

Trade shows abroad

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For a long time, trade shows abroad have been a place for leaders from the four corners of the world to finalize deals face to face. In some sectors, such as professional services, human contact can even be a critical part of good business. Now however, in the last ten years, organizers of trade shows have had to reposition this type of event to deal with new factors that have transformed international business practice.

Trade shows and the Internet: complementary or conflicting?

The Internet is one of these factors. For the last decade, this technology has been proving itself as a primary showcase for both small local businesses and multinationals with a foothold in every city in the world. By positioning itself as a universal window for promoting companies' products and services, the Internet has partly taken over functions that were formerly restricted to international trade shows. For what it costs to participate in just one show, a SME can set up a multilingual transactional Web site allowing it to reach a host of buyers located all over the globe without ever having to pack a suitcase.

But for all its effectiveness in reaching people, virtual marketing will never replace face-to-face interactions. Moreover, enlightened business people are no dummies. Knowing very well that the Web can let a small firm portray itself as big business, suppliers and purchasers often meet prior to concluding major business deals. In addition, in a number of emerging nations, the limitations on Internet access and the importance of interpersonal relations relegate the Web to second place as far as doing business goes. At that point, trade shows really prove how important they are in pinpointing and qualifying potential customers, suppliers and business partners. A good strategy uses the Internet ahead of the trade show, to send personal invitations to certain prospects to visit your booth.

Another factor that has made it less attractive to rent trade show exhibition space is the risk of revealing certain information or secrets to competition masquerading as potential customers. Despite all efforts made by organizers and exhibitors to spot possible "spies", false representation and technology will always allow less scrupulous companies to steal information from rivals who are a bit too candid.

The fact remains that exhibiting at a good show has many advantages, such as uniting of all a sector's main actors in one place. What better way to get your finger on the pulse of the market and find out about the main trends and threats? Participating in a trade show also reduces the time and effort needed to canvass new customers.

The show-mission combination

An increasingly common formula consists in combining a trade mission with a trade show abroad. Desjardins has not hesitated to explore this recipe with success. Recently, a trade mission organized by **Caisse centrale Desjardins** around the “Batimat” International Building Exhibition in Paris generated very favourable spinoffs for around twenty Québec businesses.

But to make sure that your trade show abroad is a real success, you must follow a few rules. First, you must select the right trade show, the show that fits your business development program the best. Currently, there is a wide variety of very specialized shows around the world. That is why choosing one depends on rigorous selection criteria, and not on how attractive the event’s location is (e.g. Paris, Las Vegas, etc.).

To select the right show, three elements should be considered. First, the size of the show. You may decide to exhibit in large-scale specialized trade shows. These are generally the most attractive as they draw the industry’s key players. It may also be beneficial to participate in a regional show. While the most influential buyers will probably not come, these shows enable fuller representation from the territory.

It is also imperative to know the profile (characteristics) of those visiting the target show. You can often consult the statistics (for visitors and exhibitors) for previous editions. Will the representatives of prospective businesses that visit your booth be mandated to negotiate and place orders?

To visit or to exhibit?

We strongly recommend that you visit a show before participating as an exhibitor. Among other things, this will help you verify that the show is relevant, check the quality and quantity of the prospects (visitors), and study your competition ahead of time.

Warning

While visiting a trade show allows you to check up on the competition, rest assured that the competition will also be watching you, as an exhibitor. You must remain vigilant, not hand out price lists indiscriminately, and ensure that the person you’re speaking with is a genuine prospect. In addition to checking the badge and business card, a number of qualifying questions could be of use.

Finally, the trade show will not mean much if the company has no plan of action for after the show. Evaluating the results and promotional coverage, and following up on the relationships initiated are often where the time and money invested in the show begin to pay off.

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