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Notes



Top Questions to Ask When Selecting an International Convention Center

By Michelle Bruno

In developing countries, it's not unusual for local authorities and private owners to convert former supermarkets, office buildings, and even parking garages into exhibition facilities. In some cases, the venues were purpose-built originally, but haven't been improved or modernized in decades. Although these structures wouldn't ordinarily meet the standards of professional trade show organizers, they are often the only options available. Here is a list of important questions to ask venue managers when searching overseas for a convention center.

How many loading docks do you have per hall?

Many older buildings, especially those not originally built for exhibitions, have only one dock door per exhibition hall. This feature alone can cause traffic nightmares on the streets outside and potentially extend move-in and move-out periods. The ideal situation is to have multiple loading bays and overhead door entrances.

What are the dimensions of the largest dock and door? The openings should accommodate the types of trucks that will be used to deliver international

as well as domestic cargo including ocean containers. In addition to the loading dock area, trucks should be able to enter the exhibition hall through ground level doors.

Do you permit vehicles (truck and passenger) to unload on the show floor? Permitting vehicles to drive onto the show floor (including passenger vehicles) can reduce some of the congestion in the loading dock area and in the outside waiting areas.

What is the load limit of the show floor? Even new convention centers have limits on the amount of weight that the show floor can bear due to the design (show floor is, for example, built over a parking garage) or materials used in construction. The load limit can impact the types of exhibits that are allowed into the show.

Do you have a truck marshalling system? Even a manual system (versus the electronic check-ins used in some of the modern exhibition facilities) is preferable to no system in terms of reducing the congestion and chaos that results from an uncontrolled move-in and move-out.

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How much of the exhibition space is contiguous space?

Retrofitted spaces are often marred by columns and support structures that make floor plan creation more difficult. Contiguous space is more attractive and flexible.

Does the multi-floor building have adequate freight elevators?

Some spaces have converted passenger elevators into freight elevators in which case the dimensions and weight limitations of the elevator car result in delays during move-in.

Describe the authority, regulations, and practices of labor unions? Outside the US, labor unions typically have less control over the exhibition facility's logistics, however, knowing how and where they figure into the show planning process is helpful.

What are normal working hours in the exhibition center? It's important to learn what times the restaurants and other show services will be available. In addition, organizers should ask what hours constitute straight time or overtime for workers, the hours that exhibitors can be in the building, and the hours that are customary for trade shows to be open in that region.

What are the heating and air conditioning policies? In tropical areas or those that have severe cold weather patterns, it's critical to ask about the facility's policies regarding heating and air conditioning during move-in and move-out periods.

How many parking spots do you have available? In suburban areas not served by public transportation, it's important to make accommodations for passenger vehicles.

How accommodating is the public transportation system? In many cities, traffic is so congested that visitors are prevented from attending trade shows during certain hours. Knowing whether buses, subway, or trains serve the exhibition center is critical.



What types of technical infrastructure do you have?

With mobile and Internet access as important business tools, organizers should determine the availability, connectivity, and costs of these services as well as any others.

Do you have exclusive contractors for any service?

Understanding what companies "come with" the building and what services the facility provides (electrical, furniture rental, cleaning, security, temporary labor, etc.) can help organizers plan more effectively.

What insurance requirements does the facility have?

Understanding what is required in terms of coverage and how the insurance is to be secured (cash deposit or insurance policy) helps organizers make better selection decisions and ask more detailed questions.

Do you have any lifting equipment in house or does it have to be rented? Having some lifting equipment in house (including hand lift trucks and wheeled carts) makes it more convenient for exhibitors.

How large is the indoor and outdoor storage for empties? Buildings with extensive and accessible storage areas can be more useful for exhibitors.

The above list highlights some of the major areas that trade show organizers, especially those accustomed to modern, purpose-built exhibition and convention centers, should review. In most cases, asking questions about loading docks and floor load limits wouldn't occur to planners because these features are a given in facilities in developed nations. Nevertheless, going above and beyond the measurements and costs questions can help organizers understand the potential challenges. And, in addition to asking the questions of venue managers, organizers can also rely on freight forwarders with local offices and representatives in the region to provide independent confirmation.

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