries Inc., City of Commerce, CA*

Pioneer is a residential and commercial faucet manufacturer with three brands, a factory in Taiwan and gross revenue of \$20 million-plus annually. I sit on an advisory board comprised of five members. Our role is to advise the company, quarterly, on its long-term strategy as well as give input on resolving major day-to-day matters.

*2012–2016*

*select-committee member (Young Executives Network)/Specialty Equipment Market Association, Diamond Bar, CA*

Served as a select-committee member until I aged out. Of the various initiatives and work within task forces, the creation and roll-out of Launch Pad was the highlight during my term.

2007–2013

*select-committee member (Street Performance Council)/Specialty Equipment Market Association, Diamond Bar, CA*

Served on the council as it transitioned from the Sport Compact Council to the Street Performance Council. Worked inside and outside of the council to recruit new members and broaden the reach of SPC.

September 2002–December 2006

*managing director/Slipstream Global Marketing, Irvine, CA*

Co-founded and managed one of the first boutique agencies of this kind that specialized in the import/sport compact segment and motorsports. Slipstream provided clients with event activation and brand consulting as well as execution. The agency also created and/or managed events such as the Mazda Extreme Street series that took place at all major IMSA races and was the first organization to bring professional drifting out of Japan.

October 2001–September 2002

*business development/Vision Entertainment, Laguna Beach, CA*

I was brought into Vision Entertainment to expand their Hot Import Nights car-show property to be more appealing and inclusive of hardcore motorsports companies and fans. Worked to create many partnerships like the ones with Panoz Motorsports (now IMSA) and Laguna Seca Raceway.

September 1999–October 2001

*sales manager/Import Drag Racing Circuit, Huntington Beach, CA*

IDRC was the first organization to create a national drag racing series specifically catering to import and sport-compact cars. My role primary role as sales manager was to solicit booth sales and series sponsorship as well as retain and manage those relationships. I was also part of the core team to work with the NHRA prior to their creation of their own sport compact series. Prior to my departure, I secured ample sponsorship to fund the most expansive schedule in its history, holding races across the country.

March 1997–August 1999

*sales representative/Primedia (McMullen Argus), Anaheim, CA*

What began as an internship, turned into my first job in the automotive industry. Primedia, now Motor Trend Group, were publishers of many automotive specialty magazines. My internship role was to analyze the advertising landscape and assist to create sales opportunities for the sales representatives. After graduation, I became a full-time sales representative. I grew my account base nearly triple. Aside from sales, I took a proactive role to work with magazine editors on projects that would maximize return for my clients but also help them understand the industry better. Being proactive also led me to be the point person for various magazines at events like car shows and races, where we would set up a booth to promote our brands.

## Education

1993–1997

*Bachelor of Arts, Asian American Studies/UCLA, Los Angeles, CA*

Began my college career in economics before focusing on Asian American Studies, which provided additional education in demography, statistics and research. I enhanced my studies by adding history as an emphasis subject.

## Activities

Most of my time is spent at work or with my family but when there is time, I have volunteered in my community serving as workshop host, panelist, moderator, and conference counselor with the Taiwanese American Citizens League and Taiwanese United Fund. I have also volunteered for the industry serving as SEMA Launch Pad judge & task force chair, SEMA Gen-III task force as well as various panels and workshops for SEMA and PRI.

## Part 3 – Industry Perspective

7. What do you consider to be the top opportunities or threats facing the specialty parts aftermarket over the next five years? Try to be specific to industry trends. You may comment on macroeconomic issues (inflation, unemployment, health care, etc.) but only if they are relevant to your perspective on industry issues.

With an industry this size and this diverse, there is a swath of opportunities and threats that are specific to each type of member company. Industry-wide, there are opportunities and threats that have commonalities that we can face together.

With every threat lies opportunity. Threats expose issues and force us to face them head on.

Awareness and Education:

Having been in partnership with the U.S. Air Force's recruiting team for over a decade, they have shown me that integrated awareness building/marketing and educating connects with a person emotionally and pragmatically.

Why would a person want to become an enthusiast? Who has shown him/her how fun it is, what an awesome community it is?

Why would a parent/family member support/encourage a person to seek a career in the industry? Who has explained to them the enormous diversity of opportunities that require a wide variety of skill sets?

Why would governments and communities see car culture and the industry in a positive light? Who has educated them about the industry's rich history woven in Americana, the economic impact, the camaraderie, the constructive effect on young people?

I strongly feel that building awareness of who we are as an industry, increasing education

on the benefits and opportunities the industry offers, and creating a positive image will help tackle the various urgent matters: to create more enthusiasts, to bring new career seekers, to have governmental policies that are friendly, to keep venues and race tracks open, etc.

#### Engagement and Outreach:

How do we drive awareness and education? Through engagement and outreach.

From the inside out, we need to be more engaging, proactively reaching out beyond just the SEMA Show attendees and selected member-company representatives, which is only a fraction of the entire industry. The employees of SEMA-member companies are vital in the drive for more awareness and education because they are an extension of the industry. Helping the entire membership understand important initiatives like the RPM Act and programs like SEMA Cares, will organically make them a supportive voice for the industry. In turn, we also want a more in-depth understanding of their input to have a fuller perspective of the issues and needs beyond just the business leaders and to all those that work in the industry.

From outside in, as stated above, to tackle specific industry issues through awareness and education, the public perception of who we are must change. There are many examples from Major League Baseball's "We Play Loud" campaign to highlight their young, exuberant stars to NFL's "Play 60" campaign to have kids be more active to California Milk Processors Board's "Got Milk" campaign to get people to drink more milk that can offer great insight to successfully steer public opinion, plus we are not short on talented and savvy marketers.

8. Of the issues you identify above, which ONE concerns you the most as to how it will impact the industry's future? What would you do to initiate change to either expedite a positive outcome or prevent a potential disaster?

I hate to simplify it but without new blood (new enthusiasts, new entrepreneurs, new career seekers) all the work on important matters such as regulations, emissions, electrification, trade, economy, copyright protection, etc., will mean nothing.

We are a connected industry. Car culture thrives on interacting and engaging with one another. We must address the limitations and challenges facing these mediums of interaction, event venues and racetracks. We must work to preserve and promote them.

Without car shows and car meets, we lose a vital place to network, to share ideas, to showcase our work, to create bonds and to inspire. No kid, or adult for that matter, will be saying, "I want to build a car like that!"

Without racing, there is a missing spark that fuels our industry. If young people do not have a venue to go to, they take it to the streets. Taking it to the street gives the industry as a whole a black eye. It vilifies us. It also drives people away.

No racing means no real-world R&D, no organic promotion of the prowess a part/brand, no bragging rights, no creation of an aspirational goal, no kid saying, "I want to be the next Mario Andretti!"

Without the drive to want to make more power, to go faster, we simply lose passion.

#### Part 4 – Association Specific Observations

9. Do you feel that the Board of Directors and SEMA are currently pursuing the initiatives that are critical to our business segment? What would you place more emphasis on? What would you discontinue? What would you add?

As I am not a Board member, so my insight is on initiatives that I have had experience with.

SEMA and PRI Shows: Both Shows are distinctly different but equally valuable. Addressing the potential challenges for the 2021 Shows, creating multiple alternative plans, and utilizing this pandemic as a learning opportunity to assess what new ideas, ways to pivot, and ways to adapt are possible.

SEMA Outreach: Initiatives such as Battle of the Builders, SEMA Cruise and SEMA Ignited are great to programs promoting within the industry. They do reach beyond the industry, but these initiatives can be enhanced and news ones can be added.

PRI Outreach: The quick thinking to launch the PRI Road Tour was a great response to the limitations COVID-19 had on the PRI Trade Show. This program as well as a SEMA version should continue long after the pandemic has passed.

SEMA Garage: A valuable asset that needs to continue to be promoted. The tools available to member companies are impressive. I believe the addition of a Detroit SEMA Garage/Emissions Lab will be invaluable.

Take a Kid to a Car Show: Did you know this is a program? I think this has been an overlooked program that needs association-wide education, buy-in and support as well as Board of Directors and SEMA attention.

10. As a SEMA Board member how do you feel you would be uniquely qualified to help address the issues you identified above?

Perspective.

I bring the perspective of an “outsider.” I was the young kid; one who loves imports, front-wheel-drive drag racing, car shows with deejays playing loud music, and a judged motorsport call drifting. I know how it feels to be on the outside and thus I know how to connect with a young person like that. I know how to be inclusive and embracing of new trends.

I bring the perspective of an “insider.” My insider experience is via serving as a select-committee member on the Street Performance Council (formerly Sport Compact Council) from 2007–2013, a select-committee member on the Young Executives Network from 2012–2016, a task force chair for the inaugural SEMA Launch Pad competition, and a panelist on a variety of workshops and seminars at the SEMA Show and PRI Show. I was

fortunate to have been recognized by being a finalist for the inaugural GEN III Innovator Award and winning the SEMA YEN Vanguard of the Year in 2014. I have also had experience working with SEMA staff on pillars of the association such as the SEMA Garage, Battle of the Builders and SEMA Ignited.

I bring the perspective of a current small business owner and operator. A business owner that bootstrapped it to turn a passion into a business and a career. It is just like most of the SEMA membership. I can still relate to having sleepless nights worrying about finances, about the economy, about the well-being of my employees and my family. I understand that the association must serve all members, including the many small businesses.

I bring the perspective of a marketer that has successfully engaged with youth, introduced them to car culture and motorsports by utilizing the tools of today, social-media engagement, digital-content distribution and grassroots outreach. I have the pulse on the demographic the industry desires.

11. What do you see as SEMA's weaknesses?

**Disconnect**

One of the main hurdles with attempting to engage the youth and driving membership is that they feel disconnected, they do not feel part of the "inner circle." They see that the companies involved in councils and on the Board are the same ones that get highlighted and win the awards. This perception of exclusiveness, real or unreal, does not make it motivating to participate. We can say we want to include them, but we must simultaneously address how to involve them.

**Brand Awareness**

As stated previously, there is a lack of outreach, image promoting, and brand building outside of the SEMA. It is one thing to "preach to the choir" but it is another thing to step outside the industry. Let us define who we are and go out there and tell our story.

12. How about its strengths?

There is a strong list of strengths that SEMA has that not many members are aware of: Market Research, SEMA Data, international delegations, SEMA Action Network, etc. SEMA's greatest strength is bringing the entire industry together for two distinctly different and both highly productive shows, the SEMA Show and the PRI Trade Show. The supporting programs, which I have been a part of quite a few, from workshops to fun panels like Brew Talks to ground-breaking programs like the SEMA Launch Pad, enhance one's show experience.

13. If you were chosen to chair the Long-range Planning Committee, which topics or issues would you want your committee to be deliberating on?

Outreach. I would want to tackle this issue head on. What is the Board going to do about reaching out to those outside our industry to elevate our image; to young people and those in their lives that being a car enthusiast as a positive hobby as well as an industry full of opportunities; to non-members and members in the industry about SEMA's slew of benefits and the work SEMA is doing? To have the Board create a plan for an entire industry promotions campaign.

## Part 5 – About You

14. Questionnaires can be very limiting. In the space below, share with us anything we didn't ask that you believe will help the Nominating Committee develop a better understanding of you as a candidate:

To understand me, it is hard to not tell you about my parents. My parents were immigrants that gave up the comforts of home and a growing business and career to essentially start over, not for fame and fortune, but for family, me, and later my brother. They shoved ego aside, rolled up their sleeves and worked hard.

Only after starting my own company did I realize the intangible lessons that were ingrained into me.

They owned and operated a donut shop. I remember being dragged in the car at 4:00 a.m. on days I was not in school, waking up at the donut shop before the sun rose, and watching them mix, knead and fry. I was overwhelmed by the smell of donuts for years after.

They sold shoes to stores in downtown Los Angeles's wholesale district. On Saturday mornings, I would go with my dad to our storage unit, open up boxes of shoes so that they could be repacked to each specific order. Each repacked box, weighing 60–80 lbs., was then loaded into our family station wagon to be driven to each store. I experienced many of these Saturdays.

My father eventually started a business that was able to provide stability to our family and take him into retirement.

Like many kids, I never thought my father and I were alike, nor did I have a desire to be like him. Come to realize, he had been teaching me and influencing me the entire time. There was little talk, he just taught by example.

When I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I took some of the shoes my family was selling to wholesalers in downtown LA to sell them at school.

When I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, at the motel my mom was doing bookkeeping for, I worked with the family that owned it by helping make the beds.

When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I worked with a family friend at their swap-meet booth, which meant waking up at 5:00 a.m. on Saturday mornings.

When I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I worked that summer, in a warehouse with no A/C packing

boxes of computer towers.

When I was a freshman at UCLA, I worked at arcade in the student union, where it involved early mornings and late nights and a funny-looking uniform.

Foundationally, I learned how to work hard, that a buck is not easy to come by, and that there is no room for ego.

As I was completing my degree at UCLA, I was fortunate to be given a break. McMullen Argus Publishing (what is now Motor Trend Group) gave me an internship that eventually leads to my first “real job.” This was my gateway into the industry, which I had no idea existed. They allowed me to attend my first SEMA Show in 1997 and the dominos fell. McMullen Argus led me to IDRC (Import/International Drag Racing Circuit), then to Vision Entertainment (Hot Import Nights), then to the creation of Slipstream Global Marketing (a boutique-marketing agency) with my business partner Ryan Sage, which finally led to the creation of Formula Drift.

What I am most happy about with Formula Drift is the positive effects the series and sport have had on local/regional economies, the career opportunities it created via the teams and companies that participate in the series, the new product/new business opportunities it created for companies, and the family that we built that is the core of the company.

I am thankful and grateful to this industry, for the many experiences that have impacted my life. This is my motivation to contribute, to give back. Who would have imagined that an internship would have led me to connect with hundreds of thousands globally, that it would take me to over a dozen countries and made a positive impact to individuals, companies and communities.

Most of all, the support and encouragement of my home team, my wife and daughters, enriches the work I do. I am moved by both my daughters joy in telling their friends about their experiences at the track to the countless times they’ve told me their dream of working at Formula Drift one day. I want that joy, excitement and aspiration for all young people.