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Notes



10 Things You Might See at an Overseas Trade Show That You Won't See in the U.S.

By Michelle Bruno

Exhibitions in the U.S. are creations unto themselves. The architects of American trade shows have invented products, services and processes unlike those anywhere else in the world. Exhibition organizers and exhibitors accustomed to the organization and presentation of domestic trade shows may be surprised by some of the ways trade show organizers, venues and exhibitors function in other countries. Here's a list of contrasts that can help first timers anticipate the overseas experience.

- 1 Venues as trade show organizers.** In the U.S., for-profit companies or trade associations own and manage the vast majority of exhibitions. Outside the U.S., it's not uncommon for the shows to be owned and managed by the venues. The greatest example of this practice is in Germany where the Fairgrounds (Messes) across the country divide up the industry sectors amongst themselves and produce the major trade fairs in those sectors.
- 2 Multiple show contractors and no general contractor.** The venue, exhibitor-appointed

contractors, multiple service contractors or the exhibitors themselves provide the services normally performed by general service contractors in the U.S. The flow of freight deliveries is either managed by the venue or not at all.

- 3 Displays occupying every inch of cubic space.** Line of sight rules—prohibitions in the U.S. on one exhibitor obstructing the view of another exhibitor with its display walls—are virtually non-existent in many international exhibitions. Displays are built to occupy every cubic inch of space. It's not unusual to see double-decker booths with stairs, lofts and offices on the second floor.
- 4 Exhibitors managing their own booth installation.** The diminished role of labor unions in overseas shows may account for exhibitors' ability to construct (from scratch) their own display or install pre-fabricated displays from a display house. They may hire their own labor, craftsmen and electricians as long as they comply with fire regulations.

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5 Laborers working 24 hours a day. When companies provide their own skilled and unskilled labor to construct booth properties, they often work around the clock to complete the job. Laborers hired by the exhibition organizer work, eat and sleep on site in many countries because it's too far or too expensive to commute to and from the work site. Large shows can be broken down and cleaned up in 24 to 48 hours by a massive work crew resembling ants at a picnic.



the Middle East and other Muslim countries) for alcohol and food to be served to visitors in the booth. In addition, in-booth entertainment, from native drummers to folk dancers to opera singers, is a common sight especially toward the end of the business day.

6 Customs authorities on site. Customs clearance procedures vary from country to country, but it's not unusual in Europe, for example, for Customs authorities to have offices at the fairgrounds and clearance to occur on site. International shipments can be moved directly from the airport or seaport to the venue in a streamlined process that does not require transporting the goods to a remote inspection site prior to delivery to the exhibition.

7 Freight forwarders providing delivery to booth. Freight forwarders tasked with the job of providing customs clearance to international exhibitors are also responsible for delivery to the booth, lifting and handling, unpacking (in some cases) and storage of empty shipping containers. This all-inclusive service stands in contrast to the customary handoff at the dock door to a drayage contractor for delivery of the goods to the booth at U.S. trade shows.

8 In-booth entertainment and hospitality. Although some exhibition organizers in the U.S. prohibit the serving of alcohol by exhibitors, it is common practice overseas (with the exclusion of

9 Business cards in place of electronic lead retrieval. In some countries, privacy laws prohibit the electronic collection and tracking of business prospects at trade shows. It's far more customary for exhibitors and potential customers overseas to exchange business cards (the old-fashioned way) than it is for them to scan a badge with an electronic

scanner.

10 Order taking in the booth. Very few U.S. trade shows are order-taking events. In other words, American exhibitors use the occasion of the trade show for branding themselves, prospecting, engaging existing customers and collecting competitive intelligence, but NOT taking orders (signing contracts) for products and services. In Europe, particularly, companies gear up all year (or two or three) to take orders at the trade show—hence the need for private offices inside the booths.

The contrasts between overseas trade shows and those organized in the U.S. under an Americanized system of procedures and practices may come as a surprise to exhibition organizers and exhibitors taking their brands overseas for the first time. Some of the differences are refreshing for new-to-market organizations, such as the ability to have more control over the twin processes of organizing and exhibiting. However, with more control comes more responsibility and the need for more expert advice before taking the plunge.

Global View Notes is published by:
Rogers Worldwide
1550 E. Higgins Road, Suite 106
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
Contact:
Jeanette Mucha, LCB
Director National Sales
Tel: (847) 806-9200
Mobile: (847) 970-8017
jmucha@rerogers.com

Editor:
Michelle Bruno,
CMP, CEM
Tel: (801) 520-0797
michelle@brunogroup.com

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