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What to Include in the Exhibitor Service Manual for International Exhibitors

By Michelle Bruno

International exhibitors sometimes get short shrift from trade show organizers because planners aren't as familiar with the needs of foreign companies as they are with the requirements of domestic exhibitors. In reality, international companies have much more complex issues to deal with on their exhibitor journey. When it comes to a show with perishable items, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, overseas exhibitors can use all the help they can get.

International exhibitors participating in the annual Fresh Summit International Convention and Exposition—the largest fruit and vegetable show in the Americas—organized by the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), receive a wealth of information customized just for them. PMA's thoughtful approach to serving their international customers serves as a great example of the type of information that makes an exhibitor kit for an international event complete.

Importing Instructions

Importing any food item, especially fresh produce, into the US requires adherence to strict procedures. For exam-

ple, the US Department of Agriculture, one of the authorities that regulate the importation of produce, provides importers with a 548-page instruction manual. **Specialty items, including food, drugs, firearms, electronics, cosmetics and hazardous materials ALWAYS require special attention during the importation process and should be addressed in the exhibitor manual.**

International Shipping

PMA publishes shipping information, including the contact information for the official freight forwarder and local produce supplier. They also include details on how to label and pack shipments to save money and information on shipping perishables.

Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)

Citizens from a variety of nations require visas to travel to the US. However, under the Visa Waiver Program,

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travelers from thirty-seven nations can enter the US without a visa if they obtain an authorization to do so before hand. **ESTA** is the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) automated web-based system to determine eligibility to travel without a visa to the United States for tourism or business.

Visas

For exhibitors who require visas to enter the US, PMA's exhibitor service manual provides them with detailed information on who needs a visa, how to obtain a visa, frequently asked questions, the locations of consular offices and visa waiting times. It also includes details on how to request a letter of invitation, the contents of the letter and PMA's policy regarding invitations.

Transportation

Most international travelers can navigate inbound and outbound airline routes and schedules. When they arrive in the US, however, getting around can be more difficult. PMA places information on using local transportation and the shuttle busses into the international section of the exhibitor service manual. Other groups also include information on how to get emergency medical help (dialing 911 and the location of major area hospitals, for example).

Glossary of On-site Terms

The language of trade shows includes a vocabulary all its own in the US. PMA includes a **glossary** of common terms in its manual for international exhibitors to assist them with booth installation and dismantling. Show organizers J. Spargo & Associates also publish a glossary to enhance the understanding of terms that may be foreign to overseas visitors, such as drayage, cherry picker, floor order and marshalling yard.

Information about Contractors

Move-in and move-out procedures, as well as the process for ordering labor and lifting services in the US, can be new to international exhibitors. Overseas, most

contractors use Exhibitor Appointed Contractors with much less formality than in the US. The concept of a General Service Contractor (in many countries, the venue serves as the general service contractor and not a separate company) can be one they don't readily understand. PMA takes care to explain the roles and procedures of working with these two important groups in its manual.

Labor Jurisdictions

Labor unions are not unknown to international companies; however they tend to take a much smaller role in the life of trade shows outside the US. Consequently, PMA devotes a section of the manual to helping exhibitors understand the process of working with unions, the labor divisions and, especially, which tasks exhibitors are allowed to perform themselves (without union assistance).

Information about Electricity

Because the voltage can differ between the US and many other countries, PMA makes sure that international exhibitors are educated about the differences—110V vs. 220V.

Interpretation Services

Foreign language interpretation services are as important to non-English speaking exhibitors as they are to attendees. For that reason, PMA includes information on interpreters for use in the booth or for business meetings.

While many international exhibitors speak English, it's appropriate for show organizers to offer information in at least the languages of the major exhibiting groups—no easy task as the demographics of international exhibitors in many shows changes from primarily Western European to Asian, Southeast Asian, Russian and South American—the emerging markets. Nevertheless, as the number of overseas exhibitors in many trade shows continues to rise, the idea of providing them with customized information to address their unique needs will move from “nice to offer” to “must offer.” PMA has taken the important first step with their exhibitor service manual and one that will continue to brand them as a truly international show.

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