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Notes



The International Buyer Program Brings Foreign Buyers to U.S. Trade Shows

By Michelle Bruno

“**T**he International Buyer Program [IBP] is a unique program through the U.S. Department of Commerce, the International Trade Administration and the U.S. Commercial Service (the trade promotion arm of the International Trade Administration) that helps international buyers find U.S. suppliers. Located across the United States and in U.S. Embassies and Consulates in nearly 80 countries, a global network of trade professionals help attendees locate U.S. products, services or business partners; and meet suppliers and partners face-to-face at the program trade shows.” So says a press release from Automotive Service & Repair Week (ASRW), one of the program participants in 2012. The program accepts no more than 35 trade shows each year.

Benefits

International buyers receive free access to a number of services and opportunities through the program:

- Interpreters
- Import-export counseling
- Business center with refreshments
- Appointment-setting assistance
- Welcome reception
- Free export directory

As part of the package, Commercial Service trade specialists around the world assist buyers with registering for the show, locating products, setting up meetings, arranging hotel and travel packages, and helping with VISA application procedures when necessary. Admission to the exhibitions is free for the buyers when they are part of a participating delegation. A business center at the show provides participants with a quiet place for meetings with potential suppliers or consultations with trade specialists.

IBP provides benefits to show organizers as well. Commercial Service representatives help trade show organizers recruit buyers and coordinate buyer delegations using their network of offices worldwide. IBP is an important differentiator for some buyers forced to choose among competing shows. And, there is prestige associated with being selected to participate in the program each year. A review of the list of 2012 participants reveals some of the largest and most well established shows in each sector. In 2010, “the U.S. Commercial Service recruited 496 country delegations comprising nearly 13,000 international buyers to IBP trade shows—a nearly 40 percent increase in total buyers recruited from the previous year.”

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Qualifications

The Commercial Service looks for shows that “clearly meet the Commercial Service’s statutory mandate to promote U.S. exports, especially those of small—and medium-sized enterprises...” Show organizers are evaluated on a number of criteria:

1. Level of intellectual property rights protection
2. Export potential
3. Level of international interest
4. Scope of the show
5. Percentage of exhibitors/products from the U.S.
6. Stature of the show
7. Level of exhibitor interest in international buyers
8. Level of overseas marketing being done by organizer
9. Ability to accommodate non-English speaking attendees
10. Level of cooperation from the show organizer
11. Incentives provided for the delegates

No first-time shows are eligible.

How to apply

Organizers must submit an application with a narrative statement addressing each question. Applications for 2013 are scheduled to be accepted beginning in September 2011. The deadline is usually November

1 of the same year. There is no fee to apply, however, the shows that are selected are required to pay from \$8,000 to \$19,500 depending on the duration of the show and number of international business centers required and sign a Memorandum of Agreement spelling out the show organizer’s obligations. Information will be posted at <http://export.gov/ibp/> when the application period is open.

List of shows that qualify in 2012

Exhibitions that were selected in 2010 for the 2012 IBP include some of the most prestigious shows in the country:

- International Consumer Electronics Show
- World of Concrete
- International Builders Show
- International Home and Housewares Show
- NPE International Plastic Showcase
- National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel Motel Show (NRA Show)
- InfoComm International
- Health and Beauty Association (HBA) Global Expo
- International Woodworking Machinery & Furniture Supply Fair
- Graph Expo
- Pack Expo International
- Greenbuild Expo
- Power-GEN International

In the absence of direct government subsidies to U.S. companies for exhibiting overseas, IBP is the next best thing for developing relationships between American exporters and foreign buyers. It is an integral part in the National Export Initiative to double U.S. exports by 2015. The program has been hugely successful for participants and some have applied (and been selected) for more than ten consecutive years. The International Buyer Program is a low-cost, efficient way for domestic trade show organizers to increase the number of qualified international buyers for their shows.

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