



Successful International Trade Show Marketing



Team Canada Inc • Équipe Canada inc

Canada



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Aussi disponible en français.



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FORWARD

Congratulations on entering the international arena. Up until now, it has been easy to set up a booth at one of many excellent facilities in Canada where you can promote your product and services in a language and culture you understand. Now you are ready for that big leap into the world of international exhibiting, where a show is a fair and a booth is a stand. Everything changes. Nothing is the same.

While the possible rewards are tremendous, they can be elusive. Exhibiting internationally is not a one-time thing. Many companies try it once and come home disappointed. They throw their hands in the air and say, "This is not for me." And perhaps it isn't.

However, for the company that approaches new markets intelligently, has a plan, and has taken the time to learn the subtle differences between doing business in Canada and doing business abroad, the possibilities are endless.

For years, I have been helping exhibitors improve their international exhibiting efforts and I know how difficult it can be. That's why I am pleased that the developers of this program asked me to introduce it to you.

This guide was designed as a primer for your international exhibiting efforts. Within this material, the developers have included many helpful hints and strategies that you will find invaluable when you are working an international trade fair.

There is a lot of material to digest, so take it slowly, make notes and use the checklists. You will have taken the first important step towards improving your performance at your next international trade fair.

Barry Siskind, Author
The Power of Exhibit Marketing



SECTION 1

An introduction to international trade fairs

1

General

Trade fairs are organized gatherings of buyers and sellers established precisely to create an environment where the two sides can meet and establish communication. From the perspective of the buyer, a trade fair presents an opportunity to meet with many vendors at a single location. For the seller, it is an opportunity to introduce a service or product to a new market. Companies generally participate in international trade fairs for one or more of the following reasons.

- They attend as visitors to view the competition, assess the market and develop a list of contacts for later follow-up.
- They participate as exhibitors to raise awareness, develop contacts, take orders, maintain a market presence, and introduce their products or company to the market.
- They attend to find an agent or distributor or support existing agents or distributors.
- They participate in panel discussions, make presentations or give one of the many workshops that are part of any trade fair's agenda. (By securing a speaking invitation, companies can increase their profile in a new market.)

Trade fairs can be classified in various ways. Some trade fairs are narrowly focused on a specific industrial sector or type of product, while others will address virtually any type of business. Some trade fairs are exhibitions at which participants display what they have to

offer. Others are real markets at which those attending are expected to make purchases from participants. Most trade fairs fall under one of the following headings: major general trade fair, major specialized trade fair, secondary trade fair or consumer trade fair. However, it's not uncommon to find a show that is a hybrid of two or more of these classifications. It's always best to check with show management to get a clear understanding of the fair's environment.

Major general trade fairs: All kinds of consumer and industrial goods are exhibited at general trade fairs. They are open to the public, but businesspeople also attend. The audience may be international, national, regional or even provincial in scope. In many foreign markets, this is the only type of trade fair available.

Major specialized trade fairs: Designed primarily for business visitors, trade fairs of this kind may also admit the general public, usually for only part of the time. They are specialized by industry or trade sector (e.g. food or leather), or sometimes by market (e.g. health care or education). The audience can be either international or national in scope, and tends to include people from various levels of trade and industry. If a firm is trying to enter a market, these trade fairs offer an excellent opportunity to find an agent, importer or distributor. Firms established in the market can often use these trade fairs to support representatives by giving them the opportunity to make contacts with industrial buyers and retailers. COMDEX (<http://www.comdex.com>) is a good example of a major specialized trade fair.



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Secondary trade fairs: Most trade fairs fall under this category. Although they do not rank with the major trade fairs, they can be very important in their respective fields. They include highly specialized exhibitions that are national or even international in scope, as well as many regional and provincial specialized exhibitions. They are usually restricted to business visitors, and many of the regional or provincial exhibitions are aimed specifically at retailers. Softworld (<http://www.softworld.org>) is a good example of a secondary trade fair.

Consumer trade fairs: These events are intended primarily for the general public, either from the immediate area or from various parts of the country. With respect to the products shown, these trade fairs may be general or may cater to specific areas of audience interest. You may be familiar with local "home shows," which usually showcase building products and home renovation strategies targeted to individual consumers.

In this guide, we will focus on the process you should follow if your firm intends to participate in any type of trade fair. However, we will emphasize the complexities of attending a trade fair in an international setting (outside of North America). These "international trade fairs" can be very large gatherings that draw senior executives and professional buyers from many countries. A truly international trade fair can represent a tremendous opportunity for a firm to develop business outside North America.

In general, international trade fairs are inherently more costly than domestic exhibitions, so the advantages and disadvantages of attendance must be weighed carefully in advance. In fact, you should hold off exhibiting at an international trade fair until you are ready to launch a dedicated export

business development program (to determine if you are ready to export visit

<http://exportsource.ca/diagnostic> and complete the Export Readiness Diagnostic). You may want to begin by attending a regional or national trade fair; these shows are less expensive than international trade fairs, and they give you an opportunity to gear up before exhibiting your company's products or services in an international setting.

Why trade fairs are valuable

In many foreign countries, the trade fair is the traditional method of conducting business. Many of these fairs have long histories and attract attendees from around the globe. In many industries, these are "must attend" events.

The Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) reports that upwards of 90% of attendees who make purchasing decisions view trade fairs as their number one source of information (CEIR Report #PE11, 2000). The CEIR also reports that an exhibition lead is 56% less costly to close than a field sales call (CEIR Report #SM17, 1999).

For firms that have decided to begin a dedicated export marketing effort, the main reason to participate in an international trade fair is to increase product exposure and, ultimately, to make sales in new markets. These fairs are a highly efficient way to find appropriate channels of distribution, find out what is happening in the industry and in specific markets, and investigate various market entry options.

Many potential and existing buyers attend trade fairs, making these events a good way to build contacts and give your product immediate exposure to potential customers. You will



minimize the time and effort you spend to attract each new contact. Trade fairs offer an important venue for introducing new products; they are also an ideal opportunity to publicize product advances and new services, and to show how your company can solve your potential clients' problems.

Trade fairs provide customers with an opportunity to touch your product and see it in action. You usually have a chance to ask or answer questions, and to determine the extent to which potential customers are interested in a product or service. If someone expresses interest, you can follow up with a meeting or visit the potential customer's premises.

Trade fairs also give you, as a prospective exporter, an opportunity to check out the competition. A major general or specialized trade fair will likely attract other companies involved in the sector, so you can see what they are offering and also observe reactions to it.

International trade fairs help companies reach new prospects whom the sales force may not have approached. In addition, existing clients whom salespeople have not visited in the past year may come to the stand, providing an ideal opportunity to re-establish a relationship with these clients.

Trade fairs typically account for 22 to 25 per cent of the business market's promotional budget, second only to personal selling, and ahead of print advertising and direct mail. For example, U.S. businesses spend approximately US\$9 billion annually on exhibitors' travel and direct labour costs, and a further US\$12 billion on actual exhibit costs.

In summary, the major objectives for participating in an international trade fair include meeting new customers; selling your company's product or service; testing the market's reaction to the quality, design and price of your product or service; and gleaning market intelligence. It's your company's chance to meet decision-makers in a well-established business forum. The major benefits of international trade fairs are further summarized below.

- Potential customers can get hands-on experience with your product in a one-on-one situation.
- You can assess your competitors' new products or services, and observe the public's interest in or response to them.
- International trade fairs are a good place to meet potential distributors and representatives. These events offer an opportunity to measure the performance and product knowledge of existing or prospective agents.
- You can generate goodwill and free publicity through an international trade fair. Trade fairs can also enhance your corporate image.
- Your presence at an international trade fair reassures existing clients who attend. It confirms your company's presence in the marketplace and presents an ideal opportunity to sell new or improved products to committed clients.



SECTION 2

Choosing an international trade fair

General

Tens of thousands of commercial events are held around the world and virtually every country hosts at least a few of them. Finding the right exhibition opportunity the first time can be a nightmare. So you must analyze the possibilities and choose a fair carefully to avoid costly mistakes.

Matching the fair's potential to your marketing objectives

Ultimately, attendance at a trade fair is an extension of your firm's marketing efforts. Therefore, you should assess a trade fair based on the extent to which it will complement your firm's marketing plan. You have to assess your corporate goals and make decisions that put your firm in the right venues for new business development. In the previous chapter, you learned how to set realistic goals. Now your job is to ensure that you have a good chance of realizing these objectives at the fair you have chosen.

Assessing audience quality

The main problem in exhibiting at a major general trade fair is the difficulty of attracting a worthwhile number of "target" business visitors to your booth or stand. Although the audience may be huge, only a small percentage of these visitors may be interested in any specific product.

On the other hand, major specialized trade fairs are usually the most valuable fairs because they attract large numbers of businesspeople from the sectors covered. Particularly in Europe, exhibitors at a major specialized trade fair can be certain that a large proportion of the businesspeople they would want to contact in the country will be at the fair, along with many businesspeople from other countries.

Secondary trade fairs, both national and regional, can be an important way to reach a sector at all levels. They offer an opportunity to strengthen distribution or to increase market penetration. They are often the main channels through which to introduce a new line of products.

Consumer trade fairs are open to the general public and can attract large audiences. Unless you are planning to sell directly to the end user (which is rare in international markets), these shows might not produce the best results. However, in some markets, there may not be other choices. Alternatively, you may exhibit at a consumer show to support the marketing efforts of your local dealer, representative, re-seller or distributor.

The relationship of the trade fair to your business and the quality of the audience are the most important factors to consider when assessing any trade fair. The purpose of participation is to promote your products or services to visitors. It is therefore essential to ensure that visitors to the trade fair are the types of customers your firm wishes to meet. This involves defining the target audience, finding out about the characteristics of visitors who



typically attended the fair in the past, and assessing the extent to which the target audience and actual visitors coincide.

Some trade fair organizers can break down visitors by trade or industry, job function and nationality. This is important because, when deciding to enter a fair, you will find that the "quality" or nature of the audience—in terms of its business interests and decision-making authority—means far more than the size of the total audience. You're not looking simply for numbers of people, but for numbers of people who fit your target profile. You can identify trade fairs that attract an important representation from your target market, and assign them priority in conjunction with other corporate objectives.

Trade fair organizers should also be able to provide a list of exhibitors. If your company's principal competitors are not on the list, this may indicate that the fair is not attracting the right kind of buyer. However, this may also show that the competition hasn't learned about this fair yet, and therefore it has potential.

You should also be aware of the mix of exhibitors. Obtain as much information as possible about the exhibitors, and about the kinds of products and services they tend to promote. If other exhibitors do not provide the right context, you should think carefully before attending. Aim for a trade fair that focuses on products and services similar to your own or that provides the right demographic mix of attendees.

Considering location and frequency

Location is one of the most critical factors to consider when deciding which trade fairs to attend. Is the fair located in the target market's region, or in a region to which the target market will travel? How often does the fair take place? Is it annual or bi-annual? If the fair is held in different locations each year, consider which location is most suitable for your company.

Checking out a fair

Before deciding which fair or fairs to attend, consult specific people for valuable input and ask potential clients whether they will be attending that fair. You should approach the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service in the foreign country that interests you, as well as colleagues, agents and distributors, and trade officers at the International Trade Centre (ITC) in your home province.

In all likelihood, a few of these people will have attended the fair in the past and will be able to give you valuable feedback on the following:

- previous Canadian exhibitors' reactions to the fair;
- attendance figures for past years and trends in this regard;
- the types of exhibitors at the fair;
- the cost of exhibiting at a particular fair versus the alternatives;
- the types of exhibits and common promotional tools used at the fair;



- the quality of the service that the company running the trade fair provides to exhibitors;
- problems encountered; and
- other useful tips for new exhibitors.

Compare all of this information to your company's objectives. This process will help you determine which fairs should be priorities.

Sourcing fair information

"There is no substitute for doing your own primary show research. Web sites and exhibitor prospectuses are sales and marketing tools. Many attendance figures and statistics provided are optimistic, at best." *Anne Barron, CME, CTG, President, ABComm® Ltd.*

There are a number of sources of information on international trade fairs. These sources can provide data on the various trade fairs applicable to the target sector, as well as data on the quality of the trade fair, the type of attendee and the relative cost of the options.

In general, the Internet is the best resource for fast access to targeted information on upcoming trade fairs. Most trade fairs, exhibitions and conferences have established a presence on the Internet. Trade fair Web sites usually provide detailed information on events, exhibitors, attendees, hotels and transportation, as well as online registration forms, floor plans and links to exhibitors' Web sites.

The following short list of directories will allow you to get preliminary information on just about any fair in the world. Once you have identified a specific fair, the fair's Web site is your next stop for more detailed information. For a more extensive list of trade show links, visit the "Trade Shows/Events" section of the Team Canada Inc's "Exportsource" web site at <http://exportsource.ca/>

Expo Central

<http://www.expocentral.com>

This site lists trade fairs, exhibitions and conferences held around the world, as well as virtual trade fairs in different industries. The site provides fast access and is well organized. Its hierarchical structure includes 10 top-level categories by location and 28 top-level categories by vertical industries, as well as more than 600 sub-categories.

Exhibitions 'Round the World

<http://www.exhibitions-world.com>

This site has information on more than 4,000 of the world's major trade fairs and exhibition-related services. Site registration is required but access is free.

ExpoBase

<http://www.expobase.com>

This site is a multilingual exhibition database containing information on approximately 17,000 exhibitions worldwide.

TS Central

<http://www.tscentral.com>

This site is a directory of resources for business and professional events. The site has information on more than 30,000 trade fairs, conferences and seminars, 5,000 service providers, and 5,000 venues and facilities around the world. TSC connects people who organize and support trade fairs with those who attend and exhibit at them.



Fairs are also publicized in trade periodicals. If you subscribe to trade periodicals focused on specific industry sectors, you will be generally aware of the major fairs in your field of interest. You should also study peripheral areas, or sectors that represent crossovers.

Additional information on trade fairs is available through the International Exhibitors' Association's Web site at <http://www.tsea.org>. This organization promotes the progress and development of trade fair exhibiting and disseminates trade fair information. It also conducts studies and surveys on trade fair issues. A membership-based organization, it has been providing information on trade fairs since 1966.

In addition, provincial ministries will have listings and information on trade fairs for the major industrial sectors. Canadian trade and industry associations, and the chambers of commerce located in many cities across the country, are also aware of most major international trade fairs.

When you combine this information with a careful assessment of fair visitor demographics, you can determine whether a particular trade fair will allow you to accomplish your objectives.

Finding government support

Canadian companies participating in an international trade show with a government-sponsored booth will benefit from experienced coaching by DFAIT and from a cost-sharing formula that enables a small firm to participate in the show at a reduced cost while benefitting from the prestigious connection to the Government or Canada.

If you are a qualified, first-time exhibitor deemed "export ready," DFAIT will cover approximately 50 per cent of your travel and exhibition costs via the Program for Export Market Development (PEMD). Through this program, the government shares your costs through a loan that you repay only if you make sales to the targeted market. These repayable contributions are very useful because one of the easiest and most effective ways to enter international trade is to participate in a trade mission or in an international trade fair. Activities eligible for funding include the following:

- participation in recognized trade fairs outside Canada;
- visits outside Canada to identify markets; and
- visits by foreign buyers and foreign sales agents to Canada.

You can find specific details on the PEMD program on the DFAIT Web site at <http://www.infoexport.gc.ca/pemd/menu-e.asp>. Applications for this program are available online and at the International Trade Centre in your province.

Trade missions

A trade mission consists of a group of businesspeople travelling abroad together to facilitate trade by meeting foreign companies or foreign government officials. The strategy of the mission might be to establish personal contacts with key decision-makers in the target country; to gather information and market intelligence on opportunities and prospects; or to promote the companies represented in the mission and convince the mission's hosts to do business with those companies. For more information on trade missions visit http://www.tcm-mec.gc.ca/tcworld_rb.html.



Canadian Pavilion

Typically, Canadian government officials coordinate and set up a themed, multi-unit exhibit space for Canadian companies called a Canadian Pavilion. When a large group of companies joins a trade fair using this themed approach, the result is a very powerful presence at the fair. Corollary events around the Canadian Pavilion are also organized by Government of Canada officials to allow companies to meet new and existing clients. Some of these corollary events include matchmaking events and receptions. As well, meeting space is offered on site to allow you to do business in private. You should therefore look for opportunities to get involved in Canadian Pavilions at international trade fairs.

New exporters programs

One way to prepare for such a mission is to participate in information and training sessions organized in Canada. Some programs—such as DFAIT's New Exporters to Border States (NEBS) and New Exporters Overseas (NEXOS), and New Exporters Program (NEXPRO), offered by the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC)—combine instruction in Canada with a visit to the target market. You can find information on DFAIT programs at

<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca>

and information about BDC's programs at

<http://www.bdc.ca>.



Choosing a trade fair: Summary Sheet

1

Before registering for a trade fair as a visitor, exhibitor or participant, use the following chart to research the event.

Name of trade fair

2

Dates

When is the next event?

How often does it take place (annually, bi-annually)?

Is the trade fair appropriate for your business?

Is the fair intended for a general or a sector-specific audience?

Is it for exhibitors only?

Is the general public permitted to attend?

Is attendance by invitation or pre-registration?

Will there be a Government of Canada sponsored "Canadian Pavilion" at the fair?

Attendance

What were attendance figures like for the past few events?

How is the fair promoted?

How many attendees are expected at the event?

How many countries are represented?

Who are the exhibitors?

Who are the visitors?

What is the dominant language spoken?



Choosing a trade fair: Summary

2

Continued

Location

In what country or region is the fair located?

Is it close to key markets?

Are other exhibit or business opportunities available in conjunction with the fair?

Is it accessible to my company (is it easy to travel to and communicate with the site)?

History

When was the event founded and by whom?

What is its reputation and is it successful?

Who are the organizers? (include contact names)

Facilities

How large an area does the fair cover?

What kind of buildings house the fair?

Is it located in a town or city?

How big are the stands and other spaces?

What other facilities are on the fairgrounds (i.e. meeting or demonstration rooms)?

Are hotels and other accommodations nearby?

What are the move-in and move-out arrangements?

What storage facilities are available?

What is the quality of the facility?

What other amenities are available?



Choosing a trade fair: Summary

2

Continued

Fees

What are the fees for participation?

What are the fees for renting a stand?

What are the fees for attending as a visitor?

Are there additional fees for attending workshops?

What services are included in the cost of renting a stand?

What is the cost of clearing stand materials through customs?

What is the cost of services not supplied by organizers?

What is the cost of an interpreter, if needed?

Travel

What modes of transportation serve the centre?

What connections exist between Canada and the location (for instance, flights)?

Logistics

What is the best way of getting products and samples to the fair?

What are the customs and import regulations for the products being exhibited?

Are special licences required?

Will it be easy to bring the goods back to Canada?

Applications

What are the lead times for applying as a visitor, exhibitor or participant?

What procedures, restrictions or documents are involved?

What is the space reservation deadline?

2



SECTION 3

Planning for an international trade fair

Setting realistic trade fair goals

Clearly identifying the benefits of trade fairs is the first step in focusing on their importance to your company's overall promotion strategy. Consequently, it is the first step in planning for a trade fair.

Successful participation in a fair, like any well-executed marketing exercise, depends on a carefully considered plan of action. A plan focuses the whole effort; it sets goals and provides benchmarks against which to measure results. A natural beginning is to ask, "Why should the firm exhibit? And what does the company stand to gain?" Perhaps equally important is the question, "What criteria can we use to measure success?"

The following is a list of possible objectives for attending a fair, with some examples of ways that your firm can measure the extent to which you have achieved those objectives.

Objectives: Measure of success

Raise awareness of firm

The number of people visiting the booth or the number of people attending a presentation or demonstration

Secure leads and contacts

The number of people visiting the booth and the number of lead cards completed

Sell products or take orders

The number and value of orders taken

Meet with existing customers

The number of existing customers met

Conduct market research (for example, solicit feedback on new products or services)

The amount and quality of information gathered

Conduct competitor research

The number of competitors studied and the quality of information gathered

Secure contracts

The value of contract(s) initiated

Find foreign or local partners

The number of leads to potential partners, the number of qualified candidates and the number of candidates interviewed

Learn about new products, processes and technologies

The quality of information gathered

Acquire new products, processes or technologies

The number and quality of leads and contacts

3



List all possible objectives you may wish to achieve at a fair, then review the list and rank each objective by priority. High-priority objectives might include making sales or generating sales leads, promoting your product and company, analyzing competitive products or getting a general introduction to the market.

Ultimately, one or two objectives will stand out as being of primary importance. Therefore, you should channel most of your fair-related efforts into meeting these objectives, because it is easy to lose focus at a trade fair. There are many types of visitors, many activities and many opportunities to explore. It is therefore crucial to focus on your top-priority objectives to ensure that you succeed at the fair.

You need a list of realistic objectives in order to determine which trade fairs your company will attend, what importance the trade fair budget should assume in terms of the overall marketing budget, and what image your company wants to create at trade fairs. The list will also dictate the way you will measure the results of the fair and how you will pursue your follow-up strategy after the trade fair.

In addition to the overall corporate objectives and realistic targets you set for the fair, you need to set out individual responsibilities and goals for the people working at your stand. These should include the number of hours they spend at the stand, the number of hours they spend working the floor outside the stand, the number of product demonstrations they give per hour and the number of leads they generate per day.

Establishing a budget

Although trade fairs can be very successful tools for reaching potential clients, they are expensive and have many cost elements. Without a fixed budgetary target, it is easy to overspend. So you must be well prepared for a trade fair to ensure your company maximizes the benefits of it. Treat a trade fair as a profit centre, like any other marketing expenditure.

At the outset, establish a global budget for trade fairs, using as a starting point the total number of annual trade fairs you are considering. If you are new to the trade fair world, speak to the fair manager and other exhibitors to get reasonable estimates of the various budget components. There are also full-service organizations across Canada specializing in selling trade fair exhibits, managing pre-fair promotion, training trade fair personnel and administering trade fair budgets. These professionals are good sources of information for budget estimates.

To participate in a trade fair, your company will incur costs for the following kinds of items:

- exhibit space, which typically accounts for 15 to 25 per cent of a company's total trade fair budget (basic costs for exhibit space are most often quoted on a "square metre" basis);
- show services, such as electricity and labour;
- purchase or rental of the exhibit, including any design or local construction services needed;

Business to Business

Marketers: Keep in mind a rule of thumb determined by the CEIR: Business-to-business marketers spend as much as 35% of their annual marketing budget on trade fairs



- shipping of the exhibit, including transport, set-up, dismantling and return transportation;
- material handling (also known as drayage it is an on-site cost to move your exhibit and products from the loading dock to your stand area. Material handling is usually billed for "in and out". If you are not sending back the exact same items the material handling costs can be lowered at the time you pay your bill.)
- special equipment for demonstrations or presentations (display screens, VCRs, computers, slide projectors, overhead projectors);
- brochures and other printed materials, including writing, design, translation and printing;
- registration fees;
- travel documents (fees for passports, visas);
- special permits and carnets for samples
- travel to and from destination;
- incidental travel (taxis, parking, car rentals);
- accommodation (hotel, meals, per diem, incidentals);
- hospitality (for clients, contacts);
- fair services, including furniture rentals, computer rentals, electrical hook-ups, janitorial services, security, telephone services and insurance;
- business cards (translated into the local language and reprinted, if necessary);
- production of samples or software for demonstrations;
- additional staff, if necessary, to maintain the stand and demonstrate products;
- staff training; and
- pre-fair promotion, including pre-fair releases sent to trade and business periodicals, advertising in the fair guide, local radio promotions, direct mail materials and special invitations for selected guests.

Estimate all of these costs in advance when planning the annual marketing budget. A budget for each trade fair will help you focus your trade fair program. It will introduce an element of control and encourage you to avoid cost overruns. The trade fair coordinator, the participants and anyone else supporting the trade fair effort should be acutely aware of the overall budgets and the spending constraints established for each of the cost items.

Arranging shipping

Carefully read all the documentation the trade fair organizers send you. Special shipping arrangements may be required for goods you are sending to the fair. If such arrangements are needed, you should be familiar with them at the outset of the planning process and be prepared to meet all related deadlines.

If you have to make your own shipping arrangements, check first with the fair organizers to verify when they can receive goods and how you must pack and label them. Make all arrangements with the shipper as early as possible to benefit from the least expensive



shipping modes and rates. Shipping as early as possible also ensures that customs problems (should they arise) are dealt with early and the goods arrive in time for the fair. According to Jenny Singer of FCI Fisker Cargo Inc., when selecting a shipping company, make sure you select someone with exhibit forwarding experience, "shipping to Germany and shipping to an international trade show in Germany are like night and day; you have to know the rules and regulations when shipping exhibits and products to trade shows". Ask the trade fair organizers whether there is an official show logistics company. While these services are not always the least expensive, using an official supplier can guarantee on-time delivery and saves countless last-minute hassles.

Tip: If you are participating in a Canadian Pavilion find out if other exhibitors want to consolidate their shipping and then share the costs.

Travelling with samples and display products

You will find it easier to clear customs in the destination country with samples and display products if you have an ATA carnet. The carnet acts as a merchandise passport that makes it simpler to take temporary imports such as samples and equipment into more than 50 countries, and to leave with them later. Customs authorities in most developed countries accept carnets. The document is their guarantee that all duties and excise taxes will be paid if any of the items listed are not taken out of the country within a year.

Carnets can be particularly useful when you are coping with a language barrier as well as the usual bureaucratic hurdles. Carnets also cut costs—without one, you may have to buy a

temporary import bond or pay all tariffs and excise taxes when you enter each country and claim a refund when you leave.

You can get an ATA carnet from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce at <http://www.chamber.ca>. Carnet fees currently range from \$85 to \$395 for chamber members and from \$120 to \$455 for non-members, depending on the value of the goods. Normally, a carnet is valid for one year and can be used a number of times.

Conducting a pre-fair market visit

The international trade fair you plan to attend may attract a lot of local companies. As a result, it is often worthwhile to plan a pre-fair market visit to familiarize yourself with the local culture, market dynamics and businesses.

The Canadian Trade Commissioner Service in the destination country can help you develop an appropriate itinerary. Depending on the nature of your business, you may want to visit potential customers, visit retail or wholesale operations, or talk to industry experts. You can find contact information for the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service in the InfoExport Trade Commissioner directory (<http://infoexport.gc.ca>). In addition, a Team Canada Inc online guide called Planning a Business Trip Abroad provides planning advice for international trips. It is available at <http://exportsource.ca/trip>.

"Put into writing your communication objectives, including concept, theme and ideas on how your products or services may be exhibited and include specific details important to the program."

Bruce E. Smith, Exhibit Manager and Designer



Assigning responsibility

At the outset, you should choose a person within your company to assume responsibility for all aspects of trade fairs. Since participating in a trade fair involves numerous tasks and responsibilities, even small and medium-sized companies should choose someone for this role. In a small or medium-sized company, this person should be a senior manager. A middle manager would assume this role in larger companies. In all probability, this individual will delegate various logistical aspects of the fairs but will remain the central point of command.

As soon as your company identifies its trade fair objectives for the year, the person responsible should immediately build an in-house team. If your company plans to attend trade shows regularly, the same person should be responsible for trade show logistics on an ongoing basis, so that the company can draw on his or her experience.

Designing the trade fair stand

The CEIR estimates that 85 per cent of the people who attend trade fairs help their companies make buying decisions. Thus, visitors are potential clients, so you must ensure that your company's stand is impressive and reflects positively on your company's image.

Ask the show organizers to send you photographs from the previous year's show, if possible. Often, a visual of the event location will give you a clear sense of the venue and how your stand will fit into it.

The main purposes of your stand are to differentiate your firm from its competitors and to attract attention quickly. This does not mean

that the stand must be large and imposing. In fact, quite the contrary; a well-designed small stand may be visually appealing and memorable, while also reducing space costs. When choosing a stand, focus on practicality and creative design. With one glance at the stand, visitors should be able to grasp

- the company's name;
- the company's product or service; and
- how the company can solve their problem.

A trade fair stand should be information driven. It must also have the right combination of lighting, open space and graphic presentation to help visitors focus and separate themselves from the noise level of the trade fair.

A stand that uses new, lightweight materials, which reduce shipping and set-up time as well as crate, labour and storage costs, offers many advantages. To some extent, your company's fair schedule will dictate the quality you require and investment you will make in the stand. If your company has a busy fair schedule, a larger investment in a sophisticated stand may be money well spent.

If you are new to trade fairs, consider renting a stand for your first effort. Find out what works well and what should be modified, then use this experience later if you buy a stand. If you do buy a stand, make sure participants do a dry run by setting up the stand at home before heading to the first event. You can buy trade stands as off-the-shelf, modular items at specialized stores. There are also numerous stand designers who will help you identify your needs and then work within your budget to custom design a stand. When choosing a stand to buy or rent, bear the following things in mind.



- Before deciding how your company will mount its stand, obtain a floor plan of the hall where the trade fair will be held. Whether the stand is rented or purchased, it should be versatile and adaptable to changing environments.
- Despite the variety and increasing quality of modular stand systems, they are recognizable as pre-fab systems when sitting next to specially designed stands. Therefore, carefully consider whether you need something unique. Make sure the stand includes adequate space for demonstrations if those are a feature of your company's plan for the trade fair.
- Consider the booth's comfort and traffic patterns, and the ease of working within it. For example, a table or counter of some kind should be available to hold materials. Cushion flooring may ease wear and tear on the feet of personnel who will be standing at the booth for hours on end.
- Study trade fair regulations. Some limit the width and height of stands, and limitations may also apply to side panels that can obstruct aisle views. There may also be regulations regarding music, lights, demonstrations and other factors that may disrupt traffic flow.
- The booth must appeal to the target market. For example, a target market of computer technicians will expect a booth to have operational computers running interactive programs. Firms should not pinch pennies on the final creative touches: the finer details of a booth are important.
- Certain techniques will attract people to your stand. For example, movement created by items like revolving pictures or running signs repeating the company's message, grabs attention.
- If you are part of a larger, Government of Canada sponsored Canadian Pavilion at an international trade show, you may be one of many exhibitors sharing a multi-unit display with a Canadian theme. However, while your stand hardware is pre-determined, you still need to find ways to create your space within the Canadian Pavilion so that you will stand out and attract the right attention.
- Finally, stand portability and versatility are important features, especially if you expect your staff to put up and take down the stand at each site.

Choosing a location

When you are reserving space, trade fair organizers will usually present you with a floor plan and ask you to select a preferred location in the exhibit area for your stand. In some popular shows, space selection is minimal, particularly for new exhibitors. As you establish your seniority, you will have the option of changing space year after year. You should not take this selection lightly. Generally, it is best to find a location in the heart of the trade fair exhibit area where visitors are likely to be fully focused on the fair exhibits. Consider the following additional factors when selecting your location.

Locating close to companies that sell products and services that compliment yours can provide opportunities for cross-booth referrals and increase the number of well-qualified customers walking by your space.



- Most people walk to the right when entering an exhibit hall and skip the front exhibits.
- Corner locations draw traffic from two directions. As a result, they tend to create better exposure and generate greater levels of interest.
- Visitors often skip dead-end aisles.
- Spaces near exits, restrooms and food areas tend to be high-traffic areas, but the people exiting are often focused on leaving (making stand stops less likely), while the people entering are not always focused when they initially return.
- Spaces near freight doors are often congested with late arrival (set-up) traffic and early departure (tear-down) traffic.
- Building columns or obstructions visually block some spaces.
- Locating close to your competitors are not favourable, as you will not want your competition constantly seeing who is visiting your stand.
- Locating close to companies that sell products and services that complement yours can provide opportunities for cross-booth referrals and increase the number of well-qualified customers walking by your space.

Selecting the right personnel

The people working the stand will be performing almost all the elements of personal selling. They will be identifying prospects; servicing current accounts; introducing existing and new products or services; promoting the corporate image; gathering information on competitors; getting technical information; and selling. Therefore, it is important to select personnel who are good at these functions. Trade fairs are very demanding and you cannot afford to put people at the stand who cannot cope. There is nothing a potential client will remember more than visiting a stand where staffers were openly tired or bored.

Although companies tend to staff their exhibits primarily with sales personnel, there is a growing trend toward bringing in knowledge experts. You should have a key person whose main contribution is to provide in-depth knowledge of the product or service. Such individuals fulfill a vital role. They act as resource people for the sales staff and answer technical questions that clients and visitors ask. The presence of senior officials who can talk directly to decision-makers also enhances the credibility of your company.

Note: See the next chapter, "Successful Trade Fair Strategies," for more information on booth staffing.



Checklist and timetable for exhibiting overseas

The following checklist and timetable can help you develop a critical path for participating in a trade fair. It identifies the key milestones involved in preparing for a fair. You should set these against dates by which certain tasks must be completed. The exact order of tasks will vary from one event to another.

These are recommended minimum timelines. Depending on the complexity of your program additional time may be required

12 months before Draw up an action plan

- List key steps.
- Define goals and objectives.
- Set a budget.

12 months before Do research

- Find out about the fair: attendees, costs, potential benefits, etc.

Talk to

- event organizers;
- experienced Canadian firms;
- Canadian officials at DFAIT, International Trade Centres, industry associations and other organizations;
- members of bilateral business councils; and Canadian trade commissioners in the host country.

6 months before Register for the fair

- Register as an exhibitor or a visitor.
- Mail contracts for the fair and send reservation deposits.

6 months before Event specific

- Complete applications

Apply for

- the Program for Export Market Development (PEMD), if relevant;
- a carnet for samples;
- special permits, such as those related to safety and health;
- updated passports, if necessary, for all attendees;
- visas, if necessary, for all attendees; and
- health and immunization documentation.

6 months before Define strategy

- Brainstorm to define your approach, main messages and differentiation strategy.
- Plan your exhibit and booth space.
- Decide whether you will design, construct or set up your own exhibit, or employ consultants. Finalize arrangements for this.
- Decide what samples you will need and ensure they will be available.



4 months before

Buy, rent or prepare display equipment and stand

- Define requirements.
- Source options.
- Test assembly and disassembly.

4 months before

Produce promotional materials

- Determine and arrange for pre-fair publicity, public relations, show literature and other promotional material. Decide who will produce and translate it, and finalize arrangements.
- Develop any demonstrations, presentations, software, videos, brochures, business cards and so forth that you might need for the fair. This includes planning, writing, translating, laying out, proofing and producing the materials.

3 months before

Arrange shipping

- Determine what you need to ship (samples, stand, display equipment and so forth) and what can accompany the team.
- Arrange for shipping so that goods arrive in time for the fair.
- Make sure all materials to be shipped are available on time.

2 months before

Prepare staff

- Assess staffing requirements.
- Hire support staff, if necessary.

Do dry runs and critiques of

- booth set-up;
- presentations;
- demonstrations; and
- your marketing approach.

2 months before

Make travel arrangements

- Finalize the team that will go overseas.
- Reserve flights or other transportation.
- Reserve hotel accommodations (up to one year in advance, depending on the venue).
- Establish departure and arrival procedures.
- Learn about customs procedures for accompanying samples and equipment.

1 month before

Pre-fair preparation

- Test equipment.
- Do a dry run of the stand set-up.
- Plan for contingencies.



Using successful exhibit strategies

There are many strategies you can use to ensure a successful exhibit experience. The following tips will help you attain a professional trade show image.

Employee identification

Each person staffing the booth should have clear identification badges. Not all trade show organizers provide exhibitor badges, therefore, you should always bring your own company badges.

Business cards

A very important tool for personal contact at a trade fair is a business card. Business cards should be printed on both sides, with one side carrying a translation in the language of the target market. In some countries, there is an elaborate etiquette involved in presenting business cards. You should research this etiquette and understand it well before having the cards printed.

Literature

Literature is useful for reinforcing product or service knowledge and retaining attention after the trade fair. It is also a terrific method of giving prospective customers information about your company and its principals. Attendees at international shows avoid excess paper. Experienced travellers take only what they really want and need. Often, they appreciate an offer to have literature sent to their workplace.

As a result, many companies prefer to get the names of visitors interested in the exhibited products or services, and then send corporate information to them as part of the follow-up to the fair. Another approach is to make corporate materials available on request only, after a person has been identified as a good potential lead. Still other companies advise that materials

should be available to one and all who visit the stand. If you chose to bring literature for everyone, consider producing a one-page summary with a request form for additional information.

Media kits

Regardless of what other material you develop for a trade fair, you should prepare a basic printed media kit with a theme for all media. This is integral to the marketing process. The kit should contain background information on your company, a product catalogue or service descriptions with illustrations, photographs, testimonials, and compelling examples of how the product or service has helped clients. Print price lists, delivery schedules and terms of payment separately to accommodate constant changes in these areas.

Send this media kit ahead to any known media prospects. It builds credibility and can bring highly motivated media representatives to your stand. Again, print the kit in the local language as well as English and/or French. Translations are best done by a firm from that market (the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service in that market can make recommendations). Special attention is needed to avoid embarrassing and costly mistakes. Poor translations, especially of technical and semi-technical instructional material, will not only confuse the reader; they can also lead to legal problems.

Design and write your copy with translation in mind. Avoid slang and unusual expressions. In non-English- and non-French-speaking countries, examine the meaning and acceptability of brand names and logos used in Canada. Make sure that no negative or

"Careful attention should be paid to the key languages spoken in the country or region you are exhibiting at. Generally, the local language is primary, followed by the languages spoken by staff. There are many creative ways of communicating several languages without a lot of text."

Anne Barron, CME, CTG,
President, ABCComm® Ltd



inappropriate connotations are conveyed. Make sure that colour symbols used in promotional material are sensitive to local tastes and consumer preferences. Also, bear in mind that languages spoken in more than one country can vary greatly, both nationally and regionally.

Many fairs have a media room that will display news releases from exhibitors. If you have news to announce, a large, focused trade fair is often a good venue to do so. Media tend to cover these events and journalists look for nuggets of newsworthy material. Furthermore, the fair often has its own internal methods for distributing fair news each day. If you use this service, put forward newsworthy information only; basic corporate sales information that you have simply repackaged into a news release format will generally be ignored. Finally, if you have never written a news release before, do some homework on this topic before the fair. Many tutorials on the Internet will help you develop an effective news release. Search for "how to write an effective news release" using any good search engine and you will quickly find assistance.

Other marketing aids

A host of other materials could be useful in promoting a product or service. These include videotapes, audiocassettes, CD-ROMs and diskettes. Be sure to check the formatting of these tools in advance to be sure you comply with local standards. In addition, a considerable amount of marketing is now done online. A corporate Web site with a fair-specific link can powerfully complement your participation in a trade fair.

Display items

If your company sells products, display only core products and new products. Presenting the entire product line will inevitably create clutter and may not contribute to the overall image of your company. By displaying only core products and new products, you focus visitors' attention on what your company does and on its new, exciting and progressive activities. This experience will shape visitors' expectations.

Demonstrations

Trade fair expert Barry Siskind suggests that a live demonstration is a key element of a successful trade fair stand. If your company is going to do demonstrations on site, you must prepare well in advance and make sure the demonstration is informative, concise and polished. Use demonstrations that apply directly to the product or service, delivered by a person who is comfortable performing in public and talking to crowds. Choose demonstrators based on their skills, not their seniority in the company. These skills should include product or service knowledge; comfort in public settings; the ability to articulate the advantages of the company's products or services; the ability to project a favourable image; and the ability to speak the local language.

Signage

An exhibit should be a three-dimensional, informative selling tool. However, visitors will not spend a lot of time reading lengthy signs. Signs should be brief, bold and displayed at eye level or above for the highest possible visibility.

Promotional products

Promotional products, or premiums, are small but important tools at a trade fair. These "branded" items, which help you leave a tangible impression of the firm with visitors, might include pens, letter openers, laminated business cards or key chains. In some markets,



visitors appreciate receiving something "Canadian." There are as many possibilities as there are exhibitors at a fair. Premiums should bear the company name and logo; they should be related to the company in some way; and they should be given out one by one to foster personal interaction. They can be a great way of thanking someone for visiting your stand.

Videos

Some products, such as construction equipment or in-ground swimming pools, are too large to display. Services are often difficult to physically portray or demonstrate on the spot. In such cases, videos serve a very useful purpose because they capture visitors' attention. If you are planning to use a video, keep the following suggestions in mind.

- The video should be short and snappy, getting right to the point. Two to five minutes is the maximum time for a trade fair viewing.
- The motto "a picture is worth a thousand words" applies particularly well to the trade fair environment, where many noises vie for visitors' attention.
- The colour and sound transmission should be flawless. There is nothing worse than leaving visitors with the impression that the company's product or service comes in faded colours with snowy delivery.
- The video should be on a continuous viewing loop.
- The video should also include pictures of your facilities and staff.
- A well-made video can serve many purposes beyond the trade fair. For example, it can be used on sales calls or in your company's reception area.

Examples of things that can (and will) go wrong include the following:

- your stand doesn't show up or your products don't show up;
- an international power supply output and receptacle are not compatible with North American equipment (take a universal power converter!);
- the power goes out at your stand;
- demo equipment gets damaged in transit; or
- a key technical person gets sick.

In fact, the more technical your exhibit is, the more you should consider having at least one technical support person available.

Bring all documents (re: orders, invoices, etc) with you to the show in the event something goes wrong and you need a copy of the paperwork.

Murphy's Law:
"If something can go wrong, it will."
Be prepared for a worst-case scenario and have alternative ways of achieving your objectives.

Conducting training

A crucial item to consider in advance is the training of stand personnel. All staff should attend a pre-show briefing, regardless of their experience. At a minimum, staff should spend some time with the person in charge of the trade fair effort to clearly understand the following:

- their responsibilities before the fair;
- the company's objectives for its participation in the fair;



- the role of each person at the stand and during the fair;
- the techniques for promoting the company's product;
- how to approach visitors, gather information, make effective presentations and disengage;
- how to differentiate between the signals given by real potential clients and those given by browsers;
- how to recognize and deal with competitors seeking confidential information;
- how to record details of discussions effectively while working at the stand;
- how to deal with both dissatisfied customers and former clients; and
- how to follow up after the fair.

Choosing appropriate attire

Dress should be consistent with the fair atmosphere. Many fairs have a "feel" all their own, related to the nature of the industry or to the venue in general. Anticipating the atmosphere at a fair you're attending for the first time in another country can be nearly impossible. At many international fairs, formal business attire is the norm. Some trade fairs are more relaxed, but it is better for your staff to be "overdressed" than to be too casual while meeting customers who are in business attire. Staff should be able to assess this aspect of the show by researching previous shows using the methods outlined previously.

In any event, company representatives must look professional at all times. This is especially important in the international setting, where

staff at your stand may be the only image a visitor has of your firm. First impressions are extremely important, and your staff will be the front line of your customer relations. Brief stand personnel on their positions and responsibilities at the trade fair, and on trade stand etiquette. The following tips are key to enhancing your company's image at a trade fair, so you should be sure your representatives understand them.

- Staff must not sit at a trade fair. Sitting gives an impression of disinterest or boredom.
- Key staff must always be present at the stand. Clients who have been invited to the trade fair may visit and will expect to see specific people.
- Staff should not eat at the stand. Schedule breaks to give staff ample opportunity to eat in assigned areas.
- Exhibitors should refrain from smoking except in designated areas.
- Staff must always show keen interest to visitors.

They must never betray the fact that the hours are long, the room stuffy or the questions repetitive. When a colleague looks tired, ensure he or she gets a few minutes off to freshen up. Potential clients will see many competing products or services at the fair and you want them to remember your company. Putting a positive face on their first encounter with you is the best way to do this.



Promoting your exhibit

Before the trade fair, your firm's objective is to inform as many people in your target audience as possible that your company will be participating. By promoting new products or services that you will announce at the fair, you can generate interest and enthusiasm. You can reach your target market before the fair through direct mail to specific individuals; telemarketing to specific people; radio spots in the city where the fair is being held; business periodicals; and news releases for selected media sent just before the fair.

Most trade fair organizers publish fair guides for visitors. These guides usually include a floor map of the exhibit area along with brief descriptions of the exhibitors. However, you must also promote your exhibit yourself to maximize the number of relevant contacts you make at the fair. Don't leave the popularity of your stand to chance.

Some trade fairs issue guest passes to exhibitors in advance. If the fair has an entry fee, you may have to pay for these passes. Obtain a number of these advance passes so that you can send them to existing and prospective clients. Individuals who receive these passes directly from your firm will often acknowledge this invitation by visiting your stand at the fair. If passes aren't available, send invitations from your firm.

Other forms of direct contact before the fair can also be effective. You can use direct mail, telemarketing, faxes and even e-mail to invite an existing or prospective client. However, remember that the message will be more powerful if you tailor it precisely to each individual. It cannot be stressed enough that highly targeted, direct pre-show approaches tend to yield the best results. Here are a few suggestions to guide your direct mail efforts.

Use a list of key prospects and customers who are likely to attend the fair.

- Send special invitations to the fair, a hospitality event, a conference or other event. These will have the best response.
- Create urgency by using an RSVP with comments such as, "Attendance is limited. Reserve your seat today."
- Entice prospects to visit your stand with a promise such as, "Bring this invitation to the stand to redeem a special gift."
- A series of mailings will generate a better response than just one. Start with an announcement and follow with specific details.

Setting up meetings in advance

If you are travelling a great distance to exhibit at an international trade fair and you have identified important customers in advance, move beyond a simple invitation to your stand by asking them in advance for a meeting at the fair. If a prospective client plans to attend the fair, it is unlikely that he or she will turn down your request for a meeting.

If a prospect accepts your request for a meeting, you can use your booth as a rendezvous point. However, you should hold the meeting itself at a nearby location away from the traffic and distractions of the trade fair floor. This creates a neutral place to meet and is a good way to "break the ice" with a prospective client. If you are participating in a Canadian Pavilion on-site meeting space will be provided.

You should also look at the benefits of holding meetings with representatives of firms that sell products and services that complement your



own. Cross-referrals—when non-competing firms actively look for new business opportunities for one another at the show—can be a powerful tool.

Checklists for planning and executing successful trade fairs

The following worksheets summarize the steps to follow when you are planning your participation in a trade fair.

Setting objectives and establishing managerial responsibility

- a) Assign a point of central command for your company's trade fair activities. Have a key person enlist the human resources needed for the trade fair.
- b) Brainstorm possible objectives and goals for participating in a trade fair. Involve affected departments in this process.
- c) Assign a priority to your trade show objectives.
- d) List the two most important objectives and retain these as the focal point for making future decisions while planning and executing your trade fair activities.

Planning a trade fair booth and materials

- a) How will your company attract attention at the fair?

Think about

- display techniques;
- giveaways or premiums;
- demonstrations; and
- videos.

b) Which corporate materials work best?

- Assess the information needs of visitors to your stand.
- Assess the appropriateness of your corporate brochure and product data sheets.

Develop new materials for trade fairs.

c) Does your company have a trade fair stand, and does it enhance the image your company wants to project?

- Is it new or is it tired-looking?
- Does it accommodate the needs of this trade fair?
- Does it project the right image?

d) Does your company have all the necessary information to make decisions related to the stand?

Have you considered

- the trade fair floor plan and all regulations regarding stand size?



- the "standard" being set by the trade fair and the competition?
- the need for adequate space for demonstrations?
- whether your budget allows you to purchase a modular system, rent a system or design a system for a specific trade fair?

e) What logistical questions need to be addressed?

Remember that you will need to

- pack and label products, materials and the stand itself for transport to the trade fair site, including spare parts and repair kits;
- book a freight forwarder to move products, materials and the stand's components to the trade fair site with sufficient lead time;
- understand the customs clearance procedures for the stand, sample products and materials;
- obtain and complete an ATA carnet;
- obtain sufficient and appropriate insurance for the products and materials in transit and on site;
- understand the requirements for taking delivery at the site;
- arrange for warehousing at the site, if necessary;
- plan for the time between the arrival of the goods on site and opening day; and
- construct the stand on site.

Establishing contacts before the fair and planning follow-up

a) Who should be aware of your company's participation at the fair?

Think about

- existing clients;
- potential clients;
- new leads;
- suppliers;
- potential agents or distributors;
- media;
- companies with complementary products; and
- Canadian government officials at the local embassy, consulate or high commission

b) How should you reach them?

Consider

- personal telephone calls;
- special invitations;
- telemarketing;
- direct mail;
- a special event at the trade fair featuring your company;
- e-mails;



- announcements in trade journals; and
 - hospitality invitations.
- c) What information should your company plan to gather at the trade fair to be used for follow-up?
- Determine what information would be useful and to whom.
 - Identify tools you will use to gather the information.
 - Determine the process for internal reporting after the trade fair.
 - Decide how you will respond to interested visitors after the trade fair.
 - Train stand personnel in techniques for collecting information.

Design a response sheet to collect information with space for the following details:

- name, address, phone, fax and e-mail address of the respondent;
- function of the respondent or the respondent's company;
- products or services of interest;
- type of follow-up recommended (mail, meeting, samples); and
- other comments.

Setting a budget

Costs
Annual budget
Specific fair

- a) Exhibit costs at the trade fair
- the minimum footage allowed
 - extra space
 - show services (such as furniture rentals, computer rentals, electrical hook-ups, janitorial services, security, telephone services, insurance and labour)
 - special equipment for demonstrations or presentations (display screens, VCRs, computers, slide projectors, overhead projectors)
 - registration fee
- b) Costs associated with buying or renting a stand
- purchase price
 - design or local construction services needed to mount the stand
 - rental fees
 - signage
 - transport to the point of shipment
 - meeting rooms
 - extras



c) Promotional costs related to the trade fair and training by professional trade fair experts

company literature (such as brochures, business cards and other printed materials, including writing, design, translation and printing services)

pre-fair promotion, including pre-fair releases sent to trade and business periodicals, advertising in the fair guide, local radio promotions, direct mail materials and special invitations for selected guests

staff training

special demonstration products for the stand

demonstration supplies

services of a specialized demonstration expert

promotional products

videos

TV monitor(s) for videos

professional fees for the trainer

d) Costs to transport personnel and materials

door-to-door return transit for personnel and stand

travel to and from the destination

accommodation (hotel, meals, per diems, incidentals)

hospitality (for clients and contacts)

travel documents (passports, visas)

incidental travel (taxis, parking, car rentals)

set-up and dismantling

return transit for products and materials

loading and unloading at the trade fair site

ATA carnets

customs fees

freight forwarding

e) Personnel costs

transportation

accommodation

meals and ground transportation

extras

long-distance telephone and fax

cellular phone

f) Fair services

electrical

plumbing

janitorial

carpentry

signage

utilities

furniture rental



- photography
- telephone hook-ups
- extra reception staff
- set-up crews

- g) Pre-fair promotion costs
 - advertising in trade fair publication(s)
 - advertising in local media
 - advertising in trade publications
 - direct mail related to the trade fair

- h) Entertainment costs
 - reception fees
 - dinners
 - extras

- i) Miscellaneous
 - insurance
 - parking at the trade fair
 - speakers

Selecting and preparing the personnel for the trade fair

- a) Which staffers should you select to work in the stand and attend the trade fair?
- the president
 - senior management
 - salespeople from head office
 - salespeople from the region
 - technicians
- b) Do they need professional training in any of the following areas to ensure effective trade fair performance?
- understanding stand etiquette
 - gathering information consistently
 - comprehending the roles of each person at the stand
 - opening lines of communication to encourage visitors to enter the stand
 - selling techniques that work at trade fairs
 - dealing with difficult people at the stand
 - doing demonstrations
 - participating in technical seminars
 - recognizing and dealing with the competition
 - "working" the aisles



SECTION 4

Successful trade fair strategies

Managing the stand

Fairs are stressful; you will suffer from the physical exertion of standing, talking and performing from morning through early evening. To ensure maximum efficiency in a high-stress environment, try a few different techniques.

- Develop and maintain a realistic staffing schedule that includes breaks (every three hours is preferable). The work schedule should allow everyone time off to walk around the fair.
- Conduct daily reviews. You and the other staff should spend time at the end of each day reviewing and clarifying information you have gathered during the day. This is easier to do when the information is fresh than it will be when you return to regular workloads at the office a week later. Ensure that each person knows that this task is a key element of being part of the trade fair team, because it means the company will be able to follow up the new leads effectively after the fair. You can coordinate these review sessions with fun activities such as dinners, cultural events or sightseeing.

Working the stand

Before the fair, you will need to hone your skills to work efficiently in this unique environment. Any pre-fair briefing should include the following information.

Approaching visitors

The key to an effective approach is a question that engages the visitor in conversation. The traditional line, "Can I help you?" often leads to the retort, "No thanks, just browsing." Similarly, the question, "Nice day, isn't it?" may generate a simple "Yes," and a vacant look.

Before going to the fair, role play with colleagues to develop new and more direct lines that can elicit useful information about a visitor. For example, introducing yourself to visitors and asking for their name and the name of their company can be an effective way to begin a conversation. Basically, questions should be open ended and related to the person's business. This approach will open up the discussion and create opportunities to learn about the visitor's business needs.

An in-stand demonstration is a natural icebreaker. Once the demonstration is over, approach attendees who have participated and ask them how they view the new information they have just received.



Gathering information

The next job you need to tackle is information gathering. This process serves multiple purposes after the trade fair. But before the fair, you need to decide

- whether you plan to use the information to satisfy the firm's internal reporting purposes, to build your sales base or for both purposes;
- what type of information you need to collect to satisfy these objectives;
- the methods you will use to gather the information;
- which stand staffers will gather the information;
- how you will compile the information; and
- which company employees will receive the information for use after the fair.

In his book *The Power of Exhibit Marketing*, Barry Siskind suggests using the acronym **ACTION** as a guide to creating the questions that will help you decide how to best spend your time with visitors at the fair and how to follow up effectively after the fair. While the order in which you ask the questions is irrelevant, a structure such as **ACTION** gives everyone in the stand a focus to ensure they collect consistent information from each visitor.

A = Authority

You need to know whether the visitor is a decision-maker or influencer. In international markets, you can usually determine this from the person's title.

C = Capability

Find out whether the visitor and his or her company can use your products or services and to what extent. Develop a "snapshot" of the visitor with questions such as:

- "Can you tell me a bit about your company?"
- "How do you handle your production overruns now?"
- "Where are you located?"
- "How are you solving this challenge now?"

T = Time

While you want to follow up with everyone as quickly as possible after the fair, you need to decide whom to contact first. Generally, make visitors with an immediate need your first priority. Questions such as, "When will the project start?" will give you the information you need.

I = Identity

To follow up correctly, you need a method of recording the information you are gathering. A pre-made lead sheet is the answer. Complete this lead sheet in front of each visitor. This gives visitors a sense of importance, as well as confidence that you will attend to their requests.

O = Obstacles

A common trade fair pitfall is spending time with people you cannot do business with. Often, visitors have hidden obstacles; it's your responsibility to uncover these. Questions such as, "Is there any reason you can't consider a Canadian supplier?" will do the trick.



N = Need

This is actually the first question you should ask. Find out why the visitor needs to be at the show, by asking questions such as, "Are you finding the solutions you were looking for?"

Once you learn these **ACTION** questions, you can qualify a visitor in two to three minutes.

Closing a sale

Depending on the nature of your product or service, it may be difficult to actually make sales during the fair. This is especially the case when you are focusing on generating leads, because the time you spend with each prospective customer will be relatively short.

To intensify a relationship with a prospective customer who has the authority to make buying decisions, you may want to meet the customer several times during the same fair. This strategy sometimes makes it possible to compress what would otherwise be a longer sales cycle into a few days. It gives both buyer and seller the opportunity to consult with their offices between meetings and to develop a relationship in a relatively short time.

Each industry is different, so it is difficult to say whether you can close a deal within the time frame of any given trade fair. However, the fair creates a unique environment that often eliminates normal hurdles. For instance, the president or general manager of a firm often attends major trade fairs. If executives from a prospective client firm are also on site, putting the senior people together—on their own or with salespeople—can often accelerate the sales cycle. This allows you to secure a commitment without worrying that your proposal will be quashed when your buyer takes it home for higher levels of approval.

Participating in seminars

Many trade fairs have separate facilities in which companies can give technical seminars during exhibit hours. This is an ideal way to explain your product or service to a large audience. Videos can be useful here. You should promote technical seminars well in advance of the trade fair. With a database of potential clients, you could do this through direct mail. A press release in the local newspaper can be a cost-effective means of attracting people who may attend the fair specifically for the seminar.

Participating in sponsored events

Participating in corollary events organized by Government of Canada officials around the Canadian Pavilion are a good way for companies to meet new clients. Some of these corollary events include matchmaking events and receptions. As well host organizers may organize additional events such as luncheons and dinners.

Holding meetings at the fair

If you have enough staffers at the trade fair, someone should always be free to conduct meetings with existing or prospective clients away from the stand. This is not always possible but, as noted above, such meetings can create opportunities to compress normal sales cycles. You can also use meetings to initiate detailed discussions with potential distributors or representatives, and to discuss strategic alliances project-based initiatives or other business propositions with other firms.



Regardless of the venue, remember that "breaking bread" is a universal ritual that you can use to deepen and extend a business relationship. The trade fair is the ideal place to suggest a business meeting over a meal—breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Obviously, you need to pay special attention to cultural norms. If you are visiting a foreign country to attend the trade fair, do some advance research on cultural norms to ensure that you do not offend your guest during the meal. In some cultures, it may not be considered appropriate to discuss business during the meal itself, but the ritual of eating together can be a powerful business development tool nonetheless.

Networking at the fair

Networking at a major trade fair is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, you will meet many industry colleagues who can present you with opportunities or connections. This is a natural result of effective networking and so you should exploit it. On the other hand, trade fairs can create fatigue and boredom, and colleagues may attempt to pass the time with you by wandering into your booth, then opening and sustaining an ongoing dialogue.

The latter situation is common at fairs, yet it is not really networking. It can distract you and your staff from your main task of greeting and receiving booth visitors. Accordingly, coach your staff in advance on ways to quickly disengage from these time-wasting colleagues.

Seminars, hospitality events, industry meetings, spousal programs, the media room, the lounges and hotels are just a few places where you can network at a fair.



SECTION 5

Post-trade fair activities

Arranging market visits and meetings after the fair

As noted previously, the international trade fair you attend may attract a lot of local companies. As a result, it is often worthwhile to extend your visit beyond the trade fair dates. Then, if you run into prospective clients with significant business potential, you can visit them (with their approval) after the fair. Here again, the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service in the destination country can help you work out logistical details and can provide other guidance. You can find contact information for the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service in the Infoexport Trade Commissioner directory at <http://infoexport.gc.ca>

Debriefing staff

After the trade fair, your company will face two principal tasks:

- following up potential leads; and
- evaluating the fair to determine its true benefits, ideas that worked and areas that could be improved.

To make this easier, you should immediately and thoroughly debrief all staff involved in the trade fair. It is important to review all lead cards while the information is still fresh in the minds of those who collected it.

This debriefing gives everyone an opportunity to discuss the business leads they collected. In some cases, visitors will have had discussions

with more than one person at the stand; in other cases, booth staff will have talked with more than one person from a prospective client company. It is important to reveal these relationships and related details to ensure that your firm has a complete picture of each of the leads identified.

During the debriefing, solicit comments about the fair, competition, visitors and logistics, and record them for future consideration.

Following up leads

Trade fair experts recommend that you contact clients and potential clients as quickly as possible after the fair. The quality of the information gathered at the trade fair comes into focus during this step. If you gathered data consistently, you can undertake a very fruitful follow-up campaign.

The success of any follow-up campaign starts long before the fair. You need a clear understanding of how you will do business in this new market. It is crucial to know whether you will make contact with each prospective customer using local representation or internal staff.

You should give salespeople responsible for specific products, services or geographic regions all the relevant information about leads generated at the trade fair. These should be the same salespeople who before the fair, planned the letter and telephone contact. They should be prepared to follow up within a week of the fair's closing.



If you are new to the region and do not have a sales force to follow up on your behalf, you should have a pro-forma letter ready to mail when you return to the office. Each letter should be personalized, based on the information gathered at the fair. In the letter, you should indicate when a company representative will be in the region and ask to meet with the contact at that time.

Although it usually takes a while to do detailed follow-up, you can accelerate the initial follow-up by using customized direct mail. At a minimum, an initial follow-up can be a form letter that contains a formal "thank you" and a promise of more direct contact in the near future (you can specify a time frame). Although highly tailored responses are preferable, if you have many leads, this approach may allow you to sustain contact while working through the detailed responses.

Depending where your market is, you may send this correspondence by mail, courier, fax or e-mail. The best method of making contact is something you need to determine before the fair.

You should also follow up with the Canadian trade commissioners in that target market. Trade commissioners are frequently in contact with potential sales leads and may also be able to qualify a specific lead for you.

Measuring results

To measure the payoff of the trade fair, the data gathered at the fair should be collected in a central location and analyzed in accordance with the internal procedures identified during the planning stages. If you agreed on a time line for reporting internally, uphold it, and if you promised to deliver specific information, do so. Before the fair, decide who should receive the trade fair data and report.

If you are writing the report, make sure you understand how it will contribute directly to each person involved. Recognize the key personnel who made the fair happen. Compare the benefits to the costs of participating in the trade fair and assess the main questions.

- Did we meet the objectives?
- What problems did we encounter?
- What could we do better at future fairs?

To build internal support for your company's ongoing trade fair activities, your marketing and salespeople have to prove the benefits. You need internal support to obtain a sufficient budget and resources for future trade fair activities. The intrinsic problem is knowing what to measure and how to determine explicit benefits.

Tally the number of leads generated and sort them by region or type of client, depending on your firm's priorities. Record the actual sales generated by leads from the trade fair within 30 days of the trade fair, within six months, within one year or within a longer period, depending on your sales cycle. Calculate the cost per lead by dividing the cost of the trade fair by the



number of qualified leads. Then compare this figure to the cost of generating the same number and quality of leads through personal sales calls or other key means of generating new leads.

Finally, do the final analysis of the objectives. Did you accomplish what you set out to do? For example, did you succeed in gathering information on client response to new products?

Worksheet: Follow-up after the trade fair

- a) Gather, sort and assess all data collected during the fair from all sources. Enter lead information into databases.
 - b) Carry out the activities outlined in the follow-up plan established before the fair.
- Channel required information to the various "follow-up responsibility centres."
 - Within one week, respond to all visitors who asked for specific information.
 - Send out a form letter, personalized wherever possible, to all new leads.
 - Within two weeks, respond to internal needs for the trade fair summary and assessment of the benefits of the fair.



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- Advertising Age (U.S.);
- Industrial Marketing Management (U.S.);
- Marketing (Canada);
- Marketing and Media Decisions (U.S.);
- Sales and Marketing Management (U.S.);
- Exhibitor Magazine (U.S.); and
- Expotential (U.S.).

Key Web sites

<http://exportsource.ca>

Online Export Information from Team Canada Inc

<http://www.ab-comm.com>

ABCComm® Ltd.

<http://www.ceir.org>

Centre for Exhibition Industry Research

<http://www.e-leads.ca>

Electronic Lead Service from the International Business Opportunities Centre

<http://fitt.ca>

Forum for International Trade Training

<http://www.siskindtraining.com>

Barry Siskind's Web site.