

TRADE FAIRS: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

The golden rules to plan and participate in a trade fair getting the most out of it



FIERA MILANO



**Fondazione
Fiera
Milano**

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introduction

Fairs are both the oldest and the most modern of all forms of corporate communication. The oldest, because, at least in the form of the travelling market that was held in certain areas at certain times, its origins date back to the dawn of time. Markets were held, villages were built and new activities were developed at meeting places along roads or rivers. The most modern, because they are places of experimentation and laboratories of new forms of communication and marketing. For this reason, large-scale investments are made in fairs, both in Europe and in strongly expanding international markets, in order to project them towards new scenarios. With respect to traditional forms of advertising, increasingly more crowded with messages competing for the attention of consumers, fairs maintain the decisive advantage of personal interaction. This advantage remains also as regards the new online forms of advertising: finding out about a product is one thing, reciprocal knowledge, looking in one another's eyes and exchanging experiences between suppliers, customers and other parties sharing the same audience is another. In an increasingly more globalised economy, fairs



are changing face and integrating with new forms of communication and promotion. For a large number of participating companies, they are the main form of promotional investment. It is therefore important for these companies to spend their money well by selecting the right fairs to participate in and maximising the relative benefits.

Costs and benefits

Many other companies that still do not participate in fairs must reflect on whether or not, in the sphere of their *marketing mix*, they are losing a precious opportunity. Certainly, compared with other promotional and marketing activities, participation in fairs requires higher direct and organisational costs, with advantages that are not always easy to quantify. The simple reason for this is that participating in a fair has many values, so much so that a fair can be considered as 'multifunctional', including the

eyes, mouth, ears, nose and legs of a company. Participating in a fair, in fact, involves listening to customers, seeing markets and competitors, expressing one's global offer, interacting with the public and approaching customers.

What other *marketing mix* tool can do the same?

This publication, therefore, sets out to help those who already participate in fairs to address new ideas, see things from different points of view and undergo a check-up which, we hope, will be of use for their routine activities, and those who do not yet participate to optimise their valuation of costs and benefits, also by proposing operative and assessment methods. The world and the fair market are in continuous transformation,

partly as a result of the urgent challenges posed by new markets and new technologies. It is no coincidence that the above issues are integral parts of training courses and studies conducted by advanced university institutes or that exhibition centre operators themselves feel the need to nurture renewed managerial capacities in this area, as is proved by the establishment of the Academy of Fair Management in 2002 by Fondazione Fiera Milano, the first of its kind in Europe.



Knowledge- driven success

Part one

The Italian fair market is one of the liveliest in the world. It reflects the country's economy with its strong export inclination and sectors of excellence, especially capital goods and B2B.

For this reason, in fact, fairs are an important card to play by small-to-medium companies.

Success depends on correctly defining objectives, on the masterful combination of activities and on the involvement of various subjects.

To exhibit or not to exhibit?

Summary

Participating in a fair is both a communication and a marketing activity. For many exhibitors, it is one of the most important parts of their promotional efforts, though one positive factor is that also a small enterprise, by focussing on specialisation and quality, can achieve positive results with an affordable budget.

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• Calendar of Fairs in Milan

The fair is a powerful tool for increasing market presence and is also available to SME's.



Why do or should companies participate in a fair? It is not necessary to consult a *business management* treatise to realise that participating in a fair is both a marketing and a communication activity. But how much does participation affect other corporate activities? What resources does it absorb? How can this investment be assessed with respect to other marketing and communication activities in order to understand how to adjust the needle of the balance? Let us start with some figures. 150,000 to 200,000 exhibitors' participate in Italian fairs every year. Most of these participate in the most important events, which are defined as international or national. These are elevated figures which, however, must be interpreted. Firstly, because one company can exhibit at more than one fair. Secondly, because the production fabric of the Italian economy continues to be extremely fragmented, though economic performance indices say that medium-size companies and exporting companies reap the greatest rewards. In other words: the main beneficiary is *Italian style*.

According to the latest Istat figures²

- Enterprises with 20 or more workers number almost 79,000 (1.8% of Italian enterprises) and absorb over 6.6 million workers (40.7% of total workers and 60.1% of employees).
- Companies with 20 to 49 workers number 54,000 and absorb 1.6 million workers.
- Medium and large enterprises (with 50 or more workers) number approximately 24,500 and absorb over 5 million workers, 30.8% of total workers (and 46.2% of employees); they account for 48.8% of total turnover and 44.6% of added value.
- Large companies (with at least 250 workers) number 3,215 and with 3 million workers they account for 18.3% of total workers (27.5% of employees), 29.6% of turnover and 28.5% of added value.

1 Source: Aefi (Associazione Esposizioni e Fiere Italiane – Italian Exhibition and Fairs Association). The term 'exhibitors' also includes multiple presences of the same company at more than one fair or exhibition. It does not include the trademarks that are represented or 'hosted' at the stands of 'direct' exhibitors.

2 Istat (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica – National Statistics Institute), October 2007: Structure and competitiveness of the industrial and service enterprise system – Figures for 2004 and 2005.

The economic indicators of exporting companies are clearly higher than average as regards productivity, salaries and profit margins.

**Economic indicators of industrial and service companies,
by class of workers and business activity – Year 2005**
Source: Istat, October 2007

| BUSINESS ACTIVITY CLASS OF WORKERS | Enterprises | Workers | Employees | Turnover | Added value for worker |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| | (number) | (number) | (number) | (mn euro) | (th euro) |
| 1-9 | 4,083,426 | 7,831,590 | 2,732,297 | 750,289 | 26.5 |
| 10-19 | 140,213 | 1,849,514 | 1,585,369 | 286,502 | 38.3 |
| 20-49 | 54,163 | 1,612,336 | 1,510,738 | 322,428 | 44.9 |
| 50-249 | 21,352 | 2,053,222 | 2,018,495 | 509,514 | 49.7 |
| 250 and over | 3,215 | 2,983,038 | 2,977,464 | 787,112 | 60.6 |
| Total | 4,302,369 | 16,329,700 | 10,824,363 | 2,655,845 | 38.8 |

- *The economic performance of exporting enterprises is generally better than that of companies which exclusively focus on the domestic market.*
- *Labour productivity is significantly higher for exporting enterprises. Unlike what may be commonly thought, this also applies to smaller enterprises.*
- *The differential in favour of exporting enterprises, in fact, is particularly high in the 1-9 worker class (33,700 euro per worker with respect to 22,700 euro of non-exporting enterprises, in other words, 48.8% more). Also for enterprises in higher classes, the productivity differential benefits exporting companies (+33.3% in enterprises with 10-19 workers, +20.4% in the 20-49 worker class and +4.6% in the 50-249 worker class).*



Exports account for over one fifth of Italian GNP. Fairs are a logical accompaniment to this international focus.

Especially in the B2B (*business to business*) sectors, fairs offer the benefits of a direct, professional and interactive contact.

■ *The industrial situation, however, confirms the great fragmentation of the production fabric: industrial companies in the strict sense of the term number 12,000 for the 50 workers and more class and 4,300 for the 100 workers and more class¹.*

The above numbers allow a kind of virtuous circle to be identified. Exporting companies are among the main protagonists of the exhibition panorama, both in Italy and abroad. They also achieve higher turnover, productivity and growth which consequently gives them larger average dimensions. Participation in fairs can help many Italian companies, especially in the medium-small class, to achieve their planned quality leaps.

An opportunity for SME's

As Italy is – with Germany – one of the largest fair organisers, the offer is extensive. It is also among the countries with the highest contribution to GNP (in 2006, exports amounted to 21.6% of GNP²), thanks to the excellence of many sectors which, precisely for this reason, are still able to find unexpressed potential in the international markets.

There are approximately 180,000 exporting enterprises out of a total of 450,000 in the industrial sector and 33,000 in the agriculture and aquaculture sector. Among exporting companies, those with 250 employees or more account for a little over 1% of the total, but absorb 44% of workers and 43% of Italian export. Another 17% of export derives from companies with 100 to 249 employees. These account for 2.2% of total exporting companies and absorb 12.8% of workers, thus being the component most focused on the international markets.

1 Istat, 2001 census.

2 The loss of weight in the industrial sector and, therefore, that of *Italian style*, is reflected in the decrease participation of Italian products in international trade. Countries such as Germany remain stable or even increase by about 6%. Italy decreased from an average of 4.5% during the second half of the Nineties to the current 3.5%.

There is therefore a relationship between internationalisation, force of offer and capacity of the fair system: a chain that must be fully exploited. For small and medium companies, fairs are a growth opportunity. An opportunity which, when all is said and done, is more within reach of their budgets than they might think.

Fairs and B2B

For many exhibitors, especially those that do not boast large advertising and promotional budgets, investing in a fair is an important item in their balance sheets, often the most important part of their promotional/marketing budget: the investment is higher for *B2B (business to business)* companies, who target a professional public, where direct customer-supplier relationships are decidedly important, and is correspondingly lower for *consumer-oriented* companies which focus on more differentiated and mass channels in order to reach an *audience* of millions.



The fair phenomenon

Summary

Over 100,000 exhibitors, without counting local events, contribute to make Italy one of the most developed countries in the European fair system. This liveliness also reflects the articulation of the production system, the economy of the districts and the international attraction. The transformation of the exhibition system is affected by the development of *B2B* and the emergence of new forms of communication. For this reason, one must carefully “read” the new signals and interpret them in the sphere of corporate strategies. The future will be guided by market globalisation which is already leading to an intensification of the international calendar.

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• Calendar of Fairs in Milan

• Marketing & Media

• Exhibitor services

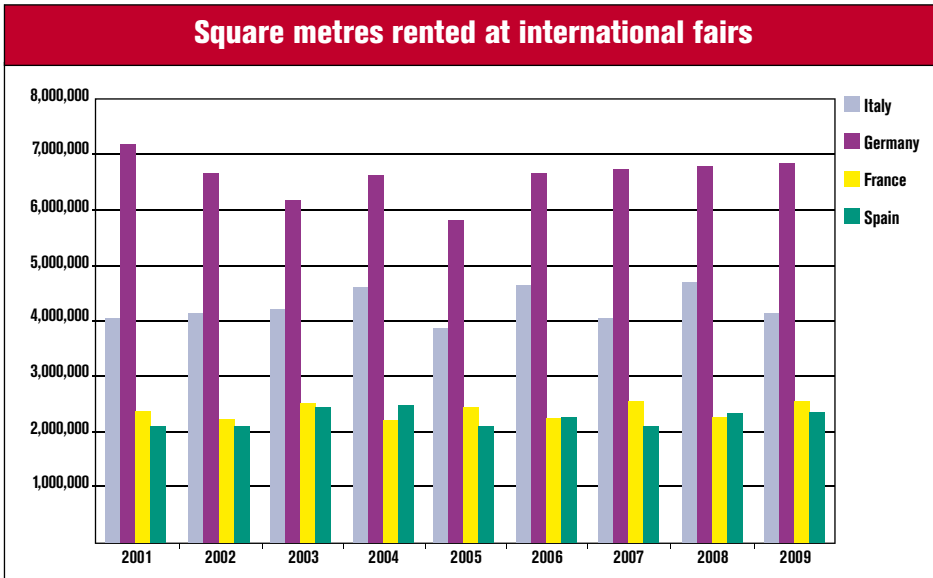
In one year, approximately 190 ‘international’ events are held in Italy, attracting almost 100,000 exhibitors and 12 million visitors. The market is therefore vast.

A European record

Italians love fairs. They attend them, they animate them, but do they really know them? Do they know how to get the best out of participating in them? Italian market figures put the number of national, international and regional/local fairs at much higher than one thousand.

Naturally, quantity and quality are not necessarily synonymous, but this ‘exuberance’ is mainly the effect of a strong territorial and sectorial articulation. The Italy of small enterprises and districts is a specialised and local market economy. In overall terms, almost 1,200 fairs are organised in Italy every year and attended by more than 23 million visitors (AEFI figures). Among these, international events alone (194) in 2006 attracted over 90,000 direct exhibitors, more than 100,000 indirect exhibitors and 12 million visitors.





Source: figures processed by the Fondazione Fiera Milano Study Department, from 2006 to 2009, forecast sector

Italy is one of the most dynamic countries in the international fair scenario. Its approximately 4½ million rented square metres (depending on seasonal factors) are second only to Germany¹, from which it lags behind by a third (in substance the two countries are comparable if the differences in GNP and inhabitants are considered), but they are almost double with respect to the just over 2½ million square metres of France, in turn accompanied by Spain.

Italy is second only to Germany as regards the size of fair activities in Europe. With the same number of inhabitants, however, the indices come closer.

In recent years, there has been an increase in exhibition capacity thanks to the opening of a new exhibition centre and the extension of others.

In Italy, the capacity of exhibition centres has grown in recent years. Between 2000 and 2007, partly due to large-scale investments in the main national exhibition centres, the exhibition area increased by 20-50% in the main regions, with a peak for Lazio².

1 By way of comparison, in 2006, in a country boasting the largest exhibition market, Germany, 159 fairs defined as 'international' involved 171,500 exhibitors, rented out 6.5 million square metres of exhibition area and attracted 9.7 million visitors (Source: Auma). In Europe, in 2006, approximately 800 international exhibitions were held, attracting 430,000 exhibitors that purchased 18.5 million square metres of exhibition area (Source: Osservatorio Cermes: Research Centre on Markets and Industrial Sectors – Bocconi, AIFI).

2 The increases were 53% for Lombardy, 20% for Emilia Romagna, 31% for Veneto and a hefty 300% for Lazio.



Between 2000 and 2006, exhibition capacity increased by over a quarter to one million square metres¹. One value has remained constant: the top three regions account for almost four-fifths of the market in terms of rented space: Lombardy (36%), Emilia Romagna (26%) and Veneto (16%).

Confirmation: in Italy, the share of fair costs out of total corporate promotional and communication expenses is higher than that of other major European countries.

The demand of business

Though a number of alternative and competing market communication tools exist, fairs take place first in the minds of companies. This is particularly true in Italy. According to recurrent forecasts², Italian companies invest most in fair communication, at least in relative terms. In greater detail, in Italy 30% of total advertising and promotion investments is placed in trade fairs, against 25% in Germany and 20-22% in the United Kingdom and France. Those that spend more are proportionally the companies that focus on the professional markets, namely, *B2B (business to business)* and export, which require more a direct, analytical and competent contact.

In the panorama of international events, business fairs account for approximately 65% of the total, they attract approximately 40% of the public and occupy approximately 55% of the exhibition area. These figures must be interpreted with a certain elasticity, partly because many events that declare themselves to be business fairs are also open to the consumer public, while others have different days for operators and final users³.

1 During 2006, the new exhibition centre of Fiera Milano (Italy), featuring 345,000 square metres of gross exhibition space and 60,000 square metres of outdoor exhibition space, was opened as was the new exhibition centre of Fiera Roma (Italy), featuring 70,000 square metres of exhibition space.
 2 F. Golfetto, A. Uslenghi: *Fairs in the corporate communication mix* – Egea 2004.
 3 In this context, the figures provided by the Cermes-Bocconi Observatory (Italy) identify, along with 'Business' and 'Consumer' fairs, 'mixed' fairs which, between 2002 and 2004, enjoyed overwhelming growth, not only in number, but also in terms of visitors and exhibition area, ending up by accounting for one third of the total under both aspects.

How fairs change

Fairs are changing. They have changed deeply during the last 25 years in the light of changes in the markets; they are changing today due to a series of factors: globalisation, internationalisation, new technologies, changes in relationships between economic areas. All the above also affects corporate marketing policies, investment decisions, the selection of fairs and participation methods. Within one decade in Italy, some events have grown strongly, new ones have been launched, others have been strongly downsized or eliminated, and many have been transformed.

From the supply fair to the demand fair

For a long time, for at least two thirds of the last century, therefore until the Seventies, fairs were mainly linked to the 'supply market': an expression areas that were economically 'strong', or at least specialised, ascribable, for example, to specific production districts. Trade fairs were the typical expression of this concept. Over the years, this concept has lost its appeal due to the growing importance of specialist markets.

Between the end of the Seventies and the beginning of the Eighties, 'trade fairs' – which, however, we will talk about at a later stage in order to rebalance the capacity of representing the reference economic systems – moved aside to make way for the increasingly more specialist fairs. The last quarter of a century, explain the marketing specialists, features the fairs of the 'demand market', events which, in other words, mainly expressed the importance and weight of the end markets¹.

¹ A perfect example of this concept is Telecom, a specialised exhibition born in Geneva (Swiss) where ITU, the International Telecommunications Union, a United Nations agency, had and has its headquarters (Geneva is one of the three UNO cities, together with New York (USA) and Vienna (Austria)) and which is also the main telecommunications standard setter. This event was held every four years in the Swiss city for several decades but, starting from 2003, the event moved to Hong Kong (China), being held every three years. The move to China wished to reflect the expansion of the new markets. In 2009, though, Telecom World will return to Geneva with a new formula and new themes.

Sectorial specialisation has guided the expansion of the offer during the last three decades, with a progressive shift from the 'supply fair' to the 'demand fair'.

The transition from 'general trade fairs' to sectorial fairs was the hallmark of the Seventies and Eighties. Specialisation has increased in recent years and the fair sector reflects the emergence of new international business poles.



The world economy is expanding. Europe accounts for an increasingly lower share of international trade. The traditional markets of North America and Western Europe have been joined by the more rapidly expanding ones of Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and Asia, starting with the 'Cindia' (Cina and India) phenomenon which not only accounts for 40% of the world population, but also represents economies that are growing at rates near to or greater than 10%.

The experience and on-line fair

Starting in around 2000, a series of correlated changes considerably modified the fair framework. In 2010, the typical international fair (that is, the large market one) will be considerably different from that of 2000. Companies, regardless of their size and organisation, must anticipate or at least closely follow the new scenarios in order to grasp opportunities and optimise use of their resources. The question "how the fair changes?" is not at all theoretical.

As well as companies, fair organisers are also aware of this and are consequently changing their methods. The role of small specialised operators, often identified with one or two events, is becoming less important while global operators (pan-European operators or exhibition centre operators, the owners of the exhibition centres) are strengthening their positions.

The new trend features the emergence of new values and attractions: it is called the 'experience fair' and acts as a counter-attraction to the new, efficient but rather impersonal forms of information.

New technologies and the web have created a new information channel, especially for the consumer world. Those who wish to find out more about products, therefore, have an alternative, easy and cheap channel. In any case, for a series of mass consumption products, the latest information can always be gleaned from a visit to a shopping centre on a Saturday. The same old formulas no longer work. End of the story? Not at all. In many cases, fairs have begun to change from 'visit venues' to 'experience venues'. In the consumer sector, people increasingly more often visit a fair to get in touch with a reality, share emotional aspects and be part of a group with the same interests. This has led to a more marked distinction between consumer and business events (or eventually dedicated and distinct days within the same fair). In business fairs, then, the

relational aspect, based on interaction, and the experience aspect are considered under a new light.

Tomorrow's fair is the service fair

What will tomorrow's fair be like, then? If you ask Jochen Witt, the 2007 president of UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, he will reply that 'the future will probably be fairs with smaller exhibition space, but more frequent and closer to the various markets'.

'Events', continues Witt, 'in which services will gain space and in which the new forms of communication and the web will be complementary and not substitutive elements'. Result: new markets will attract new fairs and players. The commitments for exhibitors who wish to operate at global level will increase. Consequently, there will be a simultaneous fair *expansion-selection* process (the strongest fairs will emerge in a more competitive framework) with formulas involving lower costs for exhibitors. To achieve this, stands will become less demanding and in some cases the events will be shorter² in order to reduce stand and staff costs.

Fairs will perhaps be 'lighter' but more intensive in order to more fully exploit the opportunities: better prepared as regards contents. The fairs could emerge with a more extensive offer of 'services': customer/visitor promotion, initiatives promoting business meetings, databases encouraging reciprocal exhibitor/visitor knowledge, websites used to 'break the ice' (before the event) and 'keep it broken' (follow-up after the event).

New fair formulas are being devised, perhaps 'lighter', but with richer overall contents, thanks to the development of high-value services for improving the capacity of analysis and contact with the market.

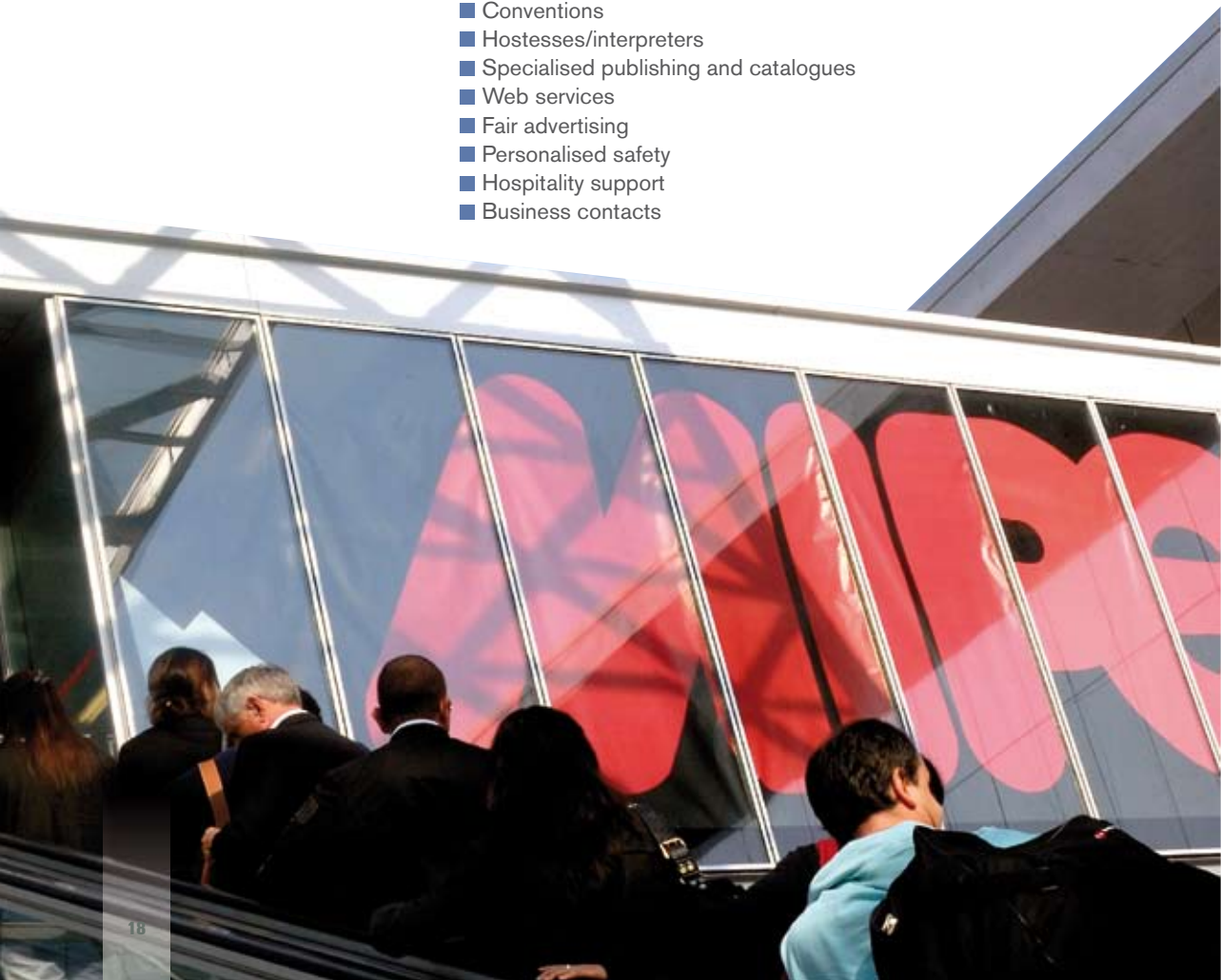
1 Speech at the "The experience economy – Fairs and the Global Market" conference, Fiera Milano, Rho-Però, (Milan, Italy) during the opening of the 2008 exhibition year on 10th September 2007.

2 The duration of events is generally connected with the expected number of visitors: for fairs with large visitor flows, organisers tend to 'dilute' the event over several days in order to reduce the daily load on transport, accommodation, visits to stands, etc.. More days, however, mean a greater commitment for exhibitors: hence the need to balance the various requirements. A typical case is the Hanover (Germany) CeBIT, the largest exhibition in the ITC sector, which in recent years first increased and then decreased the number of days.

The fair service offer

An 'easier' and 'more productive' fair for exhibitors and visitors (the two subjects that fairs bring together by vocation) goes well beyond the traditional model based on the rental of space, logistic services and event promotion. Today, the large exhibition centres, starting from Fiera Milano (the first in Italy and the second in Europe and in the world), offer for example:

- Stand design and erection
- Furnishings
- Catering/refreshments
- Technological services (monitors, computers, projectors...)
- Organisation of events
- Conventions
- Hostesses/interpreters
- Specialised publishing and catalogues
- Web services
- Fair advertising
- Personalised safety
- Hospitality support
- Business contacts





The marketing mix

Summary

A good participation in a sectorial fair offers a network of sensors for the exhibitor: a channel for interacting with the market, a showcase for promoting one's offer and image, and much more besides. In this context, participation in fairs is part of the marketing mix of an enterprise. Also because other channels and forms of communication can evolve around a fair.

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Participation in a fair is part of a series of activities that form 'a system'.

Let us call it 'strategy' or, less pompously, 'teamwork' or 'global vision'. Participation in a fair – but the same could be said of the other actions, such as a promotional campaign, an advertising investment, the organisation of a sales network – is not an instinctive act and not even an action in its own right. It is part of a series of activities.

And similarly to teamwork, one can strengthen the other.

Consider a menu. To make a good dish, a restaurant must look after the recipe, without exceeding and making sure no ingredients are missing. In turn, just one dish is not enough. If the soups are excellent but the rest is missing and, therefore, the menu is not varied and balanced, if the prices are too high, if nobody knows about the restaurant and if the service is shoddy, the tables are bound to remain empty.

Four cardinal points

When companies talk of marketing mix, they identify four 'axes' in their commercial proposition and in the commercial success of one or more of their products. These four cardinal points determine their success or failure. In short, four questions must be answered:

- What do I want to sell (product)
- At what price (cost)
- Along what channels (distribution policies)
- Using what forms of promotion (marketing tools)

One of the consequences is that it is possible to adjust each of these 'axes' in order to optimise market positioning. The product may be excellent and the price interesting, but failure is on the cards if there are no useful commercial channels. Or the product can be excellent, the commercial channels efficient, but the

The 'commercial proposition' is based on a marketing mix that can virtuously involve a company's presence at the fair, making use of the following four elements:

- product
- price/conditions
- distribution
- marketing

corporate image is inadequate and nobody knows about the product.

The fair and the product

Participation in a fair is an authentic challenge for a company's product policy. To begin with: what products should be exhibited? What objectives must they reach: range completeness, new products, diversification, demonstration of quality improvement, new design?

At the same time, companies must question themselves as regards their capacity of sustaining the competition of the products on show. At what point of their lifecycle are they? Do they have a topical design? If there is a pack, is it suitable and attractive (design & packaging)?

Whilst on the subject, it is important to consider that the presentation of a product at a fair can also allow customers and other observers make an initial assessment of it.

Price analysis at the fair

During a fair – especially a business to business fair – attempts can be made to determine the correct cost/supply/condition relationship of the products on display. On the one hand, information and assessments can be collected in order to optimise product positioning at a later stage, on the other hand, commercial strategies developed precisely for the purpose of participating in a fair (e.g.: 'fair campaign').

Of course, all the conditions will be considered: price list, trade discounts, payment terms, delivery costs and any setting-up costs.

The fair and distribution channels

Participation in a fair supposes that a reflection will be made on the distribution channels and forms of sale of the product on show. The fair is visited by end customers, who expect to receive suitable information, and third parties, such as existing or potential business operators, technicians and logistic experts.

In this context, a 'well-oiled' machine must be presented at the fair. Naturally, the fair itself is an opportunity for making these reflections, to verify the state of the sales network, and, eventually, make new contacts.



As regards the marketing mix, participation in a fair allows companies to verify aspects such as the level of interest/acceptance of a product, correct pricing and the competitiveness of the sales network.

At fairs, exhibitors can meet not only their customers but also possible partners.



The fair and marketing and communication promotion

As mentioned at the outset, the fair is an extraordinary mean of market communication and contact for an exhibitor. It is an opportunity for meeting customers, for establishing direct relations, communicating the right sensations, not only as regards products but also concerning the company and its organisation. If it is true that the new means of communication, from mass distribution chains to the Internet, have drawn customers closer to product offers, it is equally true that this especially applies to consumer products.

Vice-versa, to a greater extent in the capital goods sector, the fair is an extraordinary opportunity for coming into direct contact with products and for holding discussions with experts. More generally, fairs are increasingly becoming opportunities for exchanging experiences and for coagulating various initiatives and forms of activity. We will discuss this in more detail at a later stage.

A multiple action lever

Marketing and communication is one of the four fundamental axes. Akio Morita, the legendary founder of Sony, who knew about these things¹, loved to repeat that 'communication is the highest form of marketing'. Participation in trade fairs is a fundamental part of marketing communication, along with other tools, such as advertising (on mass communication channels or specialised publications), public relations, corporate publications, corporate events, sponsorships, direct mail, and more besides, including the latest arrival: the web. Of course, the mix can change depending on the sector (business, consumer), product positioning, corporate style, and so on. Many companies that do 'not' currently participate in fairs would do well to reconsider the 'fair tool'. However, it is equally important to note that even an effective tool like this must be part of a set of balanced actions. Fairs, in fact, have their own specific nature, as catalysts of a set of other possible actions that occupy part of this publication.

In other words: going to the fair is an excellent excuse for doing many other things that could be defined as being 'included in the price' or almost.

During fairs, customers (and consumers) consult corporate websites more frequently, it is easier to contact journalists and newspapers dedicate space to new products.

The conferences that are often held during fairs are attended by customers and experts in the sector.

Even just informing customers that one's company is participating in a fair transfers positive values. They are all opportunities that should be considered.

The fair as a catalyst of other activities

A fair, therefore, can be a formidable catalyst of other events and initiatives. Effective participation at a fair can:

- prepare the way for the 'subsequent activities of the company's sales force,

¹ Morita went down in history not only for his ingenious inventions but also for his great marketing intuitions, such as the idea of having his sales force wear shirts with oversized pockets in the Sixties to make people see how small his Walkman was, one of the most successful products in the history of consumer electronics, at least until the advent of the iPod.

Participation in fairs is a fundamental part of corporate marketing. However, it must be considered as just one of several tools.

Exhibiting at a fair is a potential catalyst of other actions taken to increase the impact and probability of success:

- websites
- press relations
- advertising
- direct marketing/mail shots
- conventions
- contacts with experts.

- help to acquire new dealers,
- allow useful customer data to be collected for telemarketing activities.

Similarly, a fair is an opportunity for

- meeting the media and experts in the sector,
- collecting information about the market and the competition.

Additionally: participation in a fair during which important new products are presented can stimulate preparatory activities focused on promoting the success of the event, such as:

- advertising campaigns,
- press conferences, direct mail shots.

There are truly no limits except the imagination and professionalism of a good communicator and marketing expert. For these – and other – reasons, the decision on whether or not to participate in a fair must be taken from a different viewpoint. This is the subject of the next chapter, along with some commonplaces to debunk.

Interactive communication

To sum up, the greatest quality of fairs is the 'bidirectionality and interactivity' of communication. No other tool (see next chapter) allows so many scopes to be achieved at the same time: projection of corporate image, illustration of strategies, knowledge of customers, presentation of products, market feedback and sales support. As can be seen, the word 'sales' came last. This, in fact, is neither the main nor the secondary reason for participating in a fair. To put it better: sales promotion is the basic reason why a company decides to participate in a fair, but it is a consequence which is postponed as regards time and methods. The premise is a well-planned action implemented in various directions.

Why to participate?

Summary

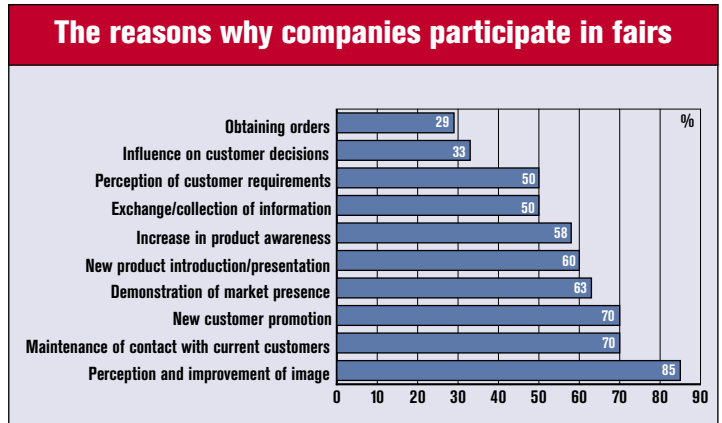
Getting an idea of the reasons – and consequently of the benefits – for participating in a fair is not an automatic process that can be taken for granted, A clear vision allows one to take full advantage of the opportunities and thus fully exploit the investment. Companies ‘also’ go to fairs to sell – or better, to prepare for subsequent sales – but there are many other reasons, such as corporate image, customer care, contact with the sales force and the collection of quality information concerning market and products.

“Cosi fan tutte” (They’re all like that) may be a famous opera by Mozart, but participating in a fair because everyone else does it is not a good thing. There are at least two reasons for this: the first is that every investment must be assessed; the second is that by doing so, companies would lose much of the potential of their presence at the fair simply because they end up by neglecting some important aspects.

Why does one participate in a fair, then? The main reasons are not ‘directly’ commercial ones. In most cases, companies do not go to fairs to ‘collect orders’. The regulations can vary from fair to fair’. But, however, the main reasons must be found elsewhere: getting oneself known and appreciated, as well as getting to know the others.

According to a recent international survey in the largest European fair market, a sample of over 1,000 companies that were asked what they thought was the main benefit of fairs, put corporate image and perception (75%) in first place, followed by contacts with potential and current customers (70%). These are followed by demonstration of market presence (63%)

Companies do not mainly participate in fairs to get orders but to win the attention of the market and communicate with current and potential customers.



Survey of fair functions by Istituto EMNID, conducted on behalf of AUMA – 1,105 companies interviewed (multiple-choice answers)

1 Sales activities are allowed in some events while in others they are expressly forbidden. In other cases still, ‘pre-contracts’ or bookings are allowed. In some cases, negotiations can be made with the sales force.

and new product presentation (58%). Another good reason is the collection of information and the assessment of customer requirements (50%). The strictly commercial aspects, such as influence on customer decisions (33%) and obtaining orders (29%), come last (Source: Auma).

A number of reasons

In short, companies mainly participate in fairs for reasons of communication, marketing and relations: reasons that principally concern relations with customers in the strict sense of the term, as well as other stakeholders. In short, these are the elements that every exhibitor would like to or should attempt to improve by participating in the event:

- Corporate image
- Customer relations
- Market relations
- Product launch and assessment
- Collection of market information
- Customer feedback
- Staff training and motivation

The driving factors of participation in fairs are the strengthening of links with the market, support of company and product image, and customer relations.

Corporate image

This is generally the main reason for participating in a fair. It is similar to putting on your 'Sunday suit', obtaining the approval of society and staying in the 'group that counts'. Naturally, fairs are not the only way to achieve these goals. However, we must also consider the alternatives and how much they cost: one can always implement a very expensive advertising campaign, inundate prospective customers with catalogues or organise a series of events in large cities. But, at the end of the day, if your market area is the same as that covered by the fair, you will have a good chance of finding the most important customers at stands and in halls, and developing significant contacts with customers, operators, sectorial experts and the press.

Relations with customers (current and potential)

The more specialised a fair, the greater the chances of meeting the 'right' customers. It is difficult to generalise because in

certain sectors the number of potential customers is measured in hundreds, in others in hundreds of thousands, and in others still (such as mobile telephony) in millions. The principle that not all sectors and not all fairs are equal therefore applies. However, the fair remains a privileged venue for meeting (we will see this in greater detail at a later stage) new customers (whether they be end customers, dealers, stakeholders, etc.) and current ones. Company managers normally give great importance to 'new contacts' with new customers and, possibly, with new dealers. However, the most precious asset of a company, current customers, must not be neglected. The fair is a good opportunity for consolidating contacts, whilst saving time and money on journeys to customer's offices.

Market relations

Fairs can also help exhibitors to fine-tune their relations with sales channels and develop the latter.

■ Development of the sales network

At fairs it is possible to give the public (and the channel) a presentation of the effective potential of the company, involving not just products but also geographical presence and coverage.

■ Support to the sales network

Depending on the customer profile, following the contacts made at a fair, the public interested in purchasing products can be directed to the sales network.

■ Contacts with other operators

Lastly, but no less important, a fair is always an excellent opportunity for a reciprocal transfer of knowledge between the exhibitor and third parties (OEM, maintenance staff, system integrators, main contractors, etc.).

Product launch and assessment

Visitors to a fair wish to see and compare new products, perhaps discuss them with competent staff and obtain 'first-hand' information. For this reason, a fair is always an ideal showcase for presenting both totally new and recently introduced products. In some cases, especially in the more professional sectors, a fair can

Fairs are important appointments with the sales network as well as excellent opportunities for checking its state of health: from market coverage to sales support and customer communication.

Market intelligence is another benefit of fairs.



also be a crucial test before launching future products. The latter can be presented to the most qualified visitors as prototypes, or discussed in the light of the latest developments of competitors, in order to fine-tune them or, in the worst of cases, to substantially modify their design.

Market information

A fair is a great showcase, a great market and a great forum. There are competitors, partners, customers, the press and experts in the sector. From this intertwining of facts and relations, it is possible to obtain various types of input which, if suitably interpreted, can give precious indications on the state of the market, the advances or setbacks of competitors, and developments in technologies, consumer tastes, user requirements and prices.

Customer feedback

Generally speaking, visitors to fairs, especially professional ones, are not only interested but also experts. Moreover, by comparing the offers of other exhibitors, their ideas about what they want and, especially, about what they do not want (such as old-generation products), become more precise. From this point of view, fairs are also good opportunities to receive direct comments from customers and understand what is in and what, vice-versa, is irremediably out.

This is also one of the typical and exclusive values of a fair: a place where one can communicate and also pick up information and sensations. Without necessarily having to use questionnaires and opinion surveys, but accurately measuring the indications of customers and visitors.

Staff training and motivation

The experience of a fair also has internal values. It is equivalent to an accelerated, irreplaceable training course for all company staff, especially the younger members. It is, in fact, possible to become more aware of the market (who are the main competitors, how important are they?) and of the trends in the sector (which are the most innovative products, what do people say about them?), to make contact with customers and learn to understand them better. After all, the success of a company always derives from its capacity of negotiating with its customers. At all levels. We have, however, also mentioned 'motivation'. Working at the stand of a fair is often



a demanding experience (especially if the fair is successful) and is generally more demanding than the usual office routine. But it is also an involving experience, an opportunity of making new acquaintances and a mark of appreciation by the company.

Hard slog at the fair

Two conclusions can therefore be drawn:

- participation in a fair has not one but many reasons;
- though it can be a significant part of a company's marketing/promotional budget, other tools should be considered in order to define suitable synergies and thus reduce overlapping.

A basic rule is to establish the objectives and give them a level of importance both beforehand, that is, when choosing if and which event to participate in, and afterwards, that is, during the final assessment. A simple grid can be of help, such as the one shown below, which each company can develop and personalise.

Assessment grid concerning fair participation objectives and results

| OBJECTIVE | IMPORTANCE | VOTE | RESULT |
|------------------------------------|------------|------|--------|
| Customer contacts | | | |
| New product design | | | |
| Pre-sale contacts | | | |
| Development of partnership network | | | |
| Public relations | | | |
| Brand focus | | | |
| Contacts with other operators | | | |
| Training and motivation | | | |
| | | | |

Identifying the objectives is the first step towards guaranteeing a successful participation in a fair, naturally bearing in mind that the objectives are not just multiple but also vary from one year to the next.

Even if new tools have been added over the years, the fair offers the advantages of a multilateral approach in which a plurality of tools can contribute towards a plurality of objectives.

Remember that the objectives are never fixed: they can vary from one year to the next (for example, a new key product, change of brand or ownership, opening of a new division/product line, entry into a new market, reaffirmation of the company after a period of crisis, the need to fight a particular competitor, etc.).

A second recommendation is not to make an isolated assessment of participation in a fair. Other forms of communication are both alternative and synergic.

One should therefore reflect and assess what action can give the best results and how action 'A' can apply even more if associated with action 'B' or 'C'. We will discuss this subject in greater detail at a later stage. What should be underlined is the number of other tools that have been used in association with fairs over the years though the fair maintains an exclusive advantage deriving from its 'multi-approach' and 'multi-function' nature.

The fair and other tools: competition or synergies?

A fair manages to communicate both with crowds and with individuals; it is an opportunity for communication and transmission and reception of information. It can transmit impressions and provide technical details; it brings products, people and organisations together. For this reason, its 'effect' is more extensive than that of an advertising campaign, a new website, or a company seminar, even though each of these tools can have particular advantages.

The following table summarises the value of various tools used by companies to convey their messages and image.

| | FAIRS | CONVENTIONS | CORPORATE VISITS | WEB | ADVERTISING |
|--------------------------|-------|-------------|------------------|-------|-------------|
| Mass communication | **** | ** | * | ***** | ***** |
| Individual communication | ***** | ***** | ***** | * | * |
| Psychological impact | ***** | *** | *** | ** | ** |
| Customer relations | ***** | ***** | ***** | * | - |
| Partner relations | ***** | *** | ***** | * | - |
| Product knowledge | **** | *** | *** | *** | ** |
| Market knowledge | ***** | * | * | * | - |
| Feedback | **** | ***** | ***** | * | - |

In other words, a fair is, though in a world with more and more opportunities, a winning tool from various points of view. It is an unbeatable system as regards interacting with customers. This characteristic of fairs is a decidedly important message for small and medium enterprises which are less inclined to distribute their time and money in a large number of directions.

Equal treatment at a fair

There is more good news, especially for small and medium enterprises. The well-known saying, 'a click of the mouse makes all companies equal', means that, when people use the web to consult catalogues or place orders, small companies can compete with giants because people see the pages of the websites and not the size of the headquarters. Something similar also occurs at fairs. You do not need large budgets to be noticed and appreciated. A well-made stand and a well-managed presence can give a better impression than that of a company which is ten times larger but exhibiting with a badly-made and badly-managed stand.

Let us forestall the objection. To acquire sufficient visibility, it is not necessary to have a stand as big as a parade ground, even though the size of a stand must consider two functional aspects: display requirements and visitor reception requirements. In fact, it is well to remember that success or failure at a fair does not only derive from the size of the stand. Most of the time, the difference is made by the activities performed 'inside' and also 'outside' the stand.

It is not necessary to have a stand as big as a parade ground in order to be successful at a fair. A quality presence also allows small-to-medium enterprises to successfully stand up to larger and more established competitors.



Myths and errors to avoid

Summary

Participating in a fair seems the easiest thing. It is not enough to fill in the forms and write out a cheque to reserve the exhibition area. More importantly, the reasons, benefits and available options must be clearly assessed. One must avoid making choices (participation or non-participation) based on stereotypes or underassessment. Especially, one must beware of platitudes.

A 'critical' assessment can also be used to fully exploit issues that are often neglected and to grasp new opportunities.

When to go to a fair? When not to go? How much does it cost? Who to use, what to take? The many doubts, questions and platitudes about fairs could fill more than one manual. Let us take a look at a few platitudes.

Five 'Why I participate in fairs...'

I have always gone, so... why not this time?

The organisers will certainly be very grateful to you. However, it does not mean that you have spent or are spending your money well. Repeating things automatically does not guarantee past and, especially, present success. It is always best to analyse the return on investment in order to assess different forms of participation and your investment mix. This will also make your participation more productive.

My competitors go...

This is a plausible reason, but remember that there are many ways for companies to address the market. Every company has its own products/services and a corresponding positioning of its offer. It is therefore not sufficient to face the competition using a single method. An immediate consequence is the possibility that, depending on the main activity performed (such as promotion, communication, advertising), participation in a fair is a success for company 'A' and an abject failure for competitor 'B', though both operate in the same market segment.

I do not want my customers to meet just my direct competitor

This is a variant of the previous argument, but with another direct consequence. If you wish to face your competitors, also worry about how you exhibit (stand, concurrent initiatives). A fair is also, and especially, a question of image.

At the end of the day, the organisers made me a good offer for the rental of the space

Similarly to last-minute flights and hotels, last-minute exhibition spaces can also be attractive offers. However, bear in mind that, unlike flights and hotels, the cost of exhibition space is never a preponderant share of the total cost. In fact, it generally lies at around 10% to 20% of the total. A little more if a shell scheme stand, generally provided by the organiser, is also included.

If I do not go, who knows what my customers will think

There is a grain of truth in this statement. Prepare a solid reply. However, as you cannot participate in all the fairs, you must also make choices: what event is effectively in line with corporate strategies, with the market situation and with the announcements that the company is making?





Five 'Why I do not participate in fairs...'

I have no particular new products to show

Would you use these reasons in your end-of-year report to justify a drop in turnover? At a fair, companies offer not just a series of products/services but also, and especially, their image; they establish or strengthen relations with partners. New products are appreciated, of course, but even if you have nothing explosive with respect to the last edition, you can use the relative corporate structures to formulate new proposals. Also in the sales area.

We didn't have many visitors last time

This is a serious reason. At this point, have you made a serious analysis of the reasons, for example, by comparing the overall performance of the fair, the number of visitors to the hall, the level of satisfaction of competitors? Have you checked the efficiency of your support action?

In this sense, you can consider whether:

- the fair is a mistake and it is therefore better to leave it,
- the stand is incorrectly positioned and therefore discuss what to do with the organisers,
- you can and must organise your presence in a different way as regards, say, promotion, the stand or invitations to customers.

We did not do much business last time

Fairs are normally places where you sow more than you reap. Similarly, an advertising campaign is not the equivalent of a catalogue sale or a telemarketing initiative. One must assess the overall impact (return of image) and the follow-up of meetings with customers (leads generated and percentage converted into sales).

We have decided to do our own customer events: they cost less and give greater returns

Are you sure? An exclusive own-brand event for customers and other corporate targets which obviously wishes to have an adequate profile, is much more expensive than one may think. Firstly, because the scale economies that spread out organisational costs, do not exist. Secondly, because additional costs must be added in (catering, for example). Lastly, the advantages of an ad hoc event are offset by a foreseeably lower visitor flow and very high promotional costs (including customer invitations). In short, think twice about it.

Instead of a single event, we hold a number of travelling meetings (road shows)

This may be a good idea if you want to concentrate on just a few precise issues: an important new announcement, a solution, coverage of local sales channels. As well as placing heavy demands on the corporate structure (unless you have local structures that allow you to follow everything closely or work with a specialised partner, which, in any case, is an additional cost), meetings of this type have advantages and disadvantages. For example, they do not transmit an adequate image of the company or of the globality of its offer. Initiatives of this kind may help to reach customer that do not generally attend fairs; in large cities, however, they often compete with similar initiatives and risk not being particularly appealing to your target which receives invitations of this type more and more frequently.

Are we absolutely certain that we know how to measure the real costs of initiatives, not just fairs?

Events organised by individual companies for their customers involve considerable organisational efforts and often have limited appeal.

Five excellent ideas for going off the rails

As well as the 'myths to debunk' concerning the reasons for participating/not participating, there are also other die-hard commonplaces that can have strongly negative implications on how a company's participation is managed. Take care, therefore: taking the wrong road to the fair can be terribly expensive. It may involve a waste of resources, last-minute corrections (always too late and ineffective).

The cost of a fair depends on the cost of the exhibition area

The exhibition area – at least for national and international events – represents just a fraction of the cost. It should also be remembered that stand rental (inclusive of fixed registration costs) includes not only the raw space but also a contribution to the coverage of the areas required for the success of the event, from public areas to promotion of the event itself. The exhibition area generally accounts for 10-15% of the cost. Another 10-20% can be calculated for the stand (from shell scheme to personalised versions). Much of the cost derives from staff (both internal and external), logistics, transport and accommodation, for distant events.

We go to fairs because customers come and visit us

This reasoning applied to the professional events has many basic errors. First of all, business customers must also organise their time and make choices: which companies to visit and how much time to dedicate to them? Secondly, a personalised invitation and an advance contact may cause customers to change their programmes. The fair is like an olive tree: you must first shake the tree and then harvest the olives.

Company staff stay behind in the office. Hostesses go to the fair

A dual level is always best: reception staff acting as 'filters', and qualified staff capable of answering visitors' questions. At the end of the day, people go to fairs for precisely this reason.

It is not true that the cost of the exhibition area is the largest part of company costs.

The stand is just the tip of the iceberg: new tools are required to attract potential customers.

The fairs and the Internet are alternative tools

All tools are alternative. But they can also be complementary. While the Internet reduces the novelty effect of new products, it also gives visitors advance information, thus allowing them to optimise their choices, especially as regards business fairs.

The fair is where new developments can be announced

If anything, the fair is where new developments can be 'presented' or exhibited. Anticipated announcements are more productive. Depending on the sector, these can be given days, weeks or months in advance: shorter for consumer products, longer for capital goods which are dealt with by the periodic trade press. This makes it possible to implement press communication plans, advertising, e-mail shots, etc., aiming at showing new products to the public during the fair.



Participation in fairs is a useful way of communicating the most important new developments of a company, such as new brands, takeovers, entrances in new markets and organisational changes.

Five new 'Why I should participate in fairs...'

On the contrary, along with commonplaces, there are good reasons that make the participation in fairs particularly interesting, especially as regards communicating something new.

Brand changes, takeovers

A change in brand is a good reason in itself for participating in a fair. Of course, we are not talking about graphic changes to the corporate logo, but also changes to the name. Generally speaking, a change of this kind underlies a new ownership structure, a different company mission, new market positioning. Participation in a fair is an excellent opportunity for presenting your new setup to the market, as part of a mix of initiatives leading up to 'D-day', coinciding with the opening day of the event.

Change of policy and commercial presence

Fairs attract not only consumers/final users but also and especially the so-called 'channel operators' (distributors, volume or value dealers, OEM, installers, etc.). For companies wishing to create a sales network from scratch, therefore, a fair is a useful point of contact. The same applies to companies entering new market segments or wishing to extend and redevelop their indirect sales network.

Change in product mix and geographical presence

Technological transformations have also modified the traditional perception of companies on the market. New names have emerged or have been strengthened, while others have had to reposition¹. A 'strong' presence at a fair is generally a good way of highlighting the new positioning of a company in the world of business operators and final customers.

¹ Numerous examples can be found in all sectors: suppliers of photocopiers that have had to cope with the advent of printers, replacement of traditional printers with all-in-one versions, film photography replaced by digital photography, decline in traditional bikes in favour of mountain bikes, replacement of cathode tube with flat screen TV's.

Of course, the above also applies to a company's penetration of new markets, especially abroad. In both cases (product/market mix), the markets must be reassured as regards the quality of the product offer, organisation and customer service and assistance.

Change in management

A fair is a great forum and therefore a great meeting place. A fair can be an opportunity to present the new management by means of interviews and press conferences, participation in conventions, meetings with customers and dealers, gala evenings or meetings with authorities in the sector.

Restructuring, overcoming difficulties

Moments of difficulty, restructuring and reorganisation are part of corporate life. During these periods, companies generally attempt to calmly implement the necessary measures while 'swimming underwater'. 'Re-emergence', that is, completion of the recovery plan can be appropriately accompanied by a launch plan in which the participation in a fair is confirmation of the company's desire to grow, invest and become a market winner.



Exhibiting in the light of the facts



After analysing the world of fairs, discussing the correct objectives of participation in a fair, the expected advantages, the 'hidden benefits' and myths to be debunked, let us now see how to plan, design and conduct the participation in a fair and attempt to optimise direct and indirect results.

Part two

The virtuous circle

Summary

Building up an effective participation in a fair must begin well beforehand. Just like any reasoned corporate investment. Companies must therefore assess the premises in the sphere of their strategies, selecting targets and markets and consequently deciding on the event, selecting the methods of participation, involving customers (and others), managing their presence at the fair, collecting information and assessing results. In order to do it better next time around.

LINK WEB www.fieramilano.it

• Calendar of Fairs in Milan

• Exhibitor services

A fair lasts just a few days but months of preparation are required for it to be truly productive. The decision-making and assessment process is even longer, but it is not a waste of time.

How does one organise participation in a fair? Firstly, by remembering that while a fair lasts an average of 4-5 days, plus the same period of time for stand erection and dismantling activities, the preparatory phase lasts much longer: up to several months. But the planning phase, which should be part of the annual corporate plan, must begin even before then.

Of course, operations are considerably simplified when participation in an event becomes repetitive (even if it should be kept under constant observation), as many activities are no longer necessary or are at least considerably simplified. However, participation in a fair must answer the following questions:

- What **target** are we addressing?
- What do we want to **communicate**?
- What are our **sales/marketing objectives**?
- What **budget** must we allocate?
- What other connected activities do we plan to develop?

Having said this, a plan must be defined which, like a loop which returns every year (or at every presence in a fair), involves four phases:

- **Activity planning** (do we want to participate in a fair?)
- **Analysis and selection** (what does the market offer, what should we choose?)
- **Operative preparation** (contact with organisers, installers, etc.) and **cost estimate**
- **Commercial preparation** (target selection, customer invitations)
- **Operative management** (on-site activities)
- **Extended communication**
- **Follow-up**
- **Costs and returns analysis**

Planning

Participation in a fair is a qualifying corporate process. It is a process that requires time, means and, especially, 'vision' and conviction. The starting point is a cost/benefit analysis which should also be checked upon completion of the process. We must find out more about the fair, especially if we have never participated in it before and even more so if it is held abroad. We can also introduce a rough cost estimate which will become more and more precise as we become more experienced (previous participations in the same fair or in others with comparable characteristics). We will then be able to fine-tune our estimates according to the findings obtained from the company and the organisers. An initial event information sheet of this type could therefore comprise the following.

| SHEET 1: FAIR | |
|--|--|
| Name of fair | |
| Location | |
| Duration | |
| Frequency | |
| Participants in recent editions | |
| - of which from the area of corporate interest | |
| Product typology | |
| Level of coverage of company range | |
| Large companies present | |
| Qualification of event | |
| Impact on current customers | |
| Potential impact on new customers | |
| Estimated costs, of which: | |
| - 'basic' costs (rental, registration) | |
| - stand, transport, furnishing | |
| - staff | |
| - travel and accommodation | |
| - marketing | |
| - other operating costs | |

A second sheet, instead, can be prepared in order to assess the contents and expected benefits:

| SHEET 2: PARTICIPATION | |
|---|--|
| Intended type of participation (institutional, product, partner hunt) | |
| Product range involved | |
| Special new developments to present | |
| Competitiveness of corporate offer | |
| Objectives: | |
| - general corporate image | |
| - contact with existing customers | |
| - contact with new customers | |
| - contact with the press, VIP's, experts, etc. | |
| - valorisation of in-house staff | |
| - market intelligence | |
| - other | |

Which fair?

The same company can reasonably be interested in several fairs, depending on the objectives it wishes to pursue and the markets it intends to address.

There are many types of fairs: international (generally defined as such when at least 5-10% of exhibitors and/or public come from abroad), national, regional/local. Some international events are real and proper meeting points of demand and supply in specific sectors. Globalisation has also generated changes in the overall exhibition framework. In some cases, it has led to concentrations, in others to a multiplication of fairs by continental 'macroareas'. Some of these give pride of place to the excellence of the offer, others reflect the strength of particular industrial 'districts', others still focus on end users and consumers.

Depending on its marketing objectives, a company must decide what type of event to participate in. It will decide depending on whether it intends to grow in a specific foreign market, in a hitherto uncovered area of Italy, or enter the domestic market.

These choices are not always simple. The picture is also complicated by developments in products and technologies. Today, after all, most cameras are sold in large retail outlets side by side with computers and printers. The same thing happens for television sets. This would have been unthinkable 10 or 15 years ago. When the Italian government recently established that as many public service telephone calls as possible should be made via the data networks (VoIP calls) of the various ministries and public bodies, sellers of corporate communication systems had to address the problem of changing target. In this case, would it be best for the supplier in question to participate in an IT fair, a networks and telecommunications fair, or a public service fair?

What must one do, therefore, when several options become available and, as often happens, the budget is limited? One must make a choice and therefore perform due preliminary analysis, divided into two parts:

- Which fair
- How to exhibit at the chosen fair

A word of warning: also the most expert companies ask this question in a dynamic way: the right fair is not always identified the first time round. In other cases, the choice that was valid until the previous year can change the following year. In some cases, consistently with corporate objectives, it may be worthwhile to reroute resources (economic and organisational) to a new event in order to 'sound out' new market segments. After all, change is not a drama provided it takes place in a logical context.

A pondered assessment

Operators in a specific sector are aware of the main events, at least in their normal reference markets. Things get more difficult, of course, when entering lesser-known markets, especially foreign ones. Useful tools can also be quantitative, capable of providing data and statistical comparisons. Especially in Italy, the data are not always certified. However, it is possible to collect interesting information about the date and duration of fairs, exhibition space, number and make-up of exhibitors and participants, and comparisons with the previous year.

It is necessary to collect preliminary information, especially when first starting out or entering new markets.



In this regard, interesting sources include the fair calendar and relative statistics published by AEFI, Association of Italian Exhibition and Fairs (www.aefi.it). Another interesting publication is the Euro Fairs Yearbook which gives information about approximately 1,600 certified fairs, including over 180 Italian events¹.

As well as these tools and direct experience/knowledge, information can also be obtained in various ways:

- Consulting the catalogues of previous events
- Performing suitable searches on exhibition websites and search engines
- Contacting consulting firms and experts in the sector

As the assessment concerning participation in a fair should begin well before the event takes place, in case of doubt we highly recommend **a visit by an 'observer'** to the previous edition – which means at least one year before – of the event. A two-day stay and journey by an attentive observer is certainly worthwhile compared with the bitter disappointment of a mistaken choice at a later stage, with relative direct and indirect costs. As well as cumulative statistical information, the following qualitative data is also of fundamental importance:

- Which companies, especially competitors, participate in the event?
- With what type of stand?
- What about visitors? (quality and quantity)
- Where do the visitors come from?
- How closely does the product typology of the fair correspond with the company mix?

If a company has no previous direct experience, it may be a good idea to visit the fair or fairs it is interested in and obtain direct information. The low cost of the journey and accommodation can avoid bitter disappointment at a later stage.

¹ A useful database concerning fairs in the world is provided by Auma, the German association of fairs (www.auma.de). The website of UFI, www.ufi.org, the international organisation of fair organisers, provides useful links to other sites where basic information about events, divided by sector, country and calendar, can be consulted.



- How is the public distributed during the event?
- In the sphere of the event, are there any particularly interesting initiatives (conventions, conferences...)?
- What visibility is given to the event?
- What are the estimated collateral costs (ease of connection, accommodation, etc.)
- What is the general impression of the event?
What is its resonance?

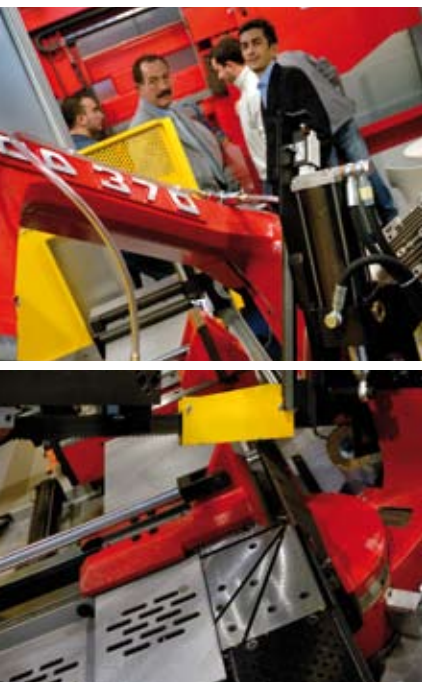
On the basis of this kind of information, the company may decide whether or not to participate in a fair, which fair to choose and what initiatives it can implement.

Preliminary investigation

This section, of course, mainly concerns the exhibitors wishing to participate in a fair for the first time. We have reached the point where the company is interested in participating in an event. How should it proceed? How should it behave? What points should it check?

Before confirming participation, an initial interview should be held with the organiser (i.e.: the office responsible for commercial relations with exhibitors) in order to check various points.

The first point, of course, is the **possibility of participating**: am I still in time to participate? Are the identified products consistent with the event? Subsequently, any limits and conditions should also be verified. While regular exhibitors have a good probability of retaining the stand area they were allocated during the previous edition, unless they ask to change, new arrivals would do well to check their location. In these cases, it is possible to check



the location as regards to any other nearby exhibitors. Proximity to 'obligatory' routes (entrances, refreshment areas, passages between one pavilion and another) can offer a clear advantage, though sometimes it can be a nuisance. In short, it is always best to check the location.

Secondly, it is a good idea to check **the consistency of the products one intends to display**. Product articulation can be important, especially at larger fairs. Very large companies may decide to use more than one stand, especially if the type of target public changes and if the exhibition regulations so allow. In other cases, the specialisation of the allocated pavilion should be checked.

It is vital to check the above regulations, also and especially in order to define the stand, a task that must be performed together with the installer.

What services, provided by whom and how

Naturally, the initial contact will also include an exchange of information concerning stand area costs, but as well as this it is also advisable to collect information about the services provided. In this contest, it is also useful to check if some of these are provided through exclusive suppliers or if official or recommended suppliers are available. In this sense, the organisers and, even more so, the exhibition centres can provide great support.

It is best to enquire beforehand about special events/initiatives held during the fair (though this information will probably be automatically provided by the organiser) . During fairs, conventions and 'institutional' or thematic exhibition areas are also organised; it is also possible to sponsor training events, entertainment, competitions, etc..

Collecting these elements makes it easier to assess both the costs and the benefits (direct and collateral) of the event. Companies should therefore make their moves in good time. Lastly, one must not forget to check the exact 'technical times': when must participation be confirmed? When must a down payment be made? When and how must the final settlement be made?

Costs and returns

It is relatively simple to estimate costs, or at least some of these. It is much less so for a number of expenses that are not immediately visible. There are at least three types of cost, in fact:

- direct visible costs, being the total of all the invoices received by the company concerning its participation in a fair: organiser, stand, power/communications, temporary staff, consulting, marketing, hotels and restaurants, travel, etc.;
- 'hidden' direct costs, involving the use of staff that would otherwise have performed its routine activities;
- indirect costs, being lost earnings. In this case, it is more difficult to make an estimate because, for example, not only can seller 'x' promote contracts during the event (if planned) but he/she can also lay the foundations for sales that will take place months into the future.

Measuring return

It is a more complex affair to estimate benefits, so much so that they are divided into quantitative and qualitative benefits. Basically speaking, as every corporate action has a value and a cost, it would be useful to quantify the value as much as possible against the above costs.

But how can the expected economic return be measured?

One way is to calculate the **cost of alternative actions** that would otherwise have had to be incurred.

If, for example, a company aims to meet 50 existing customers and to make contact with another 100 potential customers, how much would it cost to achieve this by organising exclusive conventions, or sales force visits, and what effect would the various activities have? If another objective is to present a new corporate offer, what would the alternative cost/contact of an advertising or direct mail campaign be? And what impact would it have? The operation is not simple, but at the end of the day it is just a question of qualitative and quantitative variables that a company is routinely used to addressing: is an advertising campaign or a mail shot better, is it better to create a new corporate website or produce a brochure? Is it better to sponsor an exhibition or a concert, or organise a series of meetings in different cities?

The costs of participating in a fair can be divided into three types:

- direct costs towards the organisers and service providers,
- 'invisible' costs of in-house staff,
- indirect costs, being the lower earnings due to use of corporate resources for the fair-project.

How can the benefits be assessed? That depends on the objectives. One method is to determine the alternative costs that would have otherwise been necessary to achieve them.

A 'fair-project' absorbs a considerable amount of a company's organisational and management resources.

Especially in companies of a certain complexity, the guide-messages, participation methods and products to present must be defined.

The fair project in the company

Especially in more complex companies with several decision-making centres, product lines and business areas, the biggest problems in managing the participation of company in a fair are not external (suppliers, organisers, customers, etc.) but internal. The various requests made by different segments of the company can easily clash. How should the company participate, what products should be presented, what resources should be dedicated to product presentation, corporate image or customer relations? To put it in a perhaps not totally precise but immediately understandable way: is it better to give priority to the product showcase, the graphic displays or the meeting rooms? First of all, the 'philosophy of the event' must be identified, also checking the level of 'product conformity'. At times, it is not just a question of the conformity of the event, but also of the type of products presented in the fair area (and therefore in the pavilion) where the company is located'. In these cases, the company must define how it intends to participate. Should it present its overall image, or should it focus on specific product lines? Naturally, different methods must be assessed from fair to fair and also from one edition to the next. These considerations lead the company to make two practical choices: one concerns the type of stand it intends to erect, the other regards the type of products/services it intends to present. Another problem to solve is product selection. Is it better to aim at the complete range or on new products? Visitors go to fairs to see new products, of course. This applies not only to consumer products, which will sooner or later also be seen in specialist stores, but also and especially to capital and professional goods. New developments are always appreciated but, at the same time, visitors also want to see what company 'A' can offer to satisfy their requirements.

1 The same company can, for example, operate in the mass market consumer goods sector and in that of capital goods and/or services reserved for just a few large customers. A typical case is mobile communications: the same company can sell products costing 100 euros, such as mobile phones, to a target of millions of potential customers, as well as infrastructures costing tens of millions of euros to operators that can more or less be counted on the fingers of one hand. An IT company can sell PC's for a few hundred euros or consulting and integration services costing hundreds of thousands of euros.

Besides, there cannot always be new products, they cannot always be presented at every fair (otherwise they wouldn't be new products) and they cannot always concern all market segments. Consequently, it is best to highlight new products, without passing off products that are probably already at their third showing in a fair as such: products that, however, if still significant and competitive can be well presented and promoted.

A director organising the participation in a fair

The most structured companies – especially those that have experience in communication activities at various levels – already have one or more employees with enough skill and experience to successfully manage the “Fair Operation”. The first piece of advice is, therefore, to identify within the company a ‘pilot’ or, if you prefer, a ‘director’ who can perform the delicate function of internal and external co-ordination. In short, an interface between the many internal requirements of the company and the various external suppliers. It is not only a question of administration, but also of overall activity co-ordination. If this function cannot be found within the company, external consultants can also be used, especially if they already have a good knowledge of the company and have won the trust of management. All in all, a company needs someone who, interfacing with management, can perform tasks, such as obtaining cost estimates, making contacts with and selecting installers, organisers and sundry suppliers, whilst having a sufficiently complete vision in order to draw up messages, define the methods of participation, monitor costs and keep the budget under control. One thing must be clear: participating in a fair does not mean that the exhibitor occupies stand areas that have been made available almost by miracle.

The objectives must be clearly defined and shared, the tasks must be assigned and the level of involvement of the various departments must be decided. This operation is anything but easy.



ROI

costs and benefits

Summary

Like every action, investing in a fair has a cost and must therefore be assessed with respect to the company's objectives, expected results and available alternatives. The real challenge, however, is not just to calculate the pure cost but a more significant index, just like all corporate investments.

This is the ROI, the 'Return on Investment'.

To do so, one must focus not only on the "I" (the cost) which is easier to measure, but also on the 'R' (the return), an operation which is not so simple.

In the decision-making processes and, therefore, in the assessment of the benefits of participating in a fair, the main problem is not to measure the costs, but to estimate and valorise the benefits, that is, the return on investment.

If the objectives are not clear, the operation is decidedly difficult.

How to assess the advantages of participating in a fair? This is easy in theory, but a lot more complicated in practice. As in all corporate choices, it is a question of assessing the advantages and disadvantages, in other words, the costs, the results and the alternatives. And something else, as we will see a little further on.

Assessing the cost of participating in a fair is not too hard for an enterprise, even if it is not always easy to calculate a series of hidden costs to the nearest euro (see the above scheme). But it is not enough to calculate the cost. As in every corporate investment, the ROI, 'Return on Investment', must be calculated.

If calculating the 'I' (overall investment) requires a precise approach, assessing the 'R' (return) is an even more demanding task because the collateral, induced and short-medium-and-long-term effects must be measured. In any case, company managers must make choices and they cannot therefore avoid this problem.

One of the purposes of this book is to help companies not only to calculate and optimise the 'I', but also to improve the 'R'.

One of the most frequent errors, both in the planning/selection process of a fair and in the overall assessment stage is that of only concentrating on one of the components of this ratio.

Optimising the investment

How can one limit costs? In this context, it is easy to take shortcuts that prove to be unproductive. People generally start by thinking about the size of the stand. Of course, if you have booked 500 square metres when 50 are more than enough, you must have made a mistake, but if you think that passing from 150 to 100 square metres automatically reduces costs by

a third, you are probably off the beaten track.

The reason is that the overall costs are only partly connected with the size of the stand. A number of fixed costs that are relatively unaffected by the size of the stand must be considered.

Stand area rental is just part of total cost

To give an example, the direct (fees to consultants, designers and external staff) or indirect (unperformed work activities) cost of five meetings with six people does not change for a 50 or a 150 square metre stand. The same applies to the preparation of brochures, graphics, the purchase of supporting advertising spaces.

Also stand erection costs do not necessarily rise in proportion to the size of the area. A small stand can be particularly complex (not to mention those with galleries) and therefore have an elevated unit cost. A large stand can have more free space and be easier to erect.

Rather, you should consider who and what you wish to be present in the stand. With a larger stand you can organise conference rooms without having to rent additional exhibition space. Lastly, remember that operating costs mainly depend on the staff involved, the furnishings and customer initiatives. All these elements are only partly affected by the size of the stand.

Learning from experience

Experience of a previous participation in a fair can help companies understand if, how and where it is possible to make savings or, at least, diversify participation methods in order to optimise costs. A checklist can be drawn up to help with assessing the main elements without too much effort and without having to start from scratch every time.

Was the customer reception area only marginally exploited?

Were expensive materials chosen which, in the light of the facts, were not worth the outlay?

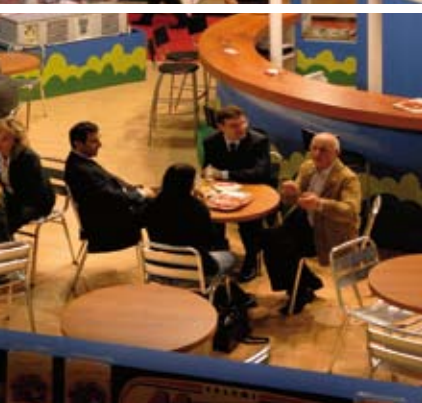
Were there too many reception staff and enough customer interlocutors (salespeople, for example)?

Did the show, organised to attract attention, prove to be below expectations'?

Did the meetings go deserted?

Many fair costs are 'fixed' and therefore only marginally affected by the size of the stand and of the rented space, which is almost never the most important part of the expense.

On the contrary, if suitably planned, the stand area can be used to perform additional activities without extra costs.



The best result is a combination of several ingredients. The ability of the 'fair-project' planner lies in creating the ideal mix.

Were over-expensive suppliers chosen?

Many questions can be asked. The important thing to do is to make a systematic analysis and remember that, as already mentioned, past experience can lead to future improvements.

Improving returns

The outcome of the participation in a fair is like a recipe containing several ingredients. It is not just a question of guessing the ingredients to use, but also of mixing them in the right proportions. And the 'exhibition mix', which at the end of the day is what will tell you if you have played your cards well, will depend on many aspects. It is therefore a question of deciding how much to invest in one direction as opposed to others.

A wise marketing planner of a fair knows when to apply the brake and when to press the accelerator, where to invest the available 1,000 or 10,000 euros². Likewise in a fair, if you wish to increase your 'R' you must decide where to focus your investments: is it better to increase the stand area, invest in a more prestigious stand, launch a newspaper advertising campaign, paper the streets of the city, organise scheduled meetings with customers, update your web presence or invite customers to a gala evening? The list could continue: what is important is not just to look in one direction. The experience of previous fairs and the professionalism of your marketing staff and, if involved, your communication and image consultants will contribute to making the most suitable decisions.

1 Recently, however, 'spectacularisation' in business fairs has decreased.

2 Let us give an example: you have to fence an area that is 10 metres long and 1 metre wide, if you add 2 meters of fencing lengthwise you will have increased the area by 10%. If you add them crosswise, you will have increased it by 100%.

In short: an all-round vision

Success at a fair depends on the company's capacity to widening its horizons. Investing all your money in just one direction is not a good idea. Participation in a fair is an opportunity for promoting your image, but this does not happen automatically. If you want your participation in a fair to be a success, remember that the game is also played elsewhere: taking the opportunity to invite customers via a direct marketing campaign, advertising and promoting your presence, organising meetings with the press, entertaining customers and visitors in a more involving way. The concept is therefore simple: do not put all your eggs into one basket. A good cake does not need just flour, but also sugar, eggs, candied fruit and chocolate. Balance is required in everything: a large stand will not guarantee customer flows. Likewise, investing in advertising promotion with direct mail shots, invitations and web promotions, and then showing customers and visitors an inadequate stand as regards size and quality is not a good policy.

Direct marketing, advertising, direct contacts with customers, workshops and press relations are some of the elements that contribute towards the success of a company participating in a fair.

The 'wheel' of exhibition communication

The following table and chart indicate a 'wheel' of possible directions that companies can balance out in order to maximise the positive impact of their participation. Each company may examine the 'level of cost-effectiveness' depending on its history, the type of sector and the investments already in place.

This mix of actions is particularly interesting as regards the launch of new products. Several actions, in fact, must be co-ordinated in order to maximise the effect.

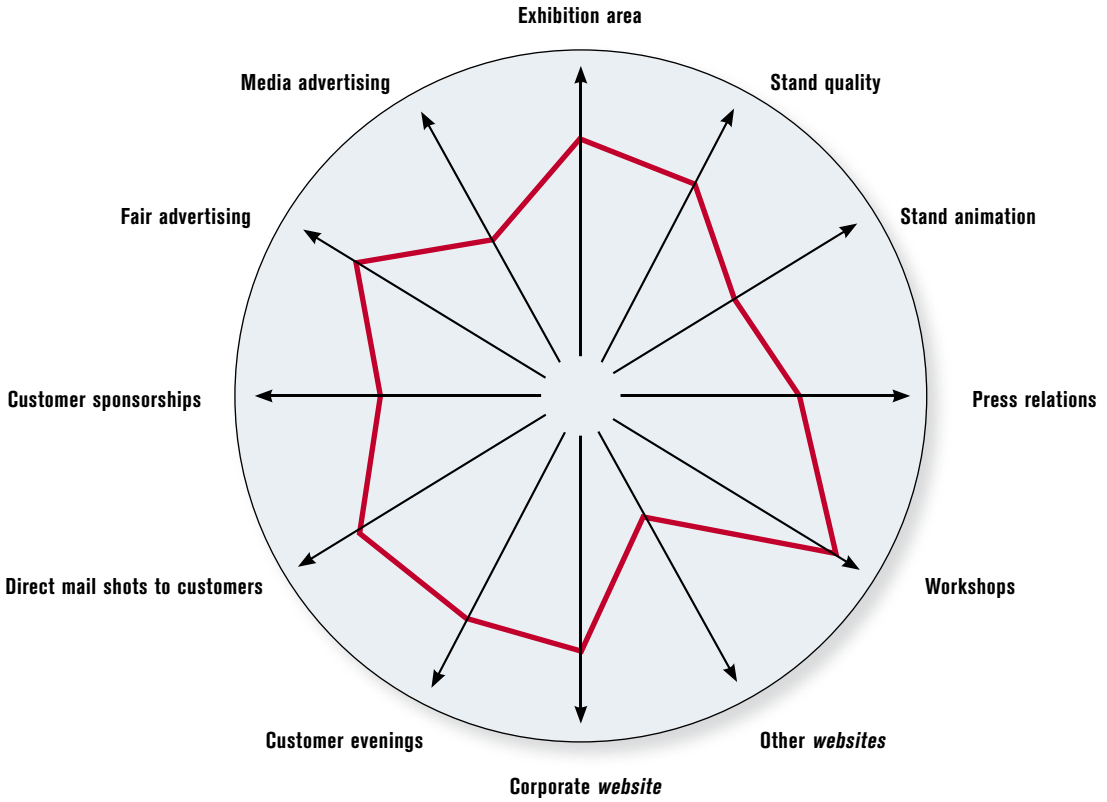
Whether it is a new motorbike, telephone or lamp, one can co-ordinate the stand graphics, printed invitations, product display layout, press initiatives, advertising in the general or specialised press, evenings with customers and/or dealers, introductions of one's website, road signs or fair signs, etc., while focussing on the element of attraction.

With suitable adjustments, this concept can be applied to both consumer and capital goods.

To 'cut your cloth to the right size' you should understand the links between the various available activities.

Areas in which the impact of a fair can be improved

| WHAT | HOW |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Exhibition area | Increased negotiating power with the organisers and optimal management of the stand area often makes it possible to increase space without considerable extra costs. The extra space can be used to create conference areas for presentations to customers and the press, or to extend the product display area. |
| Stand quality | A stand is not just a 'product container'. Depending on the type of event, greater care over furnishings, graphics, fittings and information can improve corporate image and the quality of the message transmitted. |
| Stand animation | It is possible to organise live product presentations or more complex messages using professional presenters, videos, etc |
| Press relations | Before and during the fair, activities specifically aimed at the press, especially the specialised press, can amplify messages, present new developments and capture attention. |
| Workshop | During the fair, it is possible to organise presentations or participate in conferences organised in the sphere of the event. |
| Corporate website | During fairs, requests for information by the public increase. Information about new products can be shown on the corporate website which can be updated to create further interest. Information about the company's participation in the fair – also with videos – press releases, product sheets and interviews can live up the site. |
| Other websites | Online news bulletins, the exhibition website and e-catalogues are information channels that can be suitably exploited, attracting attention to the proposed new developments and to the corporate brand. |
| Customer evenings | A fair can capture the interest of customers, partners, opinion leaders and the press. Some of this public can be 'intercepted' by organising gala evenings, cocktails and receptions. |
| Customer invitations | It is always important to create 'traffic' of existing and potential customers. Postal invitations, e-mails and phone contacts (or a combination of the three) should aim to fix appointments at the stand or at specific events. |
| Event sponsorship | Corporate image can be strengthened by sponsoring events within or, more frequently, outside the fair: exhibitions, concerts, conferences, theme shows. |
| Fair advertising | Signs in the fair or in the immediate vicinities can strengthen the corporate image and encourage people to visit the stand. |
| Media advertising | Participation in the fair and the announcement of new products can be strengthened with targeted advertising campaigns featuring a dual objective: exploit the participation in order to communicate new developments and use advertising to encourage the public to visit the company's stand. Advertising should aim to communicate new developments in enough time to attract the public to the fair, bearing in mind the different deadlines required by the daily, weekly and monthly press. |



Example of impact estimate: every 1,000 euros invested can generate an improved return according to the scale shown in the figure.

The stand

Summary

What must the stand be like in a fair? Many options are available: is it better to focus on image and communication or on relations and products? Is the 'open' or the 'exclusive' formula better? The market offers freedom of choice between shell scheme and personalised stands, between purchase or hire. The choice is strategic because it generally involves a long-term investment. One must remember, however, that the cost of the stand does not just involve areas and fittings.

LINK WEB www.fieramilano.it

• Stands

• Exhibitor services

From the operative point of view, the stand is the first thing an exhibitor thinks about. In some ways, the stand 'is the fair'. For an exhibitor, it is the heart of its investment, a visiting card, a showcase, an operative headquarters, the place where it meets customers, partners, journalists and influential people in the sector. Both the commitment and the concerns of an exhibitor can differ considerably, depending on:

- the type of event,
- the size of the stand,
- the presentation method.

At some events, a small exhibitor can get away with a few thousand euros; others may cost hundreds of thousands or even millions. These figures cover the rental of the stand area, stand design and fittings and stand staff. More generally, however, one thing should be considered: the stand – meaning the rental of the area, erection and fitting out – is a non-majority part of the expense at national/international events. Depending on the type of fair and participation, the cost oscillates between 20 and 30% of the total (approximately half of direct costs and little less than a third of indirect, organisational, staff and concurrent initiative costs). These notes may be superfluous for marketing professionals or regular exhibitors. They will be important for exhibitors participating in a fair for the first time.

In most cases, the cost of the area and the stand fitting account for 20-30% of the overall cost of participation.

The main alternative lies between a shell scheme and a personalised stand.

Exhibitor can choose between:

- a personalised stand, especially suitable for the largest and most prestigious events,
- a shell scheme stand, made from standardised materials and repetitive structures (modules) that can be directly provided by the organiser (often as a valid formula for everyone, too) or by the installer. We will discuss this subject in greater detail at a later stage.

Besides, simple events involve stand areas comparable to those of a small room while events with a very high international profile can feature multi-storey stands and areas that can be as large as several hundred square metres.

A stand can be hired or purchased. This second formula can be cost effective if you plan to use the same stand for at least 4-5 years, bearing in mind, however, the frequent need for updates and/or modifications, especially if you use it at different fairs. When choosing a stand, you must also consider its location in the hall.

A look consistent with the event

The first rule is to understand the type of event involved. The stand is the company's visiting card but, precisely for this reason, you must also be careful not to stand out from the crowd. If, on the one hand, it is counter-productive to have a 'poor' stand if you are surrounded by Hollywood-like constructions, the opposite also applies: presenting too pretentious and showy a stand at an event which encourages simplicity and shared aesthetic standards would be equally subject to criticism.

In this case, you would risk spending much more than necessary and being branded as 'eccentrics'.

History is full of errors of this kind.

In short, it is a little like wondering what to wear at a reception.

General information on previous editions of the fair is not difficult to obtain.

In any case, the organisers and their technical offices can give you all the support you need. Reading the technical regulations is a further step forward. We will return to this later on, but it is

Purchase or hire? The choice depends on what the company plans to do in the next 2-3 years.

Being at a fair is like participating in a reception: one must harmonise with the surroundings whilst attempting to give something extra.

Do not forget to carefully read the regulations in order to optimise the stand and type of participation.

Though a stand must be functional, it must also leave a recollection, 'an experience'.

well to remember that different fairs and even different pavilions at the same event can have different rules and that what is good in some cases is not necessarily good in others¹.

The stand: a meeting point for requirements

Though the success of a participation in a fair does not just depend on a 'nice stand', a quality stand is certainly an essential part of the recipe. As we have seen, there is a large number of reasons for participating in a fair. Among these, however, pride of place is taken by the capacity of attracting visitors and, consequently, potential customers, as well that of giving visitors a recollection or an experience which does not finish in the brief space of time required to reach the next stand. Let us see what criteria must be used to decide on a stand. Before asking ourselves what it should look like, let us try to discover what it will be used for and what objectives it must meet.

- Must we consider participation in the fair as a strategic or routine factor?
- How important is the fair in overall terms?
- Who are the other exhibitors?
- What are our competitors doing?
- What is the budget for the entire operation?
- How many customers do we want to meet, how many people should man the stand?

Once again, an analytical discussion inside the company, involving the various areas, starting from sales, is fundamental. Unlike what may be commonly thought, the space (and therefore the cost) is not the 'independent variable' on which all the others depend. Do we want the stand to focus on image or do we want a more 'operative' one? If we mainly want to meet customers, we will need a larger number of people to man the stand and therefore more space for conversations and negotiations. Even more space is required if we want private rooms, exclusive areas, a refreshment area or even areas for seminars and courses. After establishing

¹ Teams of carpenters are often seen reducing the height of stands that are permitted in some exhibition centres but which exceed the maximum heights in others. This risk applies not only to smaller companies but also to multinational groups that use the same stand to tour Europe.

Should you 'impress' with quantity or quality? The choice is not so simple and must be consistent with your proposed image.

An image-driven or operative stand?
That depends on objectives and contents.

the main objectives, in agreement with company management, it is useful to talk to the people involved in the realisation of the stand in good time. We therefore recommend organising a meeting with the designers and installers as soon as possible. This should be attended by the company functions that are most involved and by other experts that have a say in the matter.



Most of the time, the stand layout depends on the decisions of the organisers and this should be considered when defining the general layout.

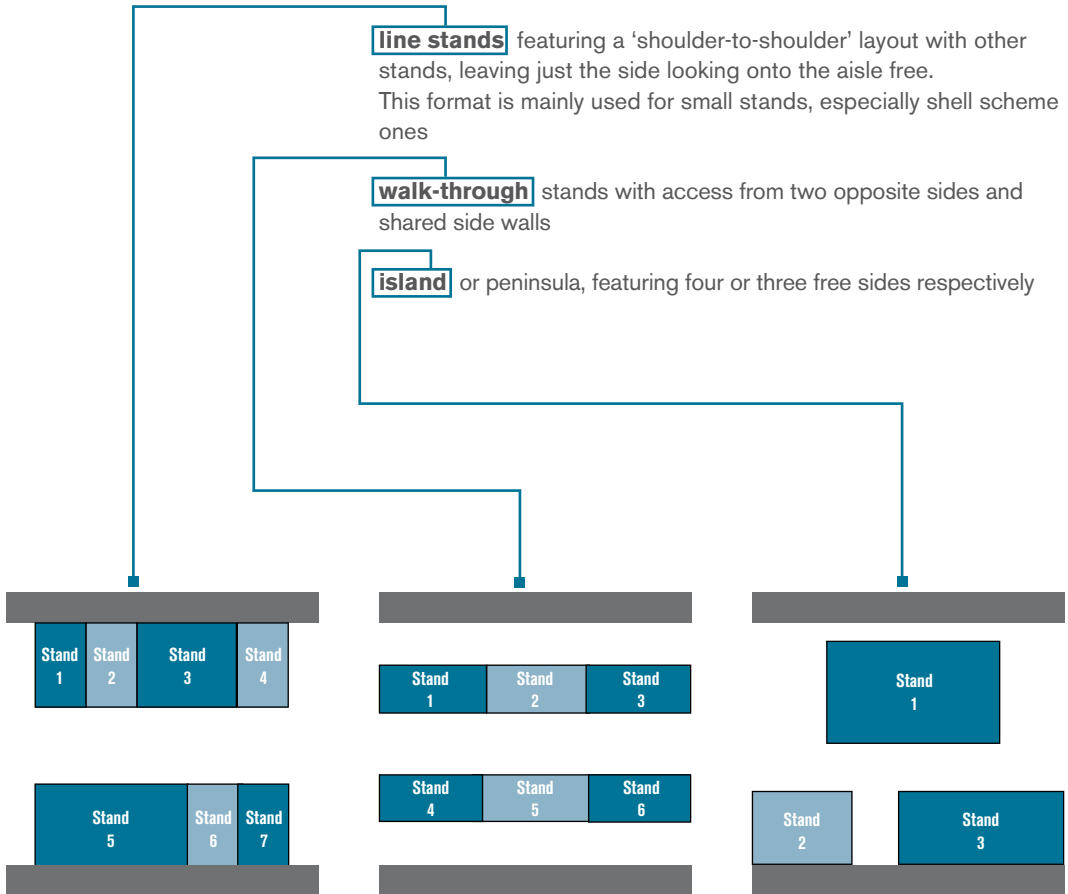
Stand structure

At this point, one must decide 'where' to locate the stand and 'how' to organise it. The first aspect, often depending on the area plans chosen by the organisers, concerns the physical layout. Stands can therefore be:

line stands featuring a 'shoulder-to-shoulder' layout with other stands, leaving just the side looking onto the aisle free. This format is mainly used for small stands, especially shell scheme ones

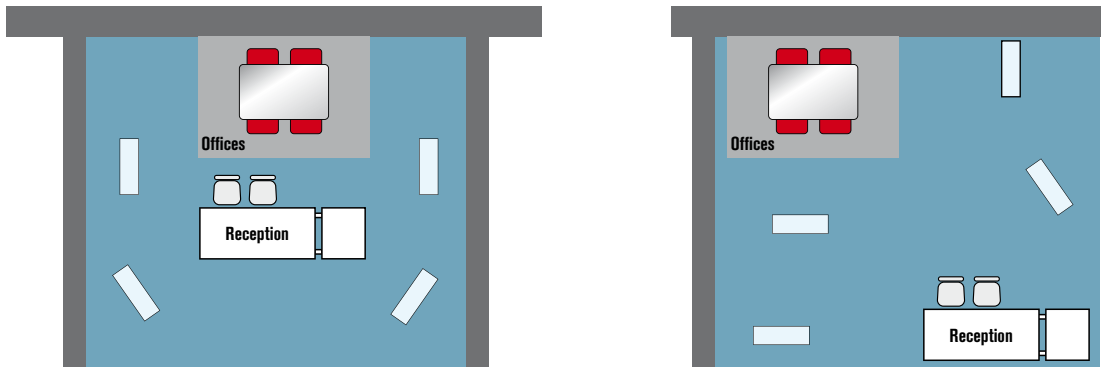
walk-through stands with access from two opposite sides and shared side walls

island or peninsula, featuring four or three free sides respectively



The **second aspect**, instead, concerns internal distribution and access methods. These problems do not arise for small spaces and shell scheme stands. Generally speaking, there are three main stand typologies, though there are other kinds, especially when more demanding events are involved.

The **open stand**, with access from one or more sides (two if shared with other stands, three for peninsula layout) and no perimeter infrastructures. The outermost part is open or occupied by products/showcases. It is a real and proper 'forum' that encourages the public to enter and wander around. It can also have an island structure with access from all sides. The reception area, offices and meeting rooms are often found in the centre (though this is not a fixed rule). It is normally used for larger exhibition areas.



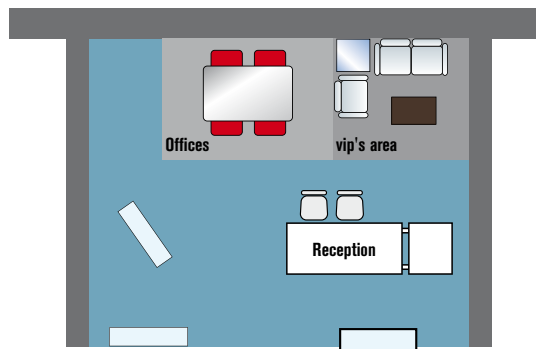
The **shop stand** generally has an open front where the reception counter is located, the latter acting as a filter towards the inner areas, which, however, are fully visible.

The **closed** or partially closed stand meets various requirements. In some cases, it is used mainly for design purposes: its high walls prevent visitors from seeing inside and thus arouse their curiosity. Visitors are therefore attracted and enter to discover an internal

The stand is not used just to 'exhibit': it is also a preferential location for meeting customers. If necessary, a 'reserved' area for VIP customers, meetings and private presentations can also be added.

area, though always with free access, isolated from the noise and distractions of the rest of the pavilion. In other cases (not very frequent), the closed structure also serves a functional purpose, for example, acting as an access control filter¹.

Sometimes – in the largest exhibition areas – the 'club' or 'closed' formula is used in combination with the 'forum' formula to create a reserved area. A typical example is that of a well-established company which wishes to reserve a more tranquil and operative area for VIPs, business partners and selected customers and guests, or for presenting products that are not yet in the public domain, or for be used as a relaxation and refreshment area.



Communication at the stand

Good communication is essential for developing stand design. It is, first and foremost, a question of giving designers and installers some key information, such as:

- The main message
- Reason for participation
- Available budget

¹ The 'closed' stand formula is not very common in Italian fairs, though there can be solutions with reserved or invitation-only areas.

The design staff should also be given basic information about the company, the market and the competition that is expected to attend. We can never highlight strongly enough the need to involve the various corporate areas and functions in order to avoid, as time goes by, 'surprises' of the following type:

- It has been decided to focus on new products but the forecasts have proved to be overoptimistic and the key product will not be ready in time (and with it, also the relative communication campaign).
- The company wants to launch a new product in the fair but the sales department discovers that the stocks of the previous model are excessive and cannot be disposed of in time.
- Priority was given to a new corporate message, but an important company division is pushing for a different kind of visibility.
- It has been decided to focus on contacts with new customers, but the sales staff has to close the year and the quarter and cannot attend the fair.

The various company functions must be involved in order to ensure a univocal message is transmitted.



A co-ordinated and coherent message must accompany the various activities of the event, from invitations to documentation, as well as any gadgets.

Communication at the stand: 'remote', 'close' and 'detailed'.

Delivering a consistent message

The stand is the showcase of a company's participation in a fair, but 'bringing' in customers and getting them 'interested' is not an automatic process. On the contrary, the advantage/disadvantage of a fair (they are the two sides of the same coin) is the fact that more than one exhibitor is present. This increases the appeal for visitors, but, on the other hand, many exhibitors must fight for their time and attention. As a result a message is required that is both visible and 'consistent', that is, co-ordinated and coherent.

The ideal thing, therefore, is to organise all communication in this sense. For example, a clear, short and easily-remembered message could be created. This would have to be repeated as much as possible in everything concerning the company's participation in the fair:

- invitation
- stand display/graphics
- promotional material: giveaways such as jotters, pens, calendars, bags, etc.
- advertising
- presence at conferences, events
- display in the pavilions, aisles
- follow-up letters
- information/motivation activities (see next chapter)

Message and graphics at the stand

The graphic presentation at the stand is important. However, one concept must never be neglected which, though it may sound banal, is often underestimated. In fact, companies too frequently oscillate between the two extremes: that of those who think that 'graphics are no use as the sellers and products speak for themselves', and that of the design professionals who are convinced that appearance can exist even without information.

Generally speaking, there are three different levels of information:

- 'Remote' information, that must allow visitors to immediately recognise the brand as soon as they draw near the stand and, if possible, as soon as they enter the pavilion (particular attention

must be paid if visitors approach the stand from above, for example, from balconies, stairways, etc.). If the stand were a newspaper, we would be talking about its name.

- 'Close' information which must provide the key messages to allow visitors to understand what they will find inside the stand: brief and concise messages. In our comparison with a newspaper, we would be talking about the headlines.
- 'Detailed' information required to identify a product: at least its name and key characteristics. This would be the summary of the newspaper.

While these three elements are fundamental, a fourth can also be useful: a brief technical sheet. This would be the article of the newspaper.

Here are a few examples:

Color master 5015

Laser colour printer
8 p/min in colour; 24 b/w
Network connection, front/rear, low consumption

Giada sofa

Modular, removable fabric,
bed option with 14 cm mattress

TV LCD BrightView 2046

46" Full HD 1920 x 1080
Contrast 10.000:1, brightness 550 candles
BrightStar technology

This is the information that visitors would find on a sales leaflet.
Why give them less?

Clarity and effectiveness
in product information.

Modular or Custom-choice stand

The first question to answer concerns the required or desired type of stand. The main choice is between a shell scheme and a personalised stand, with some intermediate options. In some

Shell scheme stands, provided directly by the organiser or by its specialised suppliers, can considerably reduce costs.

cases, there is no choice: the fair organiser provides shell scheme formulas and the only options for exhibitors concern the area, often modular, and internal furnishings, even though the latter can also belong to a shell scheme 'line': tables, cupboards, armchairs, showcases, fascia boards, lighting, etc.. These solutions are not very expensive and exhibitors do not even have to transport and erect them: they simply have to bring their products, documentation and staff.

In other cases, the exhibitor may choose whether to have a shell scheme stand or not. In this case, it is simply an option taken out with an installer, involving the use of freely modular standard structures, which is generally advantageous because no special processing is required.

The most demanding formula is naturally the personalised stand, designed to the exhibitor's specifications.

This type of stand is frequently rented for a number of years (two-three) by the installer to the exhibitor, also in order to ensure the necessary operating flexibility. It would be difficult for the stand of one edition to be the same as that of the previous edition: the area can change, as can its location in the pavilion, the internal division of the spaces, and so on.

Planning the stand

Personalised stands require adequate reflection and are generally used for more than one event, though with the necessary modifications, and their cost-effectiveness must not be overestimated.

For a personalised stand – more frequently in medium-to-long events and when size begins to become relevant – initial design is fairly laborious and it is well to start the design phase about 6 months before the event. What must one do in these cases? Everything looks easy apparently, but experience teaches that things are not so simple. You must, in fact:

- decide how you plan to participate at the event
- establish the stand area
- select the installer and agree on a cost estimate
- define what you wish to put inside the stand
- assess any concurrent activities

Image, product, customer relations

Put like this, they all seem obvious activities. But this is not the case. Companies can participate in fairs in different ways:

- image, focussing on graphic elements, messages, communication and events;
- product, with ample space for individual products and staff used for demonstrations and sales;
- relations, focussed on establishing privileged relationships with customers.

These are not linguistic niceties or formal whims: the area is only so big and therefore choices must be made. The same, of course, applies to budgets. In the first case, communication areas will prevail: parts dedicated to signs and video displays, or video projections, stages for shows and entertainment, animators, etc..

In the second case, the area will be articulated in order to display the most important products and, in some cases, there will also be semi-closed spaces for demonstrations, in as peaceful and professional an atmosphere as possible. In the third case, priority will be given to hospitality areas: bars-buffets, conversation rooms, auditoriums for scheduled presentations/meetings, courses, etc..

The internal organisation of the stand should never be taken for granted as it is the outcome of the objectives one intends to pursue.

Stand Builders

The fairly fragmented installers market comprises approximately 400-500 operators in Italy. Some of these exclusively concentrate on the fair/events sector; others have a mix of activities which also include furnishing. Reciprocal knowledge makes it possible to improve results, adding to the skills and reducing possible friction deriving from an unclear division of tasks. The exhibition centres also belong to the sector. Most of them, in fact, own specialised installer companies in order to offer exhibitors an all-round service.

Many different criteria can be used to choose a stand installer: direct knowledge, positive experiences, closeness to the exhibitor's headquarters, experience of the specific event, commercial competitiveness, etc.. In all cases, it is important to check exactly what you are being offered. In many cases, the

All exhibitors set out to attract the public to their stands. 'Spectacularisation' is added to 'exhibition', though formulas are required that are consistent with the spirit of the event.

installer has in-house marketing skills that can help the exhibitor to focus on the most suitable choices. Many exhibitors have in-house (or closely related) specialised graphic artists and architects.

The decision-making process

Especially as regards medium-to-large companies – those that not only normally need a large exhibition area but also have more complex operative structures, several product lines and a large number of decision-making centres – it may be best to start with an in-house brain-storming session. The various departments and functions hold discussions, perhaps with the installers, designers and other subjects involved in the event, in order to develop the company's participation strategy. This avoids (or, more realistically, reduces) the risk of introducing future variants with consequent discussions to the stand structure that involve inconvenience, extra costs and delays.

Animation at the stand

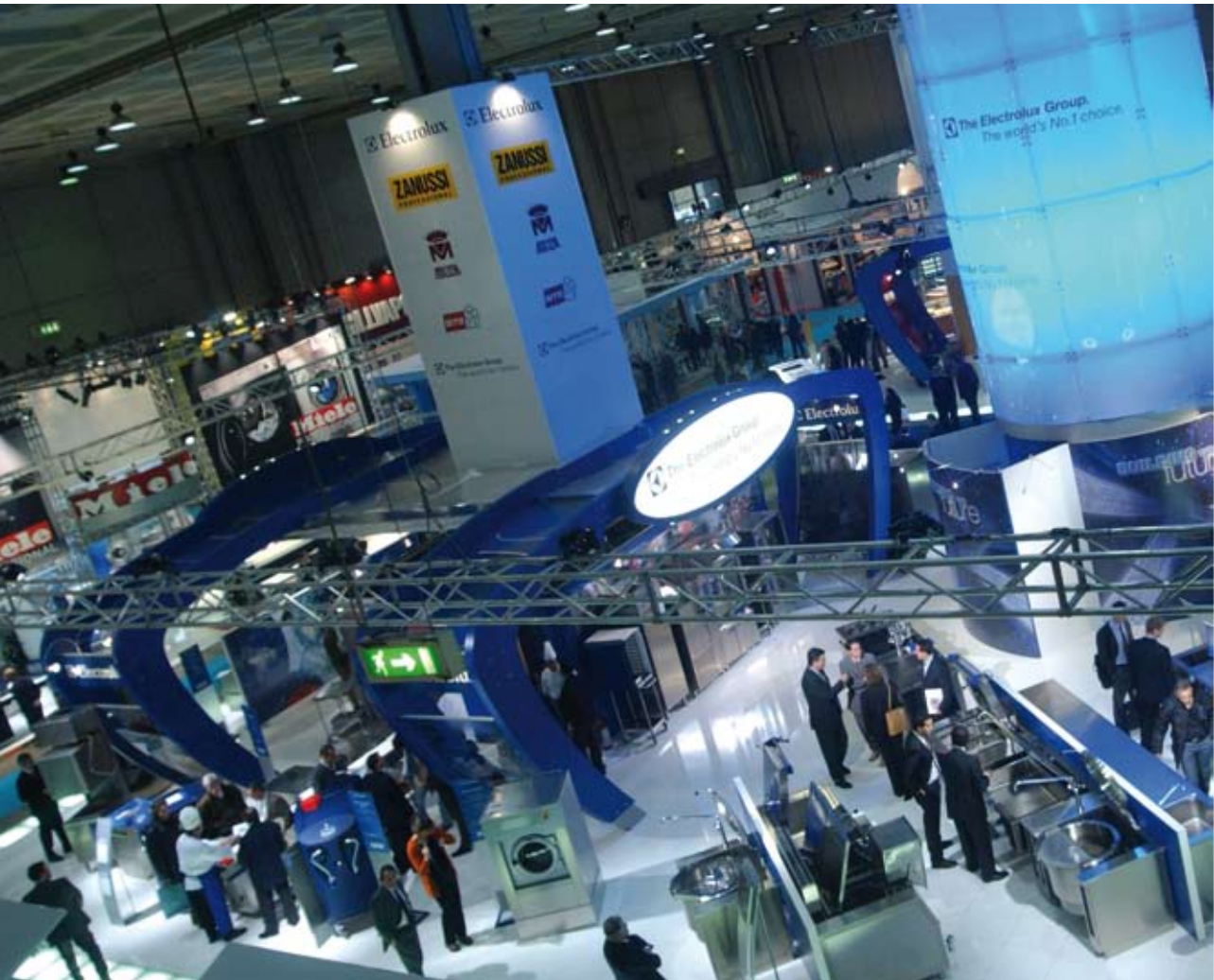
A widely debated issue is the role and methods of animation at exhibition stands. In recent years we have seen everything, from fashion shows to vintage or racing car parades, from mimes to music played at more than 100 decibels, from belly dancing to animated product presentations, from amusement parks to countless games and competitions. Fortunately, this trend has already peaked, and with it the idea that 'if there is a lot of background noise, then still more must be made'.

How should companies behave in this sense?

Apart from using their common sense, companies should talk with the organisers and read the rules of the event.

Remember that in very large events, what is allowed in one pavilion may not be allowed in another one, for example, due to the different use made of the spaces: either more consumer- or more business-oriented. Besides, it is clear that what one may expect in an event dedicated to the latest audio/video or video games development is not necessarily suitable for an antiques, garden maintenance or health fair.

Being aware of the spirit of the event, as well as its regulations, therefore, can be a good starting point. Similarly, finding out what other exhibitors do or have done, and talking with the organiser's technical offices, is another way of avoiding false moves.



Operative activities

Summary

Along with the cost of acquiring the area, of erecting the stand and procuring the staff, a set of activities that are fundamental both for the stand services and for the budget must be taken into consideration. Discovering you have a phone line but no phones, you do not have a suitable security level, you forgot to organise catering or you didn't book enough hotel rooms can lead to bitter surprises.

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• Technical services

• Catering

• Hospitality

• Security

The fittings are a fundamental part of a stand. But, naturally, other elements also come into play. In most fairs – especially international/national ones – activities that are essential to the success of the event are performed. To avoid surprises, from both the operative and the economic point of view, it is best to think about these beforehand.

Telecommunications

A fair is essentially an act of communication and information. However, it is singular how very often exhibitors, especially new ones, underestimate telecommunications. Sometimes due to the lack of correct information. In some cases, they presume that 'the installer will see to it', in others that 'the fair will see to that', in others still that 'anyway, as we all have cell phones, we won't need a phone line'. The funny thing is that, while all of this may be true, it is best to think about it beforehand.

Service requirements

The most usual situation is one that could be defined as a 'chicken without feathers'. That is, an exhibitor requests the fair for a phone line but at the last minute he discovers that the line is just wire and nothing more. The picture becomes even more complex if, as well as a phone line, an exhibitor desires a data connection, generally ADSL. If, on the one hand, communication has become easier thanks to cell phones (it would come as no surprise to learn that no-one uses the line you asked for, neither for outgoing calls nor for incoming ones), on the other hand, it has become terribly complicated with the request for an ADSL line, perhaps to set up a connection with the company server. It is no coincidence that new or recently renovated exhibition centres also give priority to these aspects.

Check what is included in the supply in order to avoid surprises. For example, the supply includes the line but not the phone. Voice communication requirements are decreasing while data service needs are increasing.

Therefore:

- Rule n° 1: remember to decide whether or not you need a phone line.
- Rule n° 2: if you ask for a line, remember that telephones and line must be connected to it.
- Rule n° 3: if you ask for an ADSL line, find out where your modem or router/gateway is coming from.

By the way, generally speaking, a wireless solution can be extremely appropriate for a fair because there are no problems with wiring and sockets. In some cases, a fax can also be useful, especially to transmit orders, documents, etc., even though nowadays much can be done with e-mails. There are also competitively priced solutions for putting PCs in WiFi networks inside the stand and connecting them to the public network via UMTS, thus achieving excellent performance levels.

Avoid surprises

It is always best to check costs in advance. Partly to avoid nasty surprises. Especially when exhibiting abroad, an ADSL connection can be extremely useful as it can also be used, for example, to make outgoing calls with Skype. Naturally, the longer the event and the larger the stand (and therefore the number of people involved), the more useful a phone/data line becomes.

Videoconference or webcast connections, lastly, are either problems or extra opportunities.

In this case, for example, the broadband connection can be used to transmit live images of the event on the company website.

New opportunities include video services. Keeping costs under control is fundamental, especially when exhibiting abroad.

The cost of cell phones should not be neglected, especially when exhibiting abroad. In many cases, it can be decidedly advantageous to activate a local phone card both for incoming calls and for those from and to local numbers. In this context, just think that a call made between two Italian phone cards when abroad, even at a distance of a few metres (for example, between the stand and the bar in the pavilion) is charged as a double international call, costing

a few euros, while the same call made with local cards costs just a few cents.

The following table can help companies to check and control communication costs.

| | WHO DOES IT | ONE OFF COST | PAY TO USE |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Phone line | | | |
| ADSL line | | | |
| Modem | | | |
| Router/Gateway | | | |
| Fax/Other | | | |
| Phone terminals | | | |
| Cell phones | | | |

Catering

Refreshments and catering (for individual demand at collective structures and for personalised customer services respectively) are services which all exhibitors, both large or small, must come to terms with.

Demand, in fact, concerns:

- Stand staff
- Important visitors and guests
- Events/exhibitions

Stand staff generally prefer to go to refreshment structures outside the stand (snack bars, restaurants, bars, canteens) in order to 'turn off' during their breaks, but they can make frequent use of the stand structures during the working day.

Depending on the type of event, its duration, visitor flows and, naturally, stand area, stand structures can range from the 'bar corner' to the restaurant area serving hot dishes (to tell the truth, the latter service is more deeply-rooted in Germany, during events where 'welcome/catering' is considered as an integral part of the way a company is presented).

Naturally, the company can also be the animator of events performed outside the stand, though within the pavilion, such as seminars, press conferences and conventions. Also in this case, more or less demanding forms of catering can be provided: from a simple welcome coffee, to a buffet or a sit-down lunch.

Personalised and package solutions 'without surprises'

In many cases, all these requirements can be satisfied with highly personalised solutions provided by specialised caterers which are often an emanation of the exhibition centres themselves. In this case, exhibitors can choose 'packages' ranging from a basic supply of drinks and snacks, to coffee machines, sandwiches, ready-to-eat dishes and even a waiter service. Along with food and drinks, it is also necessary to think of glasses, plates and cutlery, generally of the disposable type. In some cases, these can be provided by the stand installers, but they are generally supplied by the caterers themselves.



Accommodation

There are no, or almost no problems concerning accommodation if you participate in a fair near the company or one that can be easily reached day after day (if, however, the fair takes place in a faraway area, remember also to book rooms for your VIP guests/customers). Things change if you have to organise overnight stays for stand staff, company managers and even guests (customers, journalists in case of events for the press, etc.).

Problems mainly arise with the most important events where it is more difficult to find accommodation. Generally speaking, it is best to find accommodation in the city where the fair is held, or in the vicinities, also in order to increase flexibility of movement.

For highly specialised events involving limited visitor flows, it is not generally very difficult to find accommodation, unless other highly popular events or exhibitions are being held at the same time.

For more important events, these aspects should be considered in good time, in order to book rooms in advance, not only for the stand staff but also adding a 'margin' for guest accommodation.

It is not necessary to invite customers at the company's expense. In many cases, they will be grateful to you even if you simply allow them to find rooms, possibly at special prices, thanks to your wise booking.

If circumstances oblige you to take accommodation at a certain distance from the fair, the availability of easy and rapid public transport becomes an extra requirement. Travel times should be reasonably limited, though, approximately 50-70 minutes, especially if hospitality is being given to important visitors.

As regards installers, they themselves should find the most suitable accommodation for their staff.

Security and supervision

One problem that is particularly important at all events is stand security and supervision. The first indication for exhibitors is to attentively consult the regulations of the individual events and adopt specific routine measures.

Generally speaking, the exhibition centres also provide a general supervision service for the pavilions and 'public' areas of the event. In many cases, these measures can be sufficient, especially for events that do not concern products that are easy to carry or that are of limited appeal. In other cases – products with an elevated unit value, small size and considerable appeal – the risk of theft should be considered, especially during the night (but not only). Evidently, a camera exhibition will be more at risk than a furniture show. Removing a 50 inch plasma screen worth 2,500 euros is certainly more difficult than taking away a notebook worth 2,500 euros that is twenty times lighter and smaller.

The service provided at the fair

Apart from advising exhibitors to place objects of value in secure cabinets, they can also request specific stand security services of differentiated levels and costs (for example, guards patrolling several stands, guards dedicated exclusively to individual stands). Also in this case, fairs can generally give the best advice in this sense or even provide the requested service. Which are the riskiest moments? Many situations deserve attention. In many cases, of course, night time is crucial as – apart from the exhibition centre guards – the stands are cleaned at that time. Many thefts, however, do not take place in the tranquillity of the night but in the convulsion of the final stand dismantling operations when it is difficult to control the movements of people, attention wanes, tiredness comes on and intruders can mix with installers, transporters and company technicians.

Once again, the problems differ greatly from event to event because a one-ton machine tool exhibited at an automation fair is not the same thing as a consumer electronics product, and the security of a 25 square metres stand is not the same thing as that of a 500 square metre stand.

Security requirements must be proportionate to effective needs. Fairs are always opportunities to meet the public and one must avoid negative repercussions caused by measures that are too severe and not always justified.

Information security

'Soft' security, instead, is a different problem, particularly as regards the collection of information by competitors. Fairs are always a great forum where exhibitors measure themselves with the public and the competition. Common sense is therefore required when assessing whether information must effectively be protected or not.

Though in many cases exhibition regulations forbid people to photograph the products on show, it is truly difficult to prevent them from taking photographs, mainly of products that can be easily found on websites and in catalogues.

The widespread diffusion of digital cameras and mobile phones with photographing capabilities makes the numerous bans truly useless.

However, if a company truly believes it has particularly innovative products which it wishes to protect, the best advice is to set up closed areas with supervised entrances which the public can only enter if accompanied by company staff or on specific invitation. Specific signs forbidding photographs and videos can be affixed in these areas.

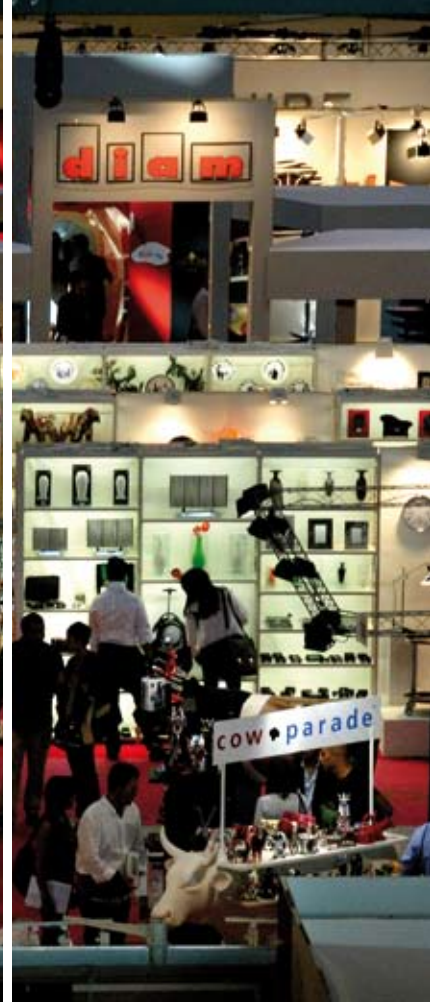
Contacts with competitors

What should you do if a competitor comes to visit your stand? Generally speaking, good manners require you to associate prudence with courtesy.

People working for different companies in the same sector are very likely to know one other.

Today, one may work for one company while tomorrow, one may move to a competing company.

In turn, fairs are a natural venues for meeting competitors, comparing their offers and, perhaps, exchanging not particularly reserved information. Some companies give the stand manager or other specific figures the task of interfacing with competitors visiting the stand. These people, therefore, will know what to say and what not to say, without being embarrassed and with total transparency. At the same time, however, they will be able to keep in touch with colleagues, also from competing companies, something that can always be useful.



Costs and budget management

Summary

Especially when participating in a fair for the first time, budget management and observance may reserve surprises. An analytical approach should therefore be used, paying attention to a number of 'hidden costs'. Generally speaking, one must remember that suitable planning saves money and it forestalls last-minute modifications to the stand, documentation and furnishings. The estimates provided by external suppliers should be checked in good time. All this information makes improvements to experience.

Adequate planning is the best way of avoiding surprises and, therefore, increases in the budget due to costs for last-minute modifications which are generally urgent and therefore even more expensive.

We previously examined the main cost categories in order to determine – also on the basis of previous experiences, where applicable – the cost of participating in a fair. It is easy, however, to lose control of costs, especially if no previous experience is available. An analytical budget is therefore required, together with suitable milestone verifications. At times, even details make the difference and not much effort is required to end up with 'numbers' that are very different from those that had been planned a few months or weeks before. Therefore, beware of 'enemies of the budget', generally last-minute changes in the stand, as it is only fair to pay designers, carpenters, upholsterers and installers for additional work. Also take care when making cost estimates for hotel rooms and flights. Changes can be made in the number of tickets, as well as in the unit costs. In the most crowded fairs, last-minute deals cost much more and not less when it is a question of finding a seat on a plane or a bed in a hotel room. The cost of stand furnishings is not necessarily the same as a furniture supermarket and therefore if you have to add tables, chairs, armchairs or ashtrays (if smoking is allowed), first check the cost and the alternatives. Especially if first-time suppliers are involved, it is best to request detailed estimates. How much does a photo session cost? What does it include? If you use an agency – especially if it is not the usual one and you are abroad – to organise an evening conference with customers, request a detailed estimate. It may seem obvious, but it is best to think about this beforehand.

Exhibition services

As indicated in another part of this 'manual', fair organisers and exhibition centres (at times these may be the same organisations) are more and more inclined to provide their exhibitors not only with square metres but also with services ranging from the stand to promotion. Some of these services may be charged for at some events and be free at others. The differences apply in Italy and, even more so, abroad. For this reason, it is best to know what services are provided, which are charged for, and act accordingly. Advertising (signs, luminous displays) inside the exhibition centre is definitely charged. Entries in the 'on-line notice boards' of a fair (or web space) may be free or partially or totally paid. The same applies to the possibility of depositing documentation in the press room (in most cases this is free but there are exceptions, especially abroad).

More and more organisers and exhibition centres offer 'catalogue' services. This is a doubly interesting opportunity because it is offered by operators with extensive experience in the sector and because this system avoids surprises with prices and conditions.



Motivated and informed staff

Summary

Let's be honest: we all know very well that the success of any event (even more so, of a fair) also depends on the support and welcome given to visitors at the stand. The presence of trained, qualified and cordial staff is essential. It is not just a question of goodwill, but also of organisation, communication and motivation. All these aspects must not be left to chance. Regardless of the size of the stand.

A stand is generally manned by direct staff and temporary hostesses/personnel.

Information and training are indispensable elements. The correct motivation of company staff begins long before the fair opens. True teamwork must be established, based on technical-operative and other rules.

Much of the image transmitted to customers and visitors depends on the behaviour and preparation of the staff.

Common sense rules

Have you ever happened to enter a stand at a fair and experience the classical situation of discomfort that makes you want to turn on your heels and go away? Scarce motivation and attention of stand staff can frustrate even the greatest commitment.

You have seen company's advertising, read about it in the specialised press, received an invitation, appreciated the size and beauty of the stand, but then you find indigestible staff: either too aggressive or unenthusiastic, or simply behaving as though you did not exist.

This experience is more frequent than one might suppose. Body language and formal behaviour are the demonstration of this. Think about it: a seller furtively smoking a cigarette (if this is allowed) in a corner of the stand, another one 'making himself a sandwich', yet another swearing down the phone or absorbed with his notebook. Another three chatting together with their backs to the public. You've seen all these scenes before, haven't you? Not to mention the stands that give you a screening as thorough as a blood test 'because, you know, I have to fill in the form', or those that welcome you by shooting on the competition: 'have you seen our latest products? They'll certainly teach company xy a lesson', of those that triumphantly inform you, before letting you open your mouth, that 'it's a wonderful day because I would like to propose our latest products which, by the way, have a special exhibition discount of 25%!'. Having a motivated stand staff which does not consider the fair as a 'distraction' with respect to other priorities but, on the contrary, a precious opportunity, also of professional growth, contributed to the success of the event. But motivation is not enough on its own. Organisation, co-ordination, information and preparation are also required. In short, staff must act as a well-informed team.

Preliminary meeting

If possible, a preliminary information/motivation session should be organised at the company. Senior management (or the owner for smaller companies) should attend this meeting in order to communicate the sense of importance of the event. In short, it is a question of showing that the company is preparing something it truly believes in. The following points should be explained during the meeting:

- Aims of the fair
- Objectives
- Key messages used to present the company and which must be communicated to visitors/customers
- Participation methods
- Commercial aims
- Basic organisational criteria

As well as the presentation, a document summarising the 'operating instructions' can also be distributed during the meeting. This should include:

- Opening times of the event
- Shifts
- Stand and function managers
- Dress code, where applicable
- Instructions on customer reception and the compilation and handling of forms

During a meeting of this kind, we also recommend including sufficient discussion time for any issues that may arise: what time is the lunch break, how many pauses do we have during the day? Are there any staff bonuses/indemnities?

When should a meeting of this kind be held? Soon enough to assess all the problems and allow staff to plan their commitments in those days, not 'too' soon to risk forgetting everything. 8-15 days in advance would be reasonable.

At the stand

At the stand it is important for all staff (especially at important events) to know what they are supposed to do and how they should behave. Language skills are important, of course, depending on the event (call in an interpreter if necessary). It is also important for staff to be immediately identifiable as such. A guide distributed before the event can also contain rules of behaviour, for example:

- Who must I contact if an important guest arrives?
- Who must I contact if a journalist arrives?
- How can I get hold of a colleague or leave messages?
- What should I do if I am asked complex technical questions?



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• Hostesses

Summary

Customers – both current and potential – are willing visitors to fairs, because they can get an overall view of the most important offers on the market in a short space of time. However, this does not mean that the customers you are interested in will come to the fair, neither does it mean that they will automatically come to your stand. An attentive preliminary phase should be used to attract customers to the event and put the name of your company at the top of their visiting list.

There can be many reasons 'why' one decides to go to a fair. But, all in all, there is just one answer to the question, 'who' do you go there for. You mainly go to meet customers. Whether you participate in a fair to present the company, to show new products, to find new customers, to announce new business lines, to launch a new brand or to create a new sales network, at the end of the day you essentially go there to communicate with the market, with customers – whether they be users or business partners. In order to be successful at a fair, a company must decide on how it relates to customers, both existing and potential, the so-called prospects.

Naturally, there are big differences between customers who buy a mobile phone or an MP3 player and those looking for a dentist's chair. In this sense, we must therefore avoid easy generalisations whilst devising a possible approach, mainly referring to the professional and capital goods market, the more natural target of specialised fairs. A fair provides one of the few market contexts in which a company's relationship with its customers becomes truly 'interactive'. Therefore, a 'one-to-one' relationship still remains, even though companies always hope to make a large number of contacts. This is yet another reason for personalising the relationship with customers as much as possible, first of all recognising existing customers with respect to prospective ones (treating the former in a different way from the latter).

As marketing experts love to repeat, maintaining existing customers costs much less than winning over new ones. In other words, this means that losing an old customer is a very expensive business. Therefore it is right to woo them. It may seem obvious, but things often do not turn out that way. Only too often, the sales staff of companies start from the mistaken assumption that, unless you really behave badly, an old customer will remain loyal to you and therefore all efforts must be focussed on conquering new customers.

Advance information

Work on current customers can and must start well in advance. Ideally, one should find out about the purchase plans of customers, but this is not always possible. Precisely for this reason, the prompt communication of the interesting new products that will be presented at the fair can already whet their appetites. Besides, due to their relationship with the company, in most cases customers will consider this kind of communication as an act of courtesy and not as yet another nuisance concocted by the sales force.

As the fair draws nearer, the contact may be more targeted and also include prospective customers. A preliminary communication may remind customers that the company is participating and that appointments can be fixed in order to illustrate its new products.

This contact communication can naturally be performed by a sales promotion agency or company. The communication may also mention a small gift in order to encourage customers to visit the stand. For example, it may include a code for a prize lottery which will take place in the fair, a gift at reception if a coupon is presented, a purchase discount, etc..

If justified by the complexity of the offer, visits can also be 'personalised', for example, by asking customers what they are most interested in and consequently make the most competent staff available.



First letter to current customers

Dear customer (or personalised),

I am pleased to inform you that Alfa Kappa will be exhibiting at the next edition of 'Fair XY'. This is a precious opportunity for us to present a number of particularly innovative solutions which contribute towards making an important step forward with respect to the entire market.

*The event will be held at from..... to.....
Given the importance of the new developments that will be presented, we would be especially pleased to be able to meet customers who, like you, have appreciated our solutions in the past. Alfa Kappa is particularly attentive to the opinions and judgements of its customers and we are also convinced that our new products will be of interest to you.*

*We look forward to seeing you at the fair if you are planning to attend. Should you require any further information, please call our customer department on
or write to _____@_____.*

Warmest regards
Antonio Rossi
Sales Director



Second letter to current and/or prospective customers

Dear customer (or personalised),

Alfa Kappa will be participating in the forthcoming edition of Fair XP with a series of new products and an entirely renewed range. This international event is one of the most important in the sector and is a benchmark for business operators in this market.

We would be pleased to give you a preview of our latest proposals concerning _____ and _____. For this purpose, I am pleased to inform you that it is possible to organise a scheduled visit in order to focus on your requirements and interests in as productive a way as possible.

If you are interested, please register on the relative web page, inserting the identification code at the bottom of this letter, send a confirmation fax, or contact our offices on or write to _____@_____.

In any case, we will call you during the next few days in order to simplify things for you. Should you register in advance, there will also be a small gift waiting for you at our stand. We look forward to seeing you at the fair!

You can find us at stand n°..... in Pavilion

Warmest regards

Antonio Rossi
Sales Director

ID code XYXYXYXYXY



These kinds of activities must be supported by a customer database' which may be enlarged during the event. Contacts at a fair do not just concern possible visits to the stand. It is also possible to participate in:

- public seminars (initiatives which various companies with the same product/service characteristics generally participate in),
- meetings specifically organised by the company in reserved areas of the fair, or scheduled meetings in stand areas.

In the latter case (collective meetings at the stand or in reserved areas), it should be remembered that there are at least two methods of meeting customers:

- individual meetings, mainly involving developing the contact and presenting new developments,
- collective meetings, involving presentations on certain dates and at certain times, also including the possibility of diversifying the contents (in this case, the communication sent to new and prospective customers must contain the programme).

Welcome kit

Customers attending the event can be given a "welcome & information kit". In practice, this contains information about the essential reasons for the company's participation and the new developments it is presenting at the event. Where suitable, for very large stands and if the areas of interest are communicated beforehand, this kit can be further personalised with the addition of specific material, consistently with customer requests. Alternatively, visitors will be given suitable visibility of the website area where they will be able to receive all the requested information.

¹ Pay attention to privacy regulations, including those connected with the disclosure outlining the rights of the recipients of the communication, and consider whether or not to include private and/or personal data. One could, for example specify, that the data included has been expressly authorised by the recipient of the communication or that it is contained in public lists and that, in any case, recipients have the right to view their data and have it cancelled if they so desire.

Welcoming customers/visitors

Summary

The magic moment has arrived and visitors/customers begin to enter the stand. How should we welcome them, what errors should we avoid? How can we obtain the necessary information and how can we provide the input required to transmit a correct image of the company and the commercial proposal connected with its presence at the fair?

LINK WEB www.fieramilano.it

• Online target

• Technical services

• Marketing & Media

A visitor to the stand should be considered as the 'king' of the fair. First and foremost, a company participates in a fair to meet new potential customers, to consolidate its relations with existing ones, to meet influential people in the sector, to talk and to listen. Naturally, things can differ greatly from fair to fair. The open ones targeting the mass and consumer markets mainly aim to act as showcases: an opportunity to transmit messages, sensations and brand awareness rather than displaying products. The more professional ones give preference to one-to-one contact, also in order to develop contacts after the fair closes.

The visitor target

We have already said that various types of visitors come to a fair and, therefore, various types of contacts must be managed:

- visitors with whom a meeting has already been planned (invitation and appointment),
- spontaneous visitors who enter the stand because they belong to the target and are therefore 'looking for the company',
- spontaneous visitors who may be more or less close to the target and come across the company by chance or almost.

When managing the various visitor types, it is well to remember that both exhibitors and visitors generally have a 'time budget' which is naturally elastic but always limited. An initial consideration to make is that it is not sufficient to be good sellers in order to successfully manage relations with visitors to a fair. Unless a scheduled appointment is involved, at times part of negotiations that are already in progress, a visit to a stand is a relatively short affair, generally lasting not more than 10-15 minutes. Many things must be done in this short space of time:

- understand whether the visitor belongs to the target (and

- therefore deserves further analysis and follow-up),
- define his/her role in the company,
 - understand the requirements of the company,
 - transfer the key messages,
 - assess if and how it is possible to start negotiations,
 - obtain information for possible further use.

Though every salesperson has his/her own style, we cannot overemphasise that a 'tranquillising' approach to customers/visitors is required; they must feel neither neglected nor 'hunted down' by eager stand staff. Visitors/Customers wish to listen but also to be listened to. Consequently, the approach by stand staff (generally a salesperson) must begin by identifying their requirements and the type of company they belong to, and then start presenting proposals, and not the other way around.

Organising the visit

The quality of the welcome is also important. For example, it is totally useless, in fact it is counter-productive, to chase a customer for two weeks, invite him to the stand, fix an appointment and then, when he comes at the arranged time, not know who to give him to 'because at the moment, you know, they're all busy, could you come back in an hour or so'. Some companies also make presentations at scheduled times which are communicated on the stand display. This is a good idea which can also be emphasised with accompanying initiatives, compatible with the rules of the event: small concerts or shows, prize competitions. Making a presentation to an individual customer is not the same thing as making one to a number of people with different levels of interest and attention. Consequently, if you intend to make collective presentations, it is best to check if there is a member of staff who is truly capable of making them. If not, it is best to contact a professional presenter who could be assisted by company experts for answering any questions asked by the public.

The issue of the skills required at the stand must not be neglected. Previous experience can show what kind of people are required at a stand apart from sales and marketing staff, partly depending on the latter's technical preparation concerning the various issues.

Customers are the priority target of a fair. Global action is required to get them interested, encourage them to participate in the event, visit the stand, meet company staff and leave a good impression.

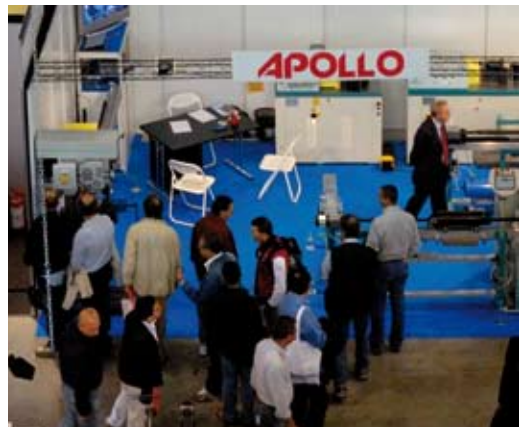
Recurring issues in this context are, for example, product operation and operating methods, financing information, product safety and regulatory information.

Customer data sheet

A fundamental element is the customer data sheet. This is useful for at least three reasons:

- extending and updating the current and prospective customer database,
- allowing sales follow-ups after the event,
- obtaining elements for assessing one's offer and the event in general.

A little diplomacy is required to fill in a customer data sheet. The company must put itself in the customer's shoes. Think about a customer visiting five exhibitors. He/she will naturally not want to be screened five times. The data obtained must be as synthetic as possible. One could explain to the visitor that it is useful to filling in the form in order to maintain special conditions for a further period (one month, for example).



Indicative scheme complete with a "visitor data sheet".
Some sections can be omitted in practice.

| Fair _____ | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| CUSTOMER DATA SHEET | | | |
| Date | | Compiled by: | |
| CUSTOMER | | COMPANY | |
| Name | | Company name | |
| Surname | | Town | |
| Title | | Address | |
| | | | |
| Position | | N° Employees | SECTOR <input type="checkbox"/> Trade <input type="checkbox"/> Industry <input type="checkbox"/> Finance <input type="checkbox"/> Public Administration <input type="checkbox"/> Health <input type="checkbox"/> Services <input type="checkbox"/> Handicrafts <input type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Consulting <input type="checkbox"/> __ |
| | | Turnover M € | |
| Company area | | Already a customer | |
| Invitation Demo 1 Demo 2 Interest | | Knows the company | |
| | | Initial contact | |
| | | | |
| FUNCTION | <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> User/Generic |
| ORIGIN | <input type="checkbox"/> Local (50 km) | <input type="checkbox"/> Regional (150 km) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (> 150 km) |
| Notes | | | |
| The Italy above data contains no sensitive information pursuant to Law 675 and amendments thereto concerning personal data privacy. It will, however, be kept with great care and will not be disclosed to third parties, unless closely connected with processing on behalf of Alfa Kappa. | | | |
| The data holder is _____ The data subject may request to view the information concerning it and to have the relative archives cancelled. | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I authorise my data to be used for the purposes indicated above, without disclosing it to third parties, apart from processing on behalf of Alfa Kappa srl. | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I authorise Alfa Kappa srl to send me information and news concerning its activities. | | | |

Relations with the press

Summary

At a fair, relations with the press, particularly with the specialised press, are very intense. Starting from preliminary information and ending with post-exhibition news gathering, attention can remain focused for up to 5-6 months. For this reason, a plan is required in order to inform the market before the event and use the fair itself as an opportunity for consolidating relations with the reference publications. Also in this case, specific skills are required so as not to leave these initiatives to chance. The new media is an additional opportunity that must not be wasted.

A professional and continuative system of relations is recommended in order to keep contacts 'warm' with the press and journalists during the event.

The press is a natural reference point for the exhibition world. This is due to several reasons. To start with, in the economically most important sectors, fairs attract the public eye as they are used to make new product announcements. They are also opportunities for editorial initiatives which, in turn, act as input for large-scale advertising initiatives. In short, there is a relationship of reciprocal attention. It is no coincidence that fair organisers have recently begun buying out specialised publications with the not too concealed objective of adding visibility to events and thus contributing towards expanding the reference market. To tell the truth, not all exhibitions have and receive the same attention from the press. It is not just a question of how important the press is, but it also involves aspects such as the maturity of the sector, the size and organisation of the companies, and so on. Having said this, what must one do to establish a positive and profitable relationship with the press?

Know before acting, adequate skills

Handling the press is like... handling the taxman. In other words, specialised and specialist skills are required. Improvisation is not a good idea. Also because the best results are generally obtained through a continuous relationship with the press. This applies to both advertising (the possibility of obtaining better conditions through negotiation) and press relations. Professional and continuative relations – depending at least on the type of sector and the importance of the company – can be maintained through either in-house structures or specialist agencies. In the latter case, it is always best to work through public/press

relations companies/firms which have a certain knowledge of the sector. Having said this, it should also be remembered that there are substantial differences from sector to sector, and from fair to fair (some fairs pass by almost totally unobserved, others also attract the attention of TV channels). There is a great difference between information about the event and information about individual companies. The organisers generally have a permanent in-house structure which deals with press relations, or they may use external agencies and consultants, but the aim is to attract attention to the event so that the press talks about it, not to focus attention on individual brands, even though, especially as regards exhibitions aimed at the general public, it is always useful to highlight the presence of prestigious brands and new products that will capture most people's attention.

Planning the work

The press relations activities begin a few months beforehand. First of all, the most interesting publications should be identified, bearing in mind that they, especially the specialised press, have their own processing times and one must therefore prepare the documentation in good time. After identifying the publications, it is best to check whether the most interesting ones have any special plans connected with the event. This will help to decide how to optimise handling of the information. When and how must they be supplied? Are there any special advertising initiatives that the company can participate in?

Well before a fair begins, companies must study the work programmes and calendars of their target publications.

Preventive action

It is best to remember that a reasonable objective should be to get the press to start talking about the most interesting new developments 'before' the event takes place. Consequently, people will be interested in visiting the company's stand in order to see the new products they have heard so much about. For this reason, it is useful to give preliminary information, generally a couple of months before the event, if possible, so as to allow the monthly press to publish the news before the fair opens.

Most of the work with the press is done before and during the fair. An articulated information release calendar is often required.

A second communication, instead, can be made by producing a press kit to use during the fair. What should this press kit contain? It could contain a general press release, suitable for both specialists and non-specialists, as well as new product sheets, a corporate information sheet and, if required, a management profile.

The popularity of electronic data supports and the Internet has considerably modified the procedures used to distribute photographic material. It is possible to insert both a CD with a collection of photos and a 'thumbnail' printout with a link to the corporate website in order to allow journalists to download the photos in a suitable resolution (at least 300 dpi).

A higher profile action is to organise a press conference.

When should it be held? It is not possible to give indications that hold true in all cases. It depends on the calendar (for example, for a fair held in Italy during September, a press conference could be held as early as June due to the summer holidays). At some important fairs, the press is allowed in one day before they are opened to the public.

Depending on the type of fair, one can decide whether it is best to have meetings with the press one month before, one week before, one day before or even during the fair.

The more the event is crowded, the greater the need to avoid excessive concentrations of dates.

Action during the exhibition

A fair is always a great opportunity to meet the press. As well as conferences and workshops, one can also organise small meetings, individual interviews with management and theme meetings. Or simply invite journalists for a cocktail or a coffee at the stand, taking the opportunity to give them a press kit or showing them round the stand. The press documentation must be kept at the stand and precise information must be given to stand staff about what to do when a journalist comes (register his/her name and publication, give him/her the press kit and, possibly, inform the person responsible for press relations). If the fair has an efficient press room, other material must be placed in the relative folders: not too much and not too little. A

Certain rules must be followed when creating press documentation. First of all, make sure that interesting information is provided, not advertising information.

A fair can be an opportunity for holding collective or individual meetings.

bookcase overflowing with the press kits of a certain brand is a sign that journalists are uninterested (rightly or wrongly). A bookcase without even one press kit is a sign of scarce attention by company managers. The specialised press often has its own stands at the event. A visit is an extra opportunity for making contact and distributing documentation. Lastly, the company's presence on the web must be considered: both the corporate website and any areas on the event website.

follow up

The follow up, lastly. It is always a good idea to make sure that the newspapers that are of greatest interest to the company have received the documentation, especially if none of their representatives have visited the stand. Consequently, it is best to have an integrated information collection system in order to avoid duplicating the material to distribute or, vice-versa, to avoid an 'information vacuum'.

One principle should always be remembered: journalists are part of the company's virtual community; participation at a fair should not be considered as just an event but also and especially as an opportunity to consolidate and develop positive relationships.



Beyond the fair, beyond opening hours

Summary

Participation in a fair does not end at the stand or even at the exhibition centre. Neither does it end at the canonical opening hours of the pavilions. Participation in a fair can be a good opportunity for the exhibitor to organise other events for business partners, customers, the press and VIPs.

This activity is also potentially capable of amplifying the corporate message and improving its image. Initiatives include business meetings, evening entertainment, dinners at prestigious restaurants or cultural events.

LINK WEB www.fieramilano.it

• Events organisation

Not all fair-related activities take place in the exhibition centre. This should come as no surprise: not all political activities take place in parliament (the opposite is true) or at the headquarters of political parties, not all corporate activities take place in meeting rooms. A fair is often an opportunity to involve various kinds of public in events that are held outside the exhibition centre and/or opening times. This trend has been consolidating for some time, though one must distinguish between the following main types of activity:

- Events organised by the fair organisers
- Events organised by individual exhibitors
- Invitation events
- Events open to the public

The most common form was and remains the *after-hours* meeting, often in the form of an informal invitation, which is held after the exhibition closes in a sufficiently large venue to host the planned number of guests. The meeting can take the form of a cocktail and/or dinner, but it may also be an invitation to a cultural event – theatre, concert or exhibition – or to an entertainment venue. Events of this kind aim to establish a more direct link between the exhibitor and its customers or important guests in a more relaxed atmosphere than that which one normally breathes during a day at the stand. It is useful to note that initiatives of this kind can virtually never be too large or too small. Consequently, they can be held by both small companies and large international groups. They can also focus on homogenous groups – for example, large customers, the press, dealers, individual professional categories – or open to a larger public that can thus exchange knowledge. A gala dinner can be doubly appreciated by guests: it allows

them to talk with the inviting company as well as striking up relations with other guests.

The various formats can be very different, ranging from a simple dinner for a few dozen guests to an evening in prestigious surroundings with hundreds of guests, perhaps also with entertainment. Compatibly with the state of 'physical prostration' of the guests, these events are not infrequently held in a discotheque, cabaret or theatre. What is important is to have a positive correlation between objectives, means and results. In other words: it is better to have an informal evening with 20 guests rather than rent a venue for 400 people which is half empty and in which guests who do not know each other have no idea what to do.

The fair in the local area

For some time now, many events are being promoted not by individual exhibitors but by the fair organisers with the objective, one would say, of 'involving the territory'.

These events may be, for example, concerts attracting thousands or even tens of thousands of participants.

In this case, the aim is to generate positive attention to the event in order to attract the public to the fair and consequently to the stands, or to indirectly communicate with other groups, such as the press and politicians.

Particularly complex events can also project more extended coverage in the city where they are held, with real and proper cultural and social event schedules.

Part of the experience of a fair takes place in the surrounding area with cultural, artistic, show or simply relational initiatives.

Generally speaking, events of this type are held outside the exhibition centre for a number of reasons. First and foremost, organisers set out to offer a 'different' context from the exhibition routine. Secondly, they require particularly prestigious and flexible venues. There are many examples, however, of exhibition centres hosting events of this kind, for example, a cocktail party held immediately after the centre closes at the end of the day.

Communication beyond the fair: the new media

Summary

The web cancels space and time. Also as regards obtaining product information finding out about company activities. To what extent, therefore, is it an alternative to a stand at a fair? After the enthusiasm of recent years, it is evident that new product information is not everything. As regards customer/supplier interaction, participation in a fair continues to be a winning move, but the two forms of communication can become increasingly more complementary and an opportunity for extending the interaction developed during the fair.

LINK WEB www.fieramilano.it

• Marketing & Media

• Online target

The question is plain for all to see. What is the relationship between participation in a fair and presence on the web? To be even clearer: does the explosion of the web make participation in a fair even more useful and necessary? For companies that, as often happens, have budgets which are anything but unlimited, this is certainly not a theoretical question. As can be understood, in the last 8-10 years we have seen everything and the opposite of everything. Fair organisers have sometimes considered the web as a competitor, other times they have seen it as an additional service to offer. For companies, the position of the needle of the balance between the two pans – the virtual one of the web and the real one of the exhibition area – has become something they have had to deal with. One thing is certain: in an increasingly more global market, communication channels have extended, the space-time concept has been transformed, there are more alternatives both for exhibitors and visitors.

The web: an alternative or a complement tool?

What is really happening, then? To say that in *media stat virtus* is not simply a diplomatic expedient. As previously mentioned, it is a question of optimising the needle of the balance as regards return on investment.

Exhibitors' websites

Companies have increased their presence on the web by creating communication and relational sites in order to present themselves and their products, obtain customer feedback and involve the distribution network: a website is seen as vital for corporate image. The *web* is an extraordinary tool, but it must be handled with care

The new forms of communication enter the marketing mix, but fairs preserve a number of exclusive advantages as regards customer/supplier relations. These will therefore be gradually integrated.

in order to prevent a classical error: thinking that after you have published something on your website, your job is finished.

One thing is certain: while nowadays it is impossible for a company with ambitions on the market not to be a part of the Internet (also because its competitors belong to it), is also true that Gresham's Law, according to which 'bad money drives out good, can find itself in its element. Or, if you prefer, when everyone shouts, it is difficult for people to appreciate your singing voice'.

If you are already a company with a strong brand and well-positioned on the market, you will have a good chance of attracting your customers to the fair and your website. If you are not, you must get moving. A nice stand is not enough (though visitors can also meet it by chance) and a nice website is not enough. Beware however. A good corporate website can help convey interest towards potential customers and visitors. However, one must remember that few things arouse so much irritation, and therefore a negative image, as a website that is not updated. A potential visitor to the fair who wishes to obtain information about the company 'Alfa' cannot find a website dating back to the previous year, without any information about its participation at the fair and perhaps with a 'news – press releases' section that has not been updated during the last six months.

The implicit messages of bad information like this can be devastating. Does 'Alfa' still exist? Has it had serious problems in the meantime? Hasn't it got anything new to communicate? Hasn't it any funds to dedicate to its website? Is it on the verge of being sold?

The need for face-to-face contact

The development of the web has increased the information opportunities available to purchasers who can obtain information by simply 'surfing the web'.

The increased availability of information, however, has not affected one fundamental requirement of commercial interaction, that is, the need for direct contact between customer and supplier. Face-

to-face contact is indispensable for discussing sales and support issues, for assessing the professionalism of the counterpart and it can be achieved through participation in fairs or visits by the sales force. Participation in a fair, in particular, is a unique opportunity for interaction because it allows companies to meet new customers in addition to regular ones, and, by setting up the stand and managing interaction, to present not only its product offer but, more in general, its image and capacity of satisfying customer requirements. A fair is also a fundamental opportunity for analysing other exhibitors and comparing one's offer with the market, thus stimulating innovation.

The web as an opportunity for optimising participation in a fair

The web is also an opportunity for fair organisers as it can be used to extend relationships with their customers, that is, exhibitors and visitors, offering new services with high added value, capable of simplifying the complex organisational procedure leading to the participation in a fair and of optimising results. The web can also be an opportunity for exhibitors to extend relationships with their contacts, offering platforms capable of developing interaction before, during and after the event, thus increasing the value of the contact and the commercial value generated during the fair. The fair sector is interested in the development of phenomena such as viral marketing, that is, the transfer of messages between individuals and existing networks of relationships: the message is conveyed by word of mouth or the online media, such as blogs, chats and websites and is based on the existence of a reference community to which all the interlocutors belong. These tools are new as regards the methods of presentation, but they have ancient origins, so much so that fairs themselves are viral communication tools: based on communities comprising manufacturing companies and purchasing companies in a particular sector, they have always encouraged interaction and the exchange of information between subjects, aggregating them inside a well-defined time and space framework. The web, therefore, can no longer be considered as a replacement for fairs, but rather as a complement and an ally.

The web is an opportunity for optimising the relationships established during the fair, extending them well after the fair closes



Going abroad

Summary

The general principles do not vary whether one participates in a domestic or a foreign fair. Operating conditions, however, change. Various aspects become considerably more complex, but if a supplier wishes to enter the international markets, it must move closer to its customers.

Planning, therefore, must begin well in advance in order to avoid last-minute surprises that can unexpectedly multiply costs.

LINK WEB www.fieramilano.it

• Fiera Milano abroad

• Accademia Fondazione Fiera Milano

• Fondazione Fiera Milano

Participation in a foreign fair offers new opportunities and, naturally, a few extra problems. Obviously, the scale of the problems varies enormously depending on the country, company organisation, and the geographic, economic and cultural distances. The more specialised a company, the more probable it is that it already exhibits or intends to exhibit at a foreign fair.

However, it should be considered that today, in a globalised world, nothing is the same as before. Companies that have participated in certain events for ten or fifteen years (or even longer!) know that new international scenarios have opened, that new markets have emerged and, therefore, that the exhibition panorama has become more and more articulated.

Consequence: it is best to frequently reconsider one's choice to participate in international events (both in Italy and abroad) in the light of developments in the markets and corporate strategies.

Planning inside and outside the company

For these reasons, a preliminary analysis/verification phase should take place during which information can be collected concerning:

- the potential reference market of the fair
- participants in previous editions and visitor distribution
- visitor typology (consumers, professionals, companies)
- international importance of the event
- presence of competitors

Similarly, in-house verification is useful as regards:

- the position of the event in the light of corporate strategies
- the competitive capacity of the products that one intends to present (it is sometimes better to wait for the subsequent year if the current range is weak)
- capacity of support for the reference markets (presenting excellent products on foreign markets but not being able to provide support is not a good idea)
- the reasons for participating in a fair: presentation of new products, search for customers, dealers or technological partners
- product compliance with legislation governing the reference markets

At financial level, one should check whether any subsidies or forms of intervention are provided by:

- national legislation
- regional programmes
- chambers of commerce and export promotion institutes

‘Collective’ participations

A form of participation in events, especially those held abroad, devised to reduce organisational costs and operative risks, is the ‘collective’ participation. In these cases, a body ‘associates’ exhibitors and acts as a single interface between them and the organiser, providing the participating companies with on-site services and directives. This form is particularly useful for companies wishing to ‘test’ new markets, companies planning a small-scale participation and that wish to reduce the fixed costs associated with the organisational aspects of the participation in a fair. Sometimes, the promoting bodies also organise communication initiatives and activities, contacts with customers, operating with the relative organisations.

Typical promoters of ‘collective’ participations are trade associations, chambers of commerce and specialised associated organisations.

‘Collective’ participations, that is, associated forms of participation, can be an especially good card to play for small enterprises and companies wishing to ‘gain experience’ in new markets whilst reducing the risks.

A few suggestions

- Trade associations, Foreign Trade Institute offices and Italian chambers of commerce abroad can provide information about markets, legislation and, in some cases, also market intelligence. These aspects, however, can also be checked with the fair organisers, at least as regards the most authoritative events.
- First-hand verification by visiting a previous edition is useful for collecting information about the fair and, for visitors, checking problems and possibilities of on-site support.
- A 'collective' participation helps reduce risks and organisational costs. One should, however, check what is 'included' and what is 'excluded'.
- Going abroad with documents written only in Italian is not very useful of course. Check the quality of your documents (signs, brochures, website, press releases) at the fair. In the largest markets, however, it is best not to use English alone if the main reason for participating in a fair is to enter or consolidate a specific market (this does not apply to specialised fairs mainly attracting international visitors).
- Your participation in the foreign fair can also be an opportunity for informing your regular interlocutors in Italy (customers, journalists)¹.

¹ Many initiatives can be taken: simple courtesy information, press releases, informing your interlocutors that, subject to availability, the company can book hotel rooms for them, as well as invitations with hospitality in special cases.

Check-list for foreign fairs

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| General info | ✓ | Exhibition information |
| | | Participants at the last edition – Exhibitors /Visitors |
| | | Reference markets |
| | | Infrastructures, travel times |
| Direct costs | | Costs of stand area and connected services |
| | | Costs of stands (local or with transport and fittings from Italy) |
| | | Local staff required |
| | | Staff from headquarters, allowance, travel, board & lodging |
| Collateral costs | | Guest invitations |
| | | Document updates/translations |
| | | Press activities |
| Products | | Technical and customs regulations |
| | | Comparison with competitors |
| Deadlines | | Information collection |
| | | Conditions of participation |
| | | Delivery of local promotional material (exhibition catalogues, signs, local advertising, etc.) |
| | | Stand assembly and dismantling |
| | | Payments |
| Organisation at the fair | | Fair press office (contacts, checks) |
| | | Photographs, reproductions, interpreters, stationery |
| | | Fair catering, availability of rooms |
| | | Info about conventions/conferences that can be attended |

Coping with emergencies

Summary

Banal problems that are easy to solve at headquarters can become nightmares when attending faraway fairs.

This is even truer if foreign fairs are involved.

Planning for unexpected events is one of the skills of a good company fair organiser. Here are some simple suggestions.

Participation in a fair generates a process that can last up to a year and that usually requires 5-6 months work, at least for the most demanding events (those in which the stand must also be prepared). However, even a small problem is enough to create widespread panic at the last moment. Especially because you are 'playing away'. What would normally be routine operations can become insurmountable barriers. In most cases, carefully checking everything that is required does the trick.

Have you prepared the stationery, has the stock of drinks been ordered (or do you know where to procure them)? Is there a first aid kit?

In some cases, a 'back-up plan' should be prepared if something goes wrong, especially if you are far away from headquarters and, even more especially, if you are abroad.

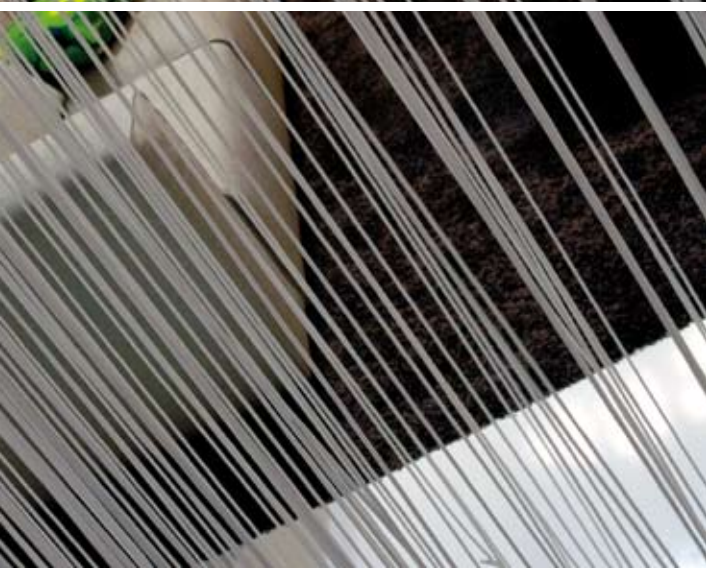
What to do if someone falls ill the day before? What to do if a hostess fails to turn up for some reason? How to cope with unexpected expenses? What to do in case of failure of the computer, video projector or data network that you use for making presentations and demonstrations?

The dress rehearsal

Especially if the stand is of a certain complexity, it may be useful to hold 'dress rehearsals', consistently with the available time during the final assembly stages. These activities (sometimes called dry runs) can be used to make sure, for example, that a video presentation is not obstructed by elements inside or outside the stand, that the 'demos' and presentations work correctly, that there are no irritating lights on the displays. In other words: that no unexpected events can occur.

Last-minute checks

| | STANDARD | VARIANTS ABROAD |
|--|---|---|
| Contracts and technical documents | Keep a copy of everything you need. The documentation should also be accessible electronically | Customs documents where required |
| Safety | Check conformity and if any certificates are required | Check room regulations, where relevant Visas, health regulations |
| Availability | List of phone/cell phone numbers of staff at the fair and of supporting staff who may need to be contacted (copy also at the company or accessible via the web) | |
| Stationery | Availability of material for orders, customer registrations, meetings, etc. | Check the material written in foreign languages |
| ID tags, business cards | Check for availability, where applicable | Material written in foreign languages, if required |
| Useful contacts | Technical offices at the exhibition centre Hotels Travel agencies/Airlines Taxis Security | |
| Accommodation | Booking confirmation, rates, conditions, copies of vouchers | |
| Travel | Copy of daily plans, departure schedule, planes, trains, shuttle buses Copy of tickets | Road maps, useful phone numbers |



The costs' check list

FAIR COSTS

Area rental

Power

STAND COSTS

Design

Fittings (purchase or hire)

Graphics

Audio/video

Stationery

Animation

Decorations/signs

STAND MANAGEMENT

Telecommunications

Technological services

Hostesses

Stand catering

Security

STAFF

Travel

Accommodation

Overtime/allowances

MARKETING/PROMOTION

Documentation

Web costs

Press relations

Press events

Customer events

Market surveys

Hospitality

Stand gadgets

Photographic service

Publications

Advertising/signs

Direct mail shots/invitations

Ticket purchases

Exhibitions/shows for guests

Supporting initiatives at the fair

Checklists

Summary

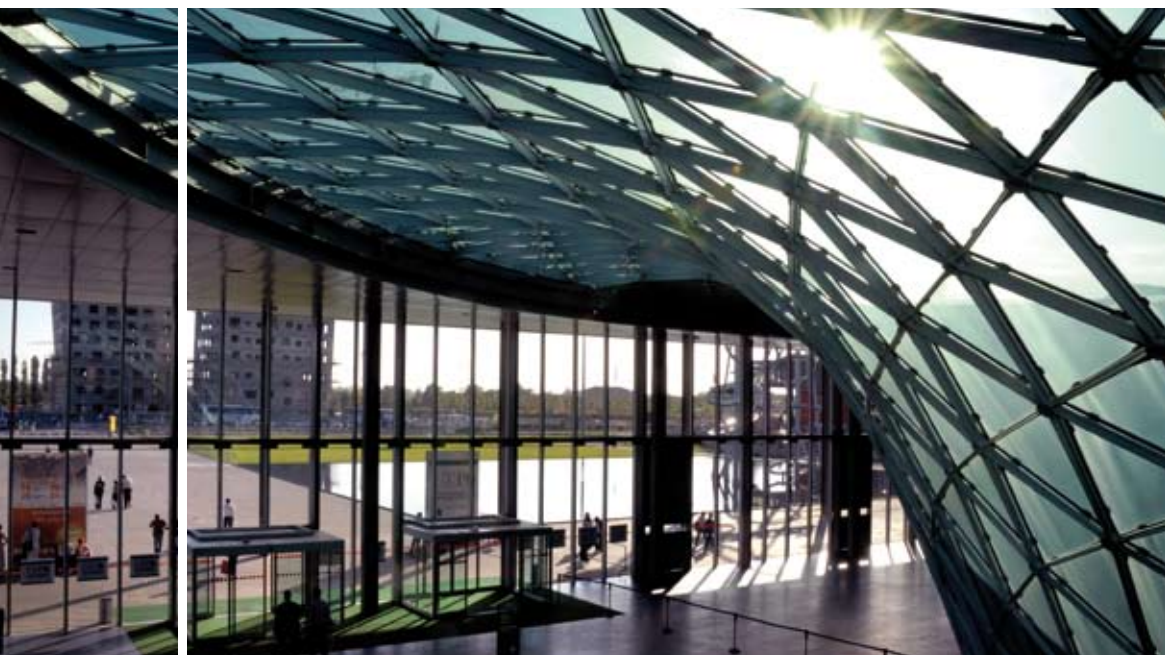
Along with the detailed sheets, two tools can be used to collect information on the field; the daily log and the final summary. These tools can be fine-tuned according to the type of fair/exhibition.

Every event has a cost and results. The cost/benefit ratio of the participation in a fair is often analysed weeks after the event. This means running the risk of being unable to perform detailed analysis. Especially as regards stands of a certain size with many contacts and a great deal of information to report.

It may therefore also be useful to have a simple log in which the most important information is registered every day. Dynamic temporal comparison can also give useful information as regards which are the most profitable days. A synthetic data sheet can also contain assessments that can be used to analyse costs/benefits, to decide if and how to participate in subsequent editions, what to improve, etc..

The model shown below is totally indicative, as various typologies of fair and participation methods (business/consumer, institutional/product) may require different tools.

The 'daily logs', used for the final report together with the evaluations of the participants, can also be varied. The one shown below, therefore, is purely an example.



Checklist

| Fair of _____ | | | | |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| PERIOD | | | DAYS | |
| | | Total | Operators | Consumers |
| Estimated visitors | | | | |
| - to the fair | | | | |
| - to the pavilion (if available) | | | | |
| - to the stand | | | | |
| <i>Day 1</i> | | | | |
| <i>Day 2</i> | | | | |
| <i>Day 3</i> | | | | |
| <i>Day 4</i> | | | | |
| <i>Day 5</i> | | | | |
| | | | | |
| N. 'Hot' customer contacts | | | % of total | |
| N. Generic contacts registered | | | % of total | |
| N. Prospective customers registered | | | % of total | |
| N. VIP/Export contacts | | | N° Press contacts | |
| Origin and distance | Province (50 km) | Region (150 km) | Other (> 150 km) | |
| Visitor typology | Managers | Technicians | Users/Generic | |
| N. customers invited/ that visited | | | | |
| Presence at meetings | Company/Fair | Observation | | |
| a | | | | |
| b | | | | |
| c | | | | |
| Overall judgement (from 1 to 5) | | Notes: | | |
| - <i>Visitors</i> | | | | |
| - <i>Customers</i> | | | | |
| - <i>Exhibitors</i> | | | | |
| - <i>Quality</i> | | | | |

Daily checklist

| Fair of _____ | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| DAILY DATA SHEET | | Progressive day | |
| Estimated visitors: | | Type of visitors to stand | |
| - to the fair | | - Current customers | |
| - to the pavilion | | - Prospective customers | |
| - to the stand | | - Others | |
| 'Hot' customer contacts | | Province | |
| Generic contacts | | Region | |
| VIP/Press/Export contacts | | Other/Abroad | |
| Visitor typology | Managers | Technicians | Users/Generic |
| Overall atmosphere of the day | | | |
| Quality assessment of visitors | | | |
| Competitors' initiatives | A | | |
| | B | | |
| | C | | |
| | D | | |
| Meetings, special initiatives at the fair | | | |
| Perceived comments on the event | | | |
| Perception of resonance | | | |
| Particularly interesting meetings | Company/Organisation | Observation | |
| a | | | |
| b | | | |
| c | | | |
| Compiled by: | | | |

Conclusions: the fractal fair

Summary

Is the fair an event or a network of events? In a physically and temporally concentrated space, the effort of all company staff must be optimised. Planning becomes essential to understand the interrelations between the various pieces of this extraordinary puzzle.

For some, this book will have provided indications that they were already aware of. It has given food for thought to others, perhaps. For others still – particularly for the many company managers that up to now have been more spectators than actors at fairs – it may have opened up new perspectives. At least, we hope so. The aim is to show how a fair, also from the exhibitor's point of view, is a process. In fact, it is a sum of processes that are often linked together. In short, a fair is a fractal event with decomposing and recomposing geometrical features. Fairs contain a benign paradox. They are one of the oldest activities in the history of business, but in the last ten years they have also proved to be one of the most modern, at least of those subject to more rapid innovation. This is due to changes in markets (globalisation), technologies (web communication) and transport. Recipes that hold true for all, if they exist, they would have little sense, but there can be a method and, therefore, a way of avoiding errors.

A complex system of relations

The first and most evident error to avoid is to consider participation in a fair as an end in itself. Whether it is a large international fair with hundreds of thousands of visitors or a more modest cash-and-carry market, there is always a set of relationships between several activities. Being able to identify them, add value to them and connect them is part of the success of the event.

Participating in a fair is a dual 'system'.

Once because it must be the outcome of a choice that is compatible with corporate strategies, the outcome of analysis of the market, of potential and of available alternatives (other fairs, other channels). Twice because it is not only a question of deciding 'whether' to participate but also 'how' to participate. In this 'sum of processes', exhibiting at a fair involves activating forms of communication concerning all the company's stakeholders: customers, business and technical partners, the press, opinion

makers, up to politician and the institutions.

In this 'system of processes', relations with exhibition centres and/or organisers (the two figures are drawing closer and closer together for large European events) are increasingly becoming an important feature. Because participating in a fair does not only involve occupying exhibition space, but also grasping the opportunity for improving the quality of relationship between the company and the market.

And this means that fairs are required to provide new services. Not only support to participations at fairs but also and especially to marketing or micro-marketing activities inside and outside the fair. For this reason, the various company functions must work together closely on a project that is never divided into airtight chambers. Though this does not guarantee success, implementing it means you are already on the right road.



Accademia di Management Fieristico (Academy of Trade Fairs Management) of Fondazione Fiera Milano

In 2002, **Fondazione Fiera Milano**, the controlling shareholder of Gruppo Fiera Milano, founded **Accademia di Management Fieristico**, the first tangible tool for training professional fair operators at national and European level. It is a **business unit** dedicated to the promotion and direct implementation of training activities and projects, developing professional skills in the entire supply chain and, more generally, to diffusing fair and entrepreneurial culture in Italy, Europe and in the world.

With the creation of Accademia, Fondazione Fiera Milano has rationalised and given additional drive to the **training, research and guidance** activities that Fiera Milano had actually begun twenty years before. Accademia protects the specific nature and identity of professional fair operators by defining standards of skills and trades inside and outside the system, monitoring existing skill levels, building **development paths** and certifying competences and 'competence based' **development** services, such as **guidance, training, evaluation and the balance of skills**.

Of even greater value is the fact that Accademia operates inside one of the most modern and largest exhibition centres in the world, created by Fondazione Fiera Milano by converting the Milan exhibition system and inaugurated, with the first exhibitions, on 31st March 2005.

The first permanent training centre in Europe for professional operators in the fair sector, Accademia performs its activities with the ambitious objective of **becoming the benchmark of fair culture**, contributing towards creating new professional outlets for young people and qualified employment in a sector featuring a strong demand for professional skills.

Focused on professionals in the sector, companies that use fairs as a marketing tool and young people who wish to enter the exhibition and congress world, Accademia offers **targeted training** and develops its activities at various levels.

Action areas

- Development and updating of professional skills in the entire fair sector.
- Creation of new professional figures.
- Innovative training paths for the managerial use of the 'fair tool' by SME's.
- Promotion of the importance of the trade fair system and initiatives aimed at supporting fair culture
- Research & Development activities on fair professions.

Recipients

- Italian and foreign trade fair organisers and exhibition centre managers who wish to acquire specific managerial and technical skills in the exhibition field (only on the basis of specific partnership agreements).
- Italian and foreign SME's and institutions responsible for promoting their development that wish to analyse the potential of the fair tool and optimise their presence at fairs.
- Young people who wish to enter the fair-congress sector.
- Economic, political, financial and cultural institutions.

A look at Fiera Milano

Fondazione Fiera Milano

The Foundation performs promotional activities and projects, implements economic, cultural and scientific development initiatives, and carries out infrastructural redevelopment and consolidation projects.

This the mission of Fondazione Fiera Milano, an organisation which defines itself as a **development foundation**, a private subject working on economic and territorial development projects, side-by-side with the institutions and in the public interest. One of these – the most well-known – was the **transformation of the Milan exhibition system**.

In recent years, **Fondazione Fiera Milano** set itself the objective of giving its fair a new infrastructure and ended up by building the new Fieramilano exhibition centre at Rho (Milan, Italy).

After transforming its fair 'container', the foundation now focuses on the 'content' by implementing initiatives to support enterprises, the fair market user basin, and activities aimed at developing the local area.

Established on 7th February 2000, Fondazione Fiera Milano is the controlling shareholder of Gruppo Fiera Milano and Sviluppo Sistema Fiera spa.

Its activities are currently divided into two separate sectors:

- the first is the **fair sector**. Eleven companies, headed by Fiera Milano spa, offer organisers, exhibitors and visitors the services they need to participate in fairs and congresses.
- The second sector is the **large-scale projects engineering and contracting** service for infrastructures and local area development: a recently launched activity carried out by the subsidiary Sviluppo Sistema Fiera spa.

The income from fair activities and that generated by large-scale projects and local area development is posted to the assets of the foundation and then reinvested in other projects that are consistent with its mission as a development foundation.

The fair supply chain

This comprises the parent company, **Fiera Milano spa**, which has been quoted in the STAR segment of the Italian stock exchange since December 2002, and **11 companies**. Of the latter, **six are involved in the organisation of exhibitions and congresses**

(Fiera Milano International, Fiera Milano ExpoCts, Fiera Milano Tech, Fiera Milano TL.TI Expo, Fiera Milano Congressi and HM Global, a joint-venture between Fiera Milano and Deutsche Messe AG set up to develop fairs on the Chinese market) while the other **five deliver services** (Fiera Milano Nolostand for fittings, Fiera Milano Food System for catering, Fiera Milano Editore and Edizioni Specializzate for specialised publishing, and Fiera Milano Expopage for web services).

Exhibitions and congresses

Fiera Milano hosts approximately **eighty** professional events a year, which attract **30,000 exhibitors and 4.5-5 million visitors**. The Milan exhibition centre is present in many sectors with professional events of international level involving the traditional areas of **Italian style** (fashion and furnishings-design), as well as machine tools in their numerous industrial applications, the electrical-electronic sector, Information & Communication Technology, tourism, services and industrial transport. In 2007, it held one exhibition in each of three new sectors of great economic importance for Italy: architecture-building, food and health.

Fiera Milano has significantly consolidated its position in the **trade publishing** sector by purchasing seven well-known engineering, electronics and automation publications from the VNU group and, in 2008, another three publications dedicated to the ho.re. ca. sector from the ES group. These new purchases are added to those already published by Fiera Milano Editore in the sphere of design, homewares and jewellery.

Fiera Milano also has access to the largest congress centre in Italy, the **Milano Convention Centre (MIC)** managed by Fiera Milano Congressi and by now the leading player in the international congress market.

The most advanced exhibition centre in the world

Fiera Milano partly owes its success to its capacity of continual renewal in order to keep up with the evolution of the promotional and marketing requirements of companies that use the fair as a fundamental element of their commercial and image policies. A renewal that has never failed to take place in more than 80 years of activity. The last and most demanding act of this continual renewal was the **realisation of the new Fieramilano**

exhibition centre at Rho and the **redevelopment of the original Fieramilanocity exhibition centre**, the future activities of which will focus more and more on the congress sector. The project to extend the Fieramilanocity Congress Centre was recently approved. This involves renovating and **integrating Portello pavilions 5 and 6** with the MIC in Gattamelata road (Milan, Italy). The new congress centre will be integrated with the **Fieramilano Rho (Milan, Italy) complex**, inaugurated in 2005, and built in just over two years – a real and proper record considering the scope and complexity of the structure – thanks to an investment of approximately 800 million euros which was total self-funded by Fondazione Fiera Milano. The centre has record-breaking dimensions and exceptional **flexibility** of use, **technological** and visitor wellbeing **fittings**, total **usability** of the spaces and an **attractive appearance**. With its **345,000** square metres of covered exhibition space (plus **60,000** square metres of outdoor exhibition space), eight huge pavilions practically without columns, 74 meeting rooms 10 of which in the Stella Polare Convention Centre, 84 refreshment points, 13,000 visitor parking spaces and 3,000 for exhibitors, a metro station (and in 2008 also a railway station) inside the exhibition centre, the new Fiera Milano sets the international standards for the exhibition sector.

EXPO 2015

On **31st March 2008**, the Bureaux International des Exposition awarded the organisation of the 2015 edition of the Universal Expo to Milan. It is an **epoch-making event** for the future of the city and the entire metropolitan area, an opportunity for a general and widespread relaunch of the economic and social potential of one of the most dynamic and populated – almost 10 million inhabitants – areas in Europe. The fulcrum of this great event will be the new Fieramilano and the surrounding areas. The entire city is already **involved** in a radical transformation that is taking place through a new renaissance involving futuristic projects, such as the Citylife construction on the site of the old exhibition centre, the new headquarters of Regione Lombardia, Città della Moda, and the redevelopment of large industrial areas, such as Alfa Romeo at Portello, Bovisa, Carlo Erba in Piazzale Maciachini and the Falck areas in Sesto San Giovanni.

Sandro Frigerio, a professional journalist and communication consultant, has thirty years experience in the Italian and foreign exhibition world.

He has analysed the sector in the sphere of publishing activities and working alongside companies and organisers, thus developing comparative knowledge from different viewpoints.

He has written publications about the fair sector in collaboration with Fondazione Fiera Milano, including "Impatto Fiera" (2006).

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