

IBT Partners

International Trade Shows

Strategies for Optimizing International Trade Shows

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Who should be reading this whitepaper?

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This whitepaper sets out strategies based on best practices for companies to optimize their international trade show presence in order to increase exports and international business.

On average, companies spend US\$60,000 per trade show. Costs for international trade shows are often even higher. So making sure your trade show participation generates maximum revenue is worthwhile.

Over the past decade, IBT Partners has helped hundreds of businesses to optimize trade shows to increase their international business. This wealth of knowledge has allowed us to establish benchmarks for best practices and strategies to optimize trade shows for international business.

An active online web presence is the most important ingredient we have found for success.

We discuss the need for setting and measuring objectives, choosing the right trade show, planning and preparing. We outline the steps necessary for marketing in advance of the show, following up after, reaching out and engaging with prospects in new markets and converting them to clients.

This whitepaper is brought to you by the IBT Partners Publications Team. For more information please email: info@ibtpartners.com



Objectives, metrics and teamwork

Objectives and teamwork are prerequisites for success

Setting business objectives

The primary goal of any trade show is to generate direct sales. But when trade shows are used to increase exports or break into new markets, other objectives take on increased importance. Typical international business-focused goals include:

1. Evaluate your market (competitors, prices, new trends, innovations.....)
2. Raise your brand profile
3. Introduce new products / educate the market
4. Reach new distributors
5. Generate new leads
6. Increase website organic traffic
7. Extend social media following
8. Gain media coverage
9. Recruit new employees
10. Strengthen relationships with existing clients

Establishing objectives and ranking them by priority at the outset is a prerequisite for the next steps in optimizing trade shows. Setting out clear goals helps determine which shows you should attend, which teams and resources allocated and what long term marketing efforts employed.

The business team

Trade shows offer a great opportunity for international and domestic sales teams to work together. One of the clearest low-hanging fruit is leveraging existing domestic clients that have operations internationally.

Clearly communicating the objectives to the relevant staff, with clear lines of responsibility, should be done early on. Company goals can then get translated into individual sales targets. Known sales goals act as a healthy stimulus for staff.

Trade shows in the marketing mix

A survey conducted by [AUMA](#) (Association for the German trade show industry) reviewed the importance of trade shows in the marketing mix:

Out of 500 companies...

83% classed trade shows as the 2nd most important "tool" in the marketing mix after the corporate website's home page.



Successful strategies

To get the most out of international trade shows we have detailed 7 defined steps:

- ✓ **Objectives and metrics are defined and communicated, including clear lines of responsibility and reward**
- ✓ **Identifying the right trade show to achieve your international business objectives**
- ✓ **Preparation – broadcast your presence via multi-channels throughout the year**
- ✓ **Connecting with prospects during the show to maximize your presence**
- ✓ **Practical tips for attending**
- ✓ **Following up – converting leads into clients and building long term pipelines**
- ✓ **Measuring return on investment and incorporating lessons learned**

Identifying the right international trade show

How to identify the best trade shows

New markets? Growing international sales?

The US\$26Bn global exhibitions business is growing - contrary to fears that the internet would replace face-to-face meetings. Trade shows remain an ideal venue for making connections, establishing relations, finding new and meeting exiting clients and keeping up to date on industry trends.

Trade shows play a particular role for companies looking to break into new markets and expand their exports. While the costs of participating in an international trade show are higher, they can bring significant returns and help reduce lead times for new market entry.

Lessons learned from a company's traditional trade show will clearly help. New tools, however, will also be needed to optimize international shows.



Which trade show is right for you?

Every year there are +30,000 trade shows held across the world. The Center for Exhibition Industry Research notes there are >14,000 trade shows hosted annually in North America and >12,000 in Europe. The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI) lists trade shows in over 85 countries.

Germany is worth a special mention as it boasts a huge presence on the international trade show scene. It is home to 100 of the leading 150 trade shows globally. Among the top 10 global venues, four are in Germany: Hannover, Frankfurt, Cologne and Düsseldorf.

Trade show portals

The Internet is the most efficient way of identifying and ranking trade shows. There are numerous portals where you can sort trade shows by criteria: Date, Industry, Event name, Location.....

A full list of trade show portals can be found on www.ufi.org but some our favorites are listed on under useful links on page 12.



Tips for choosing the right show

- ✓ List all the industry relevant shows in the target market, including local smaller shows.
- ✓ Rank the shows according to size, industry relevance, national / international appeal, reputation (years since establishment can be a proxy), ease of attendance (date and place).
- ✓ Are clients and / or competitors attending?
- ✓ Evaluate the attendees. Is the typical attendee the person you want to meet? Note also presence of press, VIPs, industry leaders...
- ✓ Does the show match your timing – i.e. to meet buyers' purchasing patterns and the ability to showcase your products/services?
- ✓ Evaluate the location. Key considerations include: accessibility and hotels, as this will affect attendance - but also places where you can meet clients and prospects.
- ✓ International or local? On average, 60% of attendees come from a 200-mile radius. The big global shows however normally have +50% international attendees.

Preparation – on-going and thorough

Broadcast your presence and help prospects find you

Your website is your best tool

In North America and the EU:

- ✓ 93% of businesses research B2B purchases and judge potential business partners online
- ✓ 85% of business procurement commences online
- ✓ 86% of B2B firms use social media

The above statistics make clear that an active online strategy is the most effective way to broadcast your presence at trade shows. This makes sense in today's connected world but is especially crucial for international markets where there is no on-the-ground sales support team.

Having an online web presence should be an integral part of your export business development. With over 2.4 billion internet users worldwide, the internet is a vital tool for marketing your company.



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The earlier the better

Preparing trade shows is most effective when it is incorporated into on-going business processes; incorporating lessons learned from previous events.

International trade shows require all the advance planning and practical considerations of traditional local trade show – only more so. The minimum preparation time needed is three months but the more time in advance the better.

Leveraging recurrent shows

If you attend a large international trade show on a regular basis, consider dedicating space on your website throughout the year. This not only highlights your company's commitment to the show but helps you stay connected with leads generated.

Sharing the annual experiences positions your company as an industry expert and a main driver for the show.

Using all channels

Social media provides the most effective means to broadcast your trade show presence early. A major advantage is the ability to connect with prospects before the show.



Recommendations

Your corporate website and social media are the most effective tools for preparing and broadcasting your trade show attendance.

Key recommendations for preparing and broadcasting international trade shows include:

- ✓ **Online marketing strategy is in place at least 3 months prior to the trade show.**
- ✓ **Your company's attendance, with contact details, is prominently displayed on your website.**
- ✓ **Join relevant online groups (LinkedIn etc)**
- ✓ **Interact via social media with relevant groups. Note social media is even more prevalent in Europe than in the USA.**
- ✓ **Use calls to action and case studies that are relevant to the local target export market**
- ✓ **Ensure your trade show involvement is widely known in your company and encourage cross-team communication. This helps leverage existing knowledge or contacts.**

Connecting with prospects during the show

Maximize your presence throughout the show

Make your company standout

Trade show organizers produce exhibitor guides, newsletters and social media feeds during the show – all excellent vehicles to maximize your corporate profile. Submit content about your experiences or industry specific information. All content can be revamped to fit the various social media channels.

TIP – Get known as an expert Seminars, panels and workshops represent great speaking opportunities. Share your expertise by offering to participate in an event that is relevant to you - a great chance to promote your business and meet new contacts

Relevant content

During a trade show, new prospects are most likely to find you via social media. To ensure increased traffic to your booth, make use of a wide range of social media channels as different prospects use different channels. Always ensure your content is high quality, industry relevant and insightful.

TIP – Involve participants to get relevant content

During the show, relevant content includes concerns and challenges expressed by visitors to your booth. Address concerns from prospects in a general way through social media, positioning your company as a problem-solver.

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Online presence during the show

Social media – Let people know you are present during the trade show via regular updates. This will bring more visitors to your booth. If there are people you want to see but you don't have specific meetings planned, give them a way to contact you during the event.

Foursquare, a location based social-networking site, is ideal for checking-in and finding out where other people are in the vicinity.



Connecting with your leads on **LinkedIn** soon after meeting them is a great way to engage and will help you keep track of your most important leads.



Including a hashtag on your marketing material encourages others to tweet about you during the show and to start following you on **Twitter**.



Recommendations

Key recommendations for your online strategy for trade shows:

- ✓ **Make your handouts web friendly – use QR codes. Hard copies will still be necessary for some prospects, but most will welcome the possibility of learning about you virtually.**
- ✓ **Include a hashtag on handouts as it encourages others to interact with you – giving you feedback during and after the show.**
- ✓ **Ensure all your calls to action are mobile-enabled. Either refer back to your core website or use QR codes. To create QR codes there are numerous suppliers, including Kaywa and Microsoft Tag.**
- ✓ **Monitor all social media during the event. Watch all feeds regularly to pick up any prospect requests and react promptly to them.**
- ✓ **Monitor the overall traffic to your website. This can give you a good idea of which prospects are checking you out and which online strategies are working best.**

Practical tips for attending

On-going preparation from show to show

Practical Tips...Bookings, hotels, setting up...

The larger international trade shows frequently have services to help international attendees. Try also the local chamber of commerce and trade associations as these frequently provide services for non-locals. Services range from hotel lists, logistic information but can extend to translation services.

- ✓ Many trade shows operate on multi-level pricing systems, including early bird discounts.
- ✓ Make sure you understand all you pay for: do booth costs cover electricity, chairs, meeting room access...
- ✓ Bring basic supplies: scissors, tape, extension cords...
- ✓ Hotels love trade shows. Book early!
- ✓ Buy a local SIM card for the show. Make it as easy as possible for prospects to contact you.

Trade shows provide an ideal venue for scoping out local competition and terms of trade. Dedicate time to investigation the characteristics of your business in the local market. What level of service/quality will they compare you with?

Logistics

Logistics include getting staff to and from the show but also includes sample products, marketing support and promotional products. Ideally all should be shipped in advance. The trade show organizers usually have recommendations and short term storage facilities.

If you are going to a new export market, enlist the help of the show organizers from the start. They usually have lists of preferred suppliers for transport and for setting up booths.

Samples are usually exempt from international import duties, at least between the US and Europe.

Meetings

For larger international shows, attendees often speak English. Ideally, especially for smaller, local shows, some translation assistance is useful. Show organizers can often provide help.

Plan your trade show route. The larger international shows can spread over a wide area. Prioritize your targets and plan your route. What material should you bring, what information do you want from your targets and where is the best place for a meeting?



Make doing business easy

Buying your product or service has to be as easy as possible for clients to sign up to. You need to ensure that your exports are on a level playing field with local competition. Here are a few recommendations:

- ✓ **If this is a new export market, make sure that all products and services comply with local standards and criteria.**
- ✓ **Instructions and manuals should be available in the local language.**
- ✓ **Work out in advance the optimal way for potential clients to pass orders. Work with an international bank that has multi-currency payment options.**
- ✓ **Pricing should reflect transport and any import costs. If not, clearly state they are ex-works.**
- ✓ **Reassure your prospect that there is someone he can easily contact if there are any problems.**

Follow up

Leads, feedback and further promotion

Personalize your follow ups

Return on Investment from a trade show is not solely dependent on attendance but on the events and follow up that happen afterwards. This is especially important for export markets where your brand recognition may be less established.

Following up with your leads within two weeks of the event is an ideal time frame. Having the face-to-face contact from the trade show is the bonus from the trade show and should be leveraged. The leads generated from trade shows are highly qualified so it is important to make them a priority.

Remember to reach out to the people you did not get a chance to meet. Call or email to let them know you were at the show and include them on any mail outs.

Personalize your responses and marketing campaigns as much as possible. This is especially necessary for international markets where prospects need to feel reassured about your company's commitment to their local market.

Follow up using online

Collect feedback – Monitor comments about your presence on social media. Note which channels were most productive (YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn...). Collect constructive insights by emailing a survey or launching a poll question.

Network – Get in touch with the people who wrote about you, and thank them. Keep in touch with them even if they are not leads as they help generate brand awareness.

On-going interaction – Generate new content about the trade show. Take the opportunity to show off your knowledge of the industry but also your commitment to the local export market.

Update your Search Engine Optimization – include an updated set of key words relating to the show and include links to articles that were written about the trade show. Make sure the articles link back to your website for additional inbound links.

Maintain the buzz – Continue the conversation on social media. Monitor the hashtag. See if people are looking for answers to questions about your company.



Recommendations

Effective online marketing should:

- ✓ **Grow new leads and sales**
- ✓ **Increase organic and direct web traffic**
- ✓ **Increase social media and blog following**

Call-to-action (CTA): The CTA is the key element to connect your marketing goal with the means of achieving it. Your marketing strategy should have clear CTAs – what do you want your visitors to do: visit your website, tweet about you, share a link....

Landing page: The CTA should take visitors to a landing page where they can enter information. Your landing page form can include trade show-specific questions that make it easier for your sales team to follow up with the most engaged leads.

Social media: Social media provides a great platform for promoting and engaging prospects. Channels like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube, complement your other promotional efforts, such as email blasts and press releases.

Return on investment

Measuring and optimizing your time and money

Measuring Return on Investment (ROI)

The objectives established at the onset should all have a measurable monetary value set against them to judge their success. Metrics should be prepared in advance and be clear to all involved.

There is a range of trade show features that can be measured, notably:

- ✓ New clients: number of leads / proposals generated
- ✓ Relationship building: number of existing clients, partners and suppliers met
- ✓ Brand awareness / profile raising: number of visitors, interaction with sponsors and multipliers, speaker events...
- ✓ Industry knowledge: industry reports, new trends and technologies, analysis of competitors...

Investments

Trade show costs include:

- ✓ Direct expenses (attendance, booth, facilities)
- ✓ Logistics (travel, accommodation)
- ✓ Marketing support (samples, brochures....)
- ✓ Staff time
- ✓ Web online support



Returns

Direct sales are the easiest return to calculate. For all other objectives, a theoretical monetary value should be assigned.

Qualified leads

One method to value qualified leads is to take the estimated possible sales that could be achieved longer term and divide it by the estimated chance of success. While subjective, this provides a benchmark to judge returns.

On average, an attendee's target market represents 15% of a trade show audience (www.uif.org). A theoretic way to evaluate lead generation is to compare number of leads generated with total number of attendees. If it approaches 15% then you have done well.

Continue to assess the impact of your trade show for a few months after the event. If your marketing efforts are successful and you are following up with online outreach programs, you should continue to see direct benefits as prospects become clients.



Online ROI

Certain objectives such as brand awareness or increased web traffic can all be measured by proxy through your website.

New leads: Monitoring and measuring your web site traffic should be part of all sales strategies. It allows you an overview of where and how interest in your company is being generated. If you are using sophisticated marketing software, you should be able to tell what portion of your submissions is totally new to your system and where they have come from.

Brand awareness: One of the clearest ways to judge brand awareness is to monitor and measure the level of "web buzz". One way to measure this metric is to look at your direct and organic traffic that is coming to your website. By direct traffic we mean, people directly typing in your company's URL in a web browser. By branded organic traffic we mean visitors who arrive on your site by searching for your company in search engines.

A trade show should impact both categories. As more people encounter your brand and CTAs, you should see an increase in direct traffic and organic search to your website.

Virtual trade shows

A growing alternative

Virtual trade shows

First appearing in 1993, virtual trade shows are essentially a business exhibition in an online environment. They bring together webcasting, online chats, video streaming, webinars and avatar graphics to simulate a real exhibition.

Exhibitors set up 'virtual stands' with information and materials describing their products and services to visitors. Communication is conducted via instant messaging, voice-call, video streaming, email, podcasts...There are also usually group online discussion areas that mimic networking forums.

The Rise of virtual trade shows

Virtual trade shows account for just 2% of the worldwide exhibition industry today and their popularity is growing.

Virtual trade show organizers like market leader ON24 (www.on24.com), hosted just 50 virtual trade shows in 2008. Just one year later this had grown to over 300.

While virtual trade shows may be on the up, they will not displace physical trade shows entirely. Their impact is also concentrated. As these shows tend to benefit smaller companies and specific industries, the large, established and internationally known events such as Hannover's CEBIT or London's DSEI are seen as 'too big to fail' - they are simply too well-established to risk losing significant traction over the coming years.

Why go virtual?

The most frequently expressed advantage of a virtual trade show is cost: the ability to generate business leads directly without incurring travel and accommodation expenses. So the more restricted your budget, the more appealing is virtual.

The relative ease of registering and attending a virtual trade show also guarantees the participation of a diverse range of companies, some of which do not have the resources to attend classic exhibitions.

Virtual shows are often praised as being more efficient. Less time is spent walking aimlessly, engaging with companies of limited interest. Interested companies are easier to identify and engage with.

What are the disadvantages?

Criticisms consistently leveled at virtual trade shows tend to focus on the difficulty of developing personal relationships which is often conducive to generating business interest.

Similarly, going virtual also means that visitors no longer interact with products directly, something which can limit the level of direct business deals or transactions taking place.

Future of virtual trade shows

Virtual trade shows are becoming ever more mainstream, particularly within hi-tech related industries. In the medium-term, virtual trade shows complement and become a vital component of exhibitions but do not necessarily replace them.



Next steps

Improving your online presence is the first step towards managing, improving and optimising your international trade shows. It is crucial to your international trade development.

IBT Partners has created [15 Tips to Improving Your International Online Presence](#). Download to find out more about how to:

- Be easily accessible for clients and your networks all over the world
- Have an international online presence where your business is perceived as local
- Generate local demand online

Download 15 tips to improve your international online presence

About IBT Partners

In 2002, we created IBT Partners with a vision to build a company that would make a substantial difference to our clients in helping them grow internationally – a vision based on the idea that international business and trade are vital engines of economic growth and an essential step in any company’s strategy.

Our staff, their enthusiasm and their skills are what make the difference. Our offices in France, Germany, the UK and USA house teams that are all multi-cultural, multi-lingual trade experts with knowledge of new technologies.

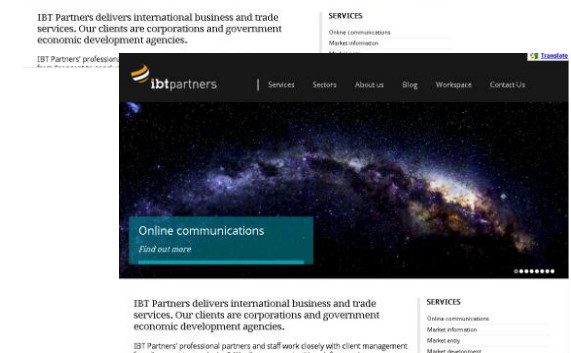
We have worked with 100s of SMEs, helping them to identify new business opportunities and new potential clients in export markets.

We invite you to get to know us, our vision, our passion and our commitment to increasing international trade for our clients.

Get in touch!

Email: info@ibtpartners.com

You can also find us on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn



Useful links

International Chamber of Commerce – Trade tools
www.iccwbo.org/products-and-services/trade-facilitation/

AUMA – ‘Successful Participation in Trade Fairs’
www.auma.de/pages/e/12_Download/download/TradeFairPreparation/SuccessfulParticipation.pdf

The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry
www.uif.org

Reed Elsevier
www.reedelsevier.com/Pages/Home.aspx

ON24 – Webcasting, virtual events, webinars
www.on24.com/

World Trade Organisation
www.wto.org

European Commission
www.ec.europa.eu/trade

American Chamber of Commerce to the EU
www.amchameu.eu

CIA World Factbook
www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook

US Commercial Services
www.export.gov/salesandmarketing

US Small Business Administration
www.sba.gov/community/blogs

Financial Times
www.ft.com/intl/cms

UKTI
www.ukti.gov.uk/export



IBT Partners recommends the following trade show portals for finding trade shows:

- www.bvents.com
- www.eventseye.com
- www.reedexpo.com
- www.tsnn.com
- www.expoabc.com
- www.expodata.com
- www.expopromoter.com

