

# Three Pillars of Exhibit Marketing Preparation

By Larry Kulchawik- Past President IFES & EDPA

I recently served on a panel discussion with two other expo suppliers from the exhibit industry to speak on the topic of international trade show marketing. My co-panelists were **Mr. Lloyd Guiang**/ Director of Marketing/Hannover Fairs USA, and **Mary Ptak**/Trade show freight division manager / Masterpiece International. I represented Larry Kulchawik Consulting/ Author of 'Trade Shows from One Country to the Next'. Each of the panelists represented a different component when preparing to organize a trade show for an event overseas. The session was sponsored by the **International Trade Association** of Greater

Chicago and the attendees were experienced global minded business leaders and exhibit managers from 18 companies in Chicago. The panel discussion was skillfully moderated by **Zachory Person** from the Illinois International Trade Center. Zach introduced the panel and proceeded to ask the panel and audience to fill in the blanks on a white board regarding the Three Pillars for International Exhibit Marketing.

"The session began with a single focus: *How to maximize the return on the international trade show investment.* This is what two hours, a goal, and some of the best trade show minds came up with, said Zachory Person.

## Three Pillars of Trade Show Planning

Pre Show Planning	At the Show	Post Show Followup
Select the Right/Best Show	Create a booth staff activity schedule	Leads gathering and follow up through Marketing Dept
Select the Right Size Space	Organize a pre show meeting -offsite	Disposition of booth and graphics after the event
Assign a Booth Captain	Organize a pre show walk thru-onsite	Grade leads in 3 categories Determine response method and follow up procedures
Rental or Purchase?	Define space purposes- (bar, conference area, reception, lead placement area)	Assign a \$ value to each lead
Determine Objectives for Event	Lead Collecting Methods- * Analog Method * Digital Method *	Determine a CMR system
Design to Achieve Objectives	Reherse methods of engagement at show site	Measure Results from event
Work with a Local Partner	Create a Booth Buzz	
Pre show Marketing	Hospitality and give aways	
Schedule in booth Meetings	Reception/Hostess Area	
Shipping to Site		
People Organizing (Hotels, staff, scheduling, dress)		



White Board

*Attached below are some of the feedback details from the discussion. Zach Person's notes from this 2 hour session by no means capture every point of concern when planning an international event, but this white paper sure provides a good start and some excellent suggestions to consider when planning an international trade show event.*

## **Panel Discussion Points to Support the 3 Pillars**

### **Pre-Show Planning**

**Is this the right show and the right place to fulfill our Objectives?**

The show organizer can help you assess this accurately.

**Create success parameters**

*(What/how can we Measure?)*

- Meet with X number of
  - Potential distributors
  - Channel partners
  - Strategic partners
  - Current distributor reps & management
  - Connectors to the above targets
- Increase sales to existing clients
- Generate X number of high quality leads
- Increase brand awareness
- Increase media exposure – generate X number of mentions on social media, articles, other media channels, etc.
- Write X numbers of orders

**Pick a Booth Leader**, give them authority and hold them responsible for the success parameters before, during and after the show.

## Exhibit Design & Space Considerations for International Participation

Choices..Be a part of the USA Pavilion? Or Exhibit Alone?

*Q: Should I be in the show via a USA Pavilion and set up our own stand in the general pavilion environment??*

*A:* It depends on where the USA Pavilion is and your experience with this event. If the USA Pavilion is a very long distance from where the general foot traffic is, it could be difficult to get potential business partners to meet you there. If you are experienced with this venue and marketplace, consider exhibiting independently for greater visibility.

*Ways to help make the decision:*

- If possible, get the exhibitor list from the previous year and call similar size companies who exhibited in the USA pavilion last year and just ask them if it was worth it.
- Look at the show floor plan and see where all the big names and action are relative to where the USA pavilion is located.
- If it is a company's first time at the show and they are still trying to assess relevance and potential, USA Pavilions tend to be a little more cost effective and have a few more built-in resources. They are a good way to start and to learn how the show works and its relevance to the market before taking the plunge into a stand-alone booth on the main show floor.

### Pre-Show Marketing

Your target business partners and customers will be doing their research before the show. Therefore you need to be where their eyeballs will go to do this research.

Every detail of your company profile should be uploaded to:

- Trade show company profile page
- Product category and details
- Match making platforms
- Directory
- Put the show and booth number on everything...emails, websites, press releases, etc.

### Tricks:

Leverage the show organizer.

Call, email, message or otherwise connect with the show organizer for advice on what channels are available, how to contact them, and what deadlines to pay attention to.

**Work with a local marketing company to:**

- Help regionalize your promotional content – including new product launches, industry relevant (and interesting) whitepapers and other content.
- Leverage this company's connections to the local industry channels and publications to get this localized content into the local ecosystem. This can then be referenced when speaking with target business partners from the area.

- The show organizers often have a list of local marketing companies they have worked with and could recommend.

## **Outreach Campaigns - Setting Meetings**

The goal should be to have about 50% of your time booked before the show – leaving the other 50% for setting up meetings during the show.

### **Creating a target company list:**

Existing customers/distributors

- Use databases such as the trade show exhibitor list, Kompass.com (accessed through your local ITC), D&B (many libraries have access), trade organizations – local and US domestic, personal networks, LinkedIn,
- Create outreach content: email copy, brochures, website/landing pages - prepare English and local language versions.
- Check local spam regulations: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email\\_spam\\_legislation\\_by\\_country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email_spam_legislation_by_country)
- Start your outreach campaign way ahead of time

### **Tricks:**

- Hire interns with the local (fluent) language ability and have them call/email the hottest target companies and set up a meeting. The Chicagoland area has a great many of the best academic institutions in the world. Choose one or two and learn about their internship process.
- Hire an independent contractor via platforms such as Upwork.com. Set up an account, create your work description, geolocate to Chicagoland and post the job. Depending on your comfort level, it may even be possible to find someone in the local region (and time-zone) to make the calls and set the meetings.
- Both these techniques will take longer than you might expect, so get the process started way ahead of time.

## **Resources**

US Commercial Service (USCS) ([www.export.gov](http://www.export.gov))

- Gold Key Matching Service ([http://www.export.gov/salesandmarketing/eg\\_main\\_018195.asp](http://www.export.gov/salesandmarketing/eg_main_018195.asp))

Prior to the show, the US Commercial Service can arrange business meetings with pre-screened contacts, representatives, distributors, professional associations, government contacts, and/or licensing or joint venture partners.

- USCS Trade Missions/sponsored trade shows ([http://www.export.gov/build/groups/public/@eg\\_main/@ibp/documents/webcontent/eg\\_main\\_088750.pdf](http://www.export.gov/build/groups/public/@eg_main/@ibp/documents/webcontent/eg_main_088750.pdf))  
The US Commercial Service attends many of the larger trade shows around the world. They often have booth blocks that US companies can purchase. They also offer translation services and other localized assistance for US companies at the show.

**Reach out to your state department of commerce**

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity attends a number of the major trade shows as well. Called Group Trade Missions, they will often have blocks of booths that they give away to qualified Illinois companies on a first come, first served basis.

<http://www.illinois.gov/dceo/SmallBizAssistance/Export/Pages/GroupTradeMissions.aspx>

### **Trade Show Organizers**

Connect with them...if you can do this far enough ahead of time, they are a wealth of insider information for the show.

### **Local Industry Associations**

They often have published member lists or other resources. These companies could potentially be target companies or strategic partners.

### **Tricks:**

Check the USCS Gold Key lead times.

- Depending on the time of year and work load, lead times can be a week or two to a number of months. So make sure to get this started early.
- Depending on your industry and product niche, results could vary. The USCS staff are very good at what they do however they may not have the background to dig into some of the more obscure product categories out there. In which case it may make more sense to use their in-country knowledge and connections to help you find local third parties/marketing people who have the right industry knowledge to help you find what you are looking for.

### **Finding Industry Publications and Associations:**

- Contact the target country Chamber of Commerce here in the US, they can often point you in the right direction.
- Google. Have your industry key words - along with the work for association - translated into the local language, go to the local Google url (Google.de for Germany, Google.fr for France, etc.) and start searching.
- Chrome Browser  
I like to use Google Chrome as Google Translate is built in which speeds up the process.
- Find marketing/PR resources at the show.  
Use your time at the show to ask around to find a qualified local marketing/PR partner.

### **Design and Organizing for an international Exhibit- Booth/Stand**

Work with an exhibit partner. Exhibit partners can be both US and International. They will know the regional rules and local customs required for your success. Don't go it alone!

Let them assist you to design, install, order show services, and coordinate delivery.

- **Graphics-** You have about 7 visual seconds per every person that walks by to communicate:
  - Your company name - Clearly
  - What your company does - Clearly
  - Why they should stop by?
- Less Is More - clear your message of all unnecessary and distracting clutter.
- A picture says a thousand words in every language - instantly.

English is the second, third or fourth language of most people walking by so imagery and demonstrations are critical to making your seven-seconds count. Check with your partner for language preferences on graphics.

- Flexibility is Key  
Booth dimensions around the world vary. They are not in tidy 10x10 increments like at US shows. Therefore, graphics/display walls/ceiling heights should be flexible in size and shape.
- Light weight booth = lowers cost in the US, but does not matter internationally.  
*Drayage - the movement of the booth from the carrier truck at the show front door to your actual booth space* - is very expensive in the USA. Much of this cost at US shows is driven by weight, not the same formula overseas.
- Store the Exhibit Properties in the Country  
If you go to the same trade show(s) in a particular country or region every year, or multiple times a year, consider storing the booth (or the custom elements like graphics, counters, etc) in that country or region for reuse. Many exhibit suppliers and freight forwarders have access to warehouse space all over the world and can many times offer very competitive storage and shipping rates. This can be especially viable if the booth is on the larger side. Quite often the difference between shipping and storage costs can be considerable. The money saved can then be used to just rent another exhibit and still be money ahead over time.
- In many countries around the world, it is widely accepted, and sometimes expected, that you have some kind of refreshment (coffee, tea, water...beer, wine) at the booth. Check with the show organizer and your local partner for advise on what to provide. Kitchens are common for larger stands.

### **Logistics**

Shipping your product and specialty components are usually all that need be shipped to the show from your home country. In some cases, an entire exhibit is shipped to site. Renting or purchasing a custom stand locally is the best solution.

## **ATA Carnet**

An international customs and temporary export-import document. It is used to clear customs in 85 countries and territories without paying duties and import taxes on merchandise that will be re-exported within 12 months (this time could vary by country). Carnets are also known as Merchandise Passports or Passports for Goods. Translation: an ATA carnet lets you ship your booth materials to the country for the trade show and then back home without paying import duties.

- Key detail: Everything that is shipped to the show has to be shipped back home. Otherwise you have to pay duties on what was left behind - adding complexity and headaches to the return trip.
- You pay a premium to set up an ATA Carnet - and some countries have relatively low import duties. Therefore look up the respective countries import duty rates and compare the estimated duty cost to the cost of the ATA Carnet. If the ATA Carnet is more expensive, just pay the duties and forgo the ATA Carnet.

## **Tradeshow Recommended Forwarder - *Pays to use them!***

Getting your booth and materials into the country and to the front door of the show is relatively easy. The trick is navigating the madness on the trade show floor as the event is being set up. The forwarders chosen by the show organizers were picked because they know everyone behind the scenes working the show - as well as all the potential union/worker/organizer complexities. Using the recommended, or an experienced trade show forwarder means the chances are much better that your booth will arrive on time, in one piece and with fewer hassles. This peace of mind is generally worth the extra cost - because you are there to generate new business, not chase around for booth materials missing.

## **Hotels, Lodging and More**

Lodging can be one of the most expensive budget line items. Quite often the best hotel locations are booked solid years in advance and can cost an arm and a leg. Here are some of the ways the pros mitigate this challenge:

- **AirBnB.com**  
Many local private residences are available for rent. From just a room to an entire house. There are a lot of local options that you will not find via platforms like hotels.com. Just make sure to do your research, read through the reviews and book far in advance.
- **Use a Local Travel Agent**  
Local (International) agents know the local lodging/dining/transportation landscape better than anyone. They can help you find the best hotel/AirBnB/rentals available as well as restaurants that offer the best deals.  
*How to find them:*  
- Start with the trade show organizer. They often know a number of good options like a country Chambers of Commerce. You are asking how to spend

money in their countries therefore the chances are good that they will be willing to help.

- Local trade organizations are also an excellent source of good info.

## At the Show Site

### Lead Collecting Systems

**Exhibitors** attend a show to generate leads that create new business. Help them to do this. International audiences may require a slightly different approach.

#### The Analog Strategy

Every Booth Staffer in the stand gets a:

- Notepad
- Small stapler
- Get a business card from every qualified lead you meet. Take notes during or after every conversation. Staple the business card to the notes for that lead. You will talk to hundreds of people during the show, and you forget most details of every conversation. This helps keep everything organized and the follow up personalized and relevant.
- Scan and save every business card and note from each day. Make sure the file is saved to the cloud or a computer that does not come with you to dinner. There are countless stories of sales reps taking their sales lead note pads to dinner/the bar after the show and losing everything.

#### The Digital Strategy

- Genius Scan is an app that uses the camera on your phone to scan documents and then save and/or email the scanned documents to a safe email address.
- Evernote - a note taking app for your phone/tablet. This is one of the most popular note taking apps in the industry.

##### *Features:*

- Take notes via text
- Using a stylus or e-pen, you can take hand written notes directly into the app
- While in the Evernote, you can take a picture of a business card and attach it to the note for that potential customer.
- Everything is instantly uploaded to the cloud.
- If you don't have your phone/tablet data turned on or mobile networks are weak or nonexistent, you can sync your Evernotes at the next Wi-Fi connection opportunity.

### **Arrive a Day Early**

Murphy's Law is alive and well in all corners of the earth. So you will want to plan a little extra time to tie up loose ends before everything begins.

### **Pre-show Meeting**

Every well-oiled machine needs a plan and someone responsible for the success of that plan.

- Appoint a **Booth Leader** who has authority and is responsible for performance at the show. If no one is in charge, it is easier for people to shirk their responsibility for making the show a success.

### *Discussion points:*

- Booth Coverage & Meeting Schedule.

Everyone should have a number of meetings scheduled walking into the show. Therefore everyone should coordinate meeting schedules to make sure there is someone at the booth at all times. Ideally, this should be coordinated as meetings are booked before the show.

- Game Plan & Team Work

Everyone should be crystal clear on what the general goals are for the show and what each team member's goals are for the show. Everyone will be talking to hundreds of people about all kinds of topics - including topics of interest to your colleagues. For example, if you are the European sales manager and happen to find yourself talking with someone from the Asian markets, you should know that the Asian market sales manager is looking for distributors and make sure to get their business card and/or introduce them to your colleague.

- Rescue Plan

There will be people who will talk your ear off and waste your time. Create a discrete, non-verbal signal to alert your other team mates to rescue you from a conversation that is going nowhere. Or just have a pre-planned way to politely - and quickly - end the conversation.

### **Generating Booth Buzz**

A busy booth with people talking and laughing is a booth potential customers want to visit.

If things are slow or the foot traffic is passing you by, try this:

Step 1) Learn some good stories and/or jokes.

Step 2) Make friends with your neighbors and/or other vendors at the show.

Step 3) Invite your friends and neighbors to your booth, tell your jokes and enjoy the laughter.

Step 4) *...and this is critical...*make sure that everyone understands that when a potential customer comes to the booth, you shift your attention to the customer.  
Step 5) Return the favor.

### Resources

- Familiarize yourself with all the services offered by the show organizer.  
Services like:
  - Translators - and the process to book their time.
  - Who do you contact if there are issues with your booth space, you need more chairs, an extension cord, coffee, etc. Your local partner can help here.

US Department of Commerce (USDC) or Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) are resources that are both of these resources attend many of the larger trade shows around the world. If they are there, they have been to the show many times and know all the show organizer key contacts and how to get a hold of them.

## Post Show Follow-Up

### Step #1: Do It!

#### Follow Up Package-

Break leads out into three categories:

- 1) Ready to buy
- 2) Just looking
- 3) Existing customers

Each of these people are at a different stage in the purchasing journey - therefore each one needs a different message. The goal is to create boiler plate body copy based on the needs of each category and then allow for a personalized greeting and sign off. This way its possible to process through more lead follow up faster, while still keeping content relevance and quality high.

#### Turn lead generation into a game-

Assign a hypothetical dollar amount to each lead category. After the show, all the reps can add up their leads, multiply by the lead category value and the rep who gets the high score can win a prize.

#### Create a follow up deadline-

When you get back from the show, it's all too easy to let the emails and tasks that piled up while away take over and distract you from the follow up process. A firm deadline will help make it a priority so it gets done.

## **It takes 8 Touch-points to make a sale -**

Your follow up email/call/snail mail is only the second touch point along this process. You will want to plan out six more unique and relevant touch-points in the future. A CRM can help with this.

## **Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software-**

One of the most well know CRM's right now is Salesforce.com and Basecamp. There are a number of other good CRM system(s) out there at varying price points. They all do a relatively good job at keeping track of customer communication. Some have features like email blast functionality and address book integration which can help with the email side of the follow up process.

The key point in the follow up context is that CRM's allow you to set up alerts for sending out your eight touch point based follow up procedure.

## **Spam Laws**

Before you send out an email blast, make sure to research the spam laws in the respective countries. The EU, for example, has strict opt-in laws that prohibit mass emails without each email opting in.

## **Was The Show Worth It?**

### **Measure Results!**

There are a number of different ways to look at this, each can be be useful and valid :

**ROI** - Return On Investment.

Did we sell enough product to get a return on our investment?

**ROO** - Return On Objective.

For example, Did we find new distributors, PR Partner, train sales reps, etc...whatever the objective was going into the show.

**ROR** - Return On Relationship

Were you able to deepen or begin new relationships with existing or new strategic partners?

**ROOC** - Return on Opportunity Cost

Sometimes you have to show up in order to make sure people know you are still around. If you decide not to go to a show that was regularly attended in the past,

customers might begin to question if you are still in business - damaging brand perception.

### **ROE- Return on Emotion**

Measure the value of a guests emotional **experience** for the time spent in your space  
The comments from this small group of experienced exhibit managers reflect their personal experiences over the past years. Their opinions reflect a common knowledge and a basic understanding to define trade show success. Each new international trade show experience has its own unique story to tell about a world region. Many trade show strategies and road maps have similar paths to success, regardless where an event is held. The unique differences when exhibiting abroad can never be completely captured in a single book, article, or focus group but many of the concepts shared here by veteran exhibit managers offer first hand insights to help keep us on a narrow path. Please share your personal experiences abroad with comments to add to the Three Pillar concept.