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detailed information, such as the country of origin of both the exhibitors and the attendees is often available as well. This information may also be found on the Web sites of the event organizers, along with other valuable facts and figures. This data can be useful in pinpointing which shows may be the most effective for reaching the audience targeted in the export plan.

Determining whether the event is general in nature or specialized is also important. General trade shows are often broader in focus (i.e. home shows and travel and leisure shows) and tend to attract the public, although business people will also attend. Specialized trade shows target business crowds, although many will still open their doors to the general public for all or part of the event. These events are very specific in scope, focusing on an

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industry sector or market. Trade fairs on industrial automation or exhibitions on the nutraceutical market in the United States are examples of events where industry experts and players will congregate. Canadian exporters will find opportunities to meet not only prospective buyers of their products or services but agents, importers, distributors and other potential partners as well.

In addition to being general or specialized, trade shows can be international, national, regional or smaller in reach. The size of the show can be important but it is not paramount. Many Canadian firms are better suited to niche opportunities and the best strategy might be to make a huge impression in a smaller arena. A consultant may not be able to afford the international conference and fair on sustainable management services, but she may get a guest lecture spot at the exhibition covering the U.S. Pacific Northwest. And as a guest lecturer, she may get into

the exhibition free. Making a name for yourself, your firm and your services in a small market can be serve as a launch pad to greater opportunities.

Trade shows can create great marketing and promotion opportunities. They can increase exposure and even sales of products and services. An exporter who is committed to "working" the show will meet more potential customers in a couple of days than they may meet all year. They are great venues to introduce new products, receive feedback and establish contacts for later action.

Trade shows serve a second valuable purpose: market research and competitive intelligence. Exporters can attend trade shows in advance of market entry as a way to learn more about an industry, a particular market or competitors. Trade shows are excellent places to conduct market research. There are very few opportunities that can equal trade shows for offering so much specific information in one spot at one time. While it takes time, effort and planning, an exporter can get a sound understanding of what consumers are interested in (what booths receive the most traffic and why?), what marketing and promotional techniques are most effective (give-aways, brochures, presentations, technology-based interactive tools), who is currently targeting the market and many other critical pieces of information.

Skilled intelligence gatherers can tap into a treasure trove of intelligence by drawing on competitive intelligence techniques, such as

subtle interviewing, analyzing media releases, asking pointed questions in public presentations and listening to employees at competing booths as they speak with the potential consumers. Asking these consumers their opinions afterward can yield valuable information regarding a competitor's strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the public.

Fairs can be expensive

Trade shows are not always affordable for an exporter. The costs of a professional display, promotional materials (designed specifically for the target market), staff to manage it, shipping expenses and travel and accommodation are often beyond the reach of a new exporter. One person attending the show as an observer, contact builder and intelligence gatherer may still be cost-prohibitive. It is important to determine the importance of trade shows for a particular export strategy. Depending on the product or service, the way in which an exporter wishes to make sales, and the consumer patterns of the target market, trade shows may not be critical to success.

If research and analysis indicates that trade shows are a critical element of the export plan, a budget is essential. This budget should be based on available resources as well as careful selection of events in which to participate. Fees include travel, event participation, shipping and clearing of any goods relating to your display and exhibit, export licences, booth rental charges, accommodation, entertaining or secondary promotional activities (i.e. business dinners, "freebies", samples) and communications to name a few. Additionally, all sales literature and marketing materials, including business cards, should be printed in the local language to enhance the exporter's professional image.

Finding the right show for a specific export strategy and a specific budget can be challenging. In the planning stage, exporters can look to Internet services like Trade Show Central to find relevant events in target markets. Industry specific publications and trade journals frequently publish calendars of upcoming events and contain advertisements from trade show organizers. Once

an exporter has a carefully planned export strategy developed, he or she can contact a Trade Commissioner in the target market to seek additional advice. Trade Commissioners are typically responsible for specific industry sectors within their target market and quickly become familiar with the intricacies of conducting business in these spheres. They may also be able to advise an exporter of any specific initiatives or assistance offered by the government with regard to participation in foreign trade events.



Trade shows, conferences, exhibitions, fairs and expos. The names may be different but the concept is the same: present businesses with an opportunity to shine in front of a mass audience. Give them a chance to strut their stuff. The effectiveness of trade shows is measured by the fact that over 30,000 trade show-type events take place annually. While it is a significant investment for an exporter, careful planning and deliberation can pay dividends. Trade shows will continue to play an integral part in the international marketing strategies of many Canadian exporters.

Plan your next trip to an international trade show with the help of Team Canada Inc's valuable online guide, *Successful International Trade Show Marketing*. It's available at www.exportsource.ca/tradeshow. For more information on exporting, call the toll-free Export Information Service at 1 888 811-1119.



CanadExport is published twice a month by International Trade Canada's Communications Services Division.
Circulation: 54,000
CanadExport paraît aussi en français.
ISSN 0823-3330

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For address changes and cancellations, return your mailing label with changes. Allow four to six weeks.

Publication Mail Agreement Number: 40064047

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