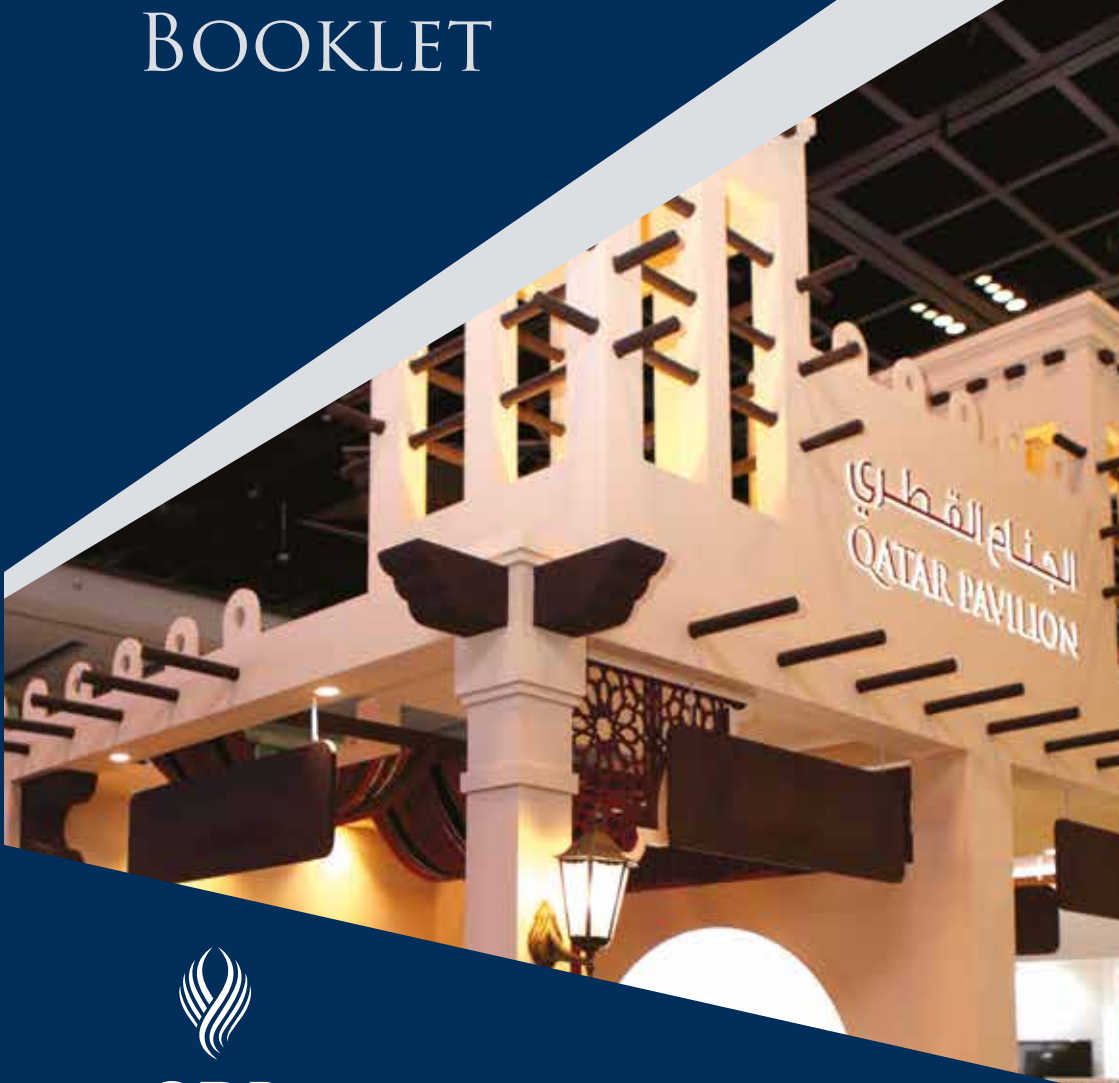


EXHIBITION MANAGEMENT BOOKLET



QDB

بنك قطر للتنمية
QATAR DEVELOPMENT BANK

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ton Willemse is a Dutch entrepreneur with professional roots in global trade, trade fairs and sales. He holds degrees in international business, marketing and corporate science.

Ton Willemse is the owner and managing director of Intraservice BV and ExpoTotalTraining and dedicates himself to improving the commercial live performance of companies and people. Through training, consultancy and business services he helps them to get new business and grow existing business. Ton Willemse works for private companies, international organisations and governments from all over the world. He has conducted training courses for and provided business consultancy to thousands of professionals in 37 different countries.

His engaging, energetic, motivating and skilling interventions range from less-than-one-hour crash courses and speeches to multiple-day workshops and complete education programs. Other publications he has written include Your Expo Coach (BSO-edition), Your Expo Coach (Exporter's Edition) and Your Image Builder.

www.intraservice.nl | www.expototaltraining.com

FOREWORD

Trade fairs play an essential role in international business. For many small and medium-sized companies, they provide indispensable tools for entering new markets or for expanding existing market shares.

Successful participation in international trade fairs demands a professional approach from beginning to end. Inadequate pre-fair preparation, weak on-site performance or failing post-fair round-off will seriously jeopardise your chances.

SME-exporters can often choose between joining a national group stand or participating independently on an individual basis. Excellence at the Frontline of Business has been written for SME-exporters from Qatar who have chosen to take on the challenge of individual participation, and of coordinating and organising their participation all by themselves.

Excellence at the Frontline of Business is a must-read for every Qatari SME-company that wants to see a return on its trade fair efforts and investment. It presents you with the highlights of the QDB trade fair training for small and medium-sized exporters.

INDEX

11 GOLDEN RULES	5
BEFORE	10
The right focus in your participation	11
Your trade fair strategy on 1 page	16
Why and how to invite visitors	20
Your stand a visitors' magnet	26
Results with a tight budget? Plan well, manage time!	29
DURING	32
The buying brain of the visitor	33
Contacting visitors with confidence	37
The expo pitch	44
Leading trade fair meetings	50
Notes you can fall back on	57
Stand behaviour do's and don'ts	59
AFTER	60
Succeeding in the follow-up	61
Evaluating your participation	64

11 GOLDEN RULES

There are rock-solid principles every exhibitor should know and live by to successfully participate in (international) trade fairs. Here are eleven golden rules for you to keep in mind.

A trade fair is a communication tool

Most exhibitors do not close deals at a fair. Rather than selling on the spot, the purpose of their participation is the influencing of target group visitors using effective communication. Therefore, effective communication must be the guiding principle for your trade fair participation.

Win the heart, convince the brain

People communicate to make others adopt ideas or adapt behaviour. As there is a natural resistance to change the others will apply filters to your communication, both emotionally as well as well rationally. It is important to know that emotion precedes logic and that emotion is a powerful filter.

When designing your trade fair communication, you therefore define:

1. what your target visitors must FEEL;
2. what your target visitors must KNOW;
3. what your target visitors must WANT;
4. what your target visitors must DO.

TIP: Always design your communication from the end-result backwards. Start with the DO and work your way back to the FEEL.

Playing to win

Obviously, you do not participate in trade fairs to shrink your business. On the contrary, like any exhibitor, you participate in trade fairs to increase or strengthen your business. Trade fair participation is like playing the finals of a tournament. In the finals, a draw is not a possible outcome. You either come out the winner or the loser. What if you would not come out the winner from your trade fair participation? What would you have lost then?

Of course, you would say you had lost time and money. Very true, but that is the least of your worries. You'll probably get over it. Much worse, however, is that you have lost opportunities! Opportunities to grow your business. Opportunities moreover, that may have been seized now by others and that will not easily come back to you anymore. When playing the finals, you are playing to win: tactics and performance go hand in hand.

Three critical success factors

When participating in a trade fair, you have many different tasks to take care of, and there are numerous aspects to consider. Each of them impacts the result, but cannot individually be regarded to be the decisive factor for success. It is the sum of all things to do and manage - before, during and after the fair - that determines your success. As such, there are three critical success factors for trade fair participation.

1. Your pre-fair preparation
2. Your on-site performance
3. Your post-fair round-off

Never on automatic pilot

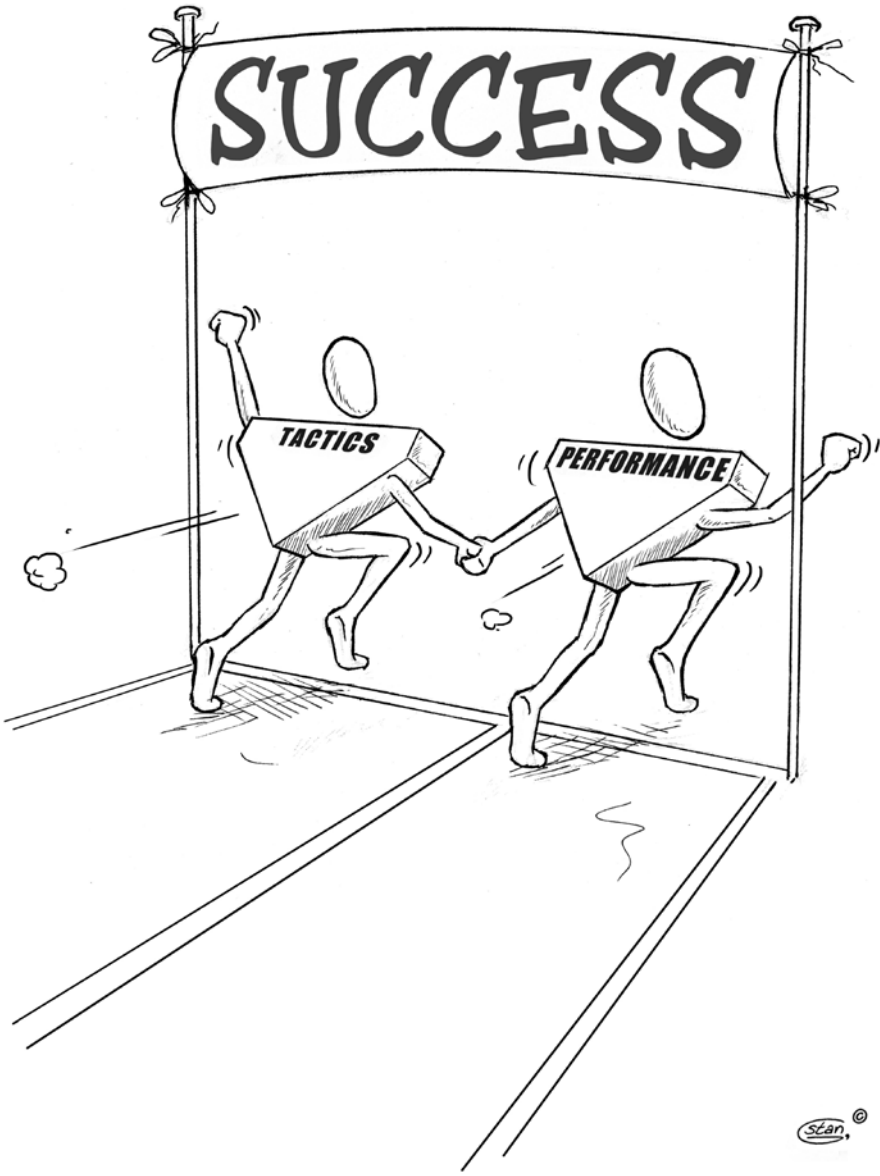
Participating on automatic pilot is out of the question. You find yourself at the frontline of doing business in an arena filled with companies that compete with you for the attention, interest and preference of potential and existing buyers.

Participating in the same way you always do, or in the same way as the other exhibitors do, is a dead-end street for your trade fair success.

Each of your trade fair participations must be tailored and dedicated to achieving specific action with the visitors you are targeting.

Stand out from the crowd

The best way to attract attention is to stand out from the crowd. As attention is the step-up to interest, make sure to present yourself and perform differently from others when at the trade fair. This applies not only to your stand presentation but also, and above all, to your stand behaviour and the experience that you give your visitors. People remember and connect to how you made them feel - it's even more important than what you tell them.



"For trade fair success tactics and performance go hand in hand."

Build your on-site communication with AIDA

Since a trade fair is a communication tool, the recipe for success lies in effective communication. On-site, there are numerous elements that radiate messages: your logo, slogan, graphics, stand layout, stand design, decorations, products, people, colours and so on. Each of these elements can make or break your communication. How do you decide on what and how to communicate, and how do you align the elements in your on-site communication? The world's oldest, and very simple marketing-communication model - AIDA - is the perfect answer to these questions.

1. Attract **A**ttention
2. Raise **I**nterest
3. Create **D**esire
4. Evoke **A**ction

Focus + the right instruments = ROI

When it comes to trade fair participation, Return on Investment (ROI) is the result of a combination of focus and the right instruments. Focus clearly and concretely on who you want to appeal to and on the proposition you want to make them. Then select the right instruments and use them in the right way to get their attention and raise their interest.

KISS

Keep It Short and Simple. With a glance at your stand, your target group visitors must instantly see and understand your messages.

WIIFM

What's In It For Me? Not only should your target visitors instantly see and understand your messages, but your proposition should also instantly trigger their business drivers. Positively answer the WIIFM-question that is on their minds when they scan your stand.

The trade fair success formula

The last golden rule is the trade fair success formula:

$$\textit{Reach} \times \textit{Contacts} \times \textit{Meetings} \times \textit{Follow-up}$$

Source: Live Communication Research Centre, Waardemodel voor Beursdeelname

The better you can REACH your target group visitors, the better it is. The more CONTACTS you establish with your target group visitors, the better it is. The more and better MEETINGS you have with the contacts you made, the better it is. Finally, the more effectively you engage after the fair in FOLLOW-UP on the opportunities you managed to create at the fair, the better it is.

This booklet helps you improve your scores on each of the four success drivers. You will gain valuable insights and effective techniques that are easy to put into practice and help you to be successful.

BEFORE

Your pre-fair preparation

THE RIGHT FOCUS IN YOUR PARTICIPATION

Focus on whom you want to appeal to, what you want to achieve with them, and how you are going to achieve this, are pre-conditional for the design and implementation of a trade fair strategy (see next chapter) that will bring success.

Rather than including things and people, focus means excluding them. Not knowing how to put focus or being afraid of choosing the wrong focus or of missing out on coincidental opportunities, many exhibitors - especially SMEs - play it 'safe' and follow unsuccessful middle-of -the-road trade fair strategies. They try to appeal to as many undefined visitors as possible. Their propositions are too vague or too common to trigger the business drivers of their actual target groups. They have a one-size-fits-all presentation, and their on-site performance is too weak to stand out.

This chapter introduces to you the concept of exhibition styles and the concept of the AIDA-scale as two guidelines to put commercial and communication focus into your trade fair participation.

Your exhibition style focus

According to Igor. H. Ansoff (1957), the capability of business owners to grow their business depends on the way in which they market existing or new products or services in existing or new markets. Ansoff distinguishes four business growth strategies.

Placed in an Ansoff-matrix, it becomes clear how the (international) business growth strategies of exhibitors relate to four fixed exhibition styles. Focus on the growth strategy - exhibition style combination that applies to your participation.

	<i>EXISTING PRODUCTS*</i>	<i>NEW PRODUCTS*</i>
<i>EXISTING MARKETS</i>	MARKET PENETRATION CUSTOMER-ORIENTED EXHIBITION STYLE	PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT PRODUCT-ORIENTED EXHIBITION STYLE
<i>NEW MARKETS</i>	MARKET DEVELOPMENT CONTACT-ORIENTED EXHIBITION STYLE	DIVERSIFICATION ADVISORY-ORIENTED EXHIBITION STYLE

*Read 'products or services'

Market penetration strategy / Customer-oriented style

You try to boost sales with the help of established products. You try to sell more to existing customers and try to achieve first-time purchases by new customers. Your products and their applications are widely known. Attention should be drawn to customer care and relations, leading to action-willingness. A clear customer-oriented exhibition style is in place here. Business discussion areas in the stand, special exhibition offers, strong publicity efforts to motivate customers to come to the stand, as well as events and incentives during the fair are adequate marketing tools.

Market development / Contact-oriented style

The strategy is to open a new market for the existing products. You must gain new customers. Products, company and brand are not yet known and must be introduced at the same time. A contact-oriented exhibition style should be applied here. Emphasis should be on achieving new contacts and on open communication. Make sure your trade fair presentation is comprehensive and catchy. Simultaneous promotions (advertising, hand-outs, invitations) - before and during the fair - to publicise your presence, together with sales promotions (price competition, lottery, giveaways) are important steps to motivate potential customers to visit your stand. Contacting skills and product knowledge of the stand staff are critical here.

Product development strategy / Product-oriented style

You are aiming to sell new products to existing clients. The product and its application need to be introduced and presented. A product-oriented style is beneficial. Sales promotions (like samples and giveaways), joining side events at the fair, direct mailing and editorial coverage in the trade press are supportive marketing techniques. Make sure that the stand lay-out offers adequate space for product display and demonstrations. Obviously, the stand staff should know the ins and outs of the new products.

Diversification strategy / Advisory oriented style

This is one of the most challenging strategies for cultivating business. You cannot fall back on known or established products while looking for customers in a new market. The exhibition style that is applicable here is the advisory-oriented style. It is crucial to present application possibilities and product benefits and to show problem awareness. Consequently, intensive consultation and contacts with experts are necessary. Quiet seating area(s) are needed for consultancy. Products and brand presentations are considered effective instruments. Joining side events at the fair can also be effective. Display of subject expertise and subject authority by the stand staff may contribute to the exhibition performance and results by distinguishing you from others.

The strategy focus of almost all SME-exporters

If more than one combination applies, determine the order of importance and choose to focus on the most important one. Depending on the size of your participation and the size of your budget you may be able to execute different combinations in a single participation and successfully achieve goals relating to each one.

Almost all SME-exporters rank the combination of Market development / Contact-oriented exhibition style as the most important combination, or single combination and commercial focus for their participation.

Your AIDA-scale focus

The acronym AIDA represents the world’s oldest model covering the steps that messages or campaigns must consecutively achieve to be effective:

1. Attract Attention
2. Raise Interest
3. Create Desire
4. Evoke Action

Using AIDA as a scale and integrating it into the Ansoff-matrix helps you know what the communication focus for your trade fair participation should be. It helps determine which AIDA-steps you need to concentrate on and work on to achieve, both before as well as during the fair.

	<i>EXISTING PRODUCTS</i>	<i>NEW PRODUCTS</i>
<i>EXISTING MARKETS</i>	<p>MARKET PENETRATION CUSTOMER-ORIENTED EXHIBITION STYLE I D A</p>	<p>PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT PRODUCT-ORIENTED EXHIBITION STYLE A I (D)</p>
<i>NEW MARKETS</i>	<p>MARKET DEVELOPMENT CONTACT-ORIENTED EXHIBITION STYLE A I (D)</p>	<p>DIVERSIFICATION ADVISORY-ORIENTED EXHIBITION STYLE A (I)</p>

In general, you will find it is only possible to sell on the spot, at the trade fair in case of the combination ‘existing clients-existing products’. For all other combinations, your communication should strive to evoke a different in-between-step-action, such as: agree on a next meeting, on a company visit, on sending a quotation, on a follow-up telephone call.

The communication focus of almost all SME-exporters

As the majority of SME-exhibitors find themselves in a contact-oriented exhibition style, their communication before and during the fair should place a very high emphasis on attracting the attention and raising the interest of their trade fair visitor target groups.

YOUR TRADE FAIR STRATEGY ON 1 PAGE

Every exhibitor should consider trade fair participation to be a unique, single-shot opportunity to expand or strengthen business. Having said that, you would expect exhibitors to eagerly seize the opportunity and have a solid strategy to make sure their participation will be a success. However, many exhibitors - if not the vast majority - do without one. They leave success up to luck and coincidence. How come?

It's difficult to give a single answer to that question. Some exhibitors may refrain from designing and implementing a trade fair strategy because they simply are not committed enough to their trade fair success. Others, especially SME-exhibitors, may refrain from it because they believe they have limited influence on their trade fair success or because they do not know what a good strategy would look like.

This chapter teaches you a method to easily, simply and quickly develop a solid exhibition strategy on a single page enabling you to take control of the success of your participation.

Success in seven steps

First, have a look at the One-page Trade Fair Strategy template at the end of this chapter. Just by looking at it you may already recognise the logic of it, have an idea of how it works and feel tempted to immediately start filling the template out and design a strategy. Before you do so, read the instructions.

Step 1: Define your trade fair target group visitor(s)

Determine who exactly you want to meet at the trade fair. Be concrete: define the countries they come from and go up to the function level description! Rank your target group visitors in order of importance.

Step 2: Define your trade fair goals

Determine how many of the target group visitors you want to meet and what results you want to achieve from your meetings with them. You may determine goals per defined target group visitor.

Use SMART goal-setting

The goals you set yourself are the drivers for all the actions you undertake before, during and after the exhibition. Make sure your goals are SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Acceptable
- Realistic
- Time-bound

Step 3: Define the top-of-mind interests of your target group visitor(s)

Define the top-of-mind interest per identified target group visitor. What is the main challenge in their daily job? What do they need to get solved? What pains would they be looking to get relieved, or what gains would they be perceiving to get achieved? Put yourself in the shoes of your target group visitor(s) for this one. You must really empathise with them.

Insert the defined top-of-mind interests into the one-page strategy template and visually connect them to the target groups they are valid for. Only include the absolute most important ones in the template.

The step of defining the top-of-mind interest always precedes the next step of determining the propositions you are going to make the target groups.

Step 4: Determine your exhibition propositions

Your trade fair proposition(s) is what attracts your target group visitor(s) to come to your stand. Your propositions should correspond to their main interests. They should relieve your target groups' main pains or create important gains for them. Insert your propositions into the one-page strategy template using simple and summarising words and visually connect them to the interests they are valid for.

Step 5: Giving proof of your propositions

As you cannot expect your target group visitors to accept and believe your propositions immediately, you need to determine how you are going to give proof of or support the credibility of (each of) your propositions.

Step 6: Determine the communication in your stand

It is now time to switch to the practical dressing of your stand with communication. Decide how you are going to best communicate and display the messages of your propositions and your proof on the stand. Decide the on-site instruments which will carry and transmit your communication.

Step 7: Draft your trade fair activity plan

The final step to completing your exhibition strategy on one page is filling out the template with the things to do and the activities to engage in before, during and after the fair in order to secure the outcome of the trade fair success formula (RxCxMxF) for you.

Brainstorm on how you can secure and achieve great scores for the individual components of the formula. Put the ideas that you want and can achieve in and commit to achieving them. For you should never leave the growth of your business to luck and coincidence.

TARGET GROUP VISITOR(S)				
GOALS				
TOP OF MIND INTERESTS				
PROPOSITION(S)				
PROOF				
COMMUNICATION				
ROI ACTIVITIES PLAN				
	REACH	CONTACTS	MEETINGS	FOLLOW-UP
BEFORE				
DURING				
AFTER				

Fig. 1: One-page Trade Fair Strategy Template, source Intraservice Dienstverlening BV, The Netherlands.

WHY AND HOW TO INVITE VISITORS

Well, a good trade fair will attract large numbers of businessmen. However, if exhibitors themselves – and especially SME-exhibitors - do not actively promote their presence, they will miss making contacts which can be the difference between failure and success.

Often enough small and medium-sized companies do not pay enough attention to visitor promotion because they lack the means or the knowledge to carry out effective promotion. However, exhibitors should be aware that visitor promotion is vital, even conditional, for the success of the participation. Let's look at some convincing arguments.

The visitor's objectives

Whereas – for you as an SME-exhibitor - making new contacts is your number one objective when you participate in a trade fair, making new business contacts comes in sixth place as a motivation for the visitors of the trade fair visitors.

...% of trade fair visitors want

- 48% Information about new products
- 41% General market orientation
- 34% Further training, extending knowledge
- 29% Exchange of experience, information
- 26% Cultivation of business contacts
- 23% Making of new business contacts
- 18% Monitoring the competition
- 17% Preparation of decisions
- 12% Exerting an influence on product development
- 7% Concluding contracts, purchases

Source: Association of the German Trade Fair Industry, representative survey at 49 trade fairs.

As you can see, you have to make your target audience want to visit you.

The visitor's agenda

To increase the probability of finding new potential foreign buyers, SME-exporters often participate in leading global trade fairs. The average stay of visitors at these big fairs is one day for national visitors and two days for foreign visitors.

Given the size of these trade fairs, the large number of exhibition halls and the huge number of stands, visitors to these fairs plan their visits. They would not have the time - nor would it be possible, effective or efficient for them - to just walk and look around, hoping to spot something or someone of interest. On the contrary, they decide whom they will visit up front. They make a plan and most likely they do not have the freedom not to stick to it, making it improbable that they will bump into you by coincidence. Therefore, you have to get yourself onto your target visitors' agenda.

The visitor's decision

Why do trade fair visitor visit specific exhibitors?

Decisive for ...% of the visitors are

- 42% Existing business contacts
- 30% Potential business relationships
- 24% Written invitation from the exhibitor
- 16% Mailing of company or product information by exhibitor
- 12% Advertising by the exhibitor of his participation on the internet
- 11% Advertisements of the exhibitor in the press
- 10% Admission ticket voucher from the exhibitor

Source: Association of the German Trade Fair Industry, representative survey at 49 trade fairs.

As you can see, for 24% of the trade fair visitors, a written invitation is the reason to visit a specific exhibitor. Should your invitation convince your target visitors of business potential, you can even increase your chances of them coming to your stand to up to 30%.

A convincing invitation

Your invitation need not necessarily be a written invitation letter. It can come in any format you consider adequate. However, it may be useful

to imagine yourself writing an invitation letter as you read through the following. This is how you should go about building the contents, keeping the reader in mind first and foremost as well as the goal of your invitation: making them visit your stand. Use the AIDA-model explained in chapter one. It serves the purpose of determining and structuring the contents of your invitation perfectly well.

Step 1: Attract attention

As emotions precede logic, recipients could be tempted to reject communication without even giving it thought. Your purpose, therefore, is to have the recipient connect emotionally to your invitation: instantly and positively.

One way to ensure emotional engagement is to make the 'look and feel' of your invitation stand out creatively from the other invitations the recipients receive. Think shape, colours, packaging, materials, visuals, surprise gift, catchy, impressive, illustrative and such. The other way is the contents. The recipient must immediately and decisively connect with what he or she reads. Your text should be about them and for them, not about you. Avoid starting your text with the words 'We' or 'Our'.

Needless to say, the first impression your invitation should generate, is to give the recipient the feeling that he or she is dealing with a professional organization. If your invitation looks lousy, they will create similar negative associations for your products, company and you in their minds.

Step 2: Raise interest

After having attracted the attention of the recipient, you must instantly raise their interest. Your goal is to make the recipients see potential opportunity in a business relationship with you. Answer their "What's-in-it-for-me question". Clearly provide them with some strong benefits. Limit yourself, do not provide too much or too detailed information. The triggering of their drivers is what you are after.

Step 3: Create desire

Once the recipient is interested, they should make the step to wanting to know more. About the opportunity, about your company, about you etcetera.

For this to happen, you need to further strengthen their interest. Use simple words to explain what the opportunity can do for them: quantify the benefits, name results achieved with others, give statistics, refer to reputable customers that already work with you and that are known to the recipients.

Step 4: Evoke action

As the final step, invite the recipient to visit you at the fair. Simply ask them to come! Better yet, ask them to confirm their visit to you up front. You may consider offering an incentive for them to confirm their visit. In any case, be concise and clear on how they can confirm their visit to you. Moreover, always reconfirm, trying to make a specific appointment.

Test your invitation

Let's test your trade fair invitation. The table below gives five criteria to evaluate it on. Give each a score, choosing from:

- 5 points: when you consider it fully met/achieved (read: very good)
- 3 points: when you consider it partially met/achieved (read: average)
- 1 point: when you consider it not met/achieved (read: poor)

CRITERIA	EXPLANATION	SCORE
1 Personal	Are company address and the gender and name of the recipient complete and used correctly in your invitation?	<input type="text"/>
2 Connection	Does your invitation instantly attract the attention of your recipient? Does its physics or contents stand out creatively and make the recipient instantly connect with it with positive emotions?	<input type="text"/>
3 Motivation	Does your invitation trigger the business drivers of the recipient, raise interest and create desire to visit you?	<input type="text"/>

4 Navigation Does your invitation clearly mention which trade fair you are participating in, when and where the trade fair is at and what your stand location is?

5 Action Is there a strong call to action: do you ask the recipient to visit you, do you ask them to pre-confirm the visit with you? Do you use an incentive to stimulate the recipient's pre-confirmation?

The scores you give for the evaluation criteria of your invitation tell you where improvement is needed.



Attention



Interest



Desire



Action



"The start to finish formula for writing great content."

YOUR STAND A VISITORS' MAGNET

Instead of attracting potential customers, the exhibition stands of SME-exhibitors often chase them away. A casual glance may already be enough to do so. This happens when the overall stand presentation, its communication, or its decoration is poor, unattractive or if it does not meet the visitors' professional standards. Learn the secrets of a visitors' magnet exhibition stand.

Creativity is key, not budget

Visitors do not expect SME-exhibitors to have big or impressive stands. They do judge you however on how professional your stand presentation is. The professionalism you radiate is a subjective indication for them of how professional doing business with you will be, how professional your company, its products and people will be to work with. The perceived look and feel of your stand and the behaviour of the people in it form an instant filter for visitors to decide about the exhibitor - either positively or negatively.

Having a limited budget is no excuse for presenting yourself poorly or inadequately at the fair. It is not so much big and costly stand construction but attractive, relevant stand communication first and foremost an instant positive, emotional connection with visitors that makes the difference. Maximize the marketing power of the stand. Make sure to stand out from the other stands around on the level of triggering your target group visitors and making them stop and come into your stand. Do you know what your competitors at the trade fair do? Good, now outperform them, do better and dare to do differently! Creativity is the key criteria for a visitors' magnet stand. The good news for SMEs is: creativity comes without cost.

What the stand must do for you

Without wasting too many words on this, there are three things that your stand must do for you:

1. make the trade fair visitors notice you;
2. make target group visitors stop or slow down pace;
3. make target group visitors enter your stand or make them receptive to your contacting them.

Win the heart first, then the mind

Catch the eye, the ear, the nose: make your target group visitor(s) look your way and notice you and your proposition. Make your visuals and texts and/or product displays instantly answer the WIIFM-question (What's-in-it-for-me?) that trade fair visitors use to scan your stand.

Make them connect with positive emotions to what they perceive as a first impression. This involves the way you package your proposition, your staff behaviour, staff's attitude and activeness, as well as the atmosphere of your stand. Your target group visitors must experience positive sentiments: interesting, nice, beautiful, wow, yummy, fun, kind etcetera. A simple rule to follow is: win the heart first, then the mind.

How texts and graphics in your stand work

You should see your stand as a three-dimensional billboard. What applies for the texts and visuals on bill boards also applies for them in your stand.

Using eye-movement cameras placed on stands, the Dutch communication research agency Validators investigated how texts and graphics work when it comes to getting and keeping the visitors' attention.

Eye-movement is a good indicator for finding out the communication locations of a display that people are interested in or for which they have a preference. Eye movement cameras register what textual and visual elements visitors look at in the stand and how long they look at them. In other words, what elements attract their attention and raise their interest.

The following applies to texts

If the eye does not rest on the text, the text is not read. Consequently, the text is not understood and you have not influenced your trade fair target group visitor(s). Texts in stands, therefore, should be short, concrete and simple. They should instantly relate to and positively satisfy the visitor's interest in finding answers to pain and gain issues. They should answer a 'What's-In-It-For-Me?'

The following applies to visuals

Even when the eye does not rest on the visual, the brain can still recognise the visual. Blow up the visuals in your stand. Show big,

concrete and catchy images. As less is more, keep your visuals simple and avoid overkill. Limit the number of impressions and messages that the visitors get in a single visual. Use high-quality images only. The visitor will scan them for immediate recognition and will not have or take the time to study them in detail.

The following applies to message transfer

You achieve better message transfer when the eye fixates on the visual.

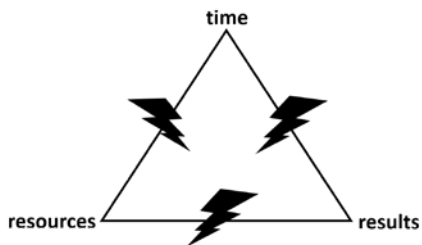
This is the single most important argument for making your visuals really catchy. The more your target group visitors like or want to look at them, the greater the chance you have of getting the messages they contain across.

Eye-movement registrations are measured in milliseconds. Keeping the eye fixated for 2000 milliseconds (2 seconds) is all that is needed for the visitor to recognise the visual plus read and understand a short text that goes with it. Enough for a good visual and attractive text to make your visitor stop to enter your stand or to slow down their pace so that you can start talking to them.

RESULTS WITH A TIGHT BUDGET? PLAN WELL, MANAGE TIME!

Project management theory teaches that when implementing a project, three aspects are to be managed: time, resources (money and people) and outcomes. The theory also teaches that when one of these three aspects suffers a change during project implementation, one of the two other aspects always suffers a change as well. SME-exhibitors with restricted or strictly fixed budgets must at all times ensure they manage their 'time' well.

For, when 'time' suffers a negative change, the outcomes of their participation almost always drop. There is no way to compensate the loss of time or poor time planning through increasing resources in order to secure the achievement of the results they wanted their participation to have.



The following is a possible checklist and time frame for planning your participation at a trade fair. Every trade fair has its own timing (some fairs are held twice a year) and attention must be paid to the deadlines set by the organiser. Therefore, the activities and dates in the planning hereafter are only indicative and you may have to adapt wherever required.

Activity	Time until start of fair
Verification of corporate objectives and expectations	-12 to -9 months
Determine exhibition objectives	-12 to -9 months
Pre-fair market study	-12 to -9 months
Project team appointment and task allocation	-12 to -9 months
Exhibition selection	-12 to -9 months
Cost expectations and return on investment estimation	-12 to -9 months
Preliminary budget approval	-12 to -9 months
Preliminary decision to participate	-12 to -9 months
Decide on stand design/assign stand contractor	-5 months
Approval from organiser on stand design	-4 months
Start supportive promotional activities: advertising	-4 months
Trade fair catalogue, organizers' matchmaking tool entry	-4 months
Hostesses, local staff, interpreters	-4 months
Order technical services from organiser	-3 months
Printed matter ready	-3 months
Assign stand staff	-3 months
Travel arrangements, i.e. tickets, visa for stand staff	-3 months
Workers' and exhibitors' passes	-3 months
Mailing lists for publicity ready	-3 months
Formal invitation to representation abroad	-3 months
Press release to organiser and trade press	-3 months

Arrange on-site P.R. activities	-3 months
1st visitor mailing	-2 months
Begin briefing stand staff	-2 months
Deliver exhibits to forwarding agent	-1 month
2nd visitor mailing	-1 month
Payment checks before departure	-1 month
Arrival of exhibits at the fair	-10 days
Arrival of staff at the fair	-2 days
Settlement payments due	-2 to -1 day
Hand-over of stand	-2 to -1 day
Pre-fair stand staff briefing	-1 day
Measure results (qualitative and quantitative)	Exhibition period
Mid-term evaluation meeting stand staff	Exhibition period
Last day evaluation meeting stand staff	Exhibition period
Customs arrangements	Exhibition period
Repacking and return transport of exhibits	Exhibition period
Settle payments due	Exhibition period
Expense report	+1 month
Preliminary evaluation report	+1 month
Follow-up activities	+1 to ...ongoing
Final evaluation report (incl. return on investment forecast)	+3 months
Conclusions, suggestions and decisions as to next trade fair	+3 months

DURING

Your on-site performance

THE BUYING BRAIN OF THE VISITOR

To improve your commercial interaction with your target group visitor(s) probably the most important thing for SME-exhibitors is to realize that, generally speaking, they will not be closing deals at the trade fair. Why not? Simply, because in general SME-exhibitors target and meet with new, potential buyers. Having as much as mere first-time meetings. To get the most out of the first-time trade fair meetings it is of utmost importance that you understand the 'buying brain' of your trade fair visitor and commercially act in line with that.

Buying is a process and that process starts and develops itself in the mind of the buyer. If there is no hick-up in the process, it goes from merely taking the possibility of buying into consideration as a thought to deciding to buy, then to comparing offers and finally to signing the deal. When looking at your target group visitor(s), determine where they find themselves in the buying process when you approach them or meet with them. Has the process already started or not? How far into the process can you get them? What is the adequate action for you to take? In case of targeting and meeting new, potential buyers you will encounter two situations.

The 'Unaware Visitor'

First, the new, potential buyer is not considering buying the product you offer or working with you. This means the buying process has not started. In this case it is your task to get the visitor to consider buying and start the buying process. In this booklet we call this visitor the 'Unaware Visitor'.

The 'Aware Visitor'

Second, the new, potential buyer has the intention to obtain the product or service you offer. His or her buying process has already started, has moved from merely considering buying to having the intention to buy. The visitor is obviously in the market. It is your task to strengthen the visitor's intention to buy so that they will take the next step in the buying process, such as requesting an offer from you, for instance. In this booklet we call this visitor the 'Aware Visitor'.

Dealing with the Unaware Visitor

The unaware visitor is the visitor that you approach unexpectedly or without them asking for it. The unaware visitor was not planning on talking to you or may not have had an intentional interest in your product or company. For the unaware visitor the product or service you offer may be completely new and unknown, or they may already be buying or using it from another supplier.

Since you are an SME, it is likely that the unaware visitor does not know your company, your brand or you yourself. And now, under these circumstances it is your job to kick-start the buying process in his or her mind.

Imagine yourself as an 'unaware' buyer being approached without asking for it by a sales person. You would probably agree that in many cases your instinctive reaction is one of rejection. You probably recognize the situation of you entering a clothing store and reacting with resistance and rejection to the shop's staff opening question, "Hi, can I help you?".

People have natural resistance to change. As such, the second common obstacle that occurs almost automatically in the mind of unaware visitors is that they weigh what you offer them (your proposition) against what they themselves want or need. They instantly ask themselves, "Is this something for me?". Then, because of the natural resistance to change, they start building up justifications in their mind to not change their current situation. Like for instance, "I do not need another supplier", "I don't think this product is right for me", "Too risky", "Not now". In their minds they create emotional (as opposed to rational) obstacles to allowing the buying process to get started up and continue.

If you do not understand the process of buying, you may try to motivate the unaware visitor in the wrong way. The buying process may end as abruptly as the first contact with the visitor began.

To motivate the unaware visitor to consider your product or service, or to consider working with your company, you must have a strong proposition. At this very early stage a strong proposition before anything emotionally engage them. You must know and connect what you say

to what strongly drives them in their business and daily job. Focus on getting the main benefits across in a convincing manner, not the advantages or features of your product or service. And since at this stage winning the heart is the most important, keep what you tell them general and limit yourself on the details. As a matter of fact, the more you tell and the more details you give, the more you feed their possible emotional buying-process-blocking justifications.

Dealing with the Aware Visitor

The Aware Visitor is the visitor that displays or communicates an interest in your product or service, or in you as a potential supplier.

Easy to recognize signs of this are, for instance, they have positively answered your invitation to visit you at the fair, they have taken the initiative of making an appointment to meet with you through the matchmaking tool of the fair organizers, or they intentionally visit your stand showing or communicating specific interest.

When dealing with the Aware Visitor it is no longer necessary for you to get them to consider the possibility of acquiring your product or service, or the possibility of you as a supplier. The Aware Visitor has passed the first stage of consideration. In the process of buying they have already moved on to the next stage of having the intention to buy.

Having the intention to buy does not necessarily mean that a purchase will eventually follow. Nor does it mean that a possible purchase will be from you. The buying process as such or the buying process with you can still stop for many reasons.

To understand what the correct behaviour for your stand staff would be, we again ask you to take yourself as the reference. Look at yourself as if you were a potential buyer who has the intention to buy a certain new product or service, or to find a new supplier.

For sure you would recognize that at this stage potential buyers generally do not know what exactly it is that they want or need. What a good solution for them looks like. Consequently, they would likely experience doubt and insecurity about it. In this stage of the buying process, taking

away the doubts and insecurity the potential buyer has, is your main task. The visitor seeks rational support for their intention at this stage. However, being confronted with interest - even the slightest bit of it - causes many exhibitors to do just the opposite. Instead of asking questions to find out, understand and frame the needs and context of the Aware Visitor, they start, and at times lose themselves, in telling and explaining about the product, service or about their own organization. This causes the Aware Visitor to disconnect from his or her intention to proceed further in the buying process or to proceed in it with this specific exhibitor.

By asking questions in a structured manner, the exhibitor may quickly and easily discover where and how they can be of real value to the visitor. Asking questions helps the exhibitor to guide and lead the trade fair meetings. It helps him or her to establish a clear need awareness and strong solution desire: it helps him to strengthen the buyer's intention.

CONTACTING VISITORS WITH CONFIDENCE

The number of contacts that SMEs establish with target group visitors has a strong and direct impact on the possible end-result of their trade fair participation. You might even say: "No contacts mean you didn't exist".

Obviously, you would hope that a large number of target group visitors would take the initiative of contacting you. For SME-exhibitors, however, it is more likely that most initiative must come from their side rather than from the visitors' side. Actively approaching and engaging with the visitors is one of the best ways to increase the amount of contacts you make.

There are three situations in which the exhibitor must take initiative as the visitor is not:

1. The visitor is (in or at the edges of the stand) looking at or studying an element of the exhibitor's display (product, brochure, demo, video presentation).
2. The visitor is looking at or studying the exhibitor's stand from a distance.
3. The visitor is in the aisle passing by the exhibitors' stand in a receptive manner (making eye-contact, looking around, orienting him or herself, relaxed pace).

Interesting

Especially at the larger specialized international fairs, active contacting may pay-off very well. Why is that?

Because, at the larger specialized international fairs the product offer on display is segmented by categories in designated halls. Consequently, the vast majority of visitors that find themselves in a certain hall relates to that product category business-wise. And therefore, there is a bigger chance that any of the visitors is the new, potential customer you are looking for.

The act of contacting strangers should, in theory or technically, be quite easy to do for anyone. In practice however, it is not. Judging by the widespread inactiveness of stand staff at trade fairs it is probably safe to conclude that initiating contact with unknown visitors who pass by the

stand and who are not clearly showing an interest is difficult. Rejection or failure anxiety that is common to all humans to a greater or lesser extent certainly plays a role at fairs and in the minds of many exhibitors. This chapter gives you three great pieces of advice that will boost your contacting skills and confidence.

Choose your attitude

The first advice has nothing to do with skills. It has to do with your personal mind-set. It has to do with how you see yourself at the fair, how you see the visitor, how you think about being at the fair and about how you programme your behaviour accordingly.

When people experience enough anxiety, it shows in their posture, facial expressions and behaviour. A negative or positive mind-set influences a person's body and behaviour too. In the live setting of a trade fair your personal attitude is either your best friend or your worst enemy. If you catch yourself developing or having negative thoughts at the fair as to the participation, your role or how you are doing, try to immediately turn them around. One way is to try thinking and talking positively to yourself. In addition, change your physical posture and your behaviour: stand up straight, make yourself tall and force yourself to move. Pick up on doing what you came to do there in the first place: start contacting people.

But what if it is rejection or failure anxiety that is keeping you from pro-actively seeking contact with passers-by? Is there a solution to that? Yes, we believe there is.

The solution lies in how you see yourself at the fair and how you see the visitors. Exhibitors should not see themselves as salesmen, nor should they see visitors as buyers. If they do so, they run the risk of taking themselves and the visitors too seriously and putting pressure on both parties. When the exhibitor sees himself as a salesperson and the visitor as a buyer, he may subconsciously raise the bar of having to score or sell, making him act unnatural, forced, unauthentic and pushy. With the visitor this could lead to an instant and instinctive perceiving of the exhibitor as a threat leading to them rejecting the exhibitor as feared. Confirmed in his or her rejection or failure anxiety, the exhibitor could become even more inactive in approaching visitors.

An effective way for exhibitors to avoid or deal with rejection or failure anxiety is to be aware that at the fair the contact between the exhibitor and the visitor takes place between two natural persons and not between two job functions. Moreover, realize that the purpose of the contact is not selling or convincing the other. It is just to have a friendly and open first-time meeting to explore opportunities and mutual interest.

Stay away from sales or your product when initiating a contact. Become a friend first and build trust on a personal level first. Act as a friend: smile, be warm, enthusiastic, direct, open and kind. Take genuine interest in the other person. Relax, have fun and make the other person enjoy it as well.

Use a visitor-situational opening

One way to turn off and chase away people is to use a wrong opening line. At fairs that could be a fetched or 'quasi-humorous' remark. These may be easily perceived as you trying to cover up hesitation or anxiety. They may make the visitor instantly find you weird, suspicious or annoying.

Asking a passing-by visitor a closed question is also far from ideal. The chance of getting a simple "No" for an answer from the passer-by (who most of the times is an Unaware Visitor) to the question, "Can I help you?", is super high. This closes the door for you immediately.

But what about asking the passer-by an open-ended question then? Like, "How can I help you?". By asking open-ended questions you are actually on the right track. However, asking passers-by an open-ended question out of the blue and, as far as they are concerned, without them asking to be contacted, often still triggers their resistance and makes them reject you. Why is that? Because, in general, one-liner open-ended question do not give the passer-by an acceptable justification for the unsolicited contacting initiative.

When practicing with open-ended questions in training role-plays the participants that play the role of exhibitors experience themselves that asking passers-by a one-liner open-ended question is not really appropriate and that it makes them feel uncomfortable and insecure. But what to do then? If the exhibitor is on the right track with open-ended questions, how should they use them in a way that causes them to be accepted by the passer-by visitor and that makes initiating contact feel like a natural thing to do?

The answer is that open-ended questions need a step up, they need a springboard. There is a simple way to do this. A way that any exhibitor can easily use repeatedly with each new, unknown visitor passing their stand and with whom the exhibitor wishes to successfully and pleasantly establish contact.

This is how it goes:

1. Approach and greet the visitor in a direct, open and friendly manner.

For the visitor it is clear that you are going to talk to him and you look like a nice person

2. Literally mention to the visitor what you saw him or her doing.

This is the first part of the springboard to your open-ended question.

For instance: "The reason that I am approaching you is that I saw you walking in the aisle and noticed glanced at the product in our stand..."

As you literally have stated what the visitor was doing, and you are thus talking about them personally he or she will instinctively not object to what you are saying or to you as a person, but rather would be curious to hear what will be the next thing you are going to say to them.

3. Then mention what the visitors' behaviour or action triggered you to think, to want to do, to know or something like that. And ask the visitor your open-ended question.

This is the second part of the springboard to your open-ended question.

*"...and I was wondering: What would be your relation to dried Mango?"
"...and I found myself curious to learn from you: ... WHO?, ...WHAT?, ... WHEN?, ...WHERE?, ...WHY?."*

Once the contact is made, you take it from there to establish a pleasant, informative, mutually-valuable conversation. See the next chapter.

Another argument for open-ended questions

Using a closed question when initiating a new contact provides the visitor with a very easy escape from having a conversation. Asking an open-ended question (preceded by a springboard) is the best way to go about things and will get you to succeed in visitors accepting your initiative in the majority of your attempts. An additional reason to use open-ended questions is that open-ended questions prevent you as an exhibitor from losing yourself in talking too much or too quickly about your product or service. Turning you into the pushy salesman-exhibitor that visitors instinctively turn away from as he or she does not qualify as a friend. Leaving you empty-handed with no knowledge about the visitor.

Use a contacting strategy

If your contact goals are seriously high you need to make sure that you have the ability to stop trade fair visitors and engage with them.

This would not just be a question of training and instructing your exhibition staff, but also of the up-front development and implementation of a contacting strategy for stopping and interacting with your target group visitors. Think of, and put into practice (multiple) creative tactics to make every visitor stop at your stand, to help your stand staff to break the ice and start a conversation with any visitor.

The visitor accepts the initial contact moment. Just because the way you do it is engaging them emotionally, is truly fun or nice and is authentic (different from the others). And obviously, because your exhibition team is visibly enjoying themselves too. Besides determining how to make visitors stop, you formulate the correct opening questions and determine how you will introduce yourself and your company. You also think of scenarios for the different ways in which you will move the initial contact made forward towards meetings at the stand. It would be good to practice and rehearse your contact strategy prior to your participation with your stand staff.

People remember how you made them feel first

If you expose people to a series of impressions and you ask them what did you see or hear, people will remember the impressions that moved them.

If you want to achieve the same with your trade fair participation you will have to take your visitor through a positive experience. A positive experience releases dopamine, "the feel-good drug" in the brain. As a sort of candy for the brain, the more dopamine the stronger the desire for your product or brand. So, stop with just sending information and knowledge during your participation. Make visitors experience the benefits of your product and organization. Rather give them one spoon of your mango marmalade, than a thousand words about its benefits. The smell and taste of your marmalade will be remembered and shared with others long after the fair. Whereas what you told will largely be forgotten by the visitors upon leaving the fair grounds.



"Pitching? Win the heart and trigger the drivers!"

THE EXPO PITCH

When meeting with new potential buyers at trade fairs the time you have to influence them is limited. If asked how long a first-time trade fair meeting takes on average, both exhibitors and visitors would probably answer it is generally short. It would not be uncommon to learn from them that on average it be between 5 to 15 minutes. Moreover, being confronted with countless impressions during their stay at the fair you can imagine that visitors are tempted to lose interest in what you have to say very quickly.

How to deal with these two challenges - time pressure and rapid loss of interest - when you have to verbally present and position your country, your company, your product/service or yourself? In this chapter you will learn how to sell anything in 20 seconds. And to write your Expo-pitch for doing so in no more than five minutes.

What is an Expo Pitch?

Your Expo-pitch is the compelling, short story you verbally deliver to trade fair visitors about a certain subject or object. The aim of pitching is to inform and position at the same time. (International) exhibitors may need to be able to pitch on different levels: their country, sector, company, product/service or themselves personally/professionally. Different topics, that is to say.

A different pitch for a different topic. A golden rule for effective pitching is that you disconnect your pitches from each another. Deliver one single-subject or a single-object pitch at a time. Do not mix or combine the subjects or objects in one pitch. If you do, your story will lose focus and will become too long to maintain interest and to be remembered.

The circle of impact

At trade fairs you deliver your verbal messages in a live environment: real-time and face-to-face. The impact that your messages have on your visitors clearly depend on your personal performance in the delivery of

your messages. In verbal, face-to-face communication there are three aspects that play a role when it comes to impact. The contribution each of them makes to the impact your communication differs as can be seen in the following figure:

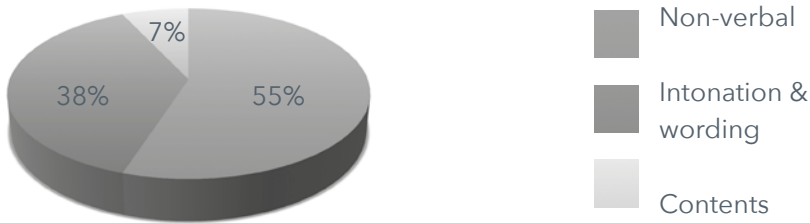


Fig. 2: Circle of Impact in Communication

The very important lesson to be taken from the circle of impact is that what you say - the content of your information - plays a very limited role in the impact of your communication.

Most of the impact in verbal communication by far comes first from your non-verbal communication - your body language - and then second, from your intonation, tone of voice and wording. In short, it is not what you say, but how you deliver it what really counts and that makes the difference in whether you get your message across or not.

Knowing this, there is one very important reason for you to make sure that you have prepared and rehearsed your Expo-pitch for each level and topic you may have to pitch on and for each different target group you may have to pitch for. Why?

Because, if you have not prepared and rehearsed it, you have to make up your pitch while talking to your visitor. And when you do so, all your energy and concentration will be dedicated to instantly inventing and delivering the contents at the same time. Leading you to disregard your non-verbal communication and your intonation and wording, which will strongly weaken the impact of your story.

Most probably you will end up delivering a boring story that is too long, non-engaging and too detailed or complicated in a noticeably hesitant manner.

The Expo-pitch model

The Expo-pitch model helps you write and structure the contents of solid pitch on any topic or object within five minutes. Whether it is to present and position your country, your sector, your company, a product or yourself. The simplicity and compactness of the contents (read: your pitch) that results from using this model, moreover, is of great help to you when focusing on the right body language, intonation and wording.

The Expo-pitch model owes its set-up to the three step Message Map Technique developed by the American author and columnist Carmine Gallo.

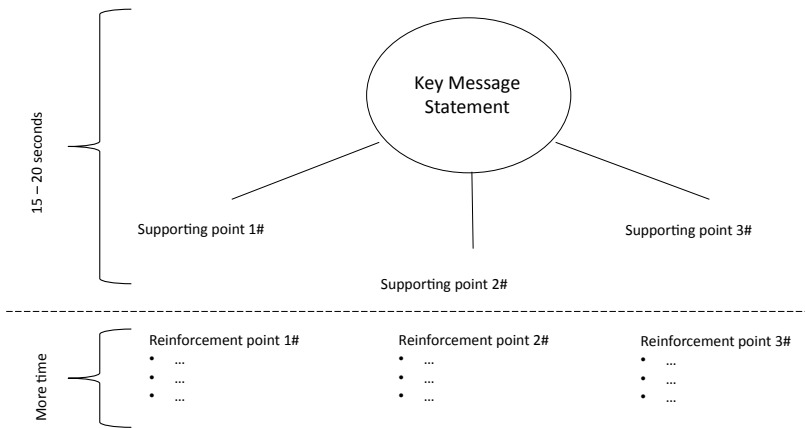


Fig. 3: Three Steps Message Map model, Carmine Gallo.

Step 1

Determine your key message statement.

Your key message statement is what you want the visitor to at least know and remember about the subject or object. At best your key message statement is Twitter-friendly (140 characters max.). It is advisable for your key message statement to contain a positioning, differentiating aspect regarding the subject or object.

An example of a key message statement given by Carmine Gallo is:

“Lush makes hand-made soaps and cosmetics”

Step 2

Determine three supporting points to support your key message statement.

According to the 'rule of three', people are best able to follow three points, and combinations of three. Your three supporting points give support as they are relevant, attractive or appreciated by your target visitor. You could say they would consider them to be 'cool things'.

An example of three supporting point given by Carmine Gallo sounds like:

- 1. "Everything we make is fresh"*
- 2. "Produced in an environmental and animal friendly way"*
- 3. "And of course a part of our earnings flows back into society"*

Step 3 is optional

Delivering step 1 and 2 will take you around 15 to 20 seconds. By only delivering this information your visitor will already know quite a lot about the subject of your pitch.

Delivering step 1 and 2 only can be enough for you to present and position the subject or object with the visitor and from there on switch to asking the visitor a relevant question and get your trade fair conversation going. Should you have more time or consider it relevant to be more extensive in your pitch, use step 3.

Step 3

Determine how to reinforce your three supporting points with explanation, statistics or examples.

Do not add a fourth or a fifth supporting point. Just elaborate, prove or reinforce the three points you are making or have made earlier.

Carmine Gallo gives as an example:

- 1. "Produced daily and shipped the next day"*
- 2. "That is, all our products are unpackaged, all ingredients we use are organic and are 100% animal-test free"*
- 3. "In Germany, for instance, we support project A and project B"*

The easiest way to build and connect the contents of your Expo-pitch is to actually design it, write it in the three-step message map. The example Carmine Gallo uses looks like this:

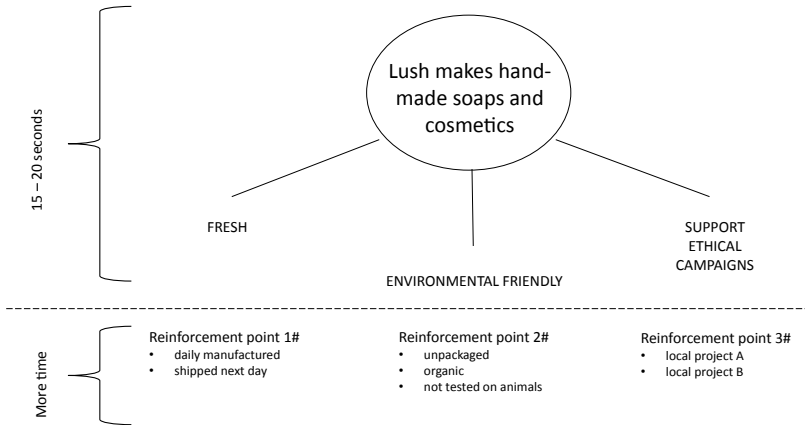


Fig. 4: Three Steps Message Map model Lush, Carmine Gallo.

Using Expo-Pitch you make contents concise and easy to memorize. Because of this, you won't have any trouble delivering it with impactful body language and intonation. As to the wording, the Lush example shows that easy to understand and concrete wording is good for message transfer and acceptance.

Because at the fair, when facing your potential buyer, you want to avoid staccato speech and must rehearse a few times ahead of time so that you are able to deliver your message maps' contents in a smoothly connected and meaningful flow of words.

Rest assured

Should you doubt the effectiveness of the Expo-pitch model, because to you it seems too simple or too limited, here is some re-assurance for you to start using it.

People's initial positive connection with or positive engagement of a subject or an object always starts with a having a positive emotional reference to it.

To start wanting something, emotion always precedes logic. So, in first-time meetings at trade fairs your introducing and positioning of the subject or object is to achieve just this: positive emotion and paving the way to continuance of your conversation. Basically, having the visitor understand what you say and think: "OK, sounds good", "OK, sounds interesting" or "OK, that makes sense". Putting them into a permissive mind-set. You can now easily ask him or her a question and start your pleasant trade fair conversation.

LEADING TRADE FAIR MEETINGS

After you have successfully established the first contact with a target group trade fair visitor, you need to follow through. It is now time to guide and lead the conversation so that the both of you can say that you had a valuable meeting. It is all about effectiveness and efficiency. On the one hand it is about achieving the best outcome possible. On the other it is about achieving the desired outcome in an acceptable amount of time given the total contact goals of your trade fair participation.

What end result?

How to have the meeting depends on what you want to get out of it. In general, first-time meetings at trade fairs with new, unknown target group visitors do not have a closed deal or signed contract as an outcome.

Prior to the fair you should think of what the biggest next step possible (what gets you closest to doing business after the fair) is that you are able to make with your (new) target group visitor. You also determine what the second best next step is and the third best next step. For effectivity purposes your stand staff is instructed to try to achieve the biggest next step possible with all (new) target group visitors they have a meeting with and that they consider a lead. If that step cannot be made with a certain visitor, they try to achieve the second best or even the third best.

Assignment

Determine the post-fair realistic next steps your stand staff can and should aim to achieve with new potential buyers at trade fairs and rank the them in order of preference to be achieved by your stand staff.

Realistic Next Steps	Order of Preference
the visitor and you agree on:	
<input type="checkbox"/> making the visitor a quotation	
<input type="checkbox"/> receiving a Request for Quotation from the visitor	
<input type="checkbox"/> a post-fair meeting at the visitor's company	

<input type="checkbox"/> a post-fair meeting at your company	
<input type="checkbox"/> the shipment of a trial order	
<input type="checkbox"/> the shipment of a sample	
<input type="checkbox"/> a post-fair follow-up conversation by phone	
<input type="checkbox"/> sending information to the visitor after the fair	
<input type="checkbox"/> receiving information from the visitor after the fair	
<input type="checkbox"/> ...	
<input type="checkbox"/> ...	

Structure your meetings

Want to increase your efficiency? Have more meetings in less time? Structure your meetings! Want to increase your effectiveness? Have your meeting provide you more and better next steps with visitors? Structure your meetings!

Having too long conversations or having conversations with the wrong visitors results in an immediate impact on the number of contacts you can make in a day and the number of lead opportunities you get to explore. Having conversations in the wrong manner means you will not recognize opportunities or will be insufficiently able to capitalize on the opportunities. When it comes to efficiency and effectiveness, trade fair meetings in particular benefit a lot from structuring them.

Strangely enough not many exhibitors follow a structured pattern for their trade fair meetings. They may not be familiar with the power of structure. They may think that trade fair conversations are too short and under too much time pressure to structure them. Or they may not know how to structure them. Whatever the reason for not structuring the meetings is, many exhibitors seem to take trade fair conversations and their outcomes the way they come and the way they go. Improvising their way through the conversation. Sometimes having short conversations and sometimes having longer ones. Unfortunately, this leads to having to accept unsatisfactory outcomes in many cases.

Big time saver at the beginning

The most obvious and impactful solution for drastically increasing your efficiency is to only enter into conversations with visitors that form part of your trade fair visitor target group. Avoiding and cutting down on wasted time starts with simple identification and qualification of visitors. Who are you and are you one of the people that we want to meet at this fair? If so, you try to proceed and enter into a conversation. If not, you may - if you wish to - break off the contact right away. Using target group membership as a knock-out qualification criterion to decide whether to proceed with the meeting or not. Disqualifying non-members for further conversations or meetings.

Tell them nicely

You may feel uncomfortable breaking off the conversation that you yourself have initiated immediately after the visitor has identified himself as not belonging to your target visitor group. It is good you have this feeling. It means that you empathize with the visitor who is going to be rejected. Without this empathy your rejection would probably sound blunt, hard and direct. Too much empathy and you would run the risk of proceeding to have a possibly lengthy and useless conversation. It is OK to use a mix of empathy and straightforwardness. How would this sound?

"Alright, so you are a purchaser in manufacturing electronic components for the automotive industry? Great, but uh..... at the same time, what a pity. Because, we do not relate to your industry whatsoever and I was hoping you were from <your target group> industry. Well anyway, thank you for your time, I am glad that we had the chance to greet each other and I hope you enjoy the rest of your visit."

Your non-verbal communication is very important here. Open, friendly, smiling, cheerful, keep it light, warm, kind.

Determine and agree with your stand staff what to do and how to go about things when you are in contact with a visitor that is not a target group member of yours.

More and better next steps

The path that exhibitors have to follow while paving it for themselves at the fair is the path that goes from visitors to contacts, from contacts to leads (potential customers) and lastly, from leads to customers. As mentioned earlier, most of the time the actual deals are only discussed and closed after the fair and not during it. This means that an exhibitor's most important job is to contact visitors, get them interested and get them to agree to taking the next step that the exhibitor would like them to take.

Don't be this doctor!

Imagine that you haven't been feeling too well since a couple of weeks. You're suffering from fever outbreaks, little aches and pains, fatigue and such. All in all, this has got you pretty worried and you have made an appointment with the doctor. You are in the waiting room, your name is called and you enter the doctor's office.

The doctor greets you pretty formally, tells you to take a seat and says, while looking through some files: "So Mr./Mrs. Thorp, what can I do for you?" You straighten your back, shift forward a bit on your chair and are ready to explain to the doctor what physical discomfort you have been experiencing over the past few weeks. You start: "Well, doctor since a couple of weeks I have not been feeling well, I..."

Before you can finish your sentence, the doctor looks at you, and motions with his hand for you to stop talking. He takes out his prescription book from his drawer and writes a prescription that he hands to you, saying: "Take this, three times a day and you should be better".

Question: Would you take the medicine? No, most probably not. And you are so right, as a proper examination for a solid diagnosis did not take place. Whereas you had expected and needed that to be the case for you to trust and go with the solution the doctor proposes to you.

A major and common mistake exhibitors make is that when their visitors show (even the slightest bit of) interest, they start giving them almost unlimited information and explanation as to what they do and how

they do it. Exhibitors know that their trade fair meetings are under time pressure and they have been given ambitious goals. This leads them to verbally push whatever it is that they offer. Turning themselves instantly into a doctor that prescribes a medicine without proper examination and diagnosis of a patient he is seeing for the first time.

When meeting at trade fairs, especially with new people, instant trust building and engagement with the visitor is vital if you wish to even get a chance to establish a next step. And even though time is limited at trade fairs, if you want visitors to want and accept the next step to take with you that you will be proposing later on, you must have examined their situation and correctly diagnosed it. So that they trust and agree on the 'medicine' (read: the next step) you propose that they take with you.

Asking questions rather than giving solutions or information is key for effective trade fair meetings. Asking questions puts you in the driver's seat. Asking questions is the secret to guiding and leading trade fair meetings. It gives you control over the contents and the timing. Moreover, and maybe even more importantly, asking questions enables you to build trust both on a personal level, as well as on a professional level.

You totally qualify with your visitor. You show genuine interest in and empathy for them. Moreover, the relevant, exploring questions you are asking make the visitor feel and know that you know what you are talking about: that you are a professional. Because of this, the next step that you eventually propose is perceived to be the logic outcome of the conversation. It makes sense and is attractive to them.

The Three I's Structure

1. Inquire - ask
2. Inform - tell
3. Influence - propose

The Three I's represent the ideal conversation structure for meetings with leads at trade fairs.

As an exhibitor you may end the trade fair meeting at any time you like. At any given moment during the conversation you may decide that you have no business interest to continue it.

The 5 things to get to know from the visitor

For first-time meetings at trade fairs there are basically only five things you would like to get to know from your visitor. Placed in a logical sequence they will provide you the following ideal course of your conversation.

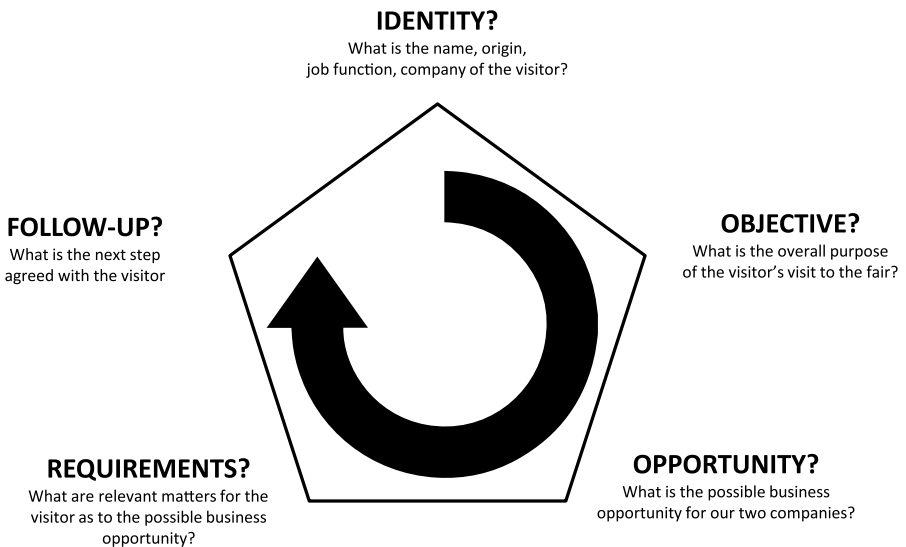


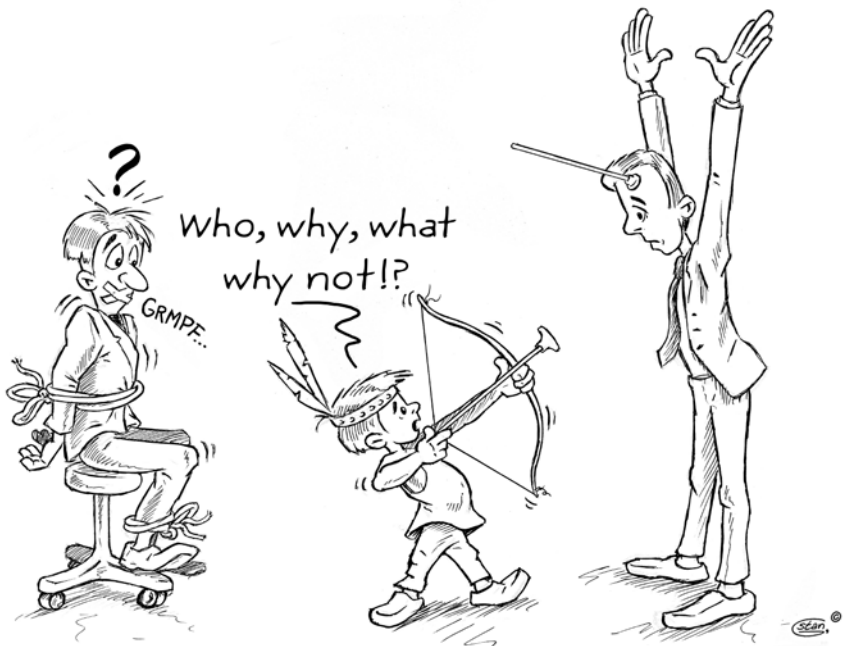
Fig. 5: The Trade Fair Meeting Model.

The above topics and their sequence go from a broad and general perspective to a narrow business perspective. Helping you be trusted as a friend first and then as a professional. It purposely encourages you to stay away from you giving too much information too soon. Obviously, you and your team should master the communication skills necessary to retrieve the information that is needed. Asking the right questions, in the right way. Verbally and non-verbally communicate effectively. Not an easy task for everybody.

LSD

LSD can be understood as a useful technique for those who find it difficult to conduct business conversations that have a pleasant, natural flow. For those who find themselves challenged in face-to-face conversations as they cannot come up with the right questions, experience themselves an interrogator more than a pleasant person to have a conversation with or they find it difficult to change topics in a conversation.

- Listen to what the other says.
- Summarise what the other has said.
- Dig into what the other says: ask for explanation, consequences etcetera.



"Telling is not selling."

NOTES YOU CAN FALL BACK ON

Obviously when you have met with leads at the trade fair you must - for the sake of your follow-up - be able to remember what you talked about and what you agreed upon after the fair. Taking notes is essential for this. Doubting the usefulness of notes, or asking yourself whether taking notes when meeting with potential customers is appropriate, is out of the question. Serious exhibitors will at all times take notes during conversations with leads! A great tool to make notes-taking easy that at the same time allows exhibitors to structure their conversations is the so-called Business Contact Form.

BUSINESS CONTACT FORM <FAIR>, <DATE>	
<Participant (name company / staff member)>	Attach business card or fill out
Date: _____	Company name: _____
	(Mr/Mrs/Ms): _____
DATA VISITOR	First Name (or initials): _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Male	Last Name: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Female	Job description: _____
	Postal address: _____
IMPORTER	Postal code/City: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturer/producer	Visiting address: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Retailer	Postal code/City: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Buying Combination	Country: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Agent	Phone: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Trader (incl. wholesaler)	Fax: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please indicate): _____	Email: _____
_____	Website: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Gives permission to send digital info	

BUSINESS INTEREST

Product description: _____

- New contact
- Existing contact

Trade Relation Sought:

- Agency (AGT) Contract manufacturing (CMFG) Co-makership (CMS)
- Exporter (IER) Joint venture finance (JVF) Joint venture technical (JVT)
- Importer (IRI) Private labelling

Product interest (be specific): _____

Agreements:

- Promised (potential) orders
- Fixed (trial) order received

Products	Value € (Euro)

Products	Value € (Euro)

Buyer interested in (exclusive) representation for _____ (indicate region)

Promised action by Participant

- Send price quotation
- Send (counter) samples
- Visit to importer
- Other: _____

Promised action by visitor/importer

- Send specification
- Send samples
- Visit to participant
- Other: _____

Agreed follow-up activities and timing (specified):

Classification of interest: A = High B = Medium C = Low priority

Is the form completely filled in?

STAND BEHAVIOUR DO'S AND DONT'S

Check out these common best practices:

- Actively approach (unknown) visitors;
- Use open and engaging body language;
- Do not 'hang out' with colleagues;
- Never eat in sight of visitors;
- Take or make phone calls outside of your stand;
- Do the same for checking and writing messages;
- Do not leave your stand unattended;
- Ask your neighbour to watch your stand when you have to leave it;
- When with colleagues, take turns to go around and visit other stands and gain knowledge on product, packaging, technology;
- Dress for the occasion, having your target group in mind;
- Know the cultural differences, adopt and adapt;
- Be fluent in at least the English language at international trade fairs;
- Become a friend first, before taking on the role of the professional;
- Smile, be kind, make eye contact, let it show you are enjoying the interaction and being at the fair;
- Every day evaluate the day's results, your own performance and change behaviour or tactics if necessary;
- Prove expertise by asking the right questions, rather than talking solutions;
- Early 'in or out' target group qualification saves a lot time waste;
- If you cannot sell on the spot anyway, do not push visitors as if you could;
- As to your follow-up: promise what you do, do what you promise;
- Apply the 4-Is sequence: Initiate, Inquire, Inform and Influence.

AFTER

Your post-fair round-off

SUCCEEDING IN THE FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up is one of the four multipliers in the success formula for trade fair participation (see chapter 1). Unsuccessful follow-up pretty much means failure with the finish in sight. A much-heard complaint from trade fair visitors is that exhibitors do not carry out any follow-up on the next-step agreements that were made during the fair. On the other hand, an equally much-heard complaint from the side of exhibitors is that trade fair visitors do not respond to their follow-up efforts after the fair. Here are three advises for SME-exhibitors to improve the situation on both ends.

Plan your follow-up

If possible, start the follow-up immediately after a prospect has left the stand. A prompt follow-up will give you the advantage of putting you ahead of competitors where it comes to making a professional impression and proving your interest. The most common obstacle for exhibitors to undertake prompt follow-up or to do what they promised their visitors at the fair is lack of time. Once back home, having returned to the office for their normal daily jobs, challenges and routines take over and consume all their time. Making them put aside, postpone and even ignore follow-up.

Your stand staff must reserve time in their daily planners up front for lead follow-up. Just stretch the duration of the fair for them. Oblige them to put the estimated necessary amount of working days for immediate follow-up directly following the dates of the fair into their daily planner. Before they return you have distributed to each of them their immediate follow-up tasks with clear goals of when and how you expect them to report to you the first results.

Limit your promises

In the face-to-face atmosphere of a trade fair too many promises are made to too many people. Many promises lack the pre-conditional need of real interest in a next step by the visitor or are made to the wrong people that are not committed to the next step. It would save exhibitors a lot of unnecessary post-fair work and frustration if they could be sure that the next step agreements they make are with real leads: truly interested potential customers. There is a simple checklist you can use to qualify and rate the lead potential of visitors.

You can use it on the spot, during the trade fair meeting. The higher the proportion of the questions they can positively answer with a 'Yes', the better the visitor qualifies as a lead and should be ranked important to follow-up.

The lead identifier

	The visitor...	Yes	No
1	is a target group member		
2	is sharing a problem or need		
3	is looking for a solution		
4	commits to the post-fair follow-up		

Point 1

The criterion that the visitor must be a member of your trade fair target group speaks for itself and is to be considered a knock-out criterion. Non-compliance means no follow-up. Breaking off the meeting at an early stage is an option that the exhibitor should consider - for the purpose of efficiency.

Point 2

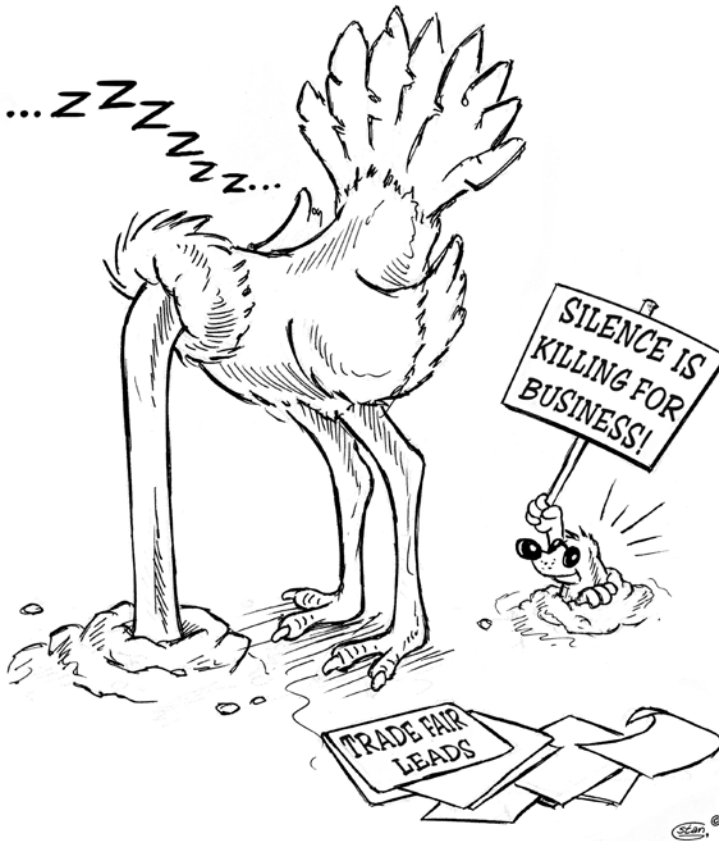
A very strong indication of interest and potential opportunity is the willingness of the visitor to talkatively elaborate on his or her situation, problem or need (want). Visitors that do not want to share any information with you or reply evasively, implicitly indicate they are less interested. Those who ask for prices and insist on you are telling them prices, but that are not willing to answer some of your questions first, may be disqualified as real leads on the spot.

Point 3

Should the visitor share a problem or a need with you, but have no (short term) interest or intention to solve it, the visitor may still be a potential customer, but there would be no urgency or relevancy to give priority to his or her follow-up.

Point 4

When proposing the next step to your visitor, always try to get some kind of commitment from the visitor to a small or minor to do from their side before you deliver your promise in the follow-up. For example, if you agree on sending the visitor an offer after the fair by a certain date, agree for them to send you some information that is easy to provide prior to the date you have to send the offer. Like their purchasing conditions, some additional specs or such. Complying with this interim next step is a strong indication of the interest of the visitor.



"Is this you?"

EVALUATING YOUR PARTICIPATION

Participation in a trade fair involves considerable investments. A quantitative evaluation of the results achieved, weighed against the costs incurred together with a qualitative evaluation of the implementation of the project, constitute the major elements for an objective assessment. They are also the basis for decision making on future participation. For rapid, easy and consistent evaluation working with a pre-designed evaluation form is useful.

Post trade fair evaluation form (example)

Trade fair name: _____

Trade fair dates: _____

Stand location: Hall no. _____ Stand no. _____

Stand type: [] row [] corner [] head [] island

Total costs: _____

Participation objective *Give a qualitative description of 'why you participated' here*

Participation goals 1. *Insert a pre-defined quantitative (SMART) goal here*

2. *Insert a pre-defined quantitative (SMART) goal here*

3. *Insert a pre-defined quantitative (SMART) goal here*

Results achieved 1. *Insert here the result achieved ref. goal 1*

2. *Insert here the result achieved ref. goal 2*

3. *Insert here the result achieved ref. goal 3*

How satisfied are we with the results of our participation?

Not at all Fully

How effective was our pre-fair marketing?

Not at all Fully

How well did we plan and manage the project?

Very poor Very good

How adequate was our stand location?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How adequate was the stand layout?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How adequate was the size of the stand?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How well did the stand attract our target group visitors?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How adequate was the product display in our stand?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How adequate were the visuals (texts and graphics) in our stand?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How adequate were the promotional materials in our stand?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How well did our stand resonate with visitors' standards?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How engaging was our stand to our target groups?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How well did we stand out from the competition?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How adequate was the number of staff at our stand?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully
How adequate was the stand staff in contacting unknown visitors?						
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully

How adequate was the stand staff in the conversations with visitors?

Not at all Fully

How adequate was the stand staff in managing time spent with visitors?

Not at all Fully

How adequate was the stand staff in engaging with our visitors?

Not at all Fully

How adequate was the stand staff in making meeting appointments prior to the fair?

Not at all Fully

How adequate was the stand staff in achieving follow-up agreements?

Not at all Fully

How active was our stand staff ?

Not at all Fully

How was our overall stand behaviour?

Very poor Very
good

How was our stand behaviour compared to our competition?

Very poor Very good

Comments:

Conclusions and suggestions:

What QDB does for its exhibitors

- Identifying exhibitions as per export strategy and as per sectors and potential markets;
- Booking the space in advance (minimum of 6 months in advance);
- Writing to all relevant exporters to participate (per sector), see the example of an invitation hereafter;
- Following up with Qatari companies to send their confirmations along with the participation agreement and security cheque;
- Following up with them to send their profile and product pictures for the preparation of exhibitor's catalogue;
- Organizing preparatory meetings;
- Follow-up with stand builder;
- Follow-up with Organizer for Branding and marketing Qatar Pavilion;
- Engaging freight forwarder for shipment of exhibits to exhibitions outside of GCC;
- Engaging Event management company to arrange for B2B meetings in exhibitions;
- Arranging for hostesses at Qatar Pavilion who assist in translation if need be;
- Obtaining feedback from exporters;
- Preparing final event report;
- Organizing post event meeting with the participants to know the results.

Invitation to participate (an example)

