

for trade expansion is underscored by a study of Quebec exporters. Rapid expansion of exports was the most striking difference setting trade fair and mission users apart from other companies whose export growth was moderate or slow¹⁵.

Trade Fairs: For companies, there is a classic rule: be present, be committed, be consistent, and try to understand the problems of the people you are talking to¹⁶. Trade fairs can be viewed from the perspective of exhibitors or visitors, of organizers' or supporting/sponsoring organizations (i.e. government). While research on the visitor side of trade fairs is emerging¹⁷, it is only relevant here to help us understand how much exhibitors and government know about visitor behaviour.

The contemporary significance of trade fairs is enormous: more than 2000 major trade fairs are held throughout the world annually, of which 60% take place in Europe, 10% in North America, 20% in South-East Asia, and the remaining 10% in Latin America, Australia and Africa¹⁸. While the US, as a trade fair venue, has become more important recently, it is expected that its trade show industry will expand by half again over the next decade¹⁹. It is a fact that Europe, and within Europe Germany, is where the largest and most important trade fairs are located.

To match trade fair and company needs depends on knowledge of which fair is most appropriate for reaching the target customer group in the desired competitive environment (i.e. level of specialization of the fair). A typology that views trade fairs broadly in terms of world significance is useful in sorting out the supply (exhibitor) and demand (visitor) side aspects²⁰. Product differentiation is a dimension that is related to different levels of globality of fairs²¹. Clearly, companies pursue broader marketing goals and use trade fairs in pursuit of some of these. Historically, fairs were seen as fulfilling an advertising or display function for companies. There is also the strongly held view among trade fair organizers that fairs should be regarded as sales events. While this view certainly has merit for the German concept of *Mustermesse* (goods for sale at the stand), the notion that both selling and the more complex non-selling objectives are pursued by exhibitors is now widely accepted²². Indeed, exhibitors pursue multiple objectives, the five most important of which are i) business contacts, ii) testing the market, iii) maintaining presence in market, iv) market access through channels, and v) taking care of existing customers and channels²³.

This multiplicity of exhibitor objectives is mirrored in the complexity faced by visitors to trade