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Notes



Evaluating Overseas Trade Shows

By Michelle Bruno

For US-based companies, especially those that are new-to-market (without the support of a local office or representative in the region), selecting an overseas trade show can be challenging. While many shows exist, deciding which shows are the best fit requires due diligence. Here are some considerations for companies that are committed to the opportunity, but need a little help thinking through the selection process.

Look for the chicken (not the egg) first

The best place for would-be exhibitors to begin looking for an overseas trade show is within their own internal marketing plan. There are plenty of great shows to choose from. Not all of them will attract the right buyer demographic in the right region. The BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) countries are very “shiny” at the moment, but unless the exhibition organizer of a specific event can demonstrate that an exhibitor’s specific buyer prospects will be in attendance, the show may not be as “hot” as the region in which it’s located. Creating a buyer profile and a list of markets with the most potential are the best ways to begin the selection process.

Create a universe of potential shows

There are a number of great online databases that list international trade shows. Using them to make a “long” list of the shows that meet the selection criteria identified by the marketing plan is a good start. Here are a couple of places to begin the search:

Trade Show News Network:

<http://www.tsnn.com/>

m+a Expo DataBase:

<http://www.expodatabase.com/>

biztradeshows: <http://www.biztradeshows.com/>

expoabc.com: <http://www.expoabc.com/>

tradefairguide:

<http://www.tradefairguide.com/en/>

Jetro: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/database/j-messe/>

Expofairs:

<http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/database/j-messe/>

exhibitions.co.uk: <http://www.exhibitions.co.uk/>

Tradeshow Calendar:

<http://thetradeshowcalendar.com/>

ExpoPromoter: <http://expopromoter.com/>

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Create a short list

Narrowing down the list of potential trade shows is the most arduous part of the selection process. It requires obtaining information from the trade show organizations and representatives (online or via telephone/Skype/email) directly to address a number of specific questions:

How many competing exhibitors are expected? The number of companies in the same product category is revealing. If there is a good number, it could be an indication that the show has a great deal of potential for similar companies. It also means that there will be strong competition for a new company. A show with few exhibitors in the same product category could indicate a poor show or a great opportunity for newcomers.

What portion of overall attendees fall into the target buyer category? It's not unusual for overseas trade shows to attract tens of thousands of attendees especially when they occur every second or third year or they are the only major show in the region. Asking show representatives about the number and percentage of specific buyer prospects in attendance is a good investigative tactic.

Is exhibition attendance audited by a third-party organization? It is more common for established trade shows, especially those in Europe, to feature audited attendance numbers than it is for US-based exhibitions. One of the main reasons is that the major tradeshow association in Europe, UFI, requires audited attendance as a requirement for membership. Audited trade shows are able to offer more in-depth information about the buyer audience.

How and where does the exhibition organizer promote the exhibition? A discussion with show representatives about their audience promotion plan can be helpful in learning what types of buyers the show is trying to attract. In addition, trade publication partners, social media websites (does the exhibition have a LinkedIn or Facebook presence), and Google search results (does the show rank highly on search engines when buyer-

oriented search terms are used?) can all be indicators of the types of attendees being solicited.

What is the track record of the trade show organizer?

Whether the show is part of a larger international brand portfolio, the production of a financially stable and reputable organization, or has been organized before are all-important criteria for selection. Obviously, the answers to all of these questions should be yes, but in some spaces (IT, for example) new shows are appearing regularly. In these instances, the discussion with sales representatives should also revolve around strategy as well as execution of the show's goals.

Do any US-based trade associations support the show?

Support for an international show from organizations that promote US exports (i.e. US trade associations) is an important indicator of the potential of the show for US companies. It also demonstrates that the association has performed some level of due diligence in throwing its weight behind a reputable event. US companies may even be able to search for international trade shows through the event calendars of US associations.

What are the costs to exhibit?

With the weak US dollar, American products are more attractive in price than some of their foreign counterparts. On the other hand, the costs to exhibit at this time are more expensive than they have been in the past. Creating a show budget that includes all of the costs to exhibit in one event vs. another can help companies make important selection decisions.

Just do it

When all of the research is complete and the budget is allocated, the final step is to select the show(s), contract the exhibit space and take the plunge. There is plenty of assistance available online and through trade show consultants and contractors to pave the way for a successful international trade show program.



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