

Foreign trade fair participation

A GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL TRADE FAIR PARTICIPATION FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED EXPORTERS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



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1 Introduction

Even in times of digital global communication, trade fairs are a very important business tool. A survey conducted among business leaders in Germany revealed that 86% of all of them consider trade fairs as one of the most important tools in the sourcing and procurement process.¹ For a simple reason: business is done between humans. People want to meet each other, see each other and get to know each other. Especially in a world that is characterised by growing digitalisation, real-life experiences make the difference.

Participation at a foreign trade fair is a not all that difficult. However, it requires good planning and meticulous execution. Especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), planning a participation at a foreign trade fair may be a daunting task.

This guide is intended to help SMEs approach this task successfully.

To most small companies, the first foreign trade fair participation feels like planning a trip to the moon. They don't know where exactly they will land and how to get there. And everything they will need once they have arrived must be brought along.

2 Scope of this guide

The scope of this guide is to provide small and medium-sized enterprises with hands-on tips to successfully plan a foreign trade fair participation. The guide focuses on leading European trade fairs. It addresses companies from developing countries that wish to expand their business by exporting to Europe.

The guide touches upon the theoretical basics of trade fairs and how to decide on participation. It discusses the different types of fairs and how to select the right one. The main focus of this guide is on planning and executing trade fair participation as well as practical advice for the presence on the fair. It closes with recommendations for the post-fair follow-up and evaluation.

After reading through this guide, the person in charge should be enabled to successfully plan and execute a participation at a foreign trade fair.

¹ LINK Institute, 2008, survey conducted amongst German business leaders.
<http://www.absatzwirtschaft.de/entscheider-halten-messen-fuer-wichtig-5563>

3 Basics

3.1 WHY TRADE FAIRS?

Recent surveys have shown that 86% of all business leaders consider trade fairs as one of the most important tools in the sourcing and procurement process. From a business leader's point of view, trade fairs mainly provide an opportunity to collect information (72%), facilitate the exchange between business partners (71%) and source products and materials (43%). The unique strength of trade fairs compared to any other form of business-making lies in the combination of three main elements: personal contacts, information and deal making.² There is no comparable tool that unites these three elementary business factors in one event.

FIGURE 1: BENEFITS OF TRADE FAIRS.



Source: Klaas Koolman 2016

PERSONAL CONTACTS Internet, e-mails, skype and video conferences allow real-time communication and exchange of information; however, they are limited as to the possibility of physically testing products and lack personal interaction. Especially in intercultural communication, physical presence is very important and can make the difference. Further, immediate feedback and adaption of communication are key.

Trade fairs bring together sellers and buyers and, in most cases, provide the highest concentration of these decision makers. In addition, they provide the opportunity to reach specific persons that might otherwise be difficult to contact. Another benefit of trade fairs is that participants are open to receive new information because that is the very purpose of attending a fair.

INFORMATION Information can be collected via desk research, however, trade fairs offer the most up-to-date competition information that can be obtained, as every trade fair participant showcases his or her latest products or services: A day at a trade fair may also provide you with more competition information than a week of internet research. Competition products can be inspected and experienced, sometimes even in working conditions. Further, the marketing activities of competitors can be observed and best practices can be taken home.

DEAL MAKING Business deals are done by real life people. However, in order to make a deal, the parties involved need to build trust. Trade fairs are an ideal environment to get to know each other and build trust. A fruitful business meeting at a trade fair can be the starting point of a long-lasting business relationship.

² LINK Institute, 2008, survey conducted amongst German business leaders. <http://www.absatzwirtschaft.de/entscheider-halten-messen-fuer-wichtig-5563>

3.2 HOW TO DECIDE ON PARTICIPATION

The idea of attending a foreign trade fair might appear attractive to a company. But is attendance actually useful in terms of possible future revenues? Will it be “worth” it? One first basic question might solve this answer:

- Is there a market and a demand for the products you offer?

If the answer is “no”, then the offer might need to be adapted as to the target market and the idea of attending foreign trade fairs with this product may be not the best idea. Your local Business Support Organisation (BSO), e.g. export promotion agency, sector association or the Import Promotion Desk (IPD) will be able to help you to solve this problem.

Once this question can be answered with “yes”, then further questions should be asked in order to determine if a trade fair attendance is a good idea:

- Is your company capable of handling this project?

This question might be difficult to answer, as you might not be aware of what will be required to successfully plan and execute a foreign trade fair attendance. This guide should give you a first understanding of the requirements and should guide you through the decision-making process. After reading through this guide, you should be able to answer the question if your company is capable of handling this project.

Another crucial success factor is the funding:

- Do you have a budget? Is the budget sufficient to realise this project?

Again, you should be able to answer this question after reading through this guide.

- What is your goal by attending a fair?
 - If it is collecting information and surveying a market, then you might consider another option, like a study tour, instead.
 - If it is establishing contacts, meeting buyers, making deals and getting to know the right people, then a trade fair might be the right thing for you.

You should make sure that you can precisely state the objectives and goals you would like to achieve with a trade fair attendance: these points need to be clear if you want to decide whether a trade fair participation is the right tool or not. Especially with regards to the next question:

- Is there a specific trade fair that covers the products and the desired target market and how can this fair enable you as an exporter to achieve your goals?

This is a specific question that may be answered through desk research. BSOs and the IPD, too, are able to help. And once you found a fair that will fit your strategy and contribute to your goals, you may want to check the admission policy and the attendance fees that apply (also see 6.5).

BSOs and specifically the IPD will also be able to help you with the following elementary questions:

- Is your company fit to export to the desired market?
- Can you fulfil the regulations?
- Can you meet the requirements in terms of quality, product security, certifications, standards, etc.?
- Is there sufficient financial capacity (also for the following activities)?

If you are able to answer all the above questions with “yes”, then attending a foreign trade fair is the right choice for your company.

3.3 INDIVIDUAL VS. JOINT PARTICIPATION

After the decision of attending a trade fair has been made, the next question arises. Should the fair be attended as a single company, together with other companies or in a joint trade fair entry together with a business support organisation? Each form of trade fair attendance has its advantages and disadvantages.

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION Individual trade fair participation allows you to tailor your exhibition strategy, communication and presentation to your goals and align it with the company's strategy. However, the costs might be significantly higher than in a joint (most often (partly) sponsored) approach. The effort of planning and organising the trade fair attendance, too, is considerably higher.

JOINT PARTICIPATION WITH A BSO Very often, companies are invited to join a national entry to a foreign trade fair. In most cases, BSOs from exporting countries are supporting, or even organising these approaches (concept of a national pavilion). On the import side, initiatives like the IPD also offer joint trade fair programmes. The advantages of attending a trade fair in this manner are lower costs and less organisational effort but also in the fact that an organisation like the IPD can help you to get in contact with importers in your target country. However, the downside is that the participating company needs to follow the programme, the communication and presentation strategy of the BSO.

PARTICIPATION TOGETHER WITH A PARTNER COMPANY Another option of attending a trade fair is to team up with other companies and set up a joint trade fair presence. Especially if you are teaming up with a more experienced partner, this can be a viable option, as costs can be brought down and technical experience (e.g. designing and setting up the booth) can be shared.

RECOMMENDATION **For small and medium-sized enterprises, start-ups, family businesses and producers of niche products, it might be best to first join a BSO programme or programmes such as the IPD. The IPD not only helps you with all the relevant organisational questions but can also support you in finding the right importers, support you through trainings and workshops that contribute to a successful trade fair attendance. After your company has attended some foreign trade fairs in this fashion you might want to realise your individual attendance.**

3.4 FUNDAMENTS OF TRADE FAIR PARTICIPATIONS

Once you have decided to participate in a foreign trade fair, be it individually, together with a BSO and/or the IPD, your expectations will probably be high. Yet especially when attending a foreign trade fair together with an organisation, the below mentioned basic fundamentals have to be considered.

Whatever your assumptions about a certain situation, process or behaviour may be, you should be aware that the actual situation could turn out to be completely different. Especially staff that has not gained international business experience yet might be confronted with new and challenging situations, behaviours and/or processes. So you should make yourself familiar with the host country's culture, its customs and habits, its language as well as verbal and non-verbal communication standards. Especially when it comes to business, European behaviour can be different from your country's customs. Most European business partners expect a high standard of quality and reliable, committed and precise communication. The following check list helps you to keep in mind what European business partners are mainly looking for in business relationships:

- Precise, reliable and true in-time information → optimized customer service
- High-quality products
- Information material matching the standards of the target country (e.g. design, level of information, material)
- Well-prepared business partners
- Commitment to agreements
- Timely follow-up
- In-time delivery of information
- Common standards and certifications (e.g. HACCP, ISO, Organic, BRC)

Other common pitfalls for companies that are attending foreign trade fairs for the first time are:

- Theory and real life often differ: do not assume that everything will be as you have learned in theory.
- What you do not address will not be taken care of. Especially when dealing with BSOs, organisations like the IPD and especially third party contractors always express your thoughts and address issues directly.
- Cultures differ: the best thing is to assume that everything could potentially be different from what it is "at home". Sensitivity for intercultural communication is one of the key success factors in foreign trade.
- Quality expectations among European buyers are high: prepare your company for doing business with European business partners by ensuring your product matches the required quality standards. BSOs or the IPD can assist you in evaluating your product quality.
- Marketing materials (brochures, flyers, websites, etc.) need to meet the standard requirements. If you have doubts about the quality of your marketing materials try to check your competition's marketing materials or ask the IPD for guidance.
- Business deals are (mostly) not concluded at the trade fair itself but afterwards (this may take up to one year). Therefore proper follow-up is very important.
- Customer centricity is key: when attending a foreign trade fair, everything you do should be about the (prospective) customer.
- Trade fair participation and customer acquisition is hard work. There is no guarantee that you will acquire new contacts, make deals and travel home with books full of orders.

4 The trade fair

4.1 FINDING THE RIGHT TRADE FAIR

Once you have decided to participate in a foreign trade fair, the next task is to select the right fair. There are different types of fairs all around the world and attending the wrong fair can cost you a lot of time and money with only little business outcome.

However, selecting the right fair is not too difficult. On the one hand, local BSOs and the IPD will be glad to assist you in finding the right fair as they can draw on experience and knowledge in organising trade fair participations. On the other hand, there are some simple checks that you can run through in order to find the right fair if you decide to participate as a single company. The most important question to be answered is:

- Will we meet our future customers (or business partners) at the fair?

In order to answer this question, you will need to know who will exhibit at the fair, which products will be showcased, who will attend the fair and where the fair takes place.

The following criteria need to be checked:

- Exhibitors
- Visitors
- Products
- Location

In order to be able to select the right city (or region) for the fair, you will need to know where your future market might be and if the selected trade fair is going to be a regional or international one.

The following checklist may help you to select the right fair:

- Date of the trade fair (and how this fits to your company's overall planning)
- Location, city, country (as some fairs are held in several countries/regions)
- Topic of the event
- How often has the event been held before?
- Products/services exhibited at the event
- How many different product sectors are present?
- Relevancy of your sector at the fair
- Breakdown of visitors (sectors, origin, type of business)
- Breakdown of exhibitors (sectors, origin, type of products)
- Level of seniority of visitors (e.g. head of buying vs. junior level employees)
- Is it a public event or an event for a professional audience only?
- What is the international reach of the event?
- What is the average stand space of the fair and how many exhibitors will there be?
- Is there a specific admission policy?
- Are there special themes or side events at the fair?
- Press coverage of previous years
- Does the event receive a lot of social media buzz (e.g. twitter, business networks, blogs)?
- Costs of stand space, set-up and communication around the fair

After running through the above mentioned questions and selection criteria, your company should be well-informed about the opportunities available and able to come to the right decision.

4.2 DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRADE FAIRS

Finding the right fair also entails the decision about which type of fair should be attended. As this is an important point, the question will be highlighted separately in this guide. Generally, there are four different dimensions in which trade fairs can be characterised:

- Level of specialisation: general fairs or specialised industry fairs
- Reach: national, regional or international fairs
- Target group: is the fair only open to professional visitors or the general public too?
- Duration: Special event fairs or permanent exhibitions

In practice some trade fair types are more common than others. For exporting SMEs from developing countries it will be most interesting to attend fairs that have an international audience, i.e. that attract visitors, exhibitors and press from at least two or more countries (e.g. European trade fairs). Also the audience should only consist of professionals and not the general public. Fairs that are open to the latter provide a good opportunity to communicate your brand to the consumer; however, they involve a lot of work and effort and the outcome is difficult to measure. If your company does not provide a consumer brand at all, then fairs that are open to the general public are not suitable. Lastly, only temporary fairs, rather than permanent exhibitions, bring together the desired decision makers.

4.3 CHECKLIST FOR THE PARTICIPATION

Once you have decided on participating in a particular trade fair you need to go through a final checking process before signing the contract. This final check is intended to clarify whether your company is ready to attend a foreign trade fair or not. Your company will need to fulfil certain requirements or will have to possess the capabilities to work on the requirements. The following factors constitute the minimum prerequisites that need to be fulfilled. If your company is not able to fulfil these, then a foreign trade fair participation may be questionable. The following items need to be checked or clarified:

- Marketability of products
 - Is the quality sufficient?
 - Do the products comply with international standards?
 - Do the products carry the mandatory certifications?
 - Are there any other certifications that might be helpful?
- Language: do the responsible employees of your company have a sufficient level of English?
- Legal: what are the legal regulations for your products? (e.g. novel food regulation)
- Does your company have sufficient financial resources for a trade fair participation?
- Is your company able to deliver larger quantities of the products you offer and are you able to scale up your production?

As soon as you can tick all these boxes your company is ready for a foreign trade fair participation on principle. However, there are additional factors that actually turn a trade fair participation into a success.

4.4 HABITS OF SUCCESSFUL EXPORTERS

Apart from the basic success factors described above, there are a couple of factors that differentiate successful exporters from unsuccessful ones.

Proper preparation is a key element for successful trade fair attendance. You need to know the markets and the customers you aim to export to. Without this basic knowledge, your company will not be able to set strategic goals for the fair and will not be able to evaluate the fair afterwards. Attending a foreign trade fair without proper market research and customer analysis is like trying to navigate a ship without map, radar and compass. Competition analysis, too, is a mandatory part of your trade fair preparation.

Markets like the European one value certain behaviour. Clear, precise and committed in-time communication is most important, followed by punctuality. Exporters from developing countries should try to remember this when they establish business relationships with European business partners.

Customers in the European market usually have several options to source their goods as many exporters frequently offer the same goods. Unless your product is 100% unique, you will face fierce competition. Make sure you elaborate your unique selling proposition (USP) and communicate it clearly. Simply stating "good/best quality" is not sufficient.

Money and budgets are usually a limiting factor for small and medium-sized exporters from developing countries. Therefore, exporters need to understand that everything connected with a trade fair attendance will cost money at some point. Never assume that anything is for free. Especially when you attend a trade fair together with a BSO and/or the IPD, be aware that a lot of money has already gone into the preparation and organisation of the trade fair and that every extra adjustment will cause extra costs.

Also keep in mind that costs will occur even after the trade fair is over. Usually, samples will have to be sent, analysis conducted or production ramped up. All these activities involve costs that your company needs to take into account. Further, documents, certifications and shipping costs will occur even before the first order has been placed. It is also important to take into account that most customers will not pay upfront but upon delivery.

Proactivity is a key habit of successful exporters. Usually there are elements of a trade fair that your company can influence and those that are given. Try to identify those respective elements and shape them according to your business and trade fair goals. If you sit back and let things happen, it is most likely that you will not achieve what you are looking for but end up somewhere else instead. This holds especially true for making appointments. In most cases, relevant senior buyers from interesting importers have a busy schedule. Simply showing up at their trade fair stand is a virtually impossible endeavour. Make sure you identify the importers you would like to meet beforehand and then try to arrange appointments with the respective buyers.

Finally, interpersonal communication is very important to avoid misunderstandings. Thus, exporters should first try to understand their business partners and then seek to be understood. Ask open questions until you have gained enough information to get an idea of the situation. If you are unsure, ask again and confirm your observation. Do not take anything for granted. Make notes all the time, as you might forget important details of your conversations later. Notes will make the follow-up process easier.

5 The strategy

5.1 THE TRADE FAIR AND ITS ROLE IN THE MARKETING MIX

The classical marketing mix comprises four elements: product strategy, price strategy, distribution and communication. Trade fairs are a distribution and communication tool at the same time. They provide the opportunity to communicate a product or service to the audience, inform the press about the latest company and product news and get in touch with possible customers, partners, suppliers and others. Hence, your company should plan trade fair attendance as an element within its marketing and sales strategy.

At the same time, trade fairs are an opportunity to deploy most of the common communication tools: i.e. printed advertisements, brochures, flyers, press releases, and business cards, booked adverts in media, social media, event marketing, sponsoring and cooperation.

Thus, trade fairs are not only a marketing strategy element, they are also a pivotal point of the company's annual business schedule.

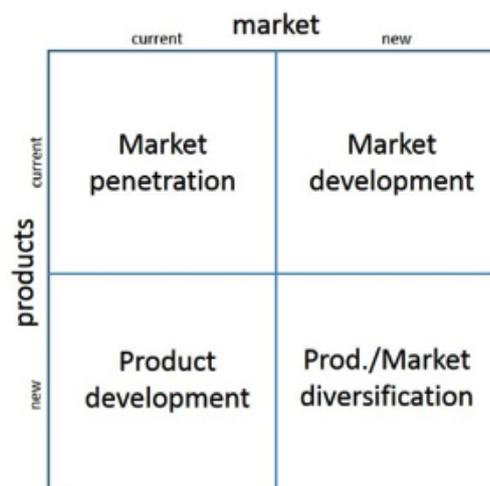
SMEs from developing countries should therefore check how a trade fair attendance fits into their own business strategy; at the same time, trade fair readiness is closely linked to the capability of being able to produce all the necessary communication tools that a trade fair entails and that are elementary to make it a success.

5.2 COMPANY STRATEGY AND TRADE FAIR STRATEGY

Once the decision to attend a trade fair has been made, the right trade fair has been selected and the checklists for trade fair participation have been worked through, it is time to define the strategic goals for the trade fair participation.

First of all, you should determine which products should be offered at the fair and to which customers. A good way to visualise the different options is the product-market-matrix.

FIGURE 2: TRADE FAIR STRATEGY OPTIONS



Source: Klaas Koolman 2016

On the basis of this matrix, you can easily determine which strategy your company is currently following and which strategy you would like to follow at the trade fair.

The selected strategy then also implies the specific tactics (e.g. actions) you need to undertake at the fair. Translated to the fair stand the following four alternatives arise:

- **Market penetration** strategy implies a customer-oriented booth and communication. The goal is to increase the distribution in the existing market with the existing products. Hence, customers will look for special offers, extra services and/or other additional features to win them over.
- **Market development** strategy implies a contact-oriented booth and communication to reach new contacts. This strategy aims at selling the existing product to a new market. For SMEs exporting from developing countries, this strategy will usually apply. Here you need to be communicative, precise and to the point. You will need to make your future customers aware of your offer and its attractiveness, even if the product is not new.
- **Product development** strategy implies a product-oriented booth style. In this case, your company or brand will be known to most of the visitors. However, the new product(s) will be the main point of attraction. Thus you need to make sure that the fair stand offers enough space for the presentation of the new products and that you showcase the benefits of your new products.
- **Diversification** strategy implies a contact- and product-focussed booth at the same time, as a new product will have to be sold to a new market. This is the most challenging strategic option and it requires the presence of the product experts at the booth so the new products may be properly explained to the new market.

The selection of the appropriate trade fair strategy is a top-management task and should not simply be carried out by the trade fair organisation team within the company.

5.3 OBJECTS OF A TRADE FAIR PARTICIPATION

Whenever you choose to attend a fair, goal setting is mandatory not only to define the right actions at the fair but also to measure the success afterwards. Goals or objectives for a trade fair are closely linked to the company strategy, as mentioned above. These top-level strategic goals can be further broken down into sub-goals.

Some guiding questions for goal setting could be:

- What are the entrepreneurial objectives to be achieved?
- What knowledge about the foreign market shall be obtained?
- Which corporate-specific or even product-specific questions may be answered at the fair?
- What other general objectives do we have (e.g. market evaluation, investigation of export opportunities, new cooperation models in production, distribution opportunities)?
- What are the communication objectives (e.g. introducing the company to a certain audience, press and blogger presentations, establishing and nurturing relations)?
- What are the sales objectives (e.g. levelling market prices and margins, emphasizing quality, providing service)?
- What are the distribution objectives?
- What are the product objectives (e.g. examining acceptance of products, new product launches)?

Generally, goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART). This means, you should be able to define a goal specifically. Further, it should be measurable by quantitative indicators (e.g. turnover or number of customers). Achievability is important, too, as goals that are not achievable will demotivate rather than motivate. Goals also should be realistic, as unrealistic goals do not contribute to your long-term business strategy. Lastly, goals should be achievable within a certain period of time that needs to be definable.

Following this SMART goal definition approach you should select and define goals that your company shall achieve at a fair and then make them "smart". The following list provides possible goals that can be achieved at a trade fair. These need to be formulated in a smart way by your company:

- SALES GOALS**
- Generate sales & turnover
 - Generate sales leads
 - Sell more known products to existing customers
 - Sell new products to existing customers
 - Foster your business contacts

- COMMUNICATION GOALS**
- Present products to the audience
 - Release novelties to the press
 - Create market awareness
 - Build and support your company image or specific brand images
 - Trigger media coverage
 - Foster media relations
 - Meet with bloggers and influencers

- OTHER GOALS**
- Inform customers
 - Gain new partners, suppliers
 - Obtain competition information

6 Planning the trade fair

6.1 THE SPACE

Depending on whether you participate at a fair together with a BSO and/or the IPD or if your company is attending as a single exhibitor, you will need to carefully plan your trade fair attendance. The space, the location and your stand at a trade fair are three elementary factors that will influence how successful your company will be there. For example, a large booth in a poor location can be less effective than just a small booth in a top location. Hence, it is crucial to analyse all available information about the fair and to make the right decisions.

If your company decided to attend a trade fair on its own, then the following steps should be carried out in order to make sure the desired stand location can be secured.

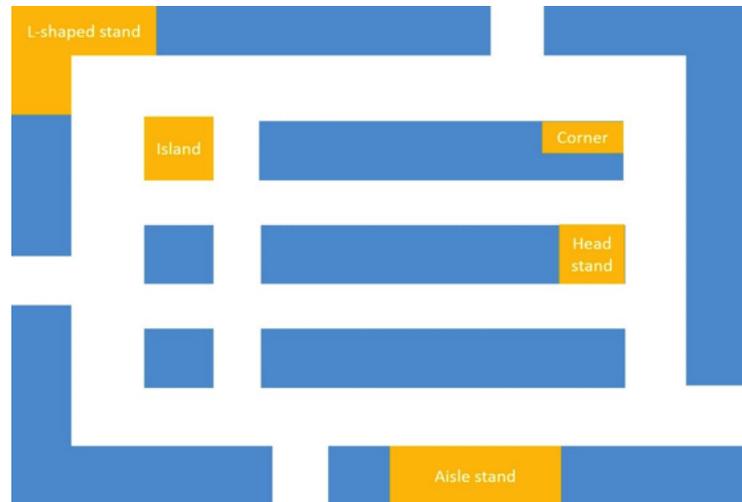
- Inquiry about the publishing date of the trade fair manual in order to make sure you will contact the trade fair as soon as the booking period for stand starts.
- Ask for name and contacts of the official stand fitter in order to have a direct connection and to obtain additional information about the hall layout etc.
- Ask for name and contact of the official forwarder in order to have all necessary information in one place in case you need to directly ship goods to your booth.
- Most importantly, check for the application closing date in order to ensure a timely registration.

When going through the trade fair manual mentioned above, you will come across the hall plan. This gives you a good understanding about the size and layout of the fair. At a later stage, the hall plan also indicates where your assigned stand is located. You should check this carefully and ask for a different location in case the assigned location does not serve your trade fair and company goals. The most important thing is to check if the stand is located in a hall that is dedicated to the type of products your company will present. You should also check if your assigned stand is located in a high-traffic zone or a quiet area. Depending on your trade fair goals, you might then want to change the stand location.

It is also possible to name a desired shape of stand when filing the application. The different stand shapes all have their advantages and disadvantages:

- Aisle stand: simple stand with one open side and three closed sides. This stand type requires creativity to make it look impressive and attract visitors. The location of aisle stands also influences the attraction of visitors.
- Corner stand: this stand has two closed sides and two adjacent open sides. The latter provide a good place for an information counter or product demonstration that catches the visitors' attention.
- Head stand: this stand has only one closed side, offering three open sides. This stand type has good communication and representation qualities.
- L-Shaped stand: this stand type most often provides a large front face, making it visible to visitors from both aisles. An L-shaped stand, however, requires a good stand layout as the two split stand sections can lead to detached areas within the booth.
- Island stand: this stand type has four open sides. Island stands can be designed to become spectacular booths; however, this requires good trade fair booth design experience as the stall is open to four sides and facilities such as warehouse or kitchen need to be incorporated into the booth.

FIGURE 3: DIFFERENT TYPES OF FAIR STANDS



Source: Klaas Koolman 2016

The size of your stand is determined by a couple of factors. In most cases, your budget will determine the size of your stand in square meters. Please bear in mind that there will not only be costs accruing for the rent of the stand area but also for the construction, the decoration and equipment of the booth itself.

Further, determinants are the limitations imposed by the trade fair company, the number of products you would like to show and the number of visitors you expect. If you would like to present a large number of products you will need to have a stand that allows you to set up the respective displays. If you are expecting a large number of visitors and you would like to provide the necessary meeting areas, your booth needs to be able to cater to this.

As a SME from a developing country, you are usually not expected to have a large and sophisticated booth. It is advisable, however, to carefully design your stand and pay attention to the details.

6.2 YOUR STAND

One of the most pressing questions is: what should a stand look like. First of all, your stand should follow your overall company strategy as well as your trade fair strategy. It should be large enough to display all the exhibits you would like to show, to provide meeting areas if business meetings are part of your trade fair objectives, and it should also provide space for back-office and supplies. If your trade fair objective only is to meet people and provide your contacts with a place to go, then you may be fine with a small meeting area-style stand. If your objective is to communicate your existing or new products to the audience, then you will need to take this into account when planning the booth.

Large professional stands usually provide closets, kitchen area, back-office and sometimes also separate meeting rooms. Some exhibitors provide a café-style meeting area for business meetings.

The following checklist should help you find the right layout for your trade fair stand:

- How much space do we need?
- What is the main purpose of the stand?
- What does the flow of visitors look like, where do they come from?
- Do the entrances provide easy access to the booth?
- What is the first thing visitors should see at my booth?
- Do the company's trade fair objectives require an open or closed layout?
- Are there any obstacles at the booth or in front of it (e.g. pillars)?
- What are the focal points of the booth?
- Where do we place the eye catchers?
- What kind of facilities are required (e.g. office, storage, catering)

The most important thing to keep in mind is: your stand needs to stick out and make the visitors want to enter the booth. It needs to attract new visitors and it also needs to make it simple for existing contacts to easily find your company in a large trade fair hall.

The following points should be kept in mind when designing the stand:

- Plan your traffic management (i.e. where should the people go once they enter the booth?)
- Factor in the number of visitors expected
- Communicate your company's identity or the brand image you would like to create
- Put yourself in your target groups shoes and view your stand through their eyes
- Use focal points and exposed objects to create attention
- Be clear in your stand communication, use a theme if applicable
- Always keep your trade fair objectives in mind

Every trade fair stand is a communication tool. Thus, make sure you select the right information to be displayed. The information you put up on your booth should be in line with your company's overall trade fair strategy. You should consider using graphics instead of long texts. As a rule of thumb, every piece of information should easily be readable from where the visitor will usually stand. Large posters with a lot of textual information will not normally be read by visitors. Some basic hints for the use of graphics and text on a trade fair booth are:

- Keep it short and simple
- Display messages and benefits, not explanations or background information
- Ensure that text size is large enough to be read from a distance
- Use visualisations of benefits rather than lengthy texts
- Use large-scale images and ensure the picture quality is sufficient for this
- Set highlights using light effects

When putting up information on a trade fair stand, try to avoid these common mistakes:

- Lengthy, technical information
- Small font sizes
- Spelling errors or badly translated text
- Too much information
- Wrong context of information at the stand
- Bad lighting

6.3 EXHIBIT & PRODUCTS

The selection of exhibits and products to take to a fair depends on your company's overall strategy as well as the selected trade fair strategy. If your objective is to sell existing products to your existing market, then you might only want to display your core assortment in order to keep your stand simple and clean. If your strategy is to sell new products to an existing market, then clearly your new products should be the highlight of your booth. If your strategy is to sell your existing products to a new market, then you might want to select those products for display which promise the best results in that particular market.

Generally, you should keep in mind that visitors are easily distracted by the huge amount of products and presentations presented at a fair. Thus, ensure your product presentation is simple, clear and straightforward and attracts and holds visitors' attention. The key to achieve this is to communicate the benefits at a glance and in an easily understandable manner. Again it is advisable to put yourself in your customers' shoes and ask yourself the question "What would I find attractive about the products?"

Some key advices for a successful product display are:

- Keep it simple
- Do not put too much information next to your product
- Limit the number of exhibits
- Select your "hero" products and give them a special location on the stand
- Group similar products together if this makes sense
- Do not group products from different product categories
- Communicate product benefits visually, but do not display too much information, text, graphic, etc.
- Leave enough room between each product sample and between groups of products
- Use different levels to display products
- Use light effects

6.4 STAFF

The type and number of staff that should be present at a trade fair depends on your overall trade fair strategy. Not all of the below-mentioned personnel need to be present at the fair all the time. However, you should make sure that at least two company representatives with good knowledge about all products and, in case of international trade fair participation, with a good command of English are available during the entire trade fair.

STAND MANAGER The stand manager is the person who is fully responsible for the success of the trade fair participation. If you attend a trade fair together with a national BSO (e.g. national pavilion) or the IPD, then the role of the stand manager will be provided by the respective organisation. However, if you attend a trade fair on your own, then a stand manager will have to be appointed.

This person needs the full back up of the company's management and also the respective colleagues present at the fair stand. The stand manager is responsible for the appearance of the stand and everything that happens there. However, this does not mean that the stand manager needs to take care of all tasks him- or herself. On the contrary, this person delegates most of the tasks and duties to his or her colleagues. Ideally a stand manager is an experienced person with multitasking skills. This person needs to have an eye for detail

as well as the big picture. The stand manager accompanies the set-up and the close-up of the stand, is responsible for opening and closing the booth every day of the trade fair and needs to make sure that all the products and information is in place. The stand manager supervises other staff, instructs forwarders and fitters and takes care of all unforeseen issues during the fair.

SALES STAFF Depending on the trade fair objectives, sales personnel will be essential at a trade fair. Especially when the trade fair goal is to sell products and make business deals, sales representatives are indispensable. As an SME exporting from a developing country, you should make sure to have **at least two sales representatives with a good command of English** at your fair stand, depending on the size of your company and the size of your booth.

SALES DIRECTOR In very small companies sometimes the sales director is the only sales employee of the company. Then this question is obsolete. However, if your company already has an adequate staffing level, then this question will arise.

Depending on the type of a trade fair, the type of visitors and the business contacts that are expected to visit the fair, it will be mandatory to let the sales director of your company attend the trade fair. The sales director does not have to be present all the time; however, he or she should make sure to be present for important meetings with important customers or business partners. In most cases, senior management staff should be present during the first 1-2 days of the trade fair and later leave the floor to the sales representatives.

PRODUCT MANAGERS Product managers (PM) will usually know the products best. PMs are essential when new products or products that need to be explained are displayed. Depending on the number of products, the different product groups and the complexity of the products it can be useful to have several product managers attending the trade fair. PMs should be present at the booth at all times so their sales colleagues may call them into sales meetings for product explanation. Also, PMs can support the press department staff in their meetings with journalists.

6.5 COSTS & BUDGETS

In order to successfully participate in foreign trade fairs, it is mandatory to plan and monitor costs meticulously. Trade fair participation can consume a major part of your annual marketing & communication budget. Thus it is important to know how much money will be needed in order to realise a trade fair visit. However, it is not only important to know the amount, it is even more important to keep track and control of the budget. To calculate and control spending, you should produce a detailed budget well in advance. This budget should at least comprise the following elements:

ITEM	Costs		
	Budget	Actual	Gap
Administration			
Stand space fee			
Additional fees (e.g. comm. packages)			
Taxes			

ITEM	Costs		
	Budget	Actual	Gap
Stand & Supplies			
Design of booth			
Construction of booth			
Furniture & decoration			
Graphics & information			
Power supply			
Water & waste			
Official fair catalogue			
Web catalogue entry			
Additional fair communication			
Audio-video equipment			
Cleaning service			
Catering			
Security service			
Beverages			
Transport			
Packaging			
Shipping			
Forwarding to trade fair			
Customs & duties			
Parking			
Staff			
Travel & accommodation			
Local transport			
Allowances			
Promoters & hostesses			
Additional services (e.g. courier)			
Communication			
Print brochures & literature			
Press releases & distribution			
Mailings			
Adverts in fair magazines			
Sponsoring			
Adverts at the fair			
Hospitality & gifts			
Photographer			
Business cards			
Flyers			
Additional material (e.g. USB sticks)			
Others			
Market research			
Insurance			
Buffer			

7 Planning and Preparation

7.1 APPLICATION

Foreign trade fair attendance requires proper planning and preparation. Specific attention should be directed to meeting the respective deadlines. Assuming that your company is attending a trade fair together with the IPD a timely application will be required (about 8 months before the fair). Thus, make sure to contact the IPD well in advance to state your company details and ask for the respective application details.

In case your company will attend a trade fair on its own, the application should be submitted 12 months prior to the fair as well. It is advisable to check the publication date of the trade fair manual and also to check the closing date for applications. The first source of information should be the trade fair's website.

Also check the deadlines for entries into electronic and printed trade fair brochures and directories. It is vital that your company is listed in these directories, as this is the source of information for most visitors.

7.2 TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION

Travel arrangements should be made well in advance, especially if your company is looking for reasonable air transfer fares. Travel arrangements should be made at the same time as the subscription to a trade fair. The same holds true for the arrangement of accommodation. Assuming that the accommodation during the trade fair is not organised by a BSO or the IPD, you should start looking for all necessary arrangements 10-12 months in advance as hotels will be booked out pretty quickly during fair times. When looking for accommodation in a foreign city, take into account the distance to the trade fair grounds. Sometimes, ground transportation during rush hour can be time consuming which makes a hotel close to the fairground particularly attractive. However, these hotels often are very expensive, especially when booked too late. It is recommended to engage a local travel agent well in advance to assist you in the arrangement of flight and accommodation. The more time you give to the travel agent, the better the chances to find a suitable flight and hotel.

7.3 VISA AND ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

For some foreign visitors visas are required for European countries. Sometimes, visa procedures can be lengthy and complex. Make sure to check your country's entry regulations with the respective host country and apply for a visa well in advance if you need one. It is advisable to check the entry requirements together with your trade fair application at least 10 months in advance. Make sure you have this point covered, as most countries that require visas will not allow people without visas to enter the country and this could jeopardise your trade fair attendance. If your company is going to attend a trade fair with IPD, the IPD will provide you with a personal invitation letter for the trade fair. However, appointments with the respective embassy have to be realized by you and on-time.

7.4 TRADE FAIR SAMPLES

Samples and exhibits should be prepared well in advance. At least 4-6 months before the fair takes place, the samples should be selected, depending on your product lifecycles. The sample selection should follow your trade fair strategy. Ensure the samples are of very good quality and comply with the target country's regulations. Check if you are allowed to bring the samples in your luggage or if you need to send them via a freight forwarder. If you choose to carry them along, make sure to correctly declare them at customs. It is recommended to carry at least one set of samples of each product in order to have backups ready in case the other set gets lost, stolen, broken or stuck in custom. You will also need extra samples to hand out to prospective customers and journalists. For this purpose, it is advisable to have small-size samples to give away during the fair. Depending on the

duration of the fair, the total amount of samples can be significant. For international fairs it is recommended to calculate up to 20 samples per day. To diversify the risk when carrying the samples in your travel luggage, it is recommended to distribute the samples among several people. If you are going to use a professional logistics provider to ship the samples to the trade fair destination, then please allow enough time for the shipment. Depending on the means of transportation (air vs. sea) the whole process can take up to 2 months. The correct address of the destination and a personal contact are mandatory. In case you attend a trade fair together with the IPD, the latter will communicate a contact person. If you attend a trade fair alone, you will need to let your stand fitter know that you are going to send samples and include the complete shipping forms and tracking codes.

7.5 LOGOS AND SIGNAGE

If you attend the trade fair together with the IPD, you will be asked to provide your company logo or signage. This should be prepared at least 4 months in advance. Depending on the fair, the BSO or IPD will arrange the stand decoration. In this case, you will only need to provide the respective data. In case you are asked to bring along your company logo, make sure you prepare this in advance. Also check if the logo needs to be printed on a solid logo plate or as a banner. Depending on the size, these may be carried in your travel luggage.

7.6 CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

As mentioned above, intercultural communication can be a challenge. In most cases, culture, habits, language, food and customs are different than at home, which makes a foreign trade fair attendance even more demanding. Thus, it is absolutely vital to prepare for your trip by studying the foreign culture's particularities. Such a preparation should be commenced at least 4 months prior to the fair. Do not waste time trying to learn the host country's language if it is not English, but rather concentrate on interpersonal communication and business customs. However, it is important that at least two sales people as well as the stand staff have a good command of English!

A good source for guidance in intercultural matters is the internet or specific guidebooks. It is advisable to study and discuss the host country's habits, culture and communication together with your colleagues at home.

7.7 PROFESSIONAL DOCUMENTS

Another important element of preparation is your company's professional documents. Marketing materials should be prepared well in advance (approx. 6 months) and you should allow enough time for printing. Later, your materials need to be shipped to the trade fair destination if they cannot be taken in the travel luggage. In case of shipment, you will need to allow at least two months in order to be sure that they arrive in time. If you need to ship your marketing material, you will need to state a local contact person who will take care of your shipment upon arrival. Ideally, this contact person is the official stand fitter of the respective organisation you will attend the fair with or your own stand fitter.

Certifications such as organic certification, ISO, fair trade etc. need to be up to date and brought to the fair.

Business cards and professional name badges are essential and should also be prepared at least 4 month prior to the fair.

7.8 PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

Last but not least, make sure to have your personal documents (passport) ready when flying out to a foreign trade fair. This preparation should at least be carried out 6 months prior to the trade fair attendance, especially when visas must be applied for.

8 Communication around the trade fair

8.1 COMMUNICATION OF PRESENCE

A trade fair attendance marks a milestone in a company's yearly business schedule. This is not only due to the amount of money that goes into the planning and execution of the trade fair attendance but also the fact that a trade fair provides the ideal setting to demonstrate products and communicate to the target groups.

Thus, it is vital to make the most of your trade fair attendance. Depending on your overall trade fair strategy, your company may want to maximize the number of the contacts targeted in order to increase efficiency. For example:

- Visitors
- Customers
- Business partners
- Suppliers
- Cooperation partners
- Press & bloggers

Another important point to keep in mind is the closing date of the exhibitor list. The exhibitor list is the backbone of the communication of your trade fair attendance. If you fail to enter this list, you will practically be non-existent on the fair, as many visitors browse through the official list in order to find the products and exhibitors they are interested in.

On top of the official exhibitor list, it is important to check if the fair offers special presentation areas or listings. Many of the leading trade fairs now offer especially themed areas where products from different exhibitors are displayed together. Visitors usually use these areas to get a first overview.

Also make sure that you insert the information about your trade fair attendance (including the hall and stand number) into your e-mail signature as well as your company's website.

8.2 ATTRACTING VISITORS

The number of visitors at your company's stand of course depends on the overall number of visitors the fair attracts. A large international trade fair might draw thousands of visitors during just a few days; a small specialised trade fair with only a narrow target group might only attract a couple of hundred visitors. Depending on the size of the trade fair and the position the trade fair holds within its industry, there are two different routes. In order to maximize the number of visitors on big international fairs, your company will need to use mass communication as it is simply not feasible to contact every potential visitor separately. For small and specialised fairs, and in case you can access the list of attendants, it is advisable to contact prospective visitors beforehand.

In order to maximize the number of visitors at the stand, the following measures should be taken into account:

- Entry into the trade fair exhibitor catalogue
- Entry into the online exhibitor list of the trade fair
- Inclusion of a banner into your corporate communication (e.g. e-mail) to notify current customers and business partners about your trade fair attendance
- Inclusion of respective information on your company's website, including date, location and hall & stand number
- Newsletter mailings to your existing customer and business partner mailing list
- Use social media to spread the information (see 8.4)

8.3 PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations are a very important element of the communication strategy since your company should try to make use of the opportunity to create a “buzz” around your trade fair attendance, especially if you have a new and interesting product that has not been introduced into the target market before.

Proactive public relations work will allow you to actively shape the public image of your company. If you do not actively engage in public relations, your company may risk to see media coverage that creates an unfavourable public image.

Especially if your trade fair goal is to sell new products to existing markets or new products to new markets you should make sure to support your presence with respective PR measures. Regular PR measures include:

- Compilation of a press release. The message of this press release depends on the overall business and communications strategy of your company. However, you should make sure only to use interesting or novel information in your press release.
- Distribution of a press release to a selected distribution list
- Arrangement of press interviews with the desired journalists/media and your company's experts (e.g. product managers)
- Arrangement of press round tables if you want to disclose novelties to a large group of journalists

8.4 SOCIAL MEDIA

With social media now being ubiquitous, it is mandatory to use these communication channels in order to maximize your trade fair efficiency. However, not all social media channels are equally appropriate to distribute your message. Again, it is important to align your social media strategy with your company's overall business and trade fair strategy.

A good way of informing your network and your target group about your trade fair attendance is to post respective information on business networks like LinkedIn. Ideally, these posts should not only be about your trade fair attendance but should also include information that is relevant to your target group. For instance, your company is going to display new and interesting products or the development of a new technique.

FIGURE 4: EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS



Source: Google inquiry

The same is true for using blogs as communication channels. Blogs usually deal with a specific topic or industry. Therefore it might be interesting to use specific blogs in order to inform the industry about your presence at the fair and about the news you have to tell. Again it is important to identify the news value of your message, as the message will not get picked up by the media otherwise. It is advisable to maintain a good relationship with the relevant bloggers. There are two types of bloggers: those present in your home country who write for local blogs and those present in your target market who write for an international audience. Your focus should be on the latter group since you want to achieve media coverage in your target market. Once you have a relationship with a blogger, make sure to invite them to your fair stand and to dedicate some time to them.

Another social network with potential for trade fair communication is Twitter. On Twitter, people and corporations use so-called "hashtags" (#) to mark certain topics. Make sure you check Twitter to see if your target group is already present there. Further, most of the leading trade fairs have their own twitter profiles, thus connecting thousands of "followers" to one topic. As a participant at a trade fair, your company can use these online discussions to distribute your own messages and advertise your trade fair presence by posting messages that include the respective hashtag.

Other social media networks such as google+ and Facebook are also good platforms for spreading the word about your company's trade fair attendance. Facebook is rather used by end consumers, whereas google+ is equally suited for business contacts and endconsumer relationships.

If possible, the task of trade fair communication should be assigned to a selected person within your company who should then closely cooperate with the trade fair manager.

FIGURE 5: EXAMPLE OF THE FOOD INGREDIENTS TRADE FAIR TWITTER PROFILE



Source: https://twitter.com/Fi_Global

9 At the trade fair

9.1 YOUR MISSION

Attending a foreign trade fair, either together with a BSO, the IPD and/or any other organisation, or alone means that you have a clear mission. This mission is to fulfil your company's business goals that have been defined as part of the business and trade fair strategy. Thus, depending on your company's strategy your mission might be to contact new customers, take care of existing customers, establish contacts to journalists, or conduct a competition survey. Whatever your goals are, it is recommended to follow the below-mentioned procedures:

- Make a plan for the entire trade fair, stating your goals in written form. Do this for all employees who will be present at the trade fair
- Have a common calendar that can be accessed by everyone in your company so that everybody knows where their colleagues are at all times. This calendar can be in written or electronic form
- Have a personal daily schedule with your daily appointments
- Make appointments especially with important customers and business partners, but also with journalists or bloggers beforehand and try to stick to the planned schedule while at the fair. This will not always be possible, as meetings are often delayed and schedules altered. However, try to get the mobile number of important customers and business partners to catch up with them if a scheduled meeting does not work out
- Try to put your time and effort into those activities that will help you achieve the strategic trade fair goals and avoid being distracted by side activities
- Use every minute the trade fair is open to meet as many potential clients, business partners etc. as possible

9.2 DOCUMENTATION

The most important task at the fair, beside actively approaching new business partners, is to document your meetings and contacts. **Documentation is the most important tool at the trade fair.** It will help you keep track of the proceedings at the fair as well as remember both contact details and the topics of the meetings. Documentation will serve as guidance for the follow-up process and it constitutes the basis for the post-fair evaluation.

Thus, it is vital to keep trade fair contact documentation forms or so-called contact sheets. These contact sheets need to be completed during the business meeting itself so that no important information is forgotten in the rush to the next appointment: You will often be dragged into some other meeting or process and thus forget about your contact sheet from the previous meeting.

When attending a trade fair together with the IPD, the contact sheets should be passed to the respective IPD colleague for digital archiving at the end of each day. But please make sure to take the original documents with you afterwards.

The information listed below should be contained on every trade fair conversation report:

- Title, name, company and position/function of the prospects
- Information about how important the prospect is for your company
- Contact details (phone and e-mail address)
- Address, location and country
- New or existing contact
- Kind of contact (client, supplier, service provider)
- Industry sector of the company
- Notes of the meeting (discussed details)
- Decisions taken
- Next steps (including the timing of the next steps)/follow-up preparation

9.3 USEFUL HINTS

Some organisational pitfalls can be avoided by proper preparation. It is recommended to finalise the set-up of the booth the day before the trade fair starts. Usually, big trade fairs open their gates a couple of days in advance for set-up. In order to access the trade fair grounds during these days, your staff may need special passes (set-up/dismantling passes). These can be requested at the trade fair office but need to be organised in advance.

Further, it is advisable to check the locations of all necessary services beforehand:

- Toilets
- Service office
- Forwarders/loading docks
- Kitchen (to prepare drinks) if not included at the booth itself
- Waste disposal
- Energy sources

On the day before the trade fair starts, all exhibits should be set up at the booth and checked for integrity. Lights and electricity should be checked as well as Wi-Fi and phone connections (if needed).

Exhibits should be stowed away after opening hours/the end of the fair or secured with appropriate security measures.

9.4 THE DAILY ROUTINE

Companies attending a foreign trade fair for the first time may find the experience overwhelming. There are many tasks involved in setting up the stand and keeping it up and running. Additionally, there are visitors, customers and prospects demanding attention. However, all this can be handled with the proper daily routine.

First thing in the morning should be to check the stand for integrity, switch on anything that needs to be switched on and make sure that all exhibits are in place. In order to do so, you need to arrive in time at the booth; depending on the size of the stand this may be up to one hour before the trade fair opens.

During the fair, always observe: Observe the competition and your visitors and take notes of interesting findings. A trade fair is one of the best opportunities to collect first-hand competitor and customer information.

When talking to prospects at your stand, try to analyse them and find out what their intentions are. During a conversation, it is advisable to try to find out as early as possible whether the visitor is of importance or not. Visitors who are merely interested in getting some information or maybe a free gift are nothing but time-consuming. Senior level executives, buyers, managing directors and journalists are the type of audience you should spend your time on.

However, be aware that especially in foreign environments, outer appearances can sometimes be deceptive. Try to ask the right questions in order to achieve the information you need. Those questions can be:

- “Where are you from?”
- “Which company do you represent?”
- “What is your mission at this fair?”
- “Which department do you represent?”

Try to avoid personal questions. However, try to understand the background of the person in front of you and the bigger context why he or she is attending the fair. Sometimes you will find out that your prospect is from the sales department of a company rather than from the buying department. In this case, it is recommended to try to find out if the person has any decision-making power in terms of buying or not. This situation can be resolved by asking for the responsible buyers contacts.

FIGURE 7: THE 5 I'S – A TYPICAL APPROACH AT A TRADE FAIR



Source: Klaas Koolman

The ideal routine of handling trade fair interactions can be described by the 5-I technique. The first thing is to be initiative and approach the visitor. This should be followed by an invitation to take a closer look. While this happens, an inquiry about the person's background should be carried out. However, this should always happen in a professional and polite way. Then, the information phase will start: here the prospect should receive the most important information, i.e. that which is relevant to him or her. At the end of the conversation, the influencing phase should follow. During this phase the prospect should be directed towards agreeing to receive further information, a product sample, an offer and/or even signing a deal.

During business meetings at a fair, always have a sufficient amount of business cards with you and always remember to take business cards from your prospects. **Take notes of every meeting while it happens.** Use the contact sheet to record the details. Especially on busy days, meetings and conversations might follow each other without stop, and by the end of the day, you will most probably have forgotten the content of the first meetings (see 9.2 Documentation).

Once the fair trade closes and visitors leave the booth, sit down and sum up your day in written form. Collect all meeting notes, sort business cards, and hand over those notes that might be relevant to other colleagues. **It is recommended to start an action list right on the first day of the fair in order to keep track of all proceedings at the fair.** Remember to link specific actions to each note and to appoint a responsible person for the task.

9.5 DO'S AND DON'TS

Attending a foreign trade fair means a considerable investment of money and time. Therefore, your goal should be to make the most out of it. The following hints will help you to professionalize your appearance and avoid the most common pitfalls.

DO'S	DON'TS
Be professional at all times	Never smoke, eat or drink inside the stand
Wear a badge or name tag	Don't chat with your colleagues
Have business cards ready to hand out	Don't argue with your visitors
Prepare yourself (knowledge, information)	Never stand with your back to the open side of the stand
Anticipate questions, prepare answers	Don't let the booth get messy
Know your role and responsibilities	Don't leave your booth unattended
Practice your product demonstration (if there is one)	Don't use inappropriate language
Arrive early at the booth (at least 0.5 h before visitor entry)	Don't complain about the trade fair or other externalities
Qualify the information you give out	Don't talk badly about your competitors
Disengage quickly (professionally) from unqualified visitors	Don't assume anything – ask questions
Know your booth and where to find things	Don't sit in the corner
Face towards the aisle (or any open side)	Don't use mobiles, laptops, etc.
Maintain or establish eye contact with your visitors	Don't let visitors wait
Be assertive	Don't be aggressive
Have a notebook and pen ready to take notes	
Isolate complaining visitors and talk to them one-to-one	
Keep everything in order at the booth at all times	
Ask questions, learn from your visitors	
Take notes all the time	
Wear good business clothes	
Pay attention to good breath (no alcohol, no smoking)	
Make sure every staff member knows about his/her responsibilities	
Have a friendly, open countenance	
Show interest and listen to your customers	
Let customers experience your products	

9.6 ATTENDING A TRADE FAIR TOGETHER WITH IPD

If your company decides to attend a trade fair together with the IPD, some things need to be kept in mind:

- All information material that will be provided by the IPD has to be studied. The contained instructions must be carried out.
- You will be asked to adhere to the respective deadlines.
- All enquiries should be answered in time to ensure a smooth planning process.
- The IPD can arrange business contacts and meetings. However, proactive behaviour of your own will be asked for. A trade fair attendance together with the IPD is a good chance to meet new business contacts, however, they will not just come by themselves.
- Contact sheets for taking meeting notes and a proper follow-up will be provided by the IPD.
- Though supported by the IPD the follow-up process will have to be carried out by your company.
- The IPD encourages proactive behaviour and the willingness to learn is a crucial factor for success.

10 Follow-up

The time a company spends at a trade fair is actually quite little compared to the time preparing for it. A lot of time, effort, energy and most of all money goes into the planning and execution of a trade fair attendance. **The biggest mistake that can be made once a trade fair is over is not to conduct a proper follow-up.** Collecting a lot of business cards at the fair and having a lot of conversations with prospects does not necessarily mean that a fair was successful. The follow-up procedure will determine if your trade fair participation will be a success or not. During the follow-up the following points should be taken into account:

- Every conversation, every meeting you had at the fair is a chance to develop a business relationship
- It is now up to the company to do a proper follow-up and to reconnect with the prospects
- A “no” not always means “no”, it can also mean “not now, but maybe later”

A proper follow-up will enhance the reputation of you, your company and your country. In order to show high professionalism, start the follow-up as soon as possible. In some cases, the follow-up should already happen at the fair itself in a follow-up meeting but at least 72 hours after the final closing of the fair. Customers and prospects are expecting a timely follow-up. Another opportunity to follow up is in the evening after the trade fair day.

Some forms of follow-up are:

- Follow-up meeting at the fair
- Dispatching of samples and additional information within the time agreed
- Follow-up e-mails or phone calls, including the information that has been shared at the fair and picking up the latest agreement on the fair
- Communication in case of delays in order to inform the prospect
- Communication even if no suitable offer can be formulated
- Request for reaction if the prospects do not come back in time

Follow-up communication should always be linked to the fair and tie in with the topics that have been discussed there. It is very important to follow this rule and not to send mass e-mails to all potential customers! Follow up communication should happen in written form (e-mail) or via phone. If written follow-up is used, it should be precise, short and personal.

It is recommended to keep a follow-up contact list or customer acquisition list. This list should contain all contacts that have been established at the fair including the following information:

- Contact/responsible person
- Position, function
- Company information
- Industry
- Topic of meeting
- Most important points discussed
- Next steps
- Deadline

Only if a proper follow-up has been conducted, the true value of the trade fair participation can be estimated. In order to compare costs against outcome, an evaluation must be carried out.

11 Evaluation & preparation for the next trade fair

Trade fair participation can be evaluated on two different dimensions: effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness describes the capability of producing a desired result. Efficiency describes the relationship between input vs. output.

Trade fair participations are effective if the desired outcome can be generated, i.e. if the set goals can be achieved qualitatively. Effectiveness basically describes “doing the right things”. To measure how effective a trade fair participation was you need to check if the pre-set goals have been achieved. For example: if a trade fair participation’s goal was to generate new leads and the only outcome of the fair was journalist contacts and business meetings with existing customers, then the trade fair participation was not effective. Effectiveness is a necessary prerequisite for a successful fair but doing and achieving “the right things” at a fair does not necessarily mean that the process has been efficient in terms of cost.

Some more questions that can be asked to check effectiveness are:

- Did we acquire new market knowledge?
- Did we accumulate information about the competition?
- Did we gather customer insights?
- Did we use the opportunity to test our product in the market?
- Did we find new suppliers?
- Did we make new journalist contacts?
- Did we meet the right people (e.g. senior executives rather than junior staff)?

Evaluation of trade fair efficiency is a challenging endeavour. On the one hand, the input can be clearly measured, on the other hand, the output is difficult to track. Usually, all expenses that are related to a company’s trade fair attendance can be summed up by simply adding the respective lines in your books. The accounting department should be able to provide these reports. In order to be able to produce these reports, all trade fair-related costs need to be marked as such when they occur.

It is also rather challenging to determine the output a trade fair attendance has generated. The results can only be measured if the objectives have been clear. It is therefore important to set SMART goals at the beginning of the trade fair planning process. SMART means “specific”, “measurable”, “applicable”, “realistic” and “time bound”. For example, “to acquire 5 new prospects for product xyz within 4 days of trade fair participation”.

Some of these goals can be:

- Turnover
- Contacts with new customers
- Contacts with journalists and bloggers
- Overall number of contacts
- Media coverage (number of mentions/clippings)

Some of the above-mentioned indicators can be measured directly; others – such as turnover – can sometimes not be directly attributed to the trade fair. In most cases, it will take time until the business talks and negotiations a company had at a trade fair will result in tangible orders. Thus, measuring the efficiency of a trade fair participation is limited to those indicators that can clearly be measured and are attributable to the trade fair attendance time-wise. Some performance indicators are:

- Value per contact (VPC): the VPC is defined as the overall number of contacts made during the fair divided by the overall costs.
- Cost per contact (CPC): the CPC is defined as the costs of the trade fair divided by the number of visitors. This indicator can also be modified to measure the cost per press contact, the cost per sales contact or any other contact. Thus, the CPC allows you to compare the acquisition costs of a trade fair against the acquisition costs that occur via the usual acquisition channels.

Another focus of the evaluation should be on the overall trade fair experience. Especially when attending a specific trade fair for the first time, it is important to conduct an evaluation right at the fair or after the trade fair ends. This evaluation should comprise the following elements:

- Space: Was the space sufficient?
- Hall: Was the hall the right hall?
- Location: How good was the location of the stand within the hall?
- Position: How visible was the stand?
- Stand: Was the stand set up well? What needs to be changed next time?
- Set-up: How well did the set-up work?
- Visitor traffic: What was the level of attention to the booth, compared to other booths?
- Logistics: What went well, what went wrong?
- Fair: How good was the overall visitor attendance at the fair?
- Visitors: What was the quality of the visitors?

All the above-mentioned elements should be tracked from the very first day of the trade fair in order to have a complete and sound trade fair evaluation report ready by the end of the fair.

If the fair has been a success in terms of effectiveness and efficiency and it also has proven to be the right fair with good trade fair conditions and good trade fair facilities, then a trade fair participation should be considered for the following year.

In order to make your life easier the next time, some basic actions can be taken right at the fair:

- Contact the fair organisation and inquire/reserve a specific booth for the next year
- Note down all necessary and helpful contacts at the fair in order to be able to call them well in advance the next time
- Sign up for the following year's trade fair and secure early-bird sign-up rebates
- Reserve accommodation for next year's fair in order to secure good prices
- Reserve facilities (rooms, etc.) if needed

12 Checklist

Item	Details	Checked?
Market	Is there a market for the products you offer?	
Capacity	Is your company capable of handling the trade fair participation project?	
	Are you ready to export to foreign markets?	
	Can you fulfil all (European) regulations?	
	Can you meet the respective requirements (e.g. quality, product security, certifications, and standards)?	
	Do you have enough people with a good command of English?	
Budget	Is there a budget for a foreign trade fair attendance?	
Fair	Is there a specific trade fair that covers the target market and products?	
	Will you meet your future customers at this fair?	
	Does the fair happen at the right time? Does it fit your business strategy?	
	Does the fair take place in the right location (country, city)?	
	Does the fair cover the right topics (product group, industry)?	
	Is the fair relevant for your company, your products?	
Strategy	Did your company decide on an overall trade fair strategy?	
	Did you set your entrepreneurial goals for the trade fair?	
	Did you define sales targets?	
	Did you define other targets such as number of contacts, business meetings, etc.?	
Requirements	Can you provide precise information about your products?	
	Is the quality of your products high enough to meet (European) expectations (quality)?	
	Do you have proper marketing material for (European) business expectations?	
	Can you commit to what you promise (e.g. delivery times, quantities, prices, quality)?	
	Can you ensure a timely follow-up after the fair?	
Planning	Is the trade fair manual publication date known?	
	Do you know the deadline for the application?	
	Do you know the deadline for other applications such as the entry into the fair directory?	
	Did you check the stand fitters' and forwarders' contacts at the location?	
	Is the stand appropriate (location, size, visibility, design, layout, signage)?	
	Is the stand located in the right hall?	

Item	Details	Checked?
Stand	Is the space big enough?	
	Did you define the main purpose of your booth?	
	Did you take into account the visitor flow (e.g. entrance to the booth, focus points, etc.)?	
	Do the entrances provide easy access to the booth?	
	What is the first thing visitors should see at your booth?	
	Do your company's trade fair objectives require an open or closed layout?	
	Are there any obstacles at the booth or in front of it (e.g. pillars)?	
	What are the focal points of the booth?	
	Did you select "hero" products or so called "eye catchers"?	
	Where to place the eye catchers?	
	Do you have a decoration plan for your booth (e.g. where to put decoration and information)?	
	Did you prepare your information material (e.g. posters, banners, pictures)?	
	Did you do spell-checks on the English information material to ensure it is correct?	
	What kind of facilities are required (e.g. office, storage, catering, etc.)	
	Did you decide on the samples to exhibit?	
	Did you plan the shipment of your samples?	
	Has the proper and secure packing of samples been covered?	
	Do the samples need to be stored under certain conditions?	
	Do you have backup samples?	
	Did you decide on logos and signage?	
	Are all decorative elements (logos, signs, posters, etc.) produced?	
	Will the materials be carried in the travel luggage or shipped via freight forwarder?	
	Who will take care of your samples if you ship them via a logistics provider?	

Item	Details	Checked?
Preparation	Has the trade fair application been completed?	
	Has the BSO and/or the IPD be contacted?	
	Did you enter the application for the printed and/or electronic trade fair directory?	
	Have the flights been booked?	
	Has the accommodation been arranged?	
	Did you check the entry regulations to the host country? (visa)	
	Do you have a valid visa for the host country?	
	Did you apply for a new visa?	
	Do you have a valid passport?	
	Do you know about the host country's culture?	
	Do you know about the business customs of your future prospects?	
	Do you have all company documents (certifications etc.) ready?	
	Did you prepare a contact list of companies you want to meet?	
	Do you have the contact sheets ready?	
	Do you have enough business cards?	
	Do you have the marketing material ready (e.g. flyers, brochures)?	
	Do you have name badges for all employees?	
	Do you have special dietary requirements? Did you communicate them to the organisers (BSO/IPD)?	
	Did you pack proper business clothes for the trade fair?	
	Do you have enough entry tickets?	
Communication	Did you prepare press information in case you have news to tell?	
	Did you compile a list of bloggers you would like to reach?	
	Have the bloggers been contacted and has there been proper follow-up?	
	Did you inform your business network about the trade fair attendance?	
	Did you post your trade fair attendance on the respective social media channels?	
	Is the fair information (hall, stand number) included on your website and your email signature?	
	Did you invite all your existing business contacts to visit you at the fair?	

List of abbreviations

BRC	British Retail Consortium
BSO	Business Support Organisation
CPC	Cost per Contact
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points
IPD	Import Promotion Desk
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
PM	Product Manager
PR	Public Relations
SMART	Specific, measurable, applicable, realistic, timebound
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
USP	Unique Selling Proposition
VPC	Value per Customer

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