

# GLOBAL VIEW notes



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## Keeping the Door Open on Booth Sales to International Companies with Regulated Imports

By Michelle Bruno

**F**or most trade shows, restricted, prohibited or licensed imports don't pose much of a problem. For a handful of others—those involving alcohol, biological specimens, firearms, foods and meats—import regulations can impact booth sales to the international companies that have products in the prohibited or restricted categories. Knowing what the restrictions are and advising exhibitors on how to be in compliance, can help organizers sell more booths and advise their clients and prospects on how to streamline the importation process.

### Imports that Require Special Attention

Although no sales representative can know all of the rules on every U.S. import—that's what customs brokers are for—they can still be aware of the items that require extra attention:

**Alcohol** is subject to both federal and state laws (the state where the alcohol is first imported). In most cases, alcohol imports require licenses and the labels on

alcoholic beverages have to contain very specific information in order to be imported for a trade show. Not all customs brokers are licensed to import alcohol so organizers should check with the companies that they appoint to make sure they are licensed or have relationships with licensed companies.

**Absinthe** (an alcoholic liquid) is subject to Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulation according to the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website:

“The absinthe content must be “thujone free” (that is, it must contain less than 10 parts per million of thujone); the term “absinthe” cannot be the brand name; the term “absinthe” cannot stand alone on the label; and the artwork and/or graphics cannot project images of hallucinogenic, psychotropic or mind-altering effects. Absinthe imported in violation of these regulations is subject to seizure.”

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**Biological goods** such as bacteria, tissue specimens, birds, plants and viruses may require a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) permit.

**Military items and firearms** are highly regulated. Defense articles that may include software, blueprints, design plans and technical information require a license. A licensed importer must import all firearms and ammunition. If a specific item is controlled (listed on the U.S. Munitions List), it may also require a Department of State license.

**Food products** are among the most heavily regulated. Many prepared foods and baked items are permissible, but fish, fruits, vegetables and most cheeses require permits from the FDA and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Since 2002, food items are subject to the provisions of The Public Health Security and Bioterrorism and Response Act requiring that “food items, imported (or offered for import) for commercial use, including hand-carried quantities, be properly reported to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration prior to arrival of those items in the United States. The FDA prior notification timeframes (by transport mode) are two hours by land, four hours by rail or air, eight hours by vessel and prior to the “time of mailing” for international mail.” This prior notice requirement is one of the most difficult for exhibitors to adhere to.

**Meats, Livestock and Poultry** regulations are also very strict. In general, says CBP, “You may not import fresh, dried or canned meats or meat products from most foreign countries into the United States. Also, you may not import food products that have been prepared with meat.” APHIS governs the importation of meat and meat products and provides a list of countries with specific livestock/poultry



diseases that impact the importation restrictions on meat products.

## What International Exhibition Organizers Can Do

Whether or not an item can be imported or requires significantly more paperwork to import can be a deal breaker for some exhibitors. The key to overcoming that particular objection is equipping the sales team with specific information about the commodities in

question. Here are some measures that organizers can take to make information available to those who need it:

- Form a relationship with a licensed customs broker so that the correct information involving specific commodities (and any updates) can be automatically relayed to sales representatives.
- Create guides and bulletins targeted at the sales team informing them about the specific commodities affected by Customs regulations and what the procedures are for importing items in those categories.
- Place information about restricted and prohibited items on the show website (or international microsite) with links to the CBP website.
- Set up an importation hotline to help exhibitors prepare documentation correctly and obtain the required permits or licenses required by CBP.

Well-informed sales representatives are better equipped to address the questions about importation that inevitably arise during conversations with prospective exhibitors. Having the answers ready or providing information to exhibitor prospects in advance via the show website demonstrates that a show organization is knowledgeable and responsive to the needs of international clients.

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