

Introduction

Trade fairs and exhibitions provide valuable opportunities for small businesses to showcase their products and expertise, network with potential customers and suppliers, and keep up to date with industry developments.

This factsheet covers planning for exhibiting at a trade fair, assessing the costs, getting the most from being present at the exhibition and following up with prospective new customers after the event.

The factsheet covers exhibiting at physical venues where the participants attend in person. It does not cover virtual or hybrid events.

Hiring exhibition space

There are normally two options for hiring exhibition space:

- A 'shell scheme', which provides basic structure for a stand, including partitions, flooring, lighting, power and often also a fascia board with the exhibitor's business name on it.
- 'Space only', which allocates a certain amount of floor space to the exhibitor, who must construct their own stand and arrange power and lighting.

Before hiring space at an exhibition, it is important to:

- Set a budget and check the costs carefully.
- Establish exactly what is included in the contract price for the exhibition space.
- Check for any hidden charges, such as for power, lighting, carpets or internet access.

It is also important to contact the organisers to find out about:

- **Extra facilities.** If a large demonstration space or private meeting rooms will be required, ask if these are available at the venue.
- **Location and access.** Check when the venue will provide access to the exhibition hall, for example when setting up the stand, and that the venue is easy to find.
- **Contractor requirements.** Some venues and exhibition organisers insist that the construction of stands and the installation of facilities, such as lighting, are carried out by the venue's own contractors.
- **Special requirements.** Check with the organisers about any special requirements, such as playing music or serving alcohol on the stand.
- **Opportunities to give workshops and seminars.** Giving free workshops can raise awareness of a business and drive visitors to the stand.

Planning for an exhibition

Exhibiting at a trade fair requires careful planning and co-ordination. Specialist exhibition organisers can be hired to help, or a member of staff can be given responsibility for organising everything that needs to be arranged in advance of the exhibition.

They will need to consider:

- **Booking the exhibition space.** It is important to book well in advance to ensure the best choice of stand or space. Central locations, corner sites and sites at the ends of walkways work best and are therefore usually booked up first.
- **Designing the stand.** Remember to arrange any design or construction work that may be needed to create or customise the exhibition stand.
- **Securing any additional space.** Book any additional demonstration areas or meeting rooms that will be needed during the course of the exhibition.
- **Booking equipment.** It can be cost effective to hire some equipment, such as large plasma screens, rather than transporting it to the venue.
- **Storage.** It is vital that there is adequate storage on the stand for personal belongings, literature, refreshments and anything that might be needed during the exhibition. The exhibition organiser will often provide details of firms that specialise in exhibition furniture hire.
- **Accommodation.** If staff need hotel accommodation, book this early, especially if it is a large exhibition with lots of exhibitors. Many exhibition organisers negotiate special rates with local hotels for the duration of the exhibition.
- **Transport.** Suitable vehicles or a courier service will be needed to transport exhibition material and equipment to the venue. It will also be necessary to arrange transport for staff.
- **Insurance.** Check whether the business's insurance policy covers public liability at exhibitions. Many insurance companies offer specific packages for attendance at trade exhibitions.
- **Risk assessment.** Exhibitors have a legal responsibility for the health and safety of their staff at the exhibition, and for minimising any risks to the public when they visit the stand. Any potential risks must be identified in advance and a risk assessment must be carried out on the stand when first arriving at the venue.
- **Marketing and PR.** Invite prospective/current customers and suppliers, the media, corporate guests and any other relevant contacts to the exhibition. Promote the exhibition online, in newsletters, emails, social media and promotional literature. Contact other exhibitors who may be potential partners or customers and arrange meetings at the exhibition.
- **Literature.** Check that all the necessary stationery, brochures, business cards, order forms, leaflets, corporate gifts and giveaways needed for the event have been ordered well in advance.
- **Contingency planning.** Consider what might go wrong at the event, and how to prepare for this, for example by bringing a first-aid kit and back-up supplies and equipment.

- **Dress code.** Organise any uniforms or corporate clothing in advance or agree a dress code.
- **Staffing rota.** This should allocate time for proper meal breaks, rest periods and attendance at relevant seminars.
- **Badges and permits.** Book, collect and distribute all the exhibitors' entry and parking permits for staff and guests. Check that each member of the team has a badge with their name, job title and the name of the business.

Most event organisers will provide an exhibitor's pack once a stand booking has been confirmed, with key deadlines for providing information about the business that is exhibiting, logos, contact details, and confirmation of any additional resources needed for the stand.

Briefing the exhibition team

It is vital to brief the team fully in advance. Discuss any expectations before the event and issue a briefing pack to refer to on the day. Make sure that every member of the team is clear about:

- Targets and objectives. Explain what key outcomes are expected from the exhibition and discuss how these will be measured.
- The product range, prices, distribution and current suppliers.
- Any sales techniques they should use or avoid, and who to consult if faced with an enquiry they feel unable to answer.
- Health and safety issues. Clarify who will take responsibility for carrying out a risk assessment on the first day. Make sure all staff understand their responsibilities and are aware of health and safety policies operated by the venue and the event organiser.
- How to operate any equipment that will be on the stand, and how to erect a display stand, if they are expected to do this on the day.
- Arrangements for accommodation and transport.
- Who to contact in an emergency. Provide contact numbers for the whole team and emergency numbers for the exhibition organiser and venue manager.

Action to be taken during the exhibition

It is critical to capture contact information from potential clients so they can be contacted after the exhibition with a view to converting enquiries into sales. It is useful to evaluate the impact of the exhibition on the business, so ask staff to record:

- The number of visitors and enquiries taken.
- The number of samples and leaflets taken.
- Positive comments.
- Negative comments, including complaints and criticisms.
- Any issues raised by visitors.
- Details of any press or media interest.

Monitor the appearance of the stand throughout the exhibition. Regularly restock empty brochure displays, tidy shelves and cabinets, and clear away rubbish.

During the exhibition it will be useful to visit other stands to network with other exhibitors and find out what they are doing and what they are offering to customers. This provides an opportunity to build partnerships and find customers and suppliers for the business. Likewise, it may be a good opportunity to look at competitors' stands, to gain valuable insight into their range of products or services.

Actions to be taken after the event

The work associated with a successful exhibition doesn't end when the trade show closes.

- Remember to follow up all leads with a telephone call, email or letter as promptly as possible.
- Take advantage of the fact that some exhibition organisers provide lists of visitors after the show for direct marketing purposes.
- Analyse and review the effectiveness of attendance at the exhibition in terms of leads generated, sales achieved and objectives met. Compare these with the costs and the staff time involved in preparing for and attending the exhibition. Use this information to refine any future exhibition strategy.

Useful resources

The Event Supplier and Services Association (ESSA) publishes a directory of suppliers and trade event management companies.

www.essa.uk.com/members

ESSA also publishes an eGuide about health, safety and operational planning at events, intended for exhibitors as well as venues and event organisers.

www.essa.uk.com/images/E-Guide/eGuide_August_2021_clean_copy.pdf

Exhibitions.co.uk is an events resource that provides event news and an online directory of suppliers, events and venues.

www.exhibitions.co.uk

The UK Tradeshow Programme provides support to eligible businesses to help them exhibit at or attend approved overseas trade fairs and conferences.

www.gov.uk/guidance/uk-tradeshow-programme

Related factsheet

BIF235 Government Support for Exporters

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