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GLOBAL VIEW

Notes



Web Pages & Microsites for International Exhibitors

By Michelle Bruno

There are a number of ways to create a welcoming and useful online space specifically for international exhibitors. It is important to do so because overseas companies are typically at a disadvantage with time differences, work practices (labor union rules, exclusive contractors), terminology distinctions, and visa requirements. Dedicating a page or microsite to helping international companies navigate the murky landscape of U.S. shows demonstrates that the show organizer has taken into consideration the challenges that foreign exhibitors face. Here are some of the topics and features that a well-built Web page or microsite should have:

Introduction

In most cultures, a personal greeting precedes any further dialogue. The same should be true of a Website that addresses international companies. A brief introduction welcoming visitors and summarizing the content of the page or microsite is a great way to begin the online conversation.

Basic information

Although there is information that is only useful to foreign visitors (currency exchange, the location of local embassies), most of the basic show information for international exhibitors—dates, location, exhibitor manual, hotels, floor plan, weather, local area attrac-

tions, etc.—will be the same for all exhibitors. That said, isolating the information on a separate page with a translation tool in place offers non English-speaking participants easier access to the information.

Visa requirements

One of the biggest challenges for international exhibitor personnel is the visa requirement. Although at least 36 countries participate in the Visa Waiver Program, most countries where many new exhibitors come from—the emerging nations of China, India, Russia, and Brazil, for example—are not covered. A Web page that clearly outlines the requirements and offers links to helpful Web sites is critically important. Some of the more helpful resources for visas include:

- Department of State Website
- Visa application forms
- Visa Waiver Program requirements
- Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)
- Locations of embassies and consulates around the world
- Letter of invitation from the show organizer

Terminology

There are some differences between terms used outside the U.S. and those used to describe work

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practices and processes in the U.S. An online area dedicated to some of the differences in terms, such as drayage, marshalling yard, general contractor, CWT (per hundred pounds in weight) and booth can help international exhibitors understand the distinctions.

Union labor rules

It is often difficult for international companies to understand the regulations of labor unions at U.S. shows—there are multiple unions covering the same shows, the rules are very defined, the cost is sometimes higher, labor unions often have exclusivity over specific jobs. Although labor unions exist in Europe and elsewhere, the practices differ. Including tips or other guidance on the international exhibitor page will help new-to-market companies avoid any misunderstandings and work more efficiently within the system.

Shipping

Because international shipments are required to clear U.S. Customs and meet specific requirements (duty, taxes, temporary import, bonds), foreign exhibitors usually require more assistance with shipping than domestic exhibitors. A section dedicated to the rules, regulations, procedures, forms, and contact information for the official freight forwarder and customs broker for the show will enhance the exhibiting experience for overseas companies.

Special services

Some shows offer special assistance to international companies including foreign language interpreters, an international exhibitor lounge with dedicating meeting space, briefing breakfasts with local dignitaries and consular officers, and receptions. Placing the links and details of these offerings on a special page will highlight their existence to foreign visitors.

Social media

The value of a dedicated page for international exhibitors doesn't have to end with text and links. Overseas companies can also benefit from being part of the social media communities formed around the show. To

that degree, the international page should include the official show Twitter stream and possibly one dedicated to international exhibitors. Links to the LinkedIn and Facebook pages for the show should also be included and if the number of international exhibitors is large, organizers may even want to create a dedicated LinkedIn group or Facebook page just for them. Links to the official blog and posts that address the needs of international participants can also help keep those companies involved in the conversation.

Translation tools

Some organizers go to the trouble of translating some or all of the information on the Web pages for international companies, however, there translation tools available to perform some of that work. Using world.altavista.com, users enter the web site address or copy and paste text for translation. They can choose from Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian or Spanish. The Google Translate Tool http://translate.google.com/translate_tools allows exhibition organizers to embed programming code into a Website to enable the instant translation of Web pages.

Contact information

Having a dedicated staff member to address specific concerns or answer the questions posed by international exhibitors is a good way to establish rapport with overseas companies. An email address is critical, however, English speakers will call and even fax inquiries. In the age of social media, including the contact's Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook information could also be a nice touch.

Paying close attention to the questions, concerns, and behaviors (email vs. telephone, for example) of international participants provides clues about what to include on a comprehensive page or microsite dedicated to overseas participants. Having the information accessible and translatable will also reduce the workload for U.S. staff and send an important message to foreign customers: "You are welcome here."

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