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Notes



Top Tips for Selling Exhibit Space in an Overseas Exhibition to U.S. Companies

By Michelle Bruno

As the economy improves, more U.S. companies will be in a financial position to exhibit in overseas trade shows either as stand-alone exhibitors or as participants in a U.S.A. pavilion. Selling exhibit space in exhibitions outside the country to American companies—many of which are small to medium-sized enterprises—involves a level of complexity that doesn't normally exist for a domestic sale. Here are some tips for setting up a sales and marketing program with all of the elements for making a successful sale.

Finding Potential Exhibitors

One of the most fertile places to find potential international exhibitors is a domestic trade show. After creating a profile of the ideal prospect (i.e. type of products, annual sales volume, currently exhibiting in the U.S. or overseas, etc.), international show/pavilion organizers can purchase a booth in an existing U.S. show in order to gain access to exhibiting companies online and on site.

Some of the more traditional resources for identifying potential exhibitors include **mailing and email lists** from trade associations, publications, and mailing list companies. Industry directories (many of which are online) can also be an important resource.

Online resources have emerged as an important tool for prospecting. Internet-based **press release services** such as [PRWeb](#), [Marketwire](#), and [Business Wire](#) are excellent sources for learning about a company's activities: trade show participation, new product launches, and new markets. By subscribing as a journalist or blogger, show producers can search and receive alerts from these services.

Google "alerts" can also notify sales staff when certain keywords appear online such as "trade show schedule," "new hires," (trade show manager, international marketing manager), or "Latin American/Asian/EMEA market."

Social networking platforms, especially LinkedIn groups, can be good places to prospect for potential exhibitors (although direct online selling is frowned upon). The International Woodworking Fair, for example, maintains a number of open groups for cabinetry

Continued on page 2

makers, furniture manufacturers, general contractors, and remodelers with over 9,000 participants. Although many are potential attendees rather than exhibitor prospects, these types of groups provide a window into an industry.

Making the Case to Prospects

Selling exhibit space in an overseas exhibition is more complex because the sale involves more than helping the exhibitor stake out the best location on the show floor or convincing the prospect that the right buyer will be in attendance. International sales efforts must include **justification that the specific market is appropriate**. In other words, sales staff must be armed with market analyses, survey data, government projections, demand information, and growth statistics.

The Obama Administration's **National Export Initiative (NEI)** and the export.gov Website is one of the best online resources for market research, trade data, product pricing, and other information. Having specific reports and trade opportunities ready when approaching exhibitor prospects will help advance the sale.

Because exhibiting overseas tends to be more costly than exhibiting domestically, sales personnel should be able to provide prospects with overall **budget numbers** including hotel, travel, meals, exhibit space rental, and shipping. This type of information shortens the time for decision-making by eliminating the need for exhibitors to investigate costs on their own.

Turnkey packages including the booth shell scheme, pre-show promotion, assistance with shipping, furniture rental, carpeting, electrical, hospitality and even hotel accommodations or travel arrangements can also facilitate the sale, especially for new-to-market firms. Some exhibition organizers offer support through their international sales groups. [Reed Exhibitions](#), for example, provides advice for

companies on locating international shows, tips for exhibiting internationally, and testimonials from successful international exhibitors.

Having the ability to **view and assign booth space online** also helps sales staff to secure a sale from exhibitors. Having to wait for confirmation of booth space reservations from show headquarters adds a layer of complexity and diminishes the credibility of the booth sales representative.

Marketing to U.S. Companies

In addition to traditional marketing methods such as **direct mail, email, and telemarketing**, show organizers have a number of Internet-based and new media alternatives for reaching American companies. **Banner ads** on popular Websites such as TSNN.com or industry-related trade associations are a good start. Listing the show in online show directories such as TSNN.com and others is another way to obtain exposure.

The **show Website** should have a section dedicated to U.S. companies (in English) and complete with detailed information and local (based in the U.S.) sales contacts. **Google/Yahoo/Bing ads** based on the appropriate keywords (and leading back to a specially-designed landing page) can help reach companies searching for international trade shows. Ads targeted to specific demographics (companies in the target industry) on **LinkedIn** are another way to use social media platforms to market to exhibitor prospects.

Filling booths in overseas (and other North American) exhibitions with American companies requires a joint effort—on the part of exhibition producers—between marketing and sales departments; online and offline resources; and traditional and non-traditional sales tactics. Having knowledge about the show, market opportunities, and exhibiting internationally helps sales staff to be more consultative in their approach and more successful with their outcomes.



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