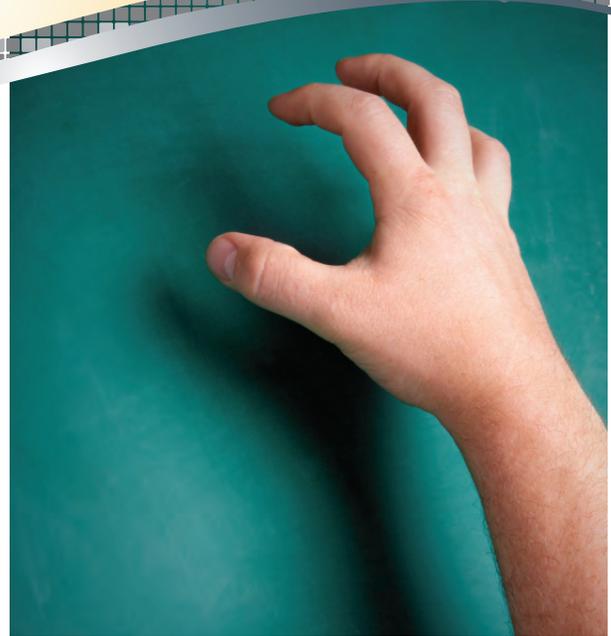




International Exhibitor Pet Peeves

By Michelle Bruno



In many ways, U.S. trade shows are among the most difficult to navigate for international exhibitors. The customs clearance requirements are strict and the on-site procedures are unusual in comparison to European-style exhibitions. Trade show organizers may be interested in some of the recent issues that have vexed foreign exhibitors participating in U.S. shows and what they can do to help.

Convention Centers and Hotels as Shipment Consignees

In recent years, the “consignee” required on ocean and airway bills of lading for an international shipment has changed. In the past, a company (the importer of record) was required to be listed as the consignee. Now, shipments must be consigned as follows (with the convention center or hotel as the consignee):

Exhibitor Name
Convention Center (or hotel), Street, City, Zip Code
Booth Number

Problem: Because of this change, exhibitors or their customs brokers (as representatives) are required to put the **federal tax identification number of the convention center or hotel** on the customs entry. This information is very difficult for exhibitors or their brokers to obtain from the venues. The time that elapses while exhibitors go through the process of obtaining the number is time that delays the clearance of the shipment through customs.

Solution: Exhibition organizers must either be prepared to provide exhibitors with the tax ID of the convention center or assist exhibitors with obtaining the number from the venue directly.

Food and Drug Administration Delays

Shipments of food, alcohol and medical devices are subject to special requirements of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prior to clearance through U.S. Customs. Most of the time, when exhibitors have filed the appropriate forms or obtained the correct filing numbers, these types of shipments are cleared within a normal time-frame.

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PROBLEM: Even when all of the documentation requirements are met, the FDA delays international shipments when **several exhibitor shipments have been combined on a single master bill of lading**. The practice is popular among freight forwarders hoping to realize a cost savings (with a single customs clearance charge) by combining multiple exhibitors in one shipment. In the case of shipments requiring FDA clearance, however, the practice usually causes clearance delays of 4 to 7 days for all of the exhibitors in the consolidated shipment.

SOLUTION: Organizers have two options. They can appoint an official freight forwarder/customs broker for the show with current FDA experience. Organizers can also inform international exhibitors of the delays being experienced on combined shipments when one or more exhibitors in the consolidation are subject to FDA clearance. The alternative to multiple shipments on one master bill of lading is multiple shipments, each with their own *house* bills of lading, under a single master bill.

Empty Labels Procedure

The usual process for remanding empty crates into storage at a U.S. show involves the exhibitor or their on-site representative placing an “empty” sticker on the container or box when it is ready for storage. Sometimes, international exhibitors forget to do the requisite empty labeling because they aren’t accustomed to having to do so themselves.

PROBLEM: When the **crates aren’t labeled as empty** (with the correct booth number), they are forcibly removed and placed in a no man’s land of unidentifiable shipping crates. At the conclusion of the event, they are either not returned or returned only after the exhibitor has investigated their whereabouts with the general contractor—a time-consuming process that often isn’t resolved until all of the other empties are accounted for.

SOLUTION: Organizers can communicate with international exhibitors (preferably on site) that empty labels are required to activate the removal, storage and return of empties process. Floor managers can be trained to visit with international companies to explain the procedures in detail. Such proactive communication can reinforce any instruction they have received from their forwarders or the general contractor.

Return of Empty Crates After the Show

Some international exhibitors find it difficult to understand why **it takes so long for empty crates to be returned** to their booths after a show closes.

PROBLEM: Exhibitors schedule flights that don’t accommodate the usual timeframe for the return of empties or they wait for hours at the booth hoping the return will come sooner rather than later.

SOLUTION: Despite the notices posted in the exhibitor manual or elsewhere in the general contractor’s materials, exhibition organizers can play a greater role in communicating these delays on site to exhibitors. After all, the exhibit coordinators—those who have read all of the rules and procedures—may not be the same individuals who staff the booth.

While most countries have peculiarities with regard to customs and on-site procedures, the U.S. stands out for the division or responsibilities between freight forwarders/customs brokers, exhibitors and general contractors. In many other countries, freight forwarders are responsible for the entire clearance, delivery and empties removal process, often including unpacking and re-packing the crates. So, it comes as no surprise that foreign exhibitors neglect some of the procedures as the responsibility shifts back and forth from exhibitor to forwarder to general contractor at U.S. shows. Exhibition organizers can help international customers by paying special attention to their unique needs and developing communication strategies to meet them.



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