



Trade Show Planning and Preparation

A Step-by-Step Guide to Successful Trade Show Execution

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1. Why Exhibit?

Trade shows are a popular marketing component of business. Trade shows allow companies to interact and forge new partnerships with a diverse group of potential buyers and clients, all within one location. Many businesses recognize these advantages and incorporate trade show exhibition as an important part of their company's export strategy.

Fact

Trade shows are used by over 80% of trade show attendees to stay informed on the latest industry trends. Exhibitions rank higher than salespersons, catalogues and trade publications as a way to view and try out products and services side-by-side.

Source: CEIR 2004

Trade shows are:

- o A global marketplace for buyers and sellers to meet, do business and make sales
- o A forum to increase your profile and differentiate yourself from competitors
- o A unique, highly effective, non-mass media marketing tool to promote existing products or to launch new ones
- o An opportunity to network and find new clients and generate new leads

- o A venue to find new investment opportunities
- o A cost-effective way to gather market research and learn about industry trends
- o A chance to reconnect with existing clients

This series of trade show guides by the Agri-Food Trade Service (ATS) provide tips on how to get the most out of trade show participation. It is important to develop unique and innovative approaches in order to set your brand and product or service apart. At the same time, there are general suggestions that apply to the majority of trade show scenarios and are helpful towards strengthening your execution.

It is important to consider each trade show as a learning experience and to approach trade show preparations, whether you are experienced or inexperienced, with clear objectives and intentions. Like all other aspects of business, with frequent participation comes proficiency.

2. Which Show?

There are hundreds of trade shows around the world to choose from. Research and careful assessment will ensure that the trade show selected aligns best with your objectives and goals.

Use Trade Commissioner and ATS Regional Office expertise

Trade Commissioners employed by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC) and other government departments are stationed around the world to promote the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector. Trade Commissioners located in the international market of interest to you, as well as staff at regionally located ATS offices throughout Canada are familiar with conducting business within specific markets, the key stakeholders, as well as the trade events held in specific locations.



Identify objectives and goals

The clearer your export and business goals, the better you can identify which trade show will offer the most value to your company and the more focus your overall exhibit will have. Your goals can pertain to interested markets, theme, down to the number and type of quality leads you hope to generate. Questions to ask include:

1. Is your product or service ready to enter the market?
2. What are your objectives in participating in a trade show?
3. Who is your target market and audience?
4. How will this trade show complement your export strategy?
5. Do you have the necessary resources: people, finance, time, commitment?
6. Do you have the capacity to follow-up on new leads?

Consult exhibitor and attendee information

Proactively contact show organizers, Web sites, and all other available sources well in advance of your commitment to exhibit. This ensures a greater understanding and well informed decision as to whether this will be a value added business activity for your organization. You will find a comprehensive list of global trade events on the ATS Web site as a starting point. Understand your options – you may choose to exhibit or instead simply attend to gather contacts and market intelligence if you have insufficient resources.

Fact	AAFC offers a walker program for those who may not have the resources to exhibit.
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3. Planning Your Participation

Many companies spend time and money on travel and booth creation and fail to spend time and money researching shows, setting goals, getting their staff ready to sell, and implementing a tactical approach to lead follow-up. The greater the understanding you have of the show in general, the audience and the necessary deliverables you must provide, the greater the potential for superior results.

Acquire pre-show training

The effort and time dedicated to pre-show preparation may impact your success during and post show. Pre-show training sessions are often offered on-site prior to the show and during the show. This kind of preparation can benefit your level of efficiency and professionalism within a trade show setting.

Set goals that compliment your marketing objectives and overall business strategy

It is important to understand that trade show participation extends beyond the few days you are exhibiting; it is a marketing tool that must be integrated into your overall business strategy and one that must be done properly in order to obtain results. Setting goals and developing a roadmap are key ways to achieve this.

For example, your company may sell 100 different products, but through goal setting you choose to focus on 10 of your products for trade show promotion and sales development. Refining the items you plan to display, sample, or discuss with potential clients gives your exhibit a stronger, more cohesive, and tailored focus.

Fact	67% of companies say that trade exhibitions increase brand recognition and corporate profile. 63% say that trade shows help expand or maintain market share. <i>Source: CEIR, 2004</i>
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Inform current and potential clients of your participation

Contact current business partners; use trade shows as a forum to not only generate new business but solidify and build on current ones. Likewise, notify prospective clients of your participation; use your trade show presence as a tool for setting up first-time interactions with your desired target audience.

To aid in pre-show preparations and ensure that you make the best use of your time at the trade show, it is a good idea to book appointments with prospective clients and buyers ahead of time if possible. [Trade Commissioners](#) in local markets and [ATS Regional Offices](#) can provide information on meetings that may be taking place with potential buyers that Canadian exporters can participate in.



CANADA PAVILION: WHY EXHIBIT WITH US?

AAFC has a presence at four prominent trade shows around the world through its Canada pavilion. The pavilion is designed to present a cohesive country brand on the international stage.

Canadian companies who wish to exhibit under the Canada pavilion are advised to visit the [ATS Trade Events](#) web page for more information on how to register with a Canada pavilion.

Your presence as a Canadian exhibitor at the Canada pavilion gives your business an opportunity to interact with new and established contacts in the world's most dynamic markets backed with first-class support. Canadian exhibitors receive, at a competitive and reasonable cost, premium exhibitor space on the exhibition floor, as well as high quality services and one-on-one support from our staff.



Sample of the Services of the Canada pavilion:

- 1 High quality Canada branded pavilion
- 2 Turn key booths with basic furnishings: Panel graphics, company signage, common lounge and refreshments, telecommunications and meeting rooms, selected Canadian promotional aids, glass product showcase, counter, table and chairs, wastebasket, basic electricity and wireless Internet services
- 3 Show and official catalogue registration (inclusion in the trade show Media Package)
- 4 Pre-show market intelligence and briefing
- 5 On-site and on-going marketing support
- 6 Printed catalogue of pavilion participants distributed prior to the show
- 7 Networking sessions with potential buyers and invitations to key international buyers
- 8 Opportunity to meet Canadian Trade Commissioners and buyers one-on-one

Designing a booth display

Trade shows require professional displays, promotional materials including product or service samples, staffing, shipping and travel fees. It is important for an exporter to budget for these expenses in designing their booth display.

The importance of creating a fresh, innovative and unmatched display and selling technique is vital to trade show success. A booth that is not accommodating or welcoming to attendees will reduce the time they are willing to spend at your booth.

- o *Tip: Avoid confusing displays. Have distinct focal points as opposed to numerous competing designs. Within a few seconds a passerby will appraise each booth and decide on approaching.*
- o *Tip: Pavilions and booths are often exhibitor friendly but also have to be attendee friendly. Counters or free standing displays should not block the view of back drops or inhibit visitors from entering the booth.*
- o *Tip: Attempt to communicate the spirit and flavour of your organization. If you are participating in the Canada pavilion, find out what the pavilion looks like and how your exhibit can complement the overall image and reputation your country is endorsing.*
- o *Tip: Use strong colours in displays that work in conjunction with the overall pavilion look and feel, but remember the eye appreciates and is drawn to less aggressive colours; seek a balance.*

Regardless of whether you are exhibiting independently or as part of a larger pavilion, it is important to pay attention to detail to ensure the impression and atmosphere you are creating is conducive to successful business activity.

Fact	Almost one-third of trade show attendees (26%) visit on behalf of companies with more than 1000 employees. Source: CEIR, 2007
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Begin trade show material development early

- *Tip: Understand the true nature of the event. Some trade shows are primarily focused on showcasing goods and services, while some are focused on actually conducting business and negotiating contracts; you need the appropriate materials in either situation.*
- *Tip: All sales literature and marketing materials should be printed in the local language if exhibiting internationally, this emphasizes a professional image.*
- *Tip: Incorporate potential delays and complications into your time frame to guarantee readiness.*

Staff training

A pro-active, friendly and well trained booth staff member is often more effective in attracting attendees than a free sample or giveaway. Sample engagement and qualifying questions should be given to staffers prior to the show. Avoid a scripted feel, but ensure there are guidelines on appropriate staff/attendee dialogue.

The clients you gain become your company's ambassadors. If attendees are happy with the interaction with your staff, they are more likely to think positively of your company, more willing to do business with you, and more eager to spread the word about your product or service to others.

- *Tip: Develop qualifying questions for staff to use to pinpoint the audience you are looking to reach and to verify booth visitors as potential clients; perform these types of activities before getting into product sampling or demonstration.*
- *Tip: Provide staff with business cards and other promotional material that can be handed out to booth visitors if appropriate.*
- *Tip: Do not employ booth staff that cannot answer questions. Not only should booth staff be able to answer basic questions pertaining to your product or service, they should be able to answer extensive questions pertaining to your company's capabilities, export intentions, current market exposure and efforts to expand into other markets.*

- *Tip: A translator may be required at your booth for attendees who may prefer to do business in their local language.*

Additional information on managing a booth can be found in the *ATS Guide on Trade Show Boothmanship*.

Customs and import regulations

Find out the best methods and approach to getting your exhibit and samples/products to the trade event location. Consider the customs and import regulations, as well as licenses needed for your sample products. Knowing these requirements in advance will ensure a smooth transition from pre-show to at-show execution.

Understanding the market access issues in the market you are interested in will also help determine where you will have the greatest chance of exporting success in the long run.

Funding Sources

The AAFC [AgriMarketing Program](#) aims to enhance marketing capacity and competitiveness of the Canadian agriculture, agri-food, and fish and seafood sectors. The Program provides funding for industry to develop and implement Long Term International Strategies (LTIS).

AgriMarketing is the successor to the Canadian Agriculture and Food International (CAFI) program. It introduces new elements including support to SMEs, and access to funding to support marketing of innovative products.

4. Resources

[Preparing for Trade Shows](#) – ATS

[Trade Event Listing](#) – ATS

[Export Assistance](#) – ATS

[Training and Tools for Canadian Exporters](#) – ATS

[Exhibit Planning Timeline](#) – Exhibitions Program

[Centre for Exhibition Industry Research \(CEIR\)](#)