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# GLOBAL VIEW Notes



## Selecting Modes of International Trade Show Transport

By Michelle Bruno

**E**xporting exhibition materials from the U.S. to international exhibitions abroad—including Mexico and Canada—involves a number of important decisions for exhibitors: what to ship, when to ship and how to ship. Any one decision can impact the other two. Exhibitor freight logistics can also impact the organizer’s planning and decision making. There are three main modes of transport used for international trade shows. Here’s a breakdown of all three methods and when exhibitors should consider them:

### When to ship by truck

It’s obvious that shipping via truck is only an option when it’s geographically feasible, for example, when shipping from the U.S. to Mexico or Canada. When possible, shipping by truck is a great choice when the following conditions exist:

- Shipment is small enough to fit inside of a box trailer (trucks can vary by manufacturer, but generally range

from 28’ to 53’ in length, 96” to 102” in width and 12.5’ to 13.5’ in height)

- Shipment can be accommodated by a flat-bed, open-top or drop-deck trailer (used for over-sized or heavy machinery)
- Shipment is too heavy for available aircraft
- Transportation budget is tight (truck transport is less expensive than air transport for larger or heavier shipments)
- Exhibitor has time to ship via truck (allow at least 10-14 days depending on the destination. Extra time may be required for Mexican customs formalities)
- Shipment is not sensitive to vibration (although air-ride trucks can be requested to reduce shock)
- Shipment contains large quantities of product requiring constant refrigeration
- Packing is sturdy or equipment can be blanket-wrapped (service offered by van lines)

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## When to ship by air

Shipping via airfreight is an option for most overseas trade shows. All major cities have airports and customs clearance facilities. In general, airfreight is more costly than other modes of transport, but it is the best alternative when the following conditions exist:

- Shipment is small enough for passenger (the largest passenger aircraft is the Airbus A380) or all-cargo aircraft (less restrictions and more cargo space than passenger airplanes)
- Shipment is very small and doesn't meet the minimum size requirements for a shipment via truck or ocean
- Shipment is light enough for an airplane (although there are large all-cargo airplanes such as the Antonov An-225 that can carry up to 600 tons of cargo)
- Transportation budget is ample (as a rule, airfreight transport costs more than shipment via truck or ocean freight)
- Exhibitor has a compact time frame (most destinations in the world can be reached within 48 hours airport to airport)
- Shipment is sensitive to vibration and movement
- Shipment is perishable
- Packing is minimal

## When to ship by ocean

Shipping by ocean is an economical and flexible alternative for shipping to international trade shows, especially those near seaports. Ocean freight is the best alternative when the following conditions exist:

- Shipment is small enough to fit inside an ocean container
- Shipment is very large and requires a specialized roll-on, roll-off vessel (no container)

- Transportation budget is limited (ocean freight is generally less expensive than airfreight).
- Exhibitor has an extended time frame (ocean shipments can take 30-45 days depending on whether they are full containers or less-than-container-load shipments)
- Shipment is not sensitive to vibration or movement
- Packing is very sturdy or equipment can accommodate transport via ocean (usually an issue for shipments that are not containerized)
- Shipment is NOT perishable (such as foodstuffs)

Most exhibition shipments won't fit neatly into the above three categories, with the exception of truck shipments (although small shipments are loaded and reloaded more than once before reaching their destinations). Shipments via airfreight will eventually be re-loaded into local trucks. Ocean freight shipments will either be re-loaded into small trucks for delivery or attached to a truck (full-container load) prior to delivery to show site. Shipments can also be consolidated with other freight. Consolidation lowers the cost, but may add to the transit time.

Exhibition organizers should take note of what exhibitors are shipping and how. First, shipping actual equipment vs. exhibit materials alone demonstrates the exhibitor's commitment to the show. Second, large shipments require special handling and equipment at show site—trucks may need to pull right up to the booth. Storage of empty crates and/or storage of empty ocean containers can be an issue at some venues requiring that freight forwarders move empties off site until the end of the trade show. Plus, the greater the distance is between the venue and the seaport or airport, the higher the likelihood of delivery delays. Exhibition logistics experts can help exhibitors make the most appropriate and economical transportation choices and advise organizers on the appropriate handling of shipments on site.

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