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Notes



Trade Show Organizer's Checklist for Accommodating International Attendees

By Michelle Bruno

International attendees have primarily the same needs and concerns about attending an exhibition in the U.S. as domestic out-of-town visitors—local transportation, hotel accommodations, navigating the show floor, etc. There is, however, a degree of difficulty added to the experience of attending a trade show in the US when the visitor speaks another language, lives in another time zone and is accustomed to different cultural norms. International trade show organizers can accommodate the needs of international buyers more easily with the following checklist of tasks that will make their visits more user friendly:

Pre-Show:

- Apply for the International Buyer Program—a US Government program that provides at-show assistance to foreign buyers.
- Create web pages or microsites with translation tools (Google Translate) or in multiple languages to provide critical information such as deadline dates, visa information and access to the exhibitor directory.
- Plan signage to accommodate non English-speaking attendees. Avoid spelling errors by using international symbols instead of text.

Local Transportation:

- If appropriate, provide international visitors with maps of mass transit routes (subway, trains, light rail) that clearly indicate the best way to get from the airport to the hotels and convention center.
- Advise foreign visitors of how and where to hire official taxicabs and shuttles (and the approximate cost of fares) from the airport to the host hotels and main venue.
- Place a welcome sign for the show in multiple languages at the exit from Customs and Immigration.

Hotels:

- Recommend hotels with front desk staff that speak different languages. For example, with a large contingent of attendees from China in the same hotel, it's a good idea to make sure that mandarin-speaking hotel representatives are available to assist them.
- Indicate the languages spoken next to the hotels listed on the reservation page. This added information can help non English-speaking attendees select a hotel that provides assistance to them taking some of the burden off of show staff.

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- ❑ Use hotels that can offer check-in at all hours. International flights may arrive in the middle of the night or early in the morning. Visitors should be allowed to check into their rooms when they arrive and not have to wait until 3:00 p.m. as is standard at some hotels.

Meals and Entertainment:

- ❑ Consider a multi-lingual concierge service in the convention center to recommend international restaurants and local events, and if necessary, to make reservations.
- ❑ In the absence of multi-lingual assistance, provide international visitors with lists and menus for restaurants offering international cuisine. This can be done with a kiosk or computer station marked with multi-lingual signs.
- ❑ Provide advice on suggested gratuities for local dining and the usual custom of adding 15% gratuity for parties of 8 or more.

During Show:

- ❑ Provide an international lounge with coffee, tea and seating areas where exhibitors can visit with attendees and receive assistance from translators.
- ❑ Offer access to the show floor (with exhibitors present) one or two hours early each day for international groups to tour the floor with bi-lingual guides.
- ❑ Identify full-time and temporary staff with pins, badges or ribbons indicating language abilities.
- ❑ Offer international attendees special identification ribbons and advise staff to reach out and offer assistance to them.
- ❑ Provide simultaneous translation services for some or all sessions (depending on budget and need).

- ❑ Consider foreign language captioning for live streaming content such as keynote addresses to accommodate remote visitors.
- ❑ Provide basic floor plans and schedules in multiple languages when large contingents from specific countries attend.
- ❑ Indicate the presence of a translator or the specific languages spoken by exhibitors in the exhibitor directory.
- ❑ Suggest the use of multi-lingual in-booth signage to exhibitors seeking international representation.

Post-Show:

- ❑ Prepare surveys for foreign visitors that address their unique experiences, such as their ability to navigate the show, the extent to which their language needs were met and how the food and beverage selections met their requirements.
- ❑ Offer channels for post-show feedback that can accommodate multiple languages using translators or online translation tools.
- ❑ Send (electronic) thank-you notes in multiple languages.

It is never possible to meet all the needs of every international visitor. The goal of the checklist above is to plan ahead to accommodate the needs that are predictable and create an impression on foreign buyers that show organizers acknowledge their special requirements and have made every effort to create an environment conducive to doing international business. With more attendees coming from emerging countries such as China, Brazil and India, the need to address this unique area of planning will continue to grow.

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