

Basics for Exhibiting at Trade and Consumer Shows

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Businesses that exhibit at trade shows and consumer shows basically do so for 3 (three) reasons: Promoting their company or brand name; Introducing new products or services; and, Selling their products and services.

Participating in shows can be very rewarding. In the *trade show* environment, many companies book up to 50% or 60% of their sales through their exhibits. Whereas, in *consumer shows* companies can get great benefits with successful introductions and promotions - And, there are even some businesses that book almost all of their sales at shows.

This article is primarily written for those businesses that may be considering for the first time whether to participate in a trade or consumer show. Though, it may also be helpful to some people that work for companies already active in shows - Perhaps it can be of help to the employees of those companies that have a new responsibility of preparing and working at the shows.

Whatever your interests may be, I hope that you will find this information helpful. And, if anyone has any suggestions, comments or information that would enhance this article - Please do contact me, as it would be welcomed and appreciated

For sake of convenience to all readers, I've broken the information up into the specific activities (or steps) that would be taken in the consideration, planning and participation in a show. Thus, whatever your situation is, you will be able to either read this article in the order of the activities, or select that activity for which you may desire to get some information.

Please note that there are 23 pages to this article.

You can scroll down to the next page, which is the index page. On it, you will find the list of steps and their page numbers. Thus, scroll down to the page number your desire - Or. You can scroll down the entire article.

The activities are broken up into 10 sections.

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1.0 Deciding whether to exhibit at a show

The basic question - *Is there a benefit to doing it?*

The cost factor is significant. Depending on your business' products or services, a show can bring you many new customers or a few new key customers. And, if you are familiar with your industry, you may already have a good idea of the opportunities of the shows in your industry.

If not, then you should do some research about them - In your industry journals, trade association web sites and by speaking to others in your industry. Very importantly, find out if your current customers attend shows - If they do, find out which shows they attend and why.

Even for businesses that are already participating in one or more shows, perhaps there are other shows that can offer other opportunities. It is something that should be continuously looked at, as the business environment is always changing - And, new shows can offer new opportunities.

The basic deciding factor is if you will see a positive return on your investment in the show - Hopefully, a very big return. There are many factors involved in exhibiting at a show. And, you must keep in mind that very often, participating in shows is a long term commitment and investment. *This is especially true for trade shows.*

You must remember that the buyers attending *trade shows* have been doing business with their current suppliers for many years. And, the trade show is really an opportunity for the buyers to conveniently visit many of their suppliers - To see what's new in their lines and do their seasonal or cyclical buying.

They will of course be looking for new products, and perhaps expanding their supplier base. So, there is opportunity for new exhibitors at shows. But, often a company may have to participate in a show several times to build up a client base at that show. *Factor this possibility into your decision.*

If you have a new and unique product or service, it may attract attention (especially if you are doing an advertising campaign). And, this may attract some attention at the show - But, consider the fact that many of the larger companies (buyers) may wait to see how successful your product/service is before making an investment in it.

In the case of doing *consumer shows*, you will be dealing with individuals (not large commercial buyers). So, your considerations must be focused on who will be attending the show, and how marketable your products are to that particular group. Also, the theme of the show, the attendance, geographic location, and other demographics that will affect your success at the show.

I don't have a formula to give you that will determine whether a show would be profitable, or even beneficial to you. What I can give you here is an idea of the costs that you will be incurring, and the work involved to exhibit at a show. Your expertise in your product or service market will have to be relied upon to make the decision.

1.1 Costs that you should factor into doing a show:

Exhibit space - The costs of exhibit space depends on the popularity of the show itself. Some shows are booked well in advance, and may not even have readily available spaces. At these shows spaces can be very expensive.

Other factors for the space costs are the geographic location of the show and whether it is a union venue. So, for instance, exhibit space for a show in New York may cost you twice as much than that in a place like Charlotte NC (maybe even more, depending on the show and location).

You would contact the show producer/manager, or visit their web site, to find out the costs of the spaces. Many have online floor plans, which can be very useful in helping you decide on an appropriate sized and located space. And, with this, you can then discuss the space costs with them.

Exhibit construction - This depends on what you are displaying and the space size. A simple 10' x 10' (9 m²) exhibit space may come with the basic pipe and curtained walls, a table and 2 chairs. This may be sufficient for you.

But, if you are taking a larger space, or decorating your own space - You must decide if you are going to simply move in and set-up yourself (using your products as display materials), or if you want the space enhanced with a nicely designed entranceway and walls. Here you must negotiate with the *Official Service Contractor* (decorating company) associated with the show. They can quote you a price. Or, you may use your own decorating company (*Exhibitor Appointed Contractor or EAC*), based on the approvals and regulations of the show.

You must have a clear understanding of what you can do, and how you can do it, from the show producer's exhibitors manual. And, again, the costs will vary greatly, depending on the location of the show and if it requires their laborers or union laborers.

Electric and Carpeting: There are specific charges for these items that should be understood from the exhibitor's information package. You must decide what your needs will be - And, this will come from your floor plan. Again, the prices vary according to location and labor/union regulations.

Is carpeting important to you? It may be, if you are standing in your space for 8 hours a day. Also, it can add a nice touch to your space.

The same with lighting - How bright is the overhead lighting? Is it sufficient to light up your space? Or, if your neighboring exhibitors have lighting, will it make your space seem dim? Perhaps you want to highlight your space with an extra flood light, or highlight part of your display or products with a spot light. Speak to the Official Service Contractor of the show - They are experienced, and genuinely helpful in these matters.

Will you need electrical outlets? There may be some outlets in the floor of the exhibit space. But, you must find out the terms of using those outlets. Or, if you would need a good number of outlets, you would have to find out about the availability, installation and costs.

Video Equipment - Find out what the regulations are about the usage and set-up of this equipment. Again, you may be subject to the venue's labor regulations.

Catering - In many venues, you will have to use their catering facilities if you are going to have food or drink available to your exhibit attendees, or if you are going to host a special event at the show or in your exhibit space. Find out the full costs and any additional charges, such as gratuities.

Drayage: This is the cost that may be charged for the conveyance of your exhibit materials/samples onto the show floor, and into your exhibit space. And, the costs are based on the regulations of the venue.

If their labor/union regulations restrict what can be done by the exhibitors, you may have to pay the Official Service Contractor a fee for handling this for you. Though, it may already be included in the price of the exhibit space. So, again, get a clear understanding of this.

Clearly understand the regulations regarding the shipping of your materials to the show. This is important for smaller exhibitors - For instance, you may be charged higher fees if the materials are not palletized.

Brochures and Catalogs - You may already have these on hand. But, if you have to print some for a show, you must determine how many you may need. Printing catalogs, and even nice brochures, is costly - You should be realistic about how many you will actually hand out at the show.

Preparation of products/samples - You may simply be using what you have in stock or making new pieces. If you are doing a consumer show, you would simply be selling your stock items at the show.

But, if it is a trade show, you must keep in mind that your show samples represent your qualifications as a supplier. So, careful attention should be focused on the production, shipping and handling of your samples.

Shipping of samples and materials to the show - These are your display items - They must be handled safely, and get to the show in time. *Also, factor in the costs of shipping and handling to their destination after the show (if they are not sold there).*

Advertising - You may be offered a package by the show producer that includes advertising/listing in the show brochure. You may also want to have an advertisement/announcement in any of the trade journals, newspapers or other media.

Mailing lists - They may help...But, it is your decision. You can typically buy them from associations or trade journals. If you decide to send out announcements/invitations, factor in their costs, as well as the printing and postage.

Insurance - Get a good idea of the liability of the show producer. You may want to get insurance for the display materials, or your own company liability insurance may already cover this. Find out from your insurance agent.

Hotel - My suggestion is to look for a hotel near the show. Book it as early as possible. Typically, hotel rooms become very scarce and expensive during any major show (especially in large cities, where there may be a multiple of other things happening during the time of the show).

Travel - Again, book your trip as early as possible. Find out all costs of getting to your hotel from the airport, if it is worthwhile to rent a car (depending on show location) and transport to and from the show if needed.

Parking - If you're are renting a car, or bringing your own car, find out about parking at the show venue and the hotel. In some cities this can be expensive.

Meals - This depends on your habits. But, factor in the possibility that you may be entertaining at the show. Or, if you are providing meals to those working with you at the show.

Find out where you will be eating. Do a little research about the restaurants nearest the show venue and your hotel. Food at the venue concessions may be expensive, and it is the same at many hotels.

Licenses and Taxes - This is a factor if you are doing a consumer show. If you are selling products at the show, you may be required to have a Certificate of Authority (or sales tax registration). Consult with the show producer about this.

2.0 Searching for shows

Firstly, you have to identify a show that will have a good number of people interested in your product or service. For some industries this may be very obvious, as there are the well known and well attended shows in the industry. But, you have to look at your own product and services, and look at all the possible options.

There can be some shows in related industries, or even shows that have a wider range of industries, that can offer you some good opportunities. There can also be some very small and focused shows, or even government sponsored trade missions, that could be very effective for you. This is something that really has to be researched by you, and the costs and potential benefits weighed.

There are some good sources for identifying shows. If you are reading your industry journals, you will be reading about the shows all the time. And, of course, you will be hearing about them from your suppliers and clients. So, it is important to listen to their comments and observations about the show(s).

There are also web sites that have extensive lists of shows. For instance, you can find information at:

<http://www.tsnn.com/>

<http://www.biztradeshows.com/>

<http://www.publicshows.com/index.cfm>

<http://www.eventseye.com/>

If possible visit a show before you participate. And study it carefully. Spend at least a whole day there, observing what goes on, and the traffic. If possible attend all the days of the show - It will give you a feel of what it is like to be exhibiting there. Also, read the industry journals that may be available during the show - You will often find comments and observations of the exhibitors and attendees.

Consumer shows and trade shows are significantly different. In a consumer show, the attendees may mostly be making one time purchases of products and services. Whereas, in trade shows the attendees (buyers) most likely will be attending the same show(s) year after year. So, you have to keep this in mind when deciding on what would be the most effective show for you.

You'll have only one chance with someone attending a consumer show. Whereas, a trade show can require a long term commitment to exhibiting at the show - But, you can have an opportunity to build up a good client base.

With all of this in mind, in choosing a show, the questions that you will be looking to answer are: *How well will your product or service sell at the show? How many people attending the show would be interested in your specific product or service?*

3.0 Choosing a show

Relying on others in your industry that have had success or failures at various shows is important information - But, fully understand how their business reflects your own business. Do they offer something that is different than you? It is important to analyze specifically how your product and service fits into the needs of the typical attendees at any show.

Consumer Shows - In the case of a consumer show, the attending public will normally be going because they are interested in getting a product or service. That is why a show focusing on a particular theme can be a better show. The people attending will be interested in those products and services. For instance - A health show, retirement show, electronics show, home and garden show, auto show or others... These shows may be small, but the attendees will be good potential buyers.

Though, more general consumer shows, that may have a broader range of products and services, could also offer opportunity. They can attract a greater number of attendees. Some of the attendees may be going to the show with open minds (not looking for anything in particular) - But, the fact that they are attending may mean they are interested in finding some new products or services. So, an attractive exhibit and product can get their attention.

Trade Shows - In the case of a trade show, many buyers are going because they are interested in expanding their business or lines. You have to decide what would be your best venue for showing and successfully selling your products and services.

If you wish to sell locally, there may be some shows nearby that would be sufficient for your needs. They may be smaller, but they could also be less expensive for exhibitors. You would best identify these by talking to local buyers or reading the industry journals. If possible, check on your competitors or complementary businesses, and find out where they exhibit.

If you wish to sell nationally, or even internationally - Then you have to identify the most successful shows. Again, do your research in the same ways - Journals, buyers and where others in the industry exhibit.

It is important to find out who attends these shows, and from what geographic area. Many of their website will be in multiple languages, and would have demographic information.

For these international shows, you could also look at what government agencies offer. Local, state and federal agencies are very active in promoting exports. And, often they subsidize your participation. There are also programs in which they will take and display your products for you (So you do not even have to travel).

4.0 Choosing and negotiating space at a show

At this point, I suggest that you do 3 (three) things:

- 1) Prepare a rough floor plan for your exhibit,*
- 2) Write up a spread sheet to analyze the variable costs that you may incur (based on the items in Section 1.1 Costs that you should factor into doing a show), and*
- 3) Start a flow chart of all the steps and items that you will need to put your exhibit and presentations together*

Choosing the space:

You must first decide how much space you need for the show. A good start would be to do a rough floor-plan of how you would exhibit at the show - *What will you present, and how will you present it?* You should have a good basic idea of your exhibit concept. - Even if it is a basic 10' x 10' exhibit.

If you are doing a show for the first time, a smaller space may be a good way to establish some initial activity (or presence) at the show. *Base your decision on what you want to display at the show, how you want to present yourself, and what you can afford.*

From your rough floor-plan (and factoring in the space costs) you should determine your space needs. And, there are some obvious needs for you to consider in your plan.

Firstly, you must remember that you want to attract people into your exhibit - They will be walking-by, and your exhibit will be among many that will be trying to get their attention. Your floor-plan should allow the show attendees to look at your exhibit and know what it's all about. They should be able to see your products in a relatively uncluttered setting. And, if there are certain items that could be strong attractions, they should be the most prominently displayed.

This is true even for a *service business* - The attendees will be passing-by, and have only a moment to understand who you are and what you have to offer. So, your signage and props should be presented in an eye-catching and unobstructed way.

How many people will you have working in your exhibit space? - This is important, because they will be taking up space there. And, you must consider the fact that each person that you have working in your exhibit space may be making a presentation to one or more people. Very often buyers from medium or larger companies travel in groups of several people. You, or your sales people, may find yourself talking to three people from the same company.

So, if you and one or two others from your company are going to be working at the show, you should have a space sufficient to allow the visitors privacy of conversation, and ability to freely move around the space to view the products exhibited.

How many pieces will you have at the show, and what are their floor dimensions? - The exhibit should be set-up to allow complete viewing of your samples or information props (signs, video players, etc.). And, visitors should be allowed sufficient space to comfortably move around the exhibit to fully view them (That is, give them enough space to stand back and look at the whole piece).

Do you want to make group presentations or hold seminars in your space? - You would first have to find out if this is allowable in the exhibit spaces. Perhaps there are certain spaces set aside for this. Discuss this with the show representative that is negotiating the space with you. There may be minimum space requirements.

Are there any obstructions in or around your space? - Again, look at the show floor plan, and the space that is being offered to you. There are support columns, exit doors, air conditioning ducts, and other permanent structural things through-out the show floor.

If there is a support column that is in your space, you must consider how it is going to affect your exhibit. It is the same if a large column is next to your space, and it juts out - This may lessen your visibility at the show. You must look at them and determine how they will affect your exhibit.

Negotiating the cost of your space in the show:

Many shows will have uniformly sized spaces, or at least similar sized spaces, grouped in sections. You want to make sure that your space is not in a section where it will “disappear” among larger exhibits. So, it is important that you study the show’s floor-plan, and refer to it while you are negotiating with the agent that is renting the space to you.

Get a clear understanding of all items and services that are included with the space rental - Signage, flooring, walls, labor, cleaning and any other service. Anything not included, you would have to negotiate with a show vendor, or the Official Show Contractor

Where do you want to be in the show? - In a popular show, you may have little choice. And, you will have to choose the best available space. But, if you manage to book early, you may have more choices. So, planning ahead is important.

Most shows have simple grid structures - So, your considerations will be if you want to be in a center aisle or end aisle; if you want to be near the entrances or away from them; and, if you want to be near or away from certain other types of exhibits. And, there are various opinions about all of these options.

Some exhibitors want to be located at the entranceways, as the attendees will see their booths first as they come into the show. But, other exhibitors feel that with the busy foot-traffic at the entranceways, it discourages people from stopping at those exhibits.

Depending on the structure of the show, the center aisles may have more foot-traffic, as these aisles may lead to other sections of the venue. But, the downside of this is that many of those people may simply be using those aisles for quick transit to some pre-determined destination - So, they will not even be looking at the exhibits along the way. And again, the busy activity in those aisles may discourage people from leisurely looking at the exhibits.

As I mentioned before, if you are able to attend a show where you are interested in exhibiting, you can study the peculiarities of the attendees at that show. But, keep in mind that any reasonably located space may serve your purpose.

You must consider the fact that those attendees who are visiting shows with the intention of buying new products or services will fully utilize their time at the show. And this will include making it a point to cover the whole show floor. So, those spaces at the end aisles and the far corners of the show may not see as much foot-traffic as some other sections - But, the attendees looking at these exhibits will be serious buyers.

If you are going to hold group presentations or seminars - What are the space requirements or available accommodations? - Again, you would discuss this with the show representative leasing the space to you. If you cannot do this in your own space, there may be separate rooms available. Typically, there is an hourly charge for this.

Find out about their availability, and negotiate a schedule that would accommodate the attendees that you wish to attract. Make sure you are not in conflict with other presentations or seminars that would compete with yours.

Electric, carpentry, flooring. Video presentations (venue labor rules) - These may have to be negotiated with various providers or through the show management. Find out, and work out the costs with them.

Walls - There may be walls included, or your neighbors may already be putting up walls - Ask the show management. If your neighbors are putting up walls, find out what the sides facing your exhibit look like. You may be satisfied with them, or you may want to enhance your exhibit with your own walls.

5.0 Planning and preparations for the show

There are numerous preparations and expenses to exhibit at a show. But, the results can be very rewarding to your business. You have to make sure that you have an attractive presentation (exhibit, samples, materials), your presentation is well polished, your pricing is competitive, and you are ready to close business there.

The following is a list of a list of things that I think you should prepare for the show - But, your own situation may be unique, and you should add to the list according to your needs:

Floor Plan of your space - Draw up a blank floor plan of your space. It should be exact - Including all obstructions (such as poles), electrical boxes and everything else in the space. The show agent should provide you with a detailed copy of your space.

You may be doing your floor plan by hand, or using your computer software. But, save the copy of the original blank space - As you can try different layouts.

Choose your products, and using the exact dimensions, lay out possible combinations on the floor plan - Finding the one that would work best. Again, design your exhibit space to allow passing attendees to look in and clearly see what you have to sell - Especially your stronger items.

Also, leave room in the exhibit space to allow visitors to comfortably walk around and see your pieces completely. Keep in mind the number of people that may be in your exhibit space at any given time - Including you and your sales people.

Don't forget to include the lighting, wiring, seating (for you and visitors), work space or desk, and any other thing that you would need during the course of your long days at the show.

Prepare your brochures or catalogs - As you are investing a lot in the show, make sure that your catalogs and brochures make a proper presentation about you and your products. Get good photos of your products. If you are not going to use a photography service, but do them yourself - Do them correctly, with a clean and attractive background. Include information that will be important to the buyers - Construction, processes, dimensions, shipping dimensions, weights and any other thing unique to your industry.

*****An observation about catalogs** - In my experience, handing out large bulky catalogs can be a costly endeavor. You must keep in mind that the show visitors will be spending a good part of the day walking around the show. And, carrying around a large, heavy catalog gets to be annoying.

Also consider the fact that after the show, they may be traveling by air to return home. And, when they are packing their luggage, they will be making some decisions about disposing of some items, to lighten their load. A bulky catalog would be a good candidate for disposal. So, many experienced show visitors may decline to take one. They would more readily take a brochure and leave you their business card to send them a catalog.

You can have some catalogs on hand, for those that ask for them - But, I think that it is better to have brochures to hand out - And, if the visitor requests it, you can mail them a catalog.

Prepare your advertising and show invitations - At this point you should have decided how to let people know that you will be at the show. If it includes advertising, you must decide on the most effective way to do this.

Many industry journals will have special show issues - These can be quite useful, as many people will review them to see who and what will be at the show. You may also want to take an advertisement out in another industry journal (that would be read by your target clients).

Either way, plan your advertisement as early as possible, so the timing is right - Many periodicals must have advertisement materials submitted well before publication dates. Send your information as early as possible.

If you are going to do a mailing of invitations or announcements, plan it well ahead and done on a timely basis. Many buyers will have their schedules drawn up many weeks before the show.

****If you are buying mailing lists, and they include names of specific buyers - Make sure that they are current. Otherwise, many of your e-mails will be going to inactive e-mail addresses, while many of your postal service mailings will be getting tossed into the trash.*

Other materials for your exhibit - Make a list of everything that you would need at the show - Pens, pencils, order books, note pads, cleaning supplies (as cleaning your space may be your responsibility), small hand tools, repair kits, and whatever else you can think about. Otherwise, you may find yourself running around the venue asking about the nearest hardware or stationary stores - That may not be so near.....

Especially think about re-packing after the show - What will you need? Unless you make prior arrangements to have your packing cartons and materials saved somewhere at the show, they will be disposed of after you set up your exhibit. Get a clear understanding of this from the Official Service Contractor for the show. But, come prepared with tapes, wraps, shipping labels, and whatever else you may need.

Hand outs, freebies are great attractions and conversation starters - It can be as simple as little chocolate candies or cookies (that are greatly appreciated by tired, hungry attendees). Or, something small and useful at the show - Like pens, note pads or shopping bags. Use your imagination - You don't have to be unique, it is more important to have something practical. *If possible, put your name on them.*

Select the people to work at the show - Do you need help at the show? There are long days at any show. And, exhibit booths should be attended at all times. Eating, using facilities, even walking around the show yourself - All will take you away from your exhibit. So, it is always advisable to have some help. If you are a small exhibitor, you may want to consider taking your spouse or someone else along with you.

If you are bringing your own marketing people, please make sure that they are suitable for doing a show. There should be clear understandings about responsibilities and behavior at the show. And, I mention this as I have seen some exhibitors' efforts dashed by their show representatives spending more time socializing at the show than selling.

You should work out your plans of working as a group at the show, clearly defining responsibilities and coordinating sales efforts - So as not to be giving contradictory or inaccurate information.

There is also the alternative of hiring people at the show. There are staffing companies that provide this service. The venue management company can be contacted for this information, or it may be on their web site.

Prepare your travel arrangements early - There is a separate section that discusses this.

Prepare your samples, and make arrangements for their shipping - There is a separate section that discusses this.

6.0 Travel and hotel

Book your travel arrangements and hotel as early as possible. Keep in mind, that if the show is a long established and popular show, the hotel rooms will be booked early. Sometimes almost a year in advance.

Also, in the case of smaller cities or towns, the hotel, car rental and flights may be fully booked quite early. And, even in the larger cities, there may be numerous activities going on at the time of the show - So, you could have problems getting convenient bookings even with the numerous options in these cities.

Many shows may offer an option to use their designated travel agency. And with this, you may get the whole package or you may be able to choose a hotel package. If you are traveling to a location that you are not familiar with, it may be a good idea to take advantage of the package.

It is always better to have someone familiar with a destination helping you with arrangements - No matter how skilled you think you are at doing your own on-line research and bookings. Why take a chance when you are investing so much in the show?

Normally these designated travel agents will offer fair and convenient packages, with various price options. And, they may have blocks of rooms and airline seats set aside and available for them.

Passports and Travel Documents - Make sure that you have all the proper documents that are required for travel. Picture ID's are now necessary for travel anywhere.

For travel to some foreign destinations you may need a visa in addition to your passport. Find out from your travel agent, the airline, or the country's US consulate office.

Travel Arrangements - Make sure that you leave yourself a window of time in the event that there may be some delays. If you are traveling to a location in which you may want to spend a little time touring - Add an extra day before or after the show.

Book your flights according to the schedule of set-up and knock-down days at the show. You want to leave yourself sufficient time for both.

Some locations have more than one airport serving them. Even though they may look equally distant from your destination, there may be a big difference in which one you use. For instance, one may have more convenient transportation to your destination, more options for car rentals, or even more flight options. And, this is why using someone familiar with the destination can make the travel arrangements much easier for you.

Getting to and from the hotel is also an important factor. Find out if the hotel provides pick-up at the airport, or has a regularly scheduled service. Otherwise, find out (from the hotel) about taxi services and costs, or other travel options.

Hotel - Again, you want to make sure that your hotel is near the show venue. *I again point out, that if the show is going on for a number of days, these will be long days for you.* And, in the event that something happens at the show, and you have to get back to your room quickly, it will be handy to have it near-by. (For instance, if you find that you need something that you left behind, or you run out of something that you have extras in your room, or you spill something on your clothing and you have to change....Many things can happen).

- Find out about check-in time and check-out time. Make sure it all fits in with your schedule of flights. If you are arriving at the hotel before check-in time, find out if you can leave your luggage at the front desk, or with the bell captain, until the room is ready. This will allow you to use the waiting time more usefully (without carrying your luggage around).

- Find out if the hotel provides transportation from the airport, and back to the airport.

- If you are renting a car, find out if the hotel provides parking, and if there is a charge. Also, if you are planning to take the car to the show, find out about parking there.

- Find out about meals at the hotel. It can be convenient - As you will have long days at the show. Also, find out about nearby restaurants.

Foreign Currency, ATM Cards and Credit Cards - *ATM cards* are really quite handy these days. But, make sure that your ATM card is usable at your destination. Your bank can advise you of this, or you can look it up on their websites (ATM locations).

If you are going to a foreign destination, find out which banks or ATM services would accept your card. Often you can get very fair exchange rates using your ATM card in foreign countries - Again, your bank may have their rate policy information on their web sites.

No matter where you go, you want some cash in your pocket. So, if you are going to a foreign country, you should arrange to have some of their currency when you arrive. You may be able to get this at your bank, at the airport, or at the destination airport. *The exchange rates at the airports will be unfavorable to you. So, if you have to get some money at the airports, get the minimum that you will need (to get to the hotel, and carry your over until you can get to a bank).*

You can also get money exchanged at *banks in your destination country*. You will need your passport for these transactions. Check the work days and hours of the banks at your destination. If you have to exchange money for travel meals, etc., you want to make sure that the banks are open on your arrival day (or at least the day after). Another option is to exchange money at your *hotel* - Check with them to see if they have this service, and at what rate of exchange.

****Warning** - Be very careful about how much foreign currency you get. Otherwise, when you are at the airport for your return flight, you may find yourself with a lot of the foreign currency left over in your pocket. If the airport you are in has some good duty-free shops, and there are clearly good bargains on some items - Then you can put that foreign exchange to some good use. But, if you have to exchange it at the airport for your own currency - Be prepared for a heartbreaking surprise... You will get an unfavorable rate of exchange.

7.0 Sending samples and brochures

Shipping your exhibit samples and brochures to the show is something that is of critical concern. You must pay attention to the suggested time schedule for shipping your show materials and samples. Make sure that they are shipped with ample time to get to the show as early as possible. This is true for shipments big or small.

Problems do arise in transportation - Don't get caught unprepared to deal with them. Especially if they are traveling great distances, and may be transshipped via one or more terminals. Or, if they have to clear through customs. There can be delays, or misplacement. Keep tracking your shipment - This can often be done online. And, if you see any potential problem - Get on the phone with the shipper.....

Your Number 1 Concern - Firstly, I must point out that your samples must have a perfect appearance at the show. And this is true for both product and service industries. Your samples represent your qualifications as a supplier.

If there is one thing that will lose a sale for you, it is a wrongly done or damaged sample - And, your salesperson telling a buyer "*It's only a sample*"....I can tell you what the buyer is thinking at that point..."...*And it's a sample of your work!!?*"

Take all due care in properly preparing your samples, and packing them for shipment. Make sure that they get to the show floor on time, and in excellent condition.

Pack your pieces with anticipation of rough roads (as almost everything will be in a truck at some time) and handing by numerous people.

Container-load Shipments - If you are packing an entire container of only your product - Then you have the responsibility of packing that container properly. If the show venue requires their laborers to unpack your container and bring them to your exhibit space, make sure that your pieces are packed for rough handling.

These workers are normally very experienced and reliable. But, some venues do hire temporary workers that may not be very experienced. And, in all cases, these workers are "working against the clock" - They are rushing to get everyone's pieces unloaded and into their exhibit spaces.

LTL or Small Shipments - If you are shipping LTL's (Less than full loads) or crates (which are preferable to cartons), then you must remember that they will be transshipped. That is, if by air - they will be transferred from a truck to the terminal, to the plane, to the destination terminal, to a truck, to the show location, to your exhibit space.

If it is going by truck to a domestic location - it may go from the pick-up truck, to a local terminal, to another truck, to a destination terminal, into another truck to the show location, to your exhibit space.

Either way - It is a lot of handling, and a lot of possibilities to be bumped into by a fork lift, dropped, bounced around on rough roads, and whatever else you can imagine. *So, pack accordingly...*

Also, if the Official Show Contractor is consolidating the LTL shipments in their warehouse, they may require palletized shipments. Otherwise the Drayage costs will be somewhat higher. Check with them on this matter.

Be on the Safe Side - In any event - If your shipment is large enough to put on a pallet, I would suggest doing this. It makes for easier handling. *But, crate everything in anticipation that someone else's shipment may be stacked on top of yours.*

Overseas Shipments - If you are shipping to an overseas destination, make sure that you work with a customs broker or a reliable shipping agent - They will help you with all needed documentation.

Ship with ample time to allow for unforeseen circumstances - Such as delays in Customs. If your shipment is chosen for an inspection - This can delay delivery for up to several days.

Track Your Shipment Constantly - Most of the shipping companies have this option, either by phone or on their web sites. *Get your tracking number, and follow through every step of the way.* If you see any potential delay or sense a problem, such as a shipment sitting in a terminal too long - Get on the phone and get something done about it.

If you are using a freight forwarder or shipping agent, they should be following through for you. But, I suggest that you also be active in the tracking.

It's your show - And you do not want it to be ruined by a lost shipment or a delayed shipment. If it arrives at the show venue too late, you may lose the opening day (as you would have to wait until the next evening to set-up).....I've seen it happen....

Hand Carry Some Brochures - Just to be on the safe side. This can be especially helpful for smaller exhibitors. Just in case a problem arises, and your shipment gets delayed. At least you will have something to hand out at the show.

Another option - Rather than send your samples/brochures by carrier, would it be more practical (and safer) to take them as excess baggage? Even if you have to pay a penalty?

It may be a possibility - Check with your airline to find out the costs of excess baggage. Brochures can be heavy though - So, you may want to send some by carrier, but bring at least one box with you.

Small exhibitors may be able to carry in their own materials - Again, check the rules with the Official Show Contractor. Some venues are very flexible, but others are very strict about what you can do. Typically, if you are able to wheel something into the show on a two wheeled luggage cart, you would be able to bring in your own materials. *This would include a Pop-up Display.*

8.0 Arriving and setting up exhibit

What is the time frame to set up? If you have a lot of work to do in setting up, allow yourself the proper number of days to do it. *Keep in mind, that things do go wrong.* You may have to improvise for something that you did not anticipate (even with the best of planning).

Remember that during the set-up of a show there is a madhouse of activity going on all around you. Everyone is rushing right up to the last minute to set-up their displays. And, if you need supplies or the attention of the show contractors - It will be very difficult towards the end of the last set-up day.

Time Frame for Set-up - Arrive at the show at a time that will allow you to do all the work, and address any unforeseen problems. This, of course, depends on the size of your exhibit, and how much work you have to do. But, add a certain amount of time for possible problems. Such as, perhaps your space will not be properly prepared, or your materials did not arrive, or you may realize that you need extra lighting or electric...*Again, it's your show...Make sure that it opens with a good appearance.*

Have everyone's phone numbers - Just in case there are problems, have the phone numbers (especially cell phone numbers) for your freight forwarder, the local delivery company or trucker, the local customs broker and show management. You may need them...

Small Hand Tools - These always come in handy. You never know what may need your attention - Such as a damaged piece, or you have to hang something....So, it is best to have some tools - Otherwise you will be running around looking to buy them or borrow them. *But, be aware of what work you can do yourself, according to the venue regulations.*

Supplies - A repair kit appropriate to your samples and display, as well as general items such as tapes, glue, stapler...Whatever may be handy in any event...

Packing supplies - After the show, you will have to pack your materials for forwarding or return. And, even though you may think that you can use the same cartons that they came in, you must remember that re-packing may require new wrapping materials, tapes, cords, labels or perhaps even new cartons. So, come prepared for this.

What about your packing materials? - Such as your cartons or crates. You should have a clear understanding about what happens with these after you unpack and set-up. Some shows have storage space available, or the Official Service Contractor may take them back to their warehouse (and return them to you after the show). Find out clearly what happens with them.

Finish your set-up on time - The show floor has to be cleaned the night before the show. And the show will have clear regulations about the time that you must finish your set-up, to allow the cleaners to work.

Before you leave, make sure that your own exhibit is clean and ready for opening the next morning. Don't forget to bring some cleaning supplies - A duster, small broom, polish, and whatever else you may need.

9.0 At the show

Prepare and practice your 10 second sales pitch. The attendees be walking-by, or coming into your exhibit space, and you want to get their interest. You want them to come into your exhibit, and not just for the free chocolate. You want to get them interested in what you're selling.

Make sure that you have all pricing, facts and logistics worked out completely for the buyers at the show. - Know all your facts about your product and service. Many buyers (consumer and trade) are very knowledgeable about what they are buying. Especially important in trade shows - One wrong answer (or lack of an answer) will lose their interest.

You should anticipate all questions - This would include performance of all services, construction, specifications, materials used, shipping options, production schedules (or time schedules for completions of services). Professional buyers know their products, and want to work with someone that gives them answers.

Keep an organized record of who visits your exhibit - Immediately make notes after a discussion (or even take notes while you are talking to them). You can bring a small notebook, or even make notes on the back of their business cards (Though this may not appear appropriate to them, or you may run out of room). Bring something in which you can organize and save everyone's business cards.

It is important that you record everything that they ask - You want to follow-up with them immediately after the show, and have their answers for them. If possible, ask them where you can follow-up with them while they are still at the show - Prompt and correct answers may help you book their business while you are still at the show.

Hand outs, freebies - As I mentioned, these are great attractions and conversation starters. It can be as simple as little chocolate candies or cookies. Or, something small and useful at the show - Like pens or shopping bags. Use your imagination - You don't have to be unique - It is more important to have something practical.

You should carefully place these items somewhat inside your exhibit - Not on the perimeter where everyone that walks by can stick out their hand and grab them, as they will disappear very quickly.

I would be best to place these items just slightly inside of the exhibit - So that they are visible, and someone only has to take one or two steps in. And, you should be prepared with some small talk to open a possible conversation with them. Most likely they will stop to exchange pleasantries with you. Also, if you see anyone that looks like a potential client passing-by, politely invite them to take one.

Catalogs - If you are bringing catalogs to the show, and they are bulky - It would be a good idea to also have some type of carrying bags or good quality shopping bags to offer the people taking them.

Also, offer visitors the option of receiving the catalogs by mail. This can be expensive - But, if you send them to good potential clients, it would be worth the expense and effort.

Again, catalogs are expensive items for you to produce - But, for a show attendee that is packing their luggage for their return trip home, it will be just one of too many things to pack - So, it may be among those disposed of at the hotel.

At a *trade show*, I also suggest that you keep your catalogs someplace that you have to hand them to a visitor. Trade catalogs are expensive to produce, and you want to hand them out sparingly.

Many shows have the shopping cart people that come in towards the end of the show. These are the people going around with their wheeled luggage carts, ambitiously collecting everything they can get. Some are indeed good potential buyers - But, others are not.

So, take the time to speak to anyone that comes into your exhibit, get their business card, and find out who they are, and what they do in the industry. Then decide if you want to give them a brochure or a catalog.

In the case of a *consumer show*, it is different - You want your catalogs out in the public - So, they should be placed for anyone walking-by to easily take. Though, it is a nicer touch for you to be handing them to people - *It gives you an opportunity to do your 10 second sales pitch.*

Socializing at Show - Use your commonsense about socializing at the end of each show day. Yes, it is important to entertain clients and to attend any industry social functions. And, you may be in a city that has much that you always wanted to see and do. But, the next day will be another long day at the show. And, you always have to be alert and sharp. Get plenty of rest at night. If you want to enjoy the city that you're visiting, add an extra day before or after the show.

At the show itself, be professional - And, this important to stress to whoever else you have working at the show for your company. Many times, inexperienced exhibitors or their reps will be "enchanted" with being at the show, and be both distracted and distracting. If you are going to have some new salespeople working at the show, please speak to them about this. *Stress to them what you expect from them at the show, and stress that it is an exhibit to promote sales - It is not a social mixer.*

Always make a good appearance - Dress appropriately for the show. It is always safest to be in business attire. But, if it is a show that is more industrial, or your exhibit is more appropriate for wearing work clothing - Then wear something neat, like coveralls or a uniform. Everyone on your team should then be dressed uniformly.

Most importantly - Make sure that you are personally clean and shaven each day of the show. Too often, I have seen people that do not realize this cultural norm. They get up in the morning and get dressed without shaving and showering, and go to the show. For some social groups this may be acceptable, and perhaps even trendy - But, if you are dealing with the public or professional buyers at a show, it is looked upon as shabby .

Keep your exhibit neat and clean - Again, you should have a clear understanding of the housekeeping responsibilities of the show management. But, you should have cleaning supplies on hand for your own needs.

Selling of your samples at the show - This is allowed in some *trade shows*. But there are strict regulations about this. Make sure that you become familiar with these regulations.

Also, do not let this become a distraction to you at the trade show. You are there to book some long term business - Focus on that.

There are times when a show does not work out well for an exhibitor, and they start thinking about recovering some of their expenses - And, the selling of the samples becomes an attraction - But, at the same time a distraction. Also, there are often the bargain hunters that seem to show up on the last few days of a show, looking to buy samples. You should be courteous to them, but do not let them distract you from the long term buyers that will still be at the show.

And, if you do sell your samples, keep in mind that it is your responsibility to vacate the space on schedule. Make sure that the sample buyer(s) conform to the time schedule, and regulations on removing pieces from the show.

10.0 After the show

Keep your list of attendees, their business cards and your notes about them - They may have some future use. Even though many of the people at the show may not immediately become buyers of your product or services, you have the basis of your own mailing list - And, with proper follow-up, a number of potential future buyers.

Follow-through with delivery of orders - This is the first critical step you must take when you return from the show. Make sure all orders are scheduled and delivered on time. And, either you, or your rep that booked the business at the show, should follow-up with the buyer - Confirming and following up on the order(s).

Your address book - Create your address book. Many computers come with the software to create these books - Use it. These software programs allow you to organize much information about your clients - Names, addresses, e-mail, phone numbers, preferences and notes...All which can be sorted for various needs and promotions. Otherwise, use your software to create your own unique data base entries. Again, it is time consuming to set this up - But, it will be a useful tool for you.

Thank you notes and invitations - Send simple thank you notes to everyone that visited your exhibit. And, invite them to visit your company if they find the occasion to be in your area. Some may take you up on the offer.

E-mail announcements and offers - Follow through with occasional e-mail announcements and offers. But, don't become a spammer - People will start blocking your e-mails.

It is important to mention that when you are sending e-mails, it is best to have an e-mail address with your own web site URL as your e-mail address (that is, me@mycompany.com) - This is important, as some companies do not accept e-mails from public sites (such as the free e-mails accounts offered by the major search engines, or even some of the popular ISP paid services). This helps them cut back on spam mail.

Postal service mailings - Again, follow-through with the occasional offer or announcements of special events, sales or new products.

Personal Visits - This is where your address book can be useful. If you are traveling somewhere, check your address book. If anyone in it is nearby your destination - Contact them to see if you can get an appointment to visit them while you are there. This is a practical use of your time and travel expenses.

Invitations to future shows - If you participate in the same show again (or even other shows) - Send out invitations to everyone in your address book. Many may be returning to the original show, or attending the other shows in which you are exhibiting.