



Australian Government
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TRADE FAIRS – Are they still important?

UK & Ireland
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TRADE FAIRS

Are they still important in the UK & Ireland?

If done successfully, exhibiting at trade shows can still be a powerful way of getting your products and services in front of potential buyers in the UK and Ireland. There are over 500 trade shows each year in the UK and Ireland, and each have the potential to generate significant business in the market.

Trade shows, done well, can deliver a number of benefits:-

- lead generation – buyers, distributors, agents
- market intelligence – competitor insights, market trends, innovation previews
- PR exposure - media, speaking opportunities, in-show awards
- service providers – industry associations, logistics partners, marketing

Knowing how a trade fair fits into your overall market strategy is key to working out which benefits you most need to try to capture and therefore which shows you should target and how (ie. exhibit, attend, speak etc)

Should I exhibit or just attend?

Time should always be spent weighing up the pros and cons of exhibiting or just attending to determine the best option for your business.

If it is your first foray into the market and your main objective is to better understand your industry in the UK then it may be a better option just to attend. This way you can observe competitors more easily, gather market intelligence and talk to service providers with greater flexibility and typically, at lower cost.

If, for example, you already have several existing customers dispersed across the UK and a majority of them attend your chosen trade show each year, then exhibiting may be a cost effective option, as you are not only demonstrating commitment to the market, raising your profile and enjoying the other benefits of exhibiting, but you are also potentially saving time and money from having to fly all over the country to meet your customers in their home territory.

If you are considering exhibiting, for whatever reason, be sure to think about exhibiting for at least three consecutive years. UK buyers, as in many fast-paced markets, are conscious of the fact that a large portion of new exhibitors may be out of business within a short period of time. It is interesting to note, that many exporters report making significant sales only in their second or third years at a show. It is important therefore, to show that your business is sound and that you are committed to the market through a longer term exhibiting.



How can I make the most out of a trade fair if I'm only attending?

Before attending a show, most people tend to access the exhibitor list to identify companies they wish to contact. What many people forget to do is to also review the list of events, seminars and information sessions. Attending some of the key events, where industry leaders, speakers and other contacts will also gather, is an often overlooked opportunity. If you have time and are prepared to “sell” (marketing materials, pricing information, distribution etc) then you should also try to organise appointments with key persons prior to attending the show.

For many exporters, the temptation when attending and not exhibiting, is not to make prior appointments but instead to walk the floor with their sales materials and “sell” on-the-run. In most exhibitions this practice is known as “carpet-bagging” and may result in you being escorted from the exhibition.

What about if I'm actually exhibiting?

Promote Yourself

Put the word out that you will be exhibiting. It is especially important to invite potential customers and key contacts to visit you and inform them of the benefits of doing so. Be sure to include details of your booth number and location with all invitations – a floor map with your booth clearly marked is preferred.

But it's also important to promote your attendance more broadly, so feature it on your website, mention it in your signature block in the lead up to the event, send out e-newsletters to your contact base – be creative.

You can often buy a pre-registrant list from the event organisers, or pay to have them deliver an email blast for you. This may not always be an effective marketing technique but it's a good reminder to at least contact the show organisers to find out what resources /options are available to you within your stand package, or at a small additional charge.

You should also prepare a press kit and ask trade show organisers if you are able to put your materials into the press room, exhibition press kit or other applications (show bags etc). Having a press kit available (including electronically) will also mean you can easily swing into action with any press that come into contact with you at the show.

Lastly, you may even want to consider using a PR company that has well-established links into both the trade (distributors, agents, importers, wholesalers) and the trade media in order to assist you in your pre- and post-event promotion. Austrade can refer you to a small selection of companies for you to consider.



Stand Design

There are lots of guides on how to design a “good” stand because design and furnishings may make a difference to how you are perceived, particularly in certain industry sectors.. The trick is to try to keep a few simple truths in play – clean design, versatile function, lightweight and compact. ‘Shell scheme’ stand space in the UK and Ireland is very basic. However, exhibitors will often invest thousands of pounds in making their stand attractive and welcoming. Review the event's website of previous shows to get a feel for the ‘norm’ which should help you design your stand appropriately for the event, your budget and the audience you're targeting.

Resource-Up

You need to ensure you have enough human resources during the event so that you can work your own stand *as well* as the wider floor. It may be a false economy to just have enough resources to man your stand but not spend time on the floor, at seminars or other networking events throughout the show. .

Train Staff

It is essential to train your staff – people have an overwhelming influence on the success of a stand. This includes basic policies such as no mobile phones, no eating or drinking, no sitting down, no negative body language, and dressing in a respectable uniform. Failing to do any of these may result in a potential customer passing the company by without a second look.

It is also important to prepare staff with a polite brief dialogue to attract customers, describe what your company does and your point of difference over other competitors. Visitors to a show have a large number of companies to visit, and you only have a few minutes to attract their interest. It is also valuable to qualify your prospect, to determine if the person you are talking to is part of the market you are targeting.

Sales Materials

Visitors will quickly forget the hundreds of booths they visit and contacts they meet. So when using sales sheets and materials - make sure they are light and striking. They have to be "bait" amongst the market “noise” to encourage people to keep your details . If this is not the case, your materials will not be carried home with the potential customer at the end of the day.

For example - You may want to double print your business cards with your details and photo on one side and your "benefit sell" message on the other side. This way a business card is likely to be kept, where a heavy corporate brochure is not.



Internet Access

Access to a good wireless or email services each night can be very useful to send immediate responses to potential leads. It is important to try to remain fresh in their mind and stay in touch.

Remember, a company's message may need to be delivered in about 7 - 12 different ways before someone can easily remember it – so the internet gives you at least one more way to reach out.

Electronic Readers

These days most exhibition packages, for an additional fee, can include an electronic reader. Depending on the set-up this essentially means you get issued with a reader that can quickly scan a business card or a barcode on an exhibitor's pass that downloads their contact details for you to refer to later.

Of course, a cost-effective alternative includes having a stapler handy so you can quickly staple people's business card to the upper corner of the page while you document discussion topics and follow-up actions or promises in the blank page.

Review Your Performance

It is also important to review your performance at the end of the show to ensure you can improve and stay in touch with your market, products, and competition. No matter how much research and preparation you do, trade shows won't always run smoothly. So summarise the results achieved and review things that worked and things that didn't.

Some universal truths about trade shows

There are lots of websites which give suggestions on how to make the most of trade fairs. Some of them are listed at the end of this paper. However, there are a few universal truths that are worth highlighting.

Research Trade Shows

If you do decide to exhibit or attend a trade show in the UK or Ireland research the available trade shows to ensure that the trade show/s you choose suits your market and what you are hoping to achieve. Obtain attendee numbers, profiles and exhibitor lists from trade show websites or by contacting event organisers directly to see what events your competition or target audience are attending.



Business Cards

Bring three times as many business cards as you think you will need to hand out to potential leads. When collecting business cards, the aim is not to collect as many business cards as possible, but rather to make strong personal connections with a few key people. The more information you can obtain from your potential customer, the better focussed your post-show activities can be. The contacts you meet are more likely to remember you that way as well.

Speaker slots

Look to see if you are able to participate in panel discussions or present on a trend or issue of relevance to your industry at the trade show. Becoming 'an expert in your field' is a useful way to improve the reputation of the company your name is associated with. This is a great method to promote your brand without costly advertising.

Follow Up

A timely follow up on every opportunity that has been generated at the trade show is also vital. Remember, the faster you send them out, the more your business will stand out from the rest – so think about ways you can ensure follow-up is done, ideally at the end of each day.

Where can I go for more information?

The following is a list of websites which may be of interest. Please note Austrade does not endorse any of the sites, institutions or organisations represented.

<http://www.businesszone.co.uk> – search for trade fair tips

www.exhibitoronline.com – search for trade fair tips

http://retail.about.com/od/merchandisingbuying/a/trade_show_tips.htm

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

http://www.thetradeshowscoach.com/articles_exhibitors.html

<http://www.exhibitions.co.uk/> - a listing of UK industrial, trade, and consumer fairs, shows and exhibitions

<http://www.austrade.gov.au/> - for further information on Austrade, its services and overseas offices

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