



Some Guidelines for Participating in International Food and Agribusiness Trade Shows

Aurora A. Saulo,¹ Louis Divinagracia,² and Rochelle McArthur³

¹CTAHR Department of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences, ²De La Salle University, ³Center for International Business Education and Research/Pacific Asian Management Institute, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Food and agribusiness companies increasingly use a portion of their promotion budget to attend international trade shows as a means of launching international marketing campaigns or improving their products' visibility in the marketplace. In the following, we provide perspective on the benefits associated with international trade show participation as an exhibitor or attendee. The steps necessary to realize these benefits include

- preparing for an international food and agribusiness trade show
- implementing marketing strategies during a show
- evaluating your participation
- choosing and preparing for future shows.

Informational resources are also given to familiarize potential participants with the different trade shows available.

Have fun, and we'll see you on the trade show floor!

9–12 months before the event

Check the exportability of your own products.

Gather information relating to the market and trade fair.

Know the exhibition itself by assessing its

- reputation
- audience and target reach
- quality rating (e.g., is it an established show?).

Determine the exhibitor profile, their

- origins

- products offered
- type of presentation.

Clearly define the objectives of going to the exhibition. For example, to

- increase the degree of awareness of your products
- present new products
- evaluate product design or acceptability range
- test your company's competitive capability
- extend the sales network
- make new contacts
- strengthen existing contacts
- observe competitors and the market.

Estimate total costs, fix your budget for the show, and estimate cash flows.

Check sponsoring options offered by the government and at a regional level.

6–9 months before the event

Note the registration deadline. Register with the organizer.

Select exhibits that will provide a starting point for communication.

Decide who will go to the exhibition.

Make travel arrangements: flights, hotel, transfers, visa and inoculations if required.

Develop promotional aids such as brochures, advertise-

ments, invitations to customers and journalists, fringe events.

Ask organizers for addresses of booth designers and forwarding agents.

3–6 months before the event

Plan your exhibition booth design:

- Check water supply, electricity, furnishings, equipment, and other things needed for the show.
- Take into account all materials and accessories needed at the booth, such as a phone, computer, kitchen equipment.
- Make sure you can bring what you need or it can be supplied at the show.
- Ensure that promotional materials and company literature are in either the internationally accepted business language or the language of the host country.

Decide on staffing for the booth:

- Provide training and motivation exercises.
- Develop a staffing schedule.
- Make sure everyone knows what to do when working at the booth.

Contact official country representations, including their embassy, chambers of commerce, etc.

Contact media, trade, and industry associations.

Distribute press releases.

Canvass visitors with mailings, brochures, entrance tickets, etc.

Last-minute planning, and at the event

Leave appropriate contact information at the booth, such as phone and fax numbers of the company in the home country, and the numbers for the hotel where the organizer and staff are staying.

Check the exhibit to ensure proper construction and setup.

Contact show organizer for exhibitor badges, parking passes, registration, etc.

Arrange times for customers to visit.

Engage in sales negotiations, making sure you get all necessary contact information from potential customers.

Meet with distributors and other contacts at the show that can help you enhance your products, reduce cost, and/or increase service levels.

Hand out surveys to solicit customer opinions about your products. Ask for their honest feedback about your display. The following websites can provide a good start and some examples:

<http://www.questionpro.com/akira/showLibrary.do?mode=1&categoryID=3>

QuestionPro online surveys that may be used for free or for a fee, depending on your research needs.

http://www.indianaventurecenter.org/pdfs/market_survey.pdf

Indiana Venture Center outlines the basic points to address when identifying the potential customer or client base for your new product or service.

Extend your marketing reach by scheduling meetings before or after the show with potential and current customers who cannot attend the show.

Check and assess the goods on offer.

Determine if your own range of products is in keeping with the market's needs.

Document or note the observation.

Observe the exhibitors, visitors, and activities during the exhibition. Determine the quality of visitors (trade, "family day out").

After the show, and planning for the next show

At a minimum, follow up with a thank-you note to every contact you made. They invested time, effort, and money

to come to the show and stop by your booth. The simple courtesy of a thank-you goes a long way in today's fast-paced and impersonal world. If you listened properly and were able to gather specific information, you can provide a quote, supply answers, and have a real reason for the follow-up contact.

Unless requested, do not send an expensive, extensive corporate package of literature that tells absolutely everything about your company. Instead, send your business card, brief information about your company, and any samples, price lists, or references that will help speed the sales cycle.

Assess the staffs' output: answering customer queries, sending off quotations, and/or confirming orders

Review the extent to which targets were met and determine key success factors: what was well done and what should be done better the next time. This will help you to plan strategies to prepare for the next trade show.

Conduct a financial evaluation of your participation in the trade show. This will help you to decide whether or not to participate in future trade shows. Here are some resources for evaluating performance:

<http://www.auma.de/start.aspx?sprache=e> has helpful advice on trade fair participation, a trade fair benefit check, and an interactive program for evaluating trade fair performance.

www.ufinet.org/education/UFI_education.pdf is available from UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, which offers a free 6-hour online course that provides a general guide to trade fairs and discusses the marketing benefits of participation; Chapter VI (p. 99) deals with evaluation of participation.

http://www.ufinet.org/pages/thetradefairsector/basic-knowledge_participating.asp?active=3 is another UFI resource on "Basic Knowledge of Participating in Fairs & Exhibitions"; evaluating participation is discussed in one of the chapters.

Other resources

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service (USFCS) maintains a comprehensive listing of industry shows at <http://www.export.gov>. For example, for a membership fee, Tradeshow Week magazine, <http://www.tradeshowweek.com>, has an events calendar and an event directory that can be searched alphabetically. It also includes an analysis of the 200 largest shows in the United States.

Other directories on the Web that provide comprehensive information about international and local professional and public shows include:

Trade Show News Network (a listing of events worldwide) <http://www.tsnm.com>

ExpoCentral.com (information about international and local business and public events, companies, products, and services) <http://www.expocentral.com>

EventsEye (a listing of exhibitions and trade shows worldwide) <http://www.eventseye.com>

Expofairs (a database of trade fairs, suppliers, worldwide operators and exhibitors, GMF or World Trade Fairs Guide circulated widely in Italy, and Prisma magazine on exhibitions, congresses, tourism, wellness, and gourmet) <http://www.expofairs.com>

Jupiterevents (IT and business webcasts and trade shows) <http://www.jupiterevents.com>

Some other helpful websites

<http://www.tradeshowtraining.com/online.htm>
TSTiOnline is a free online training course that will help you understand the function of and what to do at international trade shows.

<http://www.espexhibits.com/tips/international.php>
ESP (Extraordinary Show Productions Ltd.) focuses on international trade show marketing.

<http://globaledge.msu.edu/ibrd/marketpot.asp>
globalEdge™ is an online magazine that provides info on market potential of various foreign countries.

http://marketingpr.suite101.com/article.cfm/planning_a_successful_trade_show_suite101TM contains various information on planning for trade shows.

This publication is partially funded by a USDA CSREES grant (award 2006-51160-03402) for the project "Enhancing Hawaii's Global Competitiveness and Business Performance in International Agribusiness," Aurora A. Saulo, principal investigator, and Louis Divinagracia and Rochelle McArthur, collaborators.