

MEMO:

TO: BMA

RE: **Tips for International Trade Shows**

Date: September 11, 2015

10 Tips for International Trade Show Marketing

Offering 10 Tips for International Trade Shows is like offering 10 Tips for a Happy Life, but I will do my best to narrow it down in a general point of view.

Trade show and event marketing are always one of the most expensive components on any companies marketing budget. The cost for trade shows events may be greater but surly must be viewed as an investment to reap rewards, and measure, the full benefits of face to face marketing. Over the years, many US exhibiting companies have developed a keen understanding for what is required to achieve results through trade show marketing in North America. Participation is no longer a crap shoot for success. Each trade show experience for US exhibitors brings new knowledge and serves to formulate their strategies for success and measurable expectations at trade shows.

The biggest mistake that US companies make when taking their US trade show experiences abroad is assuming that their formula for success in the US will work the same internationally.

Exhibiting abroad requires a recalculation of thinking and exhibit strategy.

Here are 10 Tips for American exhibitors when taking their brand and message abroad.

1. Marketing tactics and exhibit designs that work well in one country do not necessarily work in another. Investigate what is different.

2. Don't go it alone! Work with an experienced partner from the region, or one who is extremely familiar with the venue and event. Ask your exhibit partner prepare a design drawing that meets the rules and regulations for the event and provides the components that the visiting exhibitors are accustomed to when exhibiting in their region.

Note that most exhibit floor spaces abroad are not necessarily available in tidy 10'x 10' increments. Most will be odd meter sizes. Not a big deal, but needs to be considered. A trusted partner also will be most helpful with freight and labor requirements at the set up and for assisting to order show site services with pre payment/taxes required.

3. *Some major exhibit design considerations-* Raised floor or carpet? The raised floor is to necessarily used as a way to hide electric cords and create a level floor. Its function is often viewed by the exhibitor as a stage to invite guests to your kingdom. Hanging ID sign-permitted? Lighting above or within? Bar area and kitchen? Catering or not? Private seating areas or open? Live presentation or one on one discussions?

4. As an exhibitor from another country, be certain about how your product or service fit the needs within a different country. What unique value proposition does your product/service offer for this region of business? This is probably more important than a stylish exhibit with engaging exhibitor staff.

5. As an exhibitor from another country, be sensitive and aware of cultural differences when attending or working a trade show. For small talk intros, learn about local topics to discuss (sports, art, attractions, history), as well as topics to avoid (religion and politics). Your product, services, and exhibit design may be great, but how you engage with an international audience can make or break your chances to meet your goals. Take the time to learn what is different about communication and protocol in the countries you plan to exhibit. *An easy read book-The Culture Map -by Erin Meyer would be a good communication primer to start with.*

6. You are not going to become an experienced native overnight, so it might be a good idea to hire a reception person from the country you are exhibiting. Many European and Asian trade shows will have attending visitors from neighboring countries, so a reception person who speaks several languages would be most effective. They are also skilled at the art of engaging with your visitors to make a good first impression. A pre show briefing of your companies value offering is usually all that will be required of a temp since you are nearby to provide knowledge about the details.

7. Depending on the country, take the time to print your business cards in two languages. Although most who attend the shows speak English, this demonstrates your sensitivity and your seriousness about marketing in their country.

8. Depending on the country, translate graphic messages in two languages. Seek the advice of your supplier partner whether to do so or not. Translations should be proofread by a bi-lingual expert who is familiar with your industry. Some English words don't always translate to what you really mean.

9. Not all international shows require a badge for entry. Not all visitors are necessarily potential buyers, since they simply can purchase a general ticket for entry. This kind of visitor is common at auto and boat shows open to the public. No badges can make it a little more difficult to qualify your visitors when gathering leads. A quick evaluation will be necessary. If show badges are not provided for visitors and exhibitors, it would be a good idea to make your own ID badges for your booth staffers. At least they know who you are.

10. Be aware how to dress for the show. The casual golf shirts with logos worn by exhibitors at many shows in the US might not be viewed the same for a show in Europe or Asia where a more formal attire is worn. Ask the show organizer, or your exhibit partner, for advice here. Your first impression can be a lasting impression.

In point #5 I mentioned Erin Meyer, author of *The Culture Map*. Here are a few of her thoughts on communication between cultures. “When preparing to engage with a different culture, arrange to meet with your team members from that country. It is important that you understand each other and explore the differences in value systems and work methods. Just as fish don’t know they’re in water, people often find it difficult to see and recognize their own culture until they start comparing it with others. Be sure to conduct this discussion with humility and without judgement. The more you can joke about your own culture, and speak positively about the ways other cultures operate, the easier it will be for everyone to share their thoughts and opinions without becoming defensive.”