

fairs are also a source of learning for new as well as experienced exporters. Such learning may prompt increased marketing efforts after the fair, such as product modification, introduction of new products, further visits to the market and more fairs²⁹.

The participation process is important, but it is the performance of a trade fair that ultimately matters most to the company. The difficulty of creating and measuring useful performance indicators was alluded to before, and will be discussed in the next section in some detail. Here it suffices to point out that both qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate trade fairs are appropriate. Interpretation of results is difficult. For example, the number of contacts made, leads obtained, leads ultimately converted into sales, and sales made on site or after the fair, all are statistics that are only meaningful for a company if compared over time, or related to industry experience.

The buyer/seller interaction is of core importance here. In one study, companies participating with government assistance felt that individual customer contact, rather than trade fair use, would yield better results³⁰. Other firms supported by government were found to have done so ineffectively³¹. One view is that the relatively easy access to government support attracts participants before they are ready to export, or have developed sufficient expertise to pursue opportunities. Whether these are shortcomings at the program implementation level or company level or both is not clear.

In sum, the decision to use trade fairs generally, and the selection of particular fairs, is influenced by perceived need to be at a key fair, or by access to government support. Effective organization, staffing and appropriate financial support, and an attractive stand, are all focused on the principal reasons for attending: personal contacts and sales. The expectation for results argues for the need to evaluate trade fairs. The nature of hard and soft objectives, and whether the focus is on the company, the visitors or the fair itself, makes evaluation challenging. Ultimately, the impact of such evaluation, for both company and government program, will influence future activity.

Trade Missions: The purpose of trade missions differs considerably from that of trade fairs, as they help companies decide whether and how best to enter a foreign market. Beyond general inferences about their positive role in international marketing little is known about them. Our interest here is with the role of outgoing missions in exporting, so that they might be better