

# Just visiting thanks



*Export New Zealand member Simon Fawkes offers some pointers on how to make your next trade fair visit a success.*

An international trade fair is one of the most cost effective marketing activities for exhibitors as well as visitors. Nowhere else will you find such a concentration of companies in your industry. What's more, everyone is there to do business.

This presents a unique opportunity, whether you are selling, buying or prospecting.

It is the forum for relationship building as well as finding out about the latest products and trends that affect your business.

Many articles about trade fairs concentrate on taking part as an exhibitor. So although visiting an international trade fair is considerably cheaper than exhibiting, many visitors fall into the trap of thinking 'we'll just turn up and look around for a few days'. However, careful planning will ensure you make best use of your time, as even the longer fairs do not last more than seven days, while some run for only three days, leaving insufficient time to work out how best to use your time once you get there.

Many first time visitors to major international trade fairs are overwhelmed at the sheer scale of these events. How do you find your way around 1000, let alone more than 2000 exhibitors in a few days? It is not just a matter of collecting brochures and business cards – quality really does count.

## Visitor guidelines

The following guidelines are drawn from many years of taking part in international trade fairs, both as an exhibitor and as a visitor.

- Ensure that you are going to the right fair by checking the industry categories and list of exhibitors from the last fair. Note that some categories may change. If possible, talk to people who have visited the fair before. See what other major fairs there are, and compare industry categories and types of companies taking part.
- Determine your overall objectives and state them in terms that will define success – then look at some more specific objectives including the different types of companies you want to meet. Document what you are seeking from them and what you will be offering them. Review these objectives internally, with your

key customers and perhaps your key suppliers too. See how you can involve them and use the trade fair visit to strengthen important relationships. You should also talk to other companies in your industry and consider attending the trade fair with a group of companies.

- Plan well in advance, if only to get the best deals on flights and accommodation. This may mean booking six months ahead. Trade fair accommodation is invariably at a premium. You should also develop a detailed plan covering all the main activities leading up to the fair.
- Do your research well before you leave home. Most trade fair websites will have full exhibitor lists that you can search by industry sector and keywords. You may well want to do further research on the companies that are of interest to you. In some cases it pays to make contact in advance.
- Ensure you plan your meetings before you leave, with your most important appointments arranged in advance. Highlight each exhibition hall plan with the companies you must visit and those you would like to visit. Organise your visits to minimise "dead time" walking between halls. Allow time for subsequent meetings with those exhibitors that are of most interest.

• Aside from plenty of business cards, decide what you need to take with you. Practice your "elevator pitch". You will need to make a positive impression and encourage exhibitors to talk to you. Make sure you still have something additional to send the best prospects after the fair. You can show a presentation on your laptop, but send a CD later.

• Pre-register to avoid queues and arrive fresh and well prepared each day, as trade fairs are exhausting. Make clear notes from each meeting – what they will do, what you will do and by when. See what responses you are getting and judge how you may need to adapt the way you present your company and business opportunities. If possible write your report before your next flight and include your observations on each company as well as specific actions. Document your learning, in particular noting what you might do differently next time.

Remember that the work does not stop at the end of the trade fair. You must follow up all the actions promptly and have a full debrief with your colleagues when you get back. Then it's time to start planning your next visit to build on the relationships you have formed at the trade fair.



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