

## A Guide to Foreign Exhibiting

By: Jerry Kallman

---

Report: G18.08

\$24

---

This report is one in a series of reports all geared to helping exhibiting companies achieve better results and gain value from exhibition participation. The complete series is available at: [www.ceir.org](http://www.ceir.org).

This report made possible in part by a grant from the Exhibition Industry Foundation.

CEIR extends special thanks to Jerry Kallman, managing director of Kallman Global Consulting in Ridgewood, N.J.

---



Center for Exhibition Industry Research

---

Center for Exhibition Industry Research

12700 Park Central Drive  
Suite 308  
Dallas, TX 75251 USA

[info@ceir.org](mailto:info@ceir.org)  
[www.ceir.org](http://www.ceir.org)

©Center for Exhibition Industry Research, 2008.

CEIR publications are registered with the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. 2008

---

*The decision to participate in an overseas exhibition should be a very carefully considered one. Beyond the immediate commitment of time and money, the affirmative choice to exhibit and thereby attempt to sell your products in an entirely new market should involve a marketing strategy no less sophisticated than a plan you would conceive and follow here at home.*

This observation applies to new-to-market firms, which are companies not already established in a foreign market. It is helpful, however, to repeat this basic bit of advice to any firms presently doing business overseas. Like any sales program, a periodic review and evaluations of one's exhibit program is always useful.

Before embarking into an overseas market, you must first establish the capacity to produce enough of your product in a timely fashion to supply a market, provide patent protection, and have reasonable adherence to safety and quality standards. Only then can one's attention turn to selecting the most appropriate and effective vehicle for entry into the overseas market.

For example, you may focus on Germany or Great Britain as the point of entry for a European sales effort. You have heard that the potential is good for sale of your product, but you need more than hearsay before investing in a trade fair appearance. You will want more specifics about the market and the proper trade fair to catapult you into that market.

The U.S. Department of Commerce will be essential to your search for information. The Department of Commerce may be able to offer you fresh market information on the country and product line you are pursuing. Full-fledged market studies are available

for a modest price, and abbreviated versions are normally prepared for free distribution through the Department of Commerce. The Office of Export Promotion will also have a good overview on the leading trade fairs in Germany and England – as well as the rest of the civilized world. The Department of Commerce may have even “certified” a trade fair addressing the industry in the market you have chosen to enter. Each year, it gives its seal of approval to more than 100 events, by implication judging the show itself worthy of consideration and the organizer of the U.S. pavilion a professional in whom you can put your confidence.

Joining a pavilion or group presentation at an overseas exhibition relieves you of most of the minutiae, while allowing you to focus on your booth and sales approach. The pavilion organizer will handle all the necessary steps concerning show management and provide a basic stand on which your corporate personality and graphic signature will stand out.

Presuming, however, that the Department of Commerce does not have all of the information you are looking for, you will want to acquaint yourself with the precise nature of the show abroad: its frequency (some shows are seasonal: spring and fall or sporting good, fashions, etc.; others are annual biennial, triennial and quadrennial. There are even some fairs that are held every seven years!); the product lines

shown; the make-up of the audience; and how the dates of the European show correlates with your domestic exhibiting schedule.

In your evaluation of the trade fair abroad, you should consider third country contacts. Will you only find Britons at a printing equipment show in Birmingham? Do Germans alone visit construction equipment exhibitions in Munich?

That sort of precise and detailed information may not be on hand at the Department of Commerce, but you have another valuable source of information: the local, U.S. representatives of the exhibition organizer, or if there is no American contact point, the show organizer himself. The largest exhibitions abroad now belong to an impartial auditing bureau that supervises the registration process and conducts random surveys of both visitors and exhibitors to determine how well the event met the expectations of the manufactures and their prospective customers. This information also gives an invaluable insight to the caliber of decision makers who attended and their geographical origins.

Your objective in participating in an overseas show might be any one of the following: to complete direct sales of your product; to recruit distributors along national or geographical lines; to sign up agents; to complete licensing agreements (either selling manufacturing processes or acquiring those of another exhibiting firm); to evaluate the market, to compare your product with those of your overseas competitors or to test reactions to your new, modified or repackaged products. Identifying the local (US) agent for the overseas trade fair is not always easy. The Department of Commerce can usually point you in the right direction. Then too, trade magazines often run calendars of events that include foreign shows. Most events will have a sophisticated Web site on all aspects of your proposed participation with information translated into English. Finally, Google and Yahoo are the obvious first stops in your cyber-chase of valuable information.

## The Exhibitor's Application

By this point, you have selected a show, sketched out your objectives and contacted the organizers or their representative for registration information. You are now ready to commit for a booth, or "stand" as it is called abroad. You request and receive an application. It is six or eight pages long, totally unlike anything you have ever had to fill out for a show in Chicago or New York. You panic, imagining how much of a headache this is going to be.

Breathe. Look closely at the application. It asks the name of the company, its address and telephone number and the executive responsible for this show. Then it asks what size stand you want – in meters. You scan through the remaining pages looking for a floor plan or diagram, but to no avail. You discover that the minimum size stand is 15 square meters. You can readily visualize a stand three meters deep and five meters across.

Recalling that a meter is a bit more than a yard (39.37 inches to be exact), you quickly come up with a stand that is about 10 feet deep by 16.5 feet wide. That's the minimum. However, you are invited to specify the dimensions you want. If 3 x 5 meters is sufficient, you enter those figures. If you are planning to show a piece of equipment that is itself 15 feet long (a packaging machine, fiberglass canoe, or computer module), you would want something more than the minimum, perhaps a 4x6 meter space that translates to 13x20 feet, more or less. The point is you specify the dimensions and the organizer will do his/her best to accommodate you. You must indicate whether you want a row stand, corner, head or block stand. A corner is open to two aisles, while a head stand is open on three sides and an island is free standing. The head and block stands are usually available only for larger areas, as in 50-100 square meters, and each type of stand carries its own price, quoted per square meter.

You have decided on how large a stand you need, opting, let's assume, for a row stand of 20 square meters. It may be priced at 70 Pounds Sterling per square meter, or 100 Euros or 300 Singapore dollars. You learned from the Foreign Exchange tables in The Wall Street Journal approximately how much that equals in U.S. dollars, multiplied by your 20 square meter requirements, and the first part of your price picture falls into focus. You may find, on your application, that this rental fee includes the use of partition side and back walls; or it may be supplemented by a "Shell Scheme" that provides partitions, a header with your company name and carpeting. You may even be offered a completely outfitted stand, with partitions, carpeting, furniture, electrical and header for a specified price.

The application will also ask about the products you intend to show at the fair. This information permits the organizer to group exhibitors more or less according to their merchandise and the visitor appeal it has. Grouping is done with the visitor and buyer in mind. A purchasing executive can make general comparisons by visiting all of the companies showing his particular product interest. Recall that European trade fair centers are often multi-hall facilities. In Munich there are 15 modern halls complete with an artificial lake, fountains and other eye-pleasing amenities...Singapore Expo is comprised of six connected halls and the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham has seven cavernous buildings to house exhibits. Pity the poor visitor who would have to traipse from Hall 1 to Hall 7 in Birmingham to see and compare all the models of machine tool cutting equipment, were they not collected in one general area.

Now that you have completed and signed the application, note that the deadline is some six months or more in advance of the show itself. Return the application to the local agent, if there is one, because now the agent becomes your advocate in dealing with the organizers.

## The Show Floor Plan

A few weeks after the deadline has passed, you receive an acknowledgement from overseas. It includes a floor plan with a big red "X" over a stand exactly 4x5 meters. The letter accompanying it says that this stand is being offered to you. Unless you reply negatively by the date prescribed in the letter, it will be assumed that you accept this assignment. With the aid of a magnifying glass, you can read the names of your prospective neighbors. Unless you have a visceral dislike for any particular company nearby, or if there is a column right in front of your area, you will probably accept the offer. Note your hall and stand number.

Before long, an invoice arrives, followed by a book of forms, covering everything from painting of your stand partition walls to lighting, furniture, wireless connectivity, flowers and insurance. The invoice may request two equal payments (in the currency of the host country) by two specific dates. Your bank can arrange the transfer of the proper amount to the account of the organizer, which should be listed on the invoice. The invoice covers booth space only, unless you have specified a shell scheme arrangement or fully furnished stand package. Later you will be billed for the painting, the carpet, the furniture rental, etc. Some service will be performed by approved contractors, and they will want payment on delivery, for obvious, distance-related reasons.

## Taxes

In many foreign countries, American firms are exempt from the local Value Added tax. You may have to remind your contractor of that when it comes time to settle up, because those with limited contact with foreigners (you) may not be aware of the exemption. Others may not realize you are fully informed. Furnishings, incidentally, are usually much more reasonably priced than similar rentals at U.S. events in Dallas, Las Vegas, New York or Chicago. My rule of thumb for estimating costs is that the cost of space alone is equal to the cost of outfitting that space. Thus, if your 20 square meter booth costs \$2,000 to rent, you can figure approximately another \$2,000 to carpet, paint, furnish and clean it over the period of the show. (Overseas shows range in duration from three days to several weeks, for general, consumer events. The mean is between four and five days.)

## Other Details

Now you have planned the physical details of the stand; you have learned from the application who the official freight forwarder is and you have been informed that this firm has several American offices, with trade fair shipping specialists in-house. There are several American firms that specialize in overseas trade fair shipping. TWI in Las Vegas, for example, is an especially experienced forwarder.

What about literature? Language? Lodging? Travel? Customs and duty, business practices abroad and show hours? There is, of course, a good answer to each of these and several sources you can tap. The first is the show's representative, again, if there is one. Then there is the Chamber of Commerce for the host country. There are several offices of the German American Chamber of Commerce, the British Chamber of Trade and Industry, the French Chamber of Commerce and so forth. There is the U.S. Department of Commerce and its wide variety of printed materials and aids. Your bank has a branch or correspondent bank abroad, which, sensing a prospective client, will assist you in many areas.

Your government representatives in the person of the Embassy commercial counselor or consular economics officers, and the Department of Commerce field office near you, stateside, are all sources of valuable information, as is the national airline serving the city where the exhibition is taking place. Many states have export promotion programs that can advise, and, in some cases, offer financial support to your overseas program.

With the abundance of information and assistance, there is no reason why your participation in an overseas trade fair cannot be achieved with a minimum of apprehension and a maximum of profitable results and return.

Stands are booths, meters replace feet and the language may be tinged with a middle European twang or Southeast Asia accent. However, the job of selling is still the same, anywhere in the world. A pleasant, welcoming demeanor, ordinary courtesy and respect would have a new prospect at a show in the U.S. combine to put you on the right path to your first overseas contact and sale. Especially sought-after are firm prices and realistic delivery information. From that point on, your product stands on its own.

You have done it! You have broken the ice without breaking your comptroller's heart. You have successfully entered the stimulating and profitable world of international commerce. Since the first caravan of camel drivers encamped at a crossroad and the merchants spread their blankets to display their wares, the trade fair has been a principal medium of merchandising. The opportunity to use this technique is open to everyone. With care and consideration, you too can profit from international exhibitions and enjoy the benefits that come to the alert, aggressive marketer.