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Winning New Business at Exhibitions

This chapter covers:

- Exhibition visitors
- Choosing where to exhibit
- Choosing how to exhibit
- Before the exhibition
- At the exhibition
- After the exhibition

Exhibition visitors

Exhibitions are a form of modern-day marketplace that offer venue sales staff an extremely valuable face-to-face selling opportunity with a self-selected audience. They may be considered 'self-selected', because the visitors to these business events have voluntarily chosen to attend, having a specific interest in the facilities, services or products being presented at the exhibition. From the point of view of venue sales staff, specialist exhibitions provide an environment in which they can meet prospects face-to-face and put into use the qualifying skills discussed in Chapter 2.

Those exhibitions which attract visitors who are potential customers for venues are generally business-to-business (B2B) events where facilities and services that support the meetings industry are to be found promoting themselves to visitors. At such events, venues find themselves exhibiting alongside a wide range of organisations and suppliers such

as convention bureaus, hotels and other accommodation providers, transport companies, audio-visual services and interpreters, as well as manufacturers/distributors of meetings-related merchandise ranging from delegate badges to conference bags.

The visitors to these exhibitions are in general people with a specialist interest in acquiring knowledge of the facilities, services and products that are presented on the exhibition stands and which they need to be familiar with in order to effectively carry out their professional duties. Although exhibition visitors include a wide range of professionals including meetings industry journalists, specialist consultants, as well as academics and students specialising in events management or business tourism, the majority of visitors – and those clearly of most interest to exhibitors – are people whose professional role includes the planning and running of meetings and events. For these visitors, exhibitions are an opportunity to keep up to date with the supply of destinations and venues that may serve as the locations for the events they organise. They attend seeking information, ideas and suggestions for their future events, as well as the chance to meet and engage with the professionals charged with attracting clients to their venues.

At many meetings industry exhibitions, certain visitors are 'hosted buyers' who have been qualified by the exhibition organisers as valuable, bona fide, meetings planners actively seeking destinations and venues for their events. The travel and accommodation expenses they incur in attending the show are paid by the exhibition organisers – funded from the fees that the exhibitors pay to the organisers. In return for their expenses being paid in this way, the hosted buyers are obliged to attend a certain number of appointments with exhibitors. They may choose which exhibitors they wish to meet according to the profiles provided by exhibitors in the show catalogue; but exhibitors can also request appointments with those hosted buyers whom they have specifically identified as potential clients. These appointments may take the form of one-to-one meetings between exhibitors and hosted buyers or presentations made by exhibitors to groups of hosted buyers, on the stand. When venues exhibit as part of a stand managed by their convention bureau, group presentations are generally given by the relevant convention bureau rather than individual venues – see below: 'Partnering with Convention Bureaus'. But when venues manage their own individual

and independent stand, they can – and do – make their own presentations to groups of hosted buyers.

How can venues make the most of this unique opportunity that exhibitions create by bringing them face-to-face with large numbers of potential customers?

Choosing where to exhibit

While some general travel and tourism exhibitions may have a particular section of the show – or a particular day of the event – on a meetings industry theme, there are a significant, and growing, number of annual, specialist exhibitions that are wholly and exclusively dedicated to the meetings industry.

These may be classified in several ways. One way of doing so is according to the specific type of venue exhibiting. There are specialist, niche, exhibitions at which only one type of venue is represented. A well-established example is the Academic Venue Show in London, for university- and college-based venues in the United Kingdom. Similarly, at shows such as the International Luxury Travel Market in Cannes, highly prestigious venues such as converted castles, palaces and monasteries are among the exhibitors.

But the most commonly-found system of categorising meetings industry exhibitions is in terms of the geographical markets they aim to cover. A few, such as EIBTM in Barcelona and IMEX in Frankfurt cover the global meetings industry market, attracting exhibitors and visitors from countries worldwide. Others focus upon a particular world region: AIME in Melbourne, for example, covers Australia and South-East Asia; GIBTM in Abu Dhabi covers the Middle East; and Convene, in Vilnius, targets the Baltic Sea Region. Many shows have a national spread of exhibitors: Salon Bedouk in Paris, for instance, attracts exhibitors from all over France; and BTC in Florence is largely aimed at the Italian market. Finally, some exhibitions for the meetings industry have a sub-national, regional focus. An example of such an event would be the German exhibition, Locations, which takes place each year in four cities, each one situated in a different region of Germany: Rhein-Neckar, Stuttgart Region, Rhein-Ruhr and Rhein-Main.

Figure 6.1 shows the main meetings industry exhibitions and the markets upon which they focus.

EXHIBITION	FOCUS	LOCATION	WEBSITE
Best of Events	Germany	Dortmund	www.bo-e.de
Conventa	Southeast Europe	Ljubljana	www.conventa.si
EMITT	Turkey	Istanbul	www.emittistanbul.com/en
FITUR	Spain, Southern Europe	Madrid	www.ifema.es/fitur_06
Salon Bedouk	France	Paris	www.salon.bedouk.com
MCE CEE	Central, Eastern Europe	Budapest	www.europecongress.com
Convene	Baltics	Vilnius	www.convene.lt
BIT	Italy	Milan	www.bit.fieramilano.it/en
Meetings Africa	South Africa	Johannesburg	www.meetingafrica.co.za
AIME	Australia, Southeast Asia	Melbourne	www.aime.com.au
Business & Meeting Solutions	Belgium, Benelux	Brussels	www.business-meeting-solutions.com
DMAI	US	Washington	www.destinationsshowcase.com
International Confex	UK, International	London	www.international-confex.com
MITT	Russia	Moscow	www.mitt.ru/en
GIBTM	Gulf	Abu Dhabi	www.gibtm.com
UITT	Ukraine	Kiev	www.uitt-kiev.com/en
IT&CM China	China	Shanghai	www.itcmchina.com
IMEX	International	Frankfurt	www.imex-frankfurt.com
AIBTM	US, International	Orlando	www.aibtm.com
IT&CM India	India	Delhi	www.itcmindia.com
SuisseEMEX	Switzerland	Zurich	www.suisse-emex.ch
CIBTM	China	Beijing	www.cibtm.com
IT&CMA	Asia	Bangkok	www.itcma.com
IMEX America	US, International	Las Vegas	www.imex-america.com
BTC	Italy	Florence	www.btc.it
EIBTM	International	Barcelona	www.eibtm.com
MBT Market	Germany	Munich	www.mbt-market.de
The Meetings Show	UK, International	London	www.themeetingsshow.com
Square Meal Venues and Events	UK	London	www.venuesandevents.co.uk

Figure 6.1: Meetings Industry Exhibitions, According to Geographical Market. Adapted from Conference & Incentive Management magazine, Issue 6, November 2012