Exhibitions

Arranging and managing these services for a large show can be quite complex for the exhibition management company and exhibitors. Convention centers, management companies, and even exhibitors have become accustomed to working with various arrangements and companies. Because the service contractors operate in a very competitive environment, they have learned that customer service, fair pricing, and responsiveness to customer needs are important. This enables organizers and exhibitors a level of comfort in relying on service contractors to take care of the problems that arise with organizing a successful trade show.

The general service contractor, in conjunction with the exhibition management company, usually develops an exhibitor service manual that encompasses all details that an exhibitor needs to plan and implement an exhibit program for the show. It also includes the forms needed to order services from the service contractors and the rules and regulations of the exhibition management company, convention center or hotel, and the local government.

Despite the controls and organization put in place by the exhibition management company and service contractors, disputes arise. When this occurs, it is important to get all concerned parties involved in achieving a successful resolution. The show manager is responsible for compliance of exhibitors, attendees, and service contractors to the show rules.

CONSIDERATIONS IN PLANNING THE SHOW

Location

Exhibition planners consider a number of variables when deciding on the location of the trade show or public exhibition. It is no secret that the city and venue selected to host the show has a major effect on attendance. Thus, a balance must be attained between location, cost, and the ideal attendance level. Many organizations that conduct annual meetings and trade shows stay in the same city year after year, and thus they can negotiate the best agreements with the local convention center and hotels and still retain the optimum attendance levels. Typically, these are association meetings that have strong educational programs and are held at a desirable site.

However, other organizations or exhibition management companies prefer to move their trade shows from city to city each year. This strategy may help attract additional visitors. Not only is a different local attendance base able to attend inexpensively, but out-of-town visitors may be attracted by local tourist offerings as well.

Organizations and exhibition management companies often survey their membership or potential attendees to assess their preferences on location. The success of convention centers in cities like Las Vegas, Orlando, and San Francisco is indicative of organizations paying attention to the needs and desires of their members and potential audience. Expansion of the convention facilities in each of these cities indicates that these destinations value the revenue generated by large trade and public shows.

Hotel facilities are also a factor to be considered when determining the location of the trade show or exhibition. Are the local facilities adequate for the projected attendance? Are the negotiated room rates within the budget of the typical attendee or exhibitor? What is the proximity to the trade show site, and will local transportation need to be provided? What is the potential for labor problems to arise in the host city or at host hotels? Do the convention center and local hotels comply with ADA requirements?

In addition, the largest trade shows often require dedicated local ground transportation to assist visitors and exhibitors in getting from their hotels to the trade show site. When determining whether dedicated ground transportation is required, consider that safety is often the key decision point. Even if hotels are within walking distance from the convention center, the conditions of the city between the hotels and the center may dictate that it is in your best interests to provide transportation. For example, in New Orleans there are many hotels within walking distance of the convention center, but in the summer when temperature and humidity are both in the 90s, the meeting organizer is better off to provide transportation. When choosing ground transportation providers, be sure to take into account experience, availability, special services, insurance, condition of vehicles, labor contracts, and cost.

Housing and transportation are essential elements to success for any trade show that attracts a national or international audience. A large part of any organizer’s time is spent negotiating room
blocks in the host city and airline and car rental discounts for attendees and exhibitors. Recently, the trend has moved toward outsourcing housing and transportation arrangements to local convention and visitor bureaus or third-party housing vendors. Regardless of how housing and transportation issues are handled, the expectation is that they will be "transparent" to the attendee or exhibitor.

Another selection factor is weather. Unlike business-to-business trade shows with many people coming from outside the city, public shows rely on the local and regional population for attendance. Locals and regional tourists will not venture out to a public show in the midst of a serious snowstorm or rainstorm. Thus, one episode of bad weather can drastically affect the bottom line of a show producer. The National Western Stock Show, held in Denver each January, is a good example of this. Years with extreme cold and snow greatly reduced the event's attendance. During years of unseasonably mild weather, attendance skyrocketed. The solution for the National Western Stock Show has been to extend the show to a sixteen-day period, ensuring that there will be "good days" and "bad days." This has led to a more consistent overall attendance figure from year to year.

Shipping and Storage

Once the location is chosen, the booths and other trade show materials need to be transported to the site. While air freight may sometimes be used, over-the-road freight by truck is the most common method. Charges are typically per hundred pounds and are based on the distance the freight must travel.

Since an exhibitor cannot afford for the freight shipment to arrive late for a trade show, extra time is allowed for transit. Thus, the exhibitor must arrange for temporary storage of the materials at the destination, but prior to the move-in date for the trade show or exhibition. One must also consider storage of the freight containers while the show or exhibition is open. When the show closes, the whole process is reversed. Some Exposition Services Contractors such as GES of Freeman have separate divisions of their company that deal with shipping and storage.

Marketing and Promotion

Without exhibitors, the exhibition will not be successful, and in turn without attendees, exhibitors will not participate or return. Show planners focus their attention to marketing and promotion programs that will fill the exhibition hall with both exhibitors and attendees. Regardless of the type of show, attendance is the key to success. It is primarily the responsibility of the exhibition management company to target and market to the right audience. This is typically done through direct mail, advertising in trade publications, and e-marketing.
Exhibitions

Exhibition management companies and service companies also offer additional marketing opportunities for exhibitors to consider. Exhibitors want to invest in a show because their potential customers are in attendance. Based on their objectives for the show, exhibitors can choose to invest in a number of programs:

- **General Sponsorships:** These programs usually involve the company’s name or logo being included on printed the show’s promotional materials or being posted in a prominent place in the exhibit hall.

- **Special Event Sponsorship:** Special events are often conducted during the trade show schedule, such as receptions, press conferences, or entertainment. Companies who sponsor these events have their name or logo mentioned prominently in promotional materials and throughout the event.

- **Advertising in the Show Daily:** Large trade shows usually have a daily newspaper available to all exhibitors and attendees each morning. It reviews the previous day’s events and previews what is coming up. Exhibitors have the opportunity to advertise in the show daily.

- **Advertising in the Show Directory:** Almost all trade shows provide attendees with a show directory containing information about the show and exhibitors. Advertising opportunities also exist for this show directory.

- **Promotional Items Sponsorship:** Management companies may offer sponsorship opportunities to companies for badge holders, tote bags, and other promotional items given to registered attendees.

Management companies (for business-to-business trade shows) must provide a convention program that has additional information beyond the exhibit hall to help attract visitors. Often, educational programs are provided as an incentive, or prominent industry leaders are hired to give keynote addresses that attract visitors. Contests, gifts, discount programs, and other tools to attract visitors have been commonplace. Exhibitors are also involved in helping boost attendance at trade shows. Usually, they are given a number of free passes to the show that can be passed on to their best customers. Exhibitors are also encouraged to sponsor or conduct special events and to promote them to their customer base.

**Technology**

Advances in technology have made trade show and exhibition management, as well as exhibition itself, easier and more productive.

- The Internet has had a great impact on how exhibitions are marketed to potential visitors. Most shows have sites that allow attendees to register online (private shows) and purchase tickets in advance (public shows). Attendees can view exhibitor lists, review educational
programs, and even make their travel arrangements online. They can also view interactive floor plans and select educational programs and/or special events to efficiently plan their time.

- Lead retrieval systems are a great benefit to exhibitors. Systems are in place that enable the exhibit staff to “swipe” an attendee’s card or bar-coded badge and capture all of that individual’s contact information, saving many hours of entering business card data.
- The use of radio frequency identification (RFID) is now being used by convention and exhibition managers to track attendees’ movement and behavior. This advanced technology is beneficial for data acquisition, lead retrieval, and reporting, but raise many issues regarding privacy and use of personal information.
- Technology is also used in promoting a company’s products. Many companies now give visitors inexpensive CD-ROMs or flash drives instead of bulky brochures. The electronic format can contain much more information and more elaborate presentations that the potential customer can view at his or her leisure.

**Risk and Crisis Management**

Organizing and exhibiting at a show can be a risky business. If things are not done correctly, the show can quickly become a colossal failure. Both show organizers and exhibitors need to have a risk management program. A risk management plan does the following:

- Identifies all potential risks for the show management and the exhibitors.
- Quantifies each risk to determine the effect it would have if it occurs.
- Provides an assessment of each risk to determine which risks to ignore, which to avoid, and which to mitigate.
- Provides risk avoidance steps to prevent the risk from occurring.
- Provides risk mitigation steps to minimize potential costs if the risk occurs.

Always keep in mind that an exhibition is a business venture that should be given every chance to succeed. Knowing how to apply risk management principles will help ensure success.

Crisis management has also become critical to trade show organizers. A crisis is different from a risk in that it poses a critical situation that may cause danger to visitors or exhibitors. Examples of recent crises include the 9/11 attacks in New York City, riots during World Trade Organization meetings, and the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Trade shows that were underway on 9/11 were either canceled or curtailed midway through the schedule. Organizing companies suffered deep losses for these events.

Every show organizer should have a crisis management plan that addresses the prevention, control, and reporting of emergency situations. The plan should address the more likely types of emergencies, such as fire, food-borne illness, demonstrations, bomb threats, terrorism, and natural disasters. It should contain all procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency situation.

Consider having a crisis management team who is well versed in assessing the potential for a crisis, taking actions to prevent emergencies, and taking control should a situation occur. The crisis management team should be represented in the site selection process.

**EXHIBITORS’ PERSPECTIVE**

If exhibitors were not successful from a business perspective, exhibitions would not exist. Exhibiting at trade shows or consumer shows is often a key part of a company’s integrated marketing strategy. Companies invest a significant portion of their marketing budget into trade show appearances and must see a positive return on their investment. This section of the chapter looks at the issues that face the exhibiting companies.

**Why Exhibit?**

An exhibition booth is constructed to exhibit products/services and to convey a message. It is important for a company to understand and analyze the benefits of exhibiting at a show prior to beginning the planning. Exhibiting at a trade or public show is the only marketing medium that allows the potential buyer to experience a product or service; and therefore, more money is spent on participating in shows than on traditional advertising or individual sales travel.
Additional reasons that companies participate in a trade show or exhibition include the following:

- Branding of their name in the industry
- Annual presentation of products to industry analysts
- New product rollout
- Opportunities to meet with potential and existing customers
- Opportunities to learn about customer needs
- Opportunities to meet with trade media
- Opportunities to learn about changes in industry trends and competitor products

Exhibit Design Principles

Although exhibit design may be limited by the rules established by the exhibit management company, the constraints of the facility, or the business culture of the host country, there are some general principles that can be discussed. These principles include selecting the right layout of the exhibit to meet your purposes, selecting the right size for your company’s budget and purposes, and proper use of signage, lighting, and personnel. Exhibits and the space they occupy are a significant corporate investment, and attention must be given to each of these factors.

Exhibit size is a major consideration, if only because of cost. The more space an exhibit occupies, the more it costs in space rental, materials, labor for setup, additional staff, and maintenance. Therefore, be sure to balance the costs with the benefits of having a larger exhibit. A larger exhibit typically means being noticed by visitors, and it creates a better impression if done well. It

Top Reasons Exhibitors Fail

1. Don’t understand that every show is different
2. No SMART objectives were set for the show
3. Failure to differentiate your company from your competitors
4. No formal marketing or promotional plan created or shared
5. Logical planning is poor
6. Do not give attendees any reason to visit your booth space
7. Staff is not trained to sell your product or service
8. Exhibiting for all the wrong reasons—did not ensure the “right” buyers would be there
9. Don’t know how to measure return on investment
10. Don’t do any post show follow-up with leads generated at the show