



Preventing Loss and Damage to International Trade Show Shipments

By Michelle Bruno

Nothing is more frustrating and costly to an exhibitor than when his international shipment becomes lost or damaged en route to the show. Fortunately, there are measures he can take to prevent his shipment from falling through the cracks or arriving in poor condition.

Avoid listing pallets instead of pieces.

Exhibitors—especially first-time international shippers—often palletize and shrink-wrap their shipments. It seems like a good way to keep all of the boxes in a shipment together, but for overseas shipments, shrink-wrapping can cause problems: incorrect piece counts and missing boxes. It happens when the “piece count” is actually written as the number of pallets on the bill of lading (in other words, 7 pallets containing 365 pieces is written as 7 pieces) and the pallets are subsequently disassembled to fit in an ocean container or aircraft.

REMEDY: Complete the bill of lading in the following manner: “7 pallets S.T.C. (Said To Contain) 365 pieces.”

RESULTS: All of the carriers and companies in the supply chain will be required to account for 365 pieces instead of 7 and every piece arrives to the booth.

Label every single piece: It is not unusual for international pavilions to consolidate and ship several exhibitors together on a single ocean or airway bill. The shipment is then delivered to the booth or pavilion area on show site and the pavilion organizers distribute the individual cartons to the appropriate pavilion participants. Unless the general contractor has explicit rules against this practice, it’s a good way for exhibitors to save money, since higher total weights are rated at lower prices per hundred pounds and one large shipment can replace several

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minimum shipments charged at flat minimum rates. Problems occur, however, when cartons are missing labels.

REMEDY: Label all cartons in the shipment with a standard format and a common label that includes the exhibitor's name (not the shipper) and booth number (not the pavilion number or name) at the very least.

RESULTS: Every exhibitor receives his or her own shipment. The total shipping costs are lower and it's much easier to locate cartons that have become separated from the "mother" shipment.

Prepare a detailed packing list: Another common mishap, even when all pieces in the shipment are accounted for, is items missing from inside the box. While theft can occur in transit when freight isn't appropriately sealed, the usual reason is that the item was never shipped in the first place.

REMEDY: Use a three-part packing process:

- List absolutely everything in the shipment and include model and serial numbers in addition to quantities on the packing list.
- Use a quality control process to verify that every thing listed on the packing list at the point of origin was packed in the box.
- Never add or remove anything at the last minute without adjusting the packing list accordingly.

RESULTS: The booth representatives on site are confident that if something is missing from inside the shipment and it's not listed on the packing list, that it likely wasn't shipped and they can make alternative plans.



Pack for the round trip: Shipments are handled (loaded and unloaded) at least five times as they pass through the international supply chain and arrive on the booth. Even when shipments are intended for one-way transit, the added stress of weather, moisture, heat, dirt and customs inspections encountered along the way can take its toll on even the sturdiest of cartons.

REMEDY: Pack shipments to withstand lifting, shifting and the elements. Make sure items inside of boxes are secured with internal bracing and cushioning. Use wing nuts for easy opening and closing of crates. Build crates onto pallets when possible. If machinery cannot be crated, make sure it is wrapped with weatherproof materials to avoid rust. If possible, employ the services of a professional packing/crating company.

RESULTS: Machinery arrives in working order so that it can be sold (if pre-arranged). Crated equipment arrives in tact. Damage occurs to the shipping container and not to the contents.

In all cases, specialized cargo insurance that covers the loss, theft or damage of shipments from the international point of origin to the booth and back is recommended for exhibitors. Of course, there are circumstances beyond the carrier and exhibitor's control—ships sinking, forklift drivers dropping crates, floods, fires and simple error—that only insurance can remedy. Working with specialized packers, forwarders and transportation companies familiar with exhibition transportation can also make a world of difference. Taking an active role in tracking the shipment through the supply chain with the help of the exhibition forwarder/customs broker can help identify problems in advance so that a back up plan can be developed or implemented in time for the show.

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