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# GLOBAL VIEW

## Notes



## Organizing an International Trade Show or Pavilion in a Volatile Region

By Michelle Bruno

**T**he economies and political climates of countries around the world ebb and flow constantly. Regions once considered safe and secure one day can become boiling pots of revolution the next. Nevertheless, the “[trade] show must go on” and they often do. In many cases, the country is still functioning and the underlying business community remains in tact despite volatility elsewhere in the country or region. It’s still possible to organize a trade show or U.S. pavilion under less-than-optimal conditions if the right precautions are taken.

### Deciding whether the risk is worth the benefit

One of the first decisions trade show and pavilion organizers should make is whether the business potential justifies the risks. Market reports issued by U.S. Department of Commerce business analysts are available to help U.S. exporters research opportunities for specific products in every country. Organizers can also use these reports as sales tools for recruiting American companies to exhibit. If the business potential is present, organizers should then review the other risks to the show and its participants:

- Personal safety for show staff, exhibitors and attendees is always a concern. Show and pavilion organizers should consult with the U.S. State Department (travel advisories are issued when the conditions are unfavorable) to determine whether the area is safe for Americans.
- In some cities, the transportation infrastructure is poor or customs procedures are slow increasing the possibility that exhibits and equipment won’t make it to the show on time. Organizers should obtain an update on conditions in the ports and airports.
- A lack of American- or European-style hotels can be a deterrent for many American travelers. Foreign hotels typically offer better security (including secure transportation to and from show site) and higher-quality food and drinking water than their local counterparts.
- Making payments for show services can be a challenge. Although exhibitors can pay organizers in the U.S., show producers sometimes have to explore alternative payment options to settle invoices with

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local service providers. Advance payments are not unusual, but they leave little recourse if the service is unsatisfactory. Cash payments on site are not particularly safe or documentable.

## Managing trade show or pavilion logistics

The logistics of managing a trade show or pavilion in a volatile region are obviously more complex than managing one in the U.S. In unstable areas, the number of show contractors may be limited, air conditioning may be non-existent and electricity may be intermittent. Weather—extreme heat and cold or heavy rain—can complicate the situation further. Bill Vigneault, a pavilion organizer and trade show consultant formerly with the U.S. Department of Commerce, offers some valuable advice to trade show organizers looking to bring their shows and groups to unstable regions:

- Work closely with the trade show organizer to ensure that booth packages (walls, chairs, tables, carpeting and other services typical for pavilions) are constructed on time and in good condition before exhibitors arrive.
- Appoint an exhibition freight forwarder with experience in the country and preferably one with a local agent or office. Make sure they offer an all-inclusive service package including customs clearance, delivery to stand, unpacking, lifting, storage of empties and re-exportation.
- Set show hours (applicable to stand-alone shows) around the local customs, culture and weather/traffic patterns of the local population. In countries where the availability of electricity is a problem, shows may have to open and close during daylight hours.
- Notify the U.S. Embassy or Consulate of the group's participation in a pavilion or the organization's intentions to produce a stand-alone event and keep embassy personnel apprised of the progress.
- Arrange for personal comforts for exhibitors such as restrooms, first aid stations and food and beverage on site.



- Fully inspect the convention center (preferably during the same time of year as the show will be held) to make sure it has adequate facilities and equipment or make arrangements to bring in outside services/contractors.
- Remain vigilant and nimble as conditions change quickly.
- Hire a partner that speaks the local language (and English) and understands the geography, political conditions, customs and culture of the area.

## Setting exhibitor expectations

Most new-to-market exhibitors will shy away from exhibiting in volatile regions. Even with the hand holding provided by experienced trade show and pavilion organizers, the risk is often too great—not to mention the high cost of doing business in regions where the conditions have deteriorated. Still, large companies with experienced exhibitors and the internal resources to exhibit in demanding environments (especially when the business prospects look good) will participate.

It's up to the organizer to make the trade show environment as conducive to doing business as possible and set expectations appropriately with information on such items as available medical facilities, local geography, travel warnings, approved local transportation companies, shipping restrictions, recommended restaurants, official hotels, U.S. Embassy contacts, required immunizations, emergency evacuation procedures and the organizer's on-site contact information.

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