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Top 10 Tips for International Exhibiting

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Offering 10 Tips for International Trade Shows (directed to the US market) is like offering 10 Tips for a happy life with so many variables to consider, but I will do my best to narrow it down in a general point of view.

Trade show and event marketing are one of the most expensive components on any companies marketing budget. The cost for trade shows & events may be greater but surely must be viewed as an investment rather than a cost to reap the rewards and measure the full benefits of face to face marketing. Over the years, many US exhibiting companies have developed a keen understanding for what is required to achieve results through trade show marketing in North America. Participation is no longer a crap shoot for success. Each trade show experience for US exhibitors brings new knowledge and serves to formulate new strategies for their success and for measurable expectations from each trade show experience.

The biggest mistake that US companies make when taking their US trade show experiences abroad is assuming that their formula for success in the US will work the same internationally. Exhibiting abroad requires a recalculation of thinking and exhibit strategy.

Here are 10 Tips for American exhibitors when taking their brand and message abroad.

1. Marketing tactics and **exhibit designs** that work well in one country do not necessarily work the same in another. Investigate what is different.

2. Don't go it alone! **Work with an experienced partner** from the region, or one who is extremely familiar with the venue and event. Ask your exhibit partner to prepare a design drawing (from your input) that meets the rules and regulations for the country event. Design should include the components that the regional exhibit visitors are accustomed to when exhibiting in their country.

Note that most exhibit floor spaces abroad are not necessarily available in tidy 10'x 10' increments like in the US. Can be odd metric sizes. Not a big deal, but needs to be considered. A regional partner also will be most helpful with arranging freight and labor requirements at the set up and for assisting to order show site services with pre payment/taxes included. (Check out an association group like **IFES** to find a trusted partner).

3. Some major **exhibit design considerations**- Raised floor or carpet only? The raised floor is not necessarily used only as a way to hide electric cords and create a level floor. Its function is often viewed by the exhibitor as a stage to invite guests to their kingdom. Hanging ID sign-permitted? Lighting above or within? Bar area and kitchen included? Catering or not? Private seating areas or open? Live presentation- or one on one discussions? Ship exhibit from US or rent locally? Discuss these point with your regional partner.

4. As an exhibitor from another country, be certain about how your **product or services are tailored to fit the needs** for this new marketplace. What unique value proposition does your product/service offer for this region of business? This point is probably more important than a stylish exhibit with engaging exhibitor staff.

5. As an exhibitor from another country, be sensitive and aware of **cultural differences** when attending or working an international trade show. For small talk intros, learn about local topics to discuss (sports, art, attractions, history), as well as topics to avoid (religion and politics). Your product, services, and exhibit design may be great, but how you engage with an international audience can make or break your chances to meet sales goal. Take the time to learn what is different about communication and protocol in the countries you plan to exhibit. An easy read book-*The Culture Map* - by Erin Meyer would be a good communication primer that points out communication differences.

6. You are not going to become an experienced native overnight, so it might be a good idea to **hire a reception person** to work in your stand from the country you are exhibiting. Many European and Asian trade shows will have show visitors from neighboring countries, so a reception person who speaks several languages would be most useful. They are also skilled at the art of engaging with your visitors to make a good first impression. A pre show briefing to review your companies value offering is usually all that will be required of a temp since you will be nearby to provide knowledge about your companies product and services.

7. Depending on the country, take the time to print your **business cards** in two languages. Although most who will attend the shows speak English, this card demonstrates your sensitivity and your seriousness about marketing in a different country.

8. Depending on the country, translate **exhibit graphic messages** in two languages. Seek the advice of your exhibit supplier partner whether to do so or not, they are most familiar with the local market. Translations should be proof read by a bi-lingual expert who is familiar with your industry. Some English words don't always translate to what you really mean. A local expert can make it read right.

9. Not all international shows require a **badge for entry**. Many visitors are not necessarily potential buyers, since they simply can purchase a general admission ticket to the event. This kind of visitor is common at auto and boat shows that are open to the public in the US. Without badges, it is a little more difficult to qualify your visitors when gathering leads. A quick evaluation of your visitor needs and status will be necessary. If show badges

are not provided for visitors and exhibitors, it would be a good idea to make your own ID badges for your booth staffers. At least the visitors will know who you are.

10. Be aware how to **dress for the show**. The casual golf shirts with logos worn by exhibitors at many US shows might not be viewed the same for a show in Europe or Asia where a more formal attire is worn. Ask the show organizer, or your exhibit partner, for dress advice here. Your first impression can be a lasting impression.

In point #5 I mentioned Erin Meyer, author of The Culture Map. Here are a few of her thoughts on communication between cultures.

“When preparing to engage with a different culture, arrange to meet with your regional exhibit team members in advance. It is important that you understand each other and explore the differences in value systems and work methods. Just as fish don’t know they’re in water, people often find it difficult to see and recognize their own culture until they start comparing it with others. Be sure to conduct this discussion with humility and without judgement. The more you can joke about your own culture with this group, and speak positively about the ways other cultures operate, the easier it will be for everyone to share their thoughts and opinions without becoming defensive.”

There is no right way, there is no wrong way, there is only a different way. Understand and respect what is different to ensure added success for engagement and selling at international trade shows.

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