

Effective Use of Trade Fairs

or

How not to make an exhibit of yourself

Over the past twenty years or more add2biz has attended virtually all of the major trade shows here in Germany. There are numerous industries, various products and different people, but they all have one thing in common: companies need to be better equipped in order to utilise these trade shows efficiently and effectively.

Introduction

When foreign companies contemplate exporting to Germany, their first thoughts are often the major trade shows which take place here. The map shows the main conurbations of trade shows in Germany.

Almost two-thirds of the world's major trade shows still take place here in Germany. Owing to the country's central location in Europe and decentralised structure, it is perhaps not surprising that Germany maintains its envious position.

Do not fall into the trap of seeing these events as being just German. If not the world, they are quite often the European events which just happen to take place in Germany. View them as such and the rewards will be greater.



The value of the trade show business, not just the stands themselves, but also the supporting sectors such as hotels, restaurants, taxis and even souvenirs purchased, is estimated to be in the order of EUR 20 billion to the German economy.

Details of the trade shows may be found on the website of [AUMA](#), the Association of the German Trade Fair Industry.

Preparation

The exporting company will most likely wish to combine the first trip to the market with a visit to the relevant trade show. Look carefully at the exhibitor list and check the various subsectors to ensure that you have selected the right show. There may be others which are more suitable. Perhaps there are exhibitors you already know and who may be able to offer advice.

Walk the show before exhibiting!

Details of the visitors are not published by the fair organisers, but you can generally find statistics about the shows from [FKM](#).

How will attendance at the show support your marketing efforts?

Certain regions/countries may have a communal stand. Often as not, those just visiting the show may be permitted to use the facilities for meeting clients who may not have their own booths either.

Alert your existing customers to your presence at the fair. Even if they are not attending it shows that you are now playing in the premier league. And it affords a good opportunity to contact them again.

Buy your entrance tickets in advance. Not only will it be cheaper, but you will save time at the event.

Familiarise yourself with the city where the fair will be taking place. Learn how you will travel to and from the airport and hotel to the fair. In most cases your entry pass will pay for public transport within the city.

You need to consider the objectives for your visit. They may include:

- Generating personal contacts within key customers and influencers
- Seeing competitors' products at first hand
- Finding suitable sales intermediaries
- Testing the market for product acceptance and positioning

Have you set objectives for your visit?

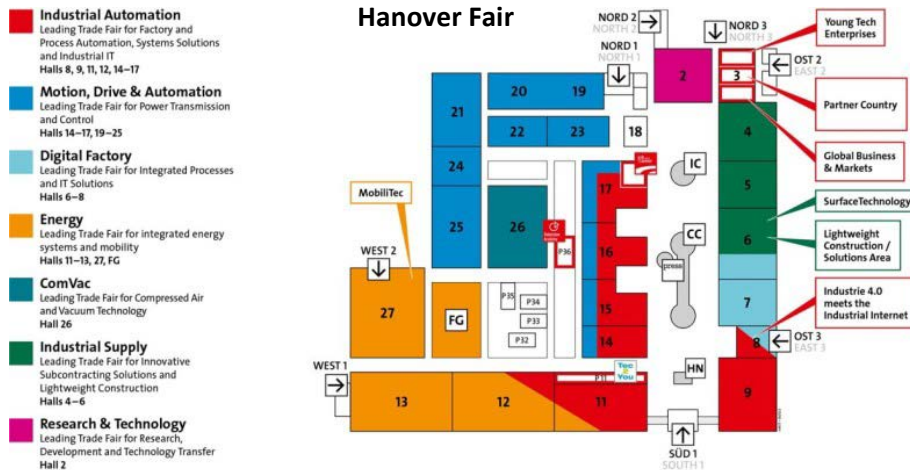
Arranging appointments

There is no right or wrong time for making contact with potential exhibitors. For some six weeks in advance is too late; for others too early. From experience we have found six weeks to be the right time to start the promotion for an annual fair. Reminder emails may be dispatched two weeks later, i.e. four weeks before the show. For biennial or even triennial events more preparatory time may be required.

Have you developed a list of the people you wish to meet?

If writing to the right people there is little need for telephone follow-up. If interested, they will agree to a meeting; some will respond politely declining a meeting; and you will most likely not hear from many others.

Depending upon the size of the showground, you could have a long distance between appointments; and if you are running late this could cause a problem. Familiarise yourself with the layout and make sure that you have sufficient time when confirming meetings.



Approaching clients

If you promote yourself as being one of many suppliers of standard products, then this is how you will be viewed. Throw out your chest and tell the world how wonderful you are.

Keep the text short and without huge attachments – nobody has time to read a dissertation – and fill it with objective measurements. Everyone can say they are better, so state clearly why this is the case.

If the information required to convince the customers is tucked away in a document, do not expect them to find it. Send only the salient points.

Use HTML emails with perhaps a diagram or table which will catch the eye, before the email lands in the spam folder.

Be specific about how your products/services will help the client. This may seem obvious, but many still focus on features. Emphasise the benefits of your products and company.

Have you prepared an appropriate text for your initial approach?

If you are already supplying a German company, even just a subsidiary in your home country, this could give you an edge over your competitors.

How can you differentiate yourself from the competition?

N.B. many of your competitors will be seeking appointments with much the same customers.

Why should they meet you instead?

Even if you have arranged to meet a client at a specific time, this will not help you if one of their customers appears at the same time or a previous meeting is dragging on. You will simply be asked to call back later.

Be flexible for timings of meetings. In many cases clients may respond saying that you may call at their stand anytime during the show. It is useful to have a few of these tucked up your sleeve for when there is a gap in your schedule.

Depending upon how much time you will be spending at the fair and how many clients agree to see you, you may wish to allocate an hour between appointments. Most of your preliminary meetings may not last that long, but you never know and you do not want to curtail an important discussion.

Have you arranged a workable schedule for meetings?

Whereas cold calling is generally not the most effective method, if you have time on your hands, speak to as many people as possible to build up your knowledge of the market.

Sharing market information perhaps with fellow nationals, even if their products are totally different, could pay dividends.

Attending the trade fair

Large companies will be predominantly fielding their sales forces. If senior management or other functions are represented, then they are most likely only to be there for a short time, and it will be difficult to meet them, especially if they are on the upper floor of their stands. Of course, if you are an existing supplier, then there could be valid reasons for others in the customer's company to see you.



Between their meetings we have often found that senior management in these companies are prepared to give up a few of minutes of their valuable time and exchange business cards, especially when representing a foreign government as add2biz frequently does. For these senior people tied up in meetings when in the office, they enjoy the freedom of being away from the daily grind and find the experience refreshing. They are more likely to be open and helpful than their junior colleagues.

With smaller firms you are more likely to meet a board member, if not the CEO. At this juncture this is probably all that is required, and you have the proverbial foot in the door. From here you can follow up by putting your shoulder against the door.

Companies may offer you refreshment when attending a pre-arranged meeting, but this may not always be the case. In the office you may drink beverages frequently: during a trade show you can dehydrate quickly, so carry a small bottle of water with you.

Exhibiting at the event

Having visited the show once or twice the company may wish to take a booth and exhibit. A trade show should be viewed as an integral part of the marketing mix. There may be other promotional methods at your disposal and you need to consider the value of all before taking a decision.

In the early days, and to gain experience, it is recommended that companies liaise with the public sector in their regions/countries which may be organising a communal stand for numerous exhibitors. This is a cheaper and easier option than having to do everything oneself.

Often as not, the organisers of communal stands will have an after-show party. This affords an opportunity to meet potential clients who have experience of dealing with companies from your region.

One person just visiting the show for a couple of days is one thing; manning a stand for what could be a week or more – do not forget the time required to erect and dismantle the stand – with more executives travelling, and the costs will be extremely high. Also bear in mind that you will have to repeat the process, probably on several occasions, in order to be taken seriously by German clients.

Especially for larger shows you need to have the right location and where your subsector is represented. At the large shows buyers will perhaps only visit two or three halls. If you are there, then there is a chance that the buyer will find you. Choose the wrong location and you may as well not exhibit.



Have you decided upon the best location at the trade fair?

You should alert all your agents and distributors well in advance so that they can inform end-users of your products accordingly.

Have you calculated the total costs of exhibiting?

Follow-up

This may seem obvious and is often forgotten. You have had a tiring week, walked for miles (wear comfortable shoes), dined with clients on several occasions, consumed more alcohol than usual and had less sleep. You are exhausted. Your colleagues back home think you have been on vacation and there is a mountain of other tasks to undertake which have piled up during your absence.

You have collected a wad of business cards during your visit and made verbal commitments to clients that you will be following up promptly after the event. If you cannot keep these promises, then why should clients believe anything you say?

The show does not finish when you sit down in the aeroplane on your way home. Set aside a day or two for follow-up on your return. This does not have to be the first day back in the office, but do not let it slip.

You have opened the doors to prospective new clients and wish to close the sales within a short period of time. Do not let the clients close the door on you. Ideally start the process during the show when there is a quiet time.

How soon will you start the follow-up procedure?

Support from add2biz

add2biz assists foreign companies with their preparation for and attendance at trade shows here in Germany. We provide bespoke support.

Not only do we arrange appointments in advance for our clients, we also accompany them to the meetings and support with follow-up.

This way, our clients demonstrate that they already have support in the German market, are prepared to conduct business in the German language, if need be, and on an on-going basis add2biz may act as an intermediary for both parties.