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AGRIBUSINESS SERIES

Export Handbooks

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY PARTICIPATE IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE SHOWS

IICA

Inter-American Program for the Promotion of Trade, Agribusiness and Food Safety

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Export Handbooks

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY PARTICIPATE IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE SHOWS

Inter-American Program for the Promotion of Trade,
Agribusiness and Food Safety

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FOREWORD

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), through its Agribusiness Competitiveness Directorate, seeks to assist countries in identifying and taking advantage of market opportunities, and works to support public and private institutions in promoting the competitive development of agribusiness.

In January 2004, IICA launched the *Inter-American Program for the Promotion of Trade, Agribusiness and Food Safety,* headquartered in Miami, Florida, USA. This initiative emerged with the mandate to provide technical cooperation in order to strengthen the entrepreneurial capacity of small and medium-sized agribusinesses in IICA's member countries, help them take advantage of trade opportunities and provide information to facilitate decision-making processes in business.

The activities carried out to date, both by the Directorate of Agribusiness Competitiveness and by the Inter-American Program, have helped to identify a set of specific needs among small and medium-sized agribusinesses in the Americas. These needs have been classified as "priority issues" and are analyzed in the IICA publications entitled **Agribusiness Series**, with the aim of contributing to strengthen the competitiveness of the hemisphere's agro-entrepreneurs. The Export Handbooks are practical documents aimed at giving readers a clearer overview of what is involved in operating in international markets, and providing the necessary tools to help them succeed in their business negotiations.

This handbook, entitled How to successfully participate in International Trade Shows, describes what an entrepreneur needs to do before, during and after an international fair, in order to achieve his or her proposed objectives.

We trust that this publication will provide a useful and permanent resource for small and medium-sized agribusiness companies, and reiterate IICA's continued commitment to strengthening their competitiveness and improving their living conditions.

Sincerely,

Miguel García Winder

Director of Agribusiness Competitiveness
Inter-American Program for the Promotion of Trade, Agribusiness and Food Safety

IICA Office in Miami

INTRODUCTIÓN

Nowadays, the companies of the agrifood sector are faced with a global trade environment that is forcing them to enter the international market in order to boost their sales, increase their profit margins, use resources more efficiently and reduce the vulnerability of operating in a single market.

In this context, international trade shows, in which suppliers from all over the world, from one or more sectors, converge at the same time and in the same place, are an excellent opportunity for companies to strengthen or adjust their marketing strategies, carry out market research or accelerate their entry into a new market.

The purpose of this guide, which complements previous publications of the "Agribusiness Series, Export Handbooks", is to provide readers with a practical tool that will help them prepare for an international fair, perform successfully during the event and carry out appropriate follow-up afterwards.

This document is written thinking of companies that attend a show with two objectives in mind: the short-term goal of establishing contacts and carrying out market research with first-hand information; and a medium-term goal of increasing sales by identifying potential customers.

The handbook has been structured as a five-step guide, with recommendations and examples that will help companies to prepare effectively to participate in a fair.

The first step involves setting achievable and measurable goals, and various examples are offered in this respect. The second is to select the right show or exhibit based on the company's proposed objectives, using a series of selection criteria. The third step emphasizes the importance of arriving solidly prepared for the fair, and covers aspects such as the budget, travel logistics, rental of a space at the show venue, training the company representatives, decorating the stand and others.

The fourth step refers to the participation in the event itself and, among other things, discusses the role of the company's representatives and their capacity to attract and retain potential clients. The fifth step refers to follow-up, the right time to begin these activities and the elements to be considered.

Finally, by way of a summary, the handbook includes a Checklist of Activities, beginning 12 months prior to the exhibit, covering the actual day(s) of the event, and then the follow-up stage. Objectives are the starting point for a company's possible participation in a show or fair and are what will determine its subsequent actions. In setting goals, it is important to bear in mind that a fair is not simply a place to sell products.

STEP I.
SETTING PARTICIPATION GOALS

Objectives are the starting point for company's possible participation in a show or fair and are what will determine its subsequent actions. In setting goals, it is important to bear in mind that fair is not simply a place to sell products.

Fairs are the ideal events to find out about the latest promotional and marketing trends, and discover the latest novelties in equipment and packaging, presentations and technologies. In addition - and this is extremely important – they are useful places to find out what the competition is doing, make business contacts and interact with clients and consumers.

To summarize, fairs are the ideal scenario for carrying out market intelligence and finding out about technological developments. With proper planning, they can be the best place to gather valuable information in a very short time.

Here is a list of objectives that a company may consider when deciding to participate in a show:

- Find new clients
- Identify agents or distributors
- Penetrate/explore a new market
- Introduce/validate a new product
- Strengthen customer loyalty/raise the company's profile (visibility)
- Promote a product
- Position or reposition a company brand
- Carry out market intelligence and technological monitoring
- Increase sales

When defining the goals you must ensure that these can be achieved with the financial, human and logistical resources available to the company. Therefore, it is important to set priorities: what do we really wish to achieve? We must also make an effort to set objectives that can be quantified.

The following boxes show three examples of possible objectives and the means to quantify these.

Example 1.
Identify new clients

To quantify this objective, the first thing to do is decide how many people will represent the company at the fair. Secondly, determine how many hours the event will last. Finally, estimate the number of visitors who can be attended to per hour. An average visit by a potential customer may last around 15 minutes, in which case 4 people could be attended to per hour.

If the company is to be represented by just one person, who can attend to 4 people per hour, and the event lasts 24 hours (3 days of 8 hours each), the company could not aspire to have more than 96 prospects. And, if we consider that the flow of visitors will not be the same at all hours and that the representative is unlikely to spend 100% of his/her time in the stand, a more realistic figure would be 75 prospects.

Example 2.
Assess the possible acceptance of a new product by offering samples for tasting

If two company representatives participate and each one offers 4 samples for tasting per hour, during a 24-hour event distributed over 3 days, a total of 192 samples of the new product would be tasted. When offering visitors samples to taste, we recommend preparing a product evaluation sheet, so that the company can obtain the opinion of potential clients about their products.

Example 3.
Obtain new orders for products already on the market

In this case it is advisable to define how many orders you expect to obtain during the event and plan to distribute these according to the number of representatives. Once you have established your sales targets, remember that in general selling to new clients is not a simple process, and that it is not normal to clinch the deal at the first meeting.

STEP 2.
SELECTING THE TRADE SHOW

Shows certainly provide great opportunities to contact a large number of people, but the challenge lies in determining which ones are really of interest to the company. Entrepreneurs should therefore devote sufficient time to researching the event that they plan to attend and make sure that it is appropriate or useful to their company.

Before choosing a fair, it is important to remember that although a general classification exists, show organizers, in their desire to respond to the public's needs, often organize events that combine various elements of different types of fairs. Below we list the most widely recognized show categories.

Show categories

Type of Visitor	Geographic Area	Periodicity	Sector
Professionals: Shows organized by and for members of a specific industry or sector i.e. they are not open to the general public. The products exhibited are not for retail sale.	Local: How attended mainly by visitors and exhibitors from the city or area in which the event is being held. However, attendees may include national or international companies interested in selling or promoting their products in that city or region.	Annual: Once a year	General: Fairs attended by visitors and exhibitors from different sectors. These are non-specialist fairs.

Show categories

Type of Visitor	Geographic Area	Periodicity	Sector
Open to the public: Shows that target consumers, so access is not restricted. Normally, the products and samples exhibited are for sale. Mixed: Fairs open to both trade/industry members and the general public, either throughout the event or during a part of it.	National: Fair attended by visitors and exhibitors from all over the country. In some cases, attended by international exhibitors interested in selling their products in the country hosting the fair. International: Normally trade fairs attended by visitors and exhibitors from different countries.	Biennial: Every two years	Sectoral: Specialist shows focusing on a specific sector; e.g., agricultural products, food and beverages, equipment.

Criteria for selecting a show

Choosing a show should be based on a number of criteria to help determine which type of event is best suited to the company's needs. Below are some aspects to consider when making a selection:

Type of fair: Is it a sectoral or general fair? Is it a professional trade show or is it open to the general public? Or both? Is it a local, national or international event?

Geographic area: Where is it being held? Does the location respond to the company's objectives? Will it help the company to contact a varied range of international clients, regardless of the venue?

Date: Is the date convenient for the company? In the case of fresh or seasonal products, are there sufficient samples and are those samples appropriate?

Visitors: It is helpful to have an idea of the number of people who visited previous shows, including the percentage of nationals and foreigners; the type of visitors (producers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers); and the sector(s) represented (fresh produce, processed products, supermarkets, food services, organic produce, private brands, etc.).

Exhibitors: It is useful to know how many exhibitors participated in previous events, including the percentage of nationals and foreigners; the type of exhibitors (producers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers); the sector represented (fresh produce, processed products, supermarkets, food services); and whether previous shows were attended by companies that compete with your company's products or rather that complemented them.

Background and periodicity: Is the show well recognized in your sector? How many shows have taken place? Has the number of visitors and exhibitors increased or decreased at recent events?

The show organizers: Are the organizers internationally recognized? Do they have experience in organizing fairs in their sector? Do they have "pulling power"? Do they provide solid promotional campaigns? Are they accessible? Knowing the show organizers and having an opportunity to contact them is helpful and facilitates access to pre-show information.

Promotional activities: How is the fair being promoted by the organizers? What type of publicity is used? Is the show advertised nationally, internationally or both? In general, the organizers of these types of fairs publish information online, but it is also useful to listen to the recommendations of organizations that promote exports and the opinions of companies that have participated in previous events.

The following box lists some of the leading international shows featuring fresh and processed products, along with their respective e-mail addresses. If you are interested in finding out about other national or regional fairs, or those aimed at specific sectors, you can visit the following web site:

Type of product	Show
Fresh produce	• Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Fresh Summit, United States. Annual trade show specializing in fresh produce. The venue or host city changes each year. www.pma.com • Canadian Produce Marketing Associations (CPMA), Canada. Annual trade show specializing in fresh products. The venue changes each year. www.cpma.ca • Fruit Logistica, Germany. Largest international trade show in the world for produce marketing. Held annually in Berlin. www.fruitlogistica.com
Processed Products	• Alimentaria Barcelona, Spain. Biennial trade fair, specializing in processed products. Additional events are held in Mexico and Lisbon. www.alimentaria.com • ANUGA, Germany. Trade fair, biennial event featuring processed products. www.anuga.com • Expo Antad, organized by the National Association of Self-Service and Department Stores. Annual trade fair specializing in food and beverages for the Mexican market. www.antad.org.mx • Expo Comida Latina, United States. Annual trade fair featuring Latin American ethnic products for the United States market. Three events are held annually. www.expo-comida-latina.com • Fancy Food Show, United States. Annual trade show specializing in gourmet products. www.specialtyfood.com • Fispal Latino, United States. Annual trade fair specializing in Latin American ethnic products for the US market, held in Miami. www.fispalusa.com • FoodEx, Japan. Annual trade fair specializing in food and beverages for the Japanese market. www.jma.or.jp/foodex • FMI Show. Organized by the Food Marketing Institute. Annual trade show featuring food and beverages. www.fmi.org • Asian International Exhibition of Food & Drink, Hotel, Restaurant & Foodservice Equipment, Supplies Services HOFEX, China, Hong Kong. Annual trade show specializing in food and beverages. www.hofex.com • IFE Americas Food and Beverages, United States. Annual trade show featuring processed products. Held in Miami. www.americasfoodandbeverage.com • Private Label Trade Show (PLMA), United States. Annual trade fair specializing in private brands. www.plma.com • SIAL, Paris. Biennial trade fair specializing in processed products. www.sial.fr. SIAL also organizes shows in Canada, Mercosur and China.
Organic produce	• Biofach, Germany. Annual trade fair specializing in organic produce. Major international event. Shows are also held in the United States, Japan, China and Brazil. www.biofach.de

STEP 3.
PREPARING FOR THE TRADE SHOW

www.feriasalimentarias.com
Good preparation has a decisive impact on achieving the proposed objectives. Therefore, once your company has decided to participate in a particular show, it is essential to begin preparing for the event. We recommend that this process begin one year before the date of the fair.

Below we describe the most important aspects of preparation for a trade show.

Step 3.1 Preparing the budget

The first task is to prepare the budget, and here it is important to consider the following items: the stand, the company representatives who will attend the fair, any external personnel that need to be hired, promotional messages (faxes, e-mails), advertising materials (brochures, etc.), the product to be introduced or tasted/sampled, publicity (magazines, etc.) and customer service. It is a good idea to include 'unforeseens' as a budget item, allocating at least 5% of the budget to this item.

To help you prepare the budget we present the following example, which includes the categories mentioned previously, as well as their different components.

Budget for Participating in a Show

Category	Cost per item	Cost per category
Stand		_____
Space rental	_____	
Design and construction	_____	
Furniture	_____	
Decoration	_____	
Services	_____	
Electricity	_____	
Telephone	_____	
Cleaning	_____	
Securit	_____	
Others	_____	
Transport of materials	_____	
Company personnel		_____
Air tickets		
Hotel		
Food		
External staff		_____
Translators		
Assistants		
Promotional messages		_____
Mail		
Fax		
Promotional materials		_____
Brochures and catalogues		
Passes/invitations for clients		
Products to sample or taste		_____
Product		
Shipping		
Publicity		_____
Fair Catalogue		
Magazines and other media		
Client hospitality		_____
Meals		
Others		_____
Training sessions		
Unforeseens		_____
TOTAL		_____

Step 3.2 Selecting individuals to represent the company

Before selecting the staff that will represent the company at the fair, it is important to remember that they will provide potential clients with their first impression of the company. Accordingly, and bearing in mind the company's goals, the representatives should meet the following basic requirements:

- Speak the language of the country of destination or another language required to communicate directly with potential clients. If the company's own staff does not have these skills, consider hiring an interpreter.
- Have a thorough knowledge of the product(s) exhibited, the technological processes involved in their production, regulations, any certifications obtained (quality, health and safety, HACCP, GAP, GMP), customs duties and terms of entry into the target market, and the company's objectives in that market.
- Have the authority to negotiate on behalf of the company.
- Have an extrovert personality to be able to attract and retain potential clients, without pressuring them.
- Have previous experience in international shows and travel.

We recommend that at least two people per company participate in the fair. This means that someone will always be available to deal with visitors at the stand, while the other person scouts for potential clients among the other exhibitors and carries out market intelligence.

Step 3.3 Arranging travel logistics

Having selected the fair and the people who will participate in it, the next step is to find out about entry requirements (visas) to the country of destination. As the requirements for international travel become more complex, we recommend beginning this process at least two months in advance.

Once you have completed the formalities for entering the market of destination, proceed to reserve airline tickets and hotels. If the reservations are made well in advance, the costs are generally less. Remember: leaving things until the last minute often has an additional cost. It is also worth checking whether the show organizers have made arrangements with an airline or hotel chain to offer more attractive rates.

When participating in a major international show that is normally attended by large numbers of people, we recommend that you make the reservations at least eight months in advance, since direct flights and hotels close to the convention center or venue are quickly sold out.

To avoid setbacks and facilitate your stay at your place of destination we recommend the following:

- Take out travel insurance and make sure you fully understand how to use it.
- Use a credit card to avoid carrying large amounts of cash. Take an additional card in case the main one is lost or damaged.
- Find out if your mobile phone works in the country of destination. If not, it is advisable to rent one temporarily.
- Find out if you will have Internet access and fax facilities.
- Find out about the voltage used in the country of destination: some countries use 110W and others 220W, so you may need to bring adaptors.
- Find out what the climate is like at the show venue to take the appropriate clothing, and not have to buy items while you are there.
- Inquire about the weight limits, per bag, permitted by the airlines, to avoid surcharges.
- Find out about requirements for transporting samples, both in the country of destination and in the transit countries, to avoid delays, setbacks or even the destruction of products.

Step 3.4 Reserving a space and decorating the stand

To obtain a good location at the exhibit we recommend reserving a space well in advance: six months in advance, if it is a small show, and one year in advance, if it is a major international event. Remember, the organizers generally offer discounts to the first companies that purchase floor space at the show.

Having selected and reserved your space, the next step is to find a company to design the booth or stand. Most show organizers offer a basic design, but if you want to make a good impression and attract the attention of visitors, it is worth making the effort to build a more elaborate stand.

When choosing the design, select one that will showcase your products. Make sure the stand looks clean, tidy and spacious and try to avoid the temptation to place chairs and tables inside the booth, especially if it is

small: furniture may restrict the flow of visitors and create a psychological barrier. It is also important to have a quiet area where you can take the most interested clients; make sure that a meeting room is available inside the show venue or, alternatively, find a comfortable place nearby, where you can calmly discuss business with these customers. It is also advisable to reserve a space to store samples and promotional materials.

The visual aspect of the exhibit is essential to attract clients, hence the importance of providing graphic support for the products that are being displayed. It is also important to showcase the company itself and this can be done by emphasizing its name and logo, avoiding the use of texts as much as possible. If you do decide to include texts, make sure these are translated into the local language or into a "business language", such as English.

Step 3.5 Training company representatives for the fair

Company representatives should be properly trained before leaving for the show.

First of all, they should make an effort to gather as much information as possible about the market they will be visiting, as well as about the sector in which the company operates. Aspects of particular interest include local business practices in the market of destination, existing distribution networks, competing products and the most commonly used forms of payment. If it is not possible to obtain this information through secondary channels, we recommend arriving in the country of destination a couple of days before the start of the show in order to visit sales points and distribution centers. Representatives should be well informed before the exhibit begins.

If the company's goals include promoting the sale of products or finding distributors, the representatives should be ready to negotiate with potential clients. To speed up this process, it is advisable to be prepared to answer questions such as:

- What are your company's commercial objectives in the target market (volume of sales, market niche, desired commercial intermediaries)?
- What types of products does your company export?
- Are there detailed documents (brochures, etc.) about your company and its products?
- How does your product differ from the rest? What are its main characteristics or specifications?
- How does your company package its export products?

- Are the products authorized by foreign authorities?
- Is the brand registered in the market of destination?
- Do the products comply with foreign labeling regulations?
- What method of payment are you willing to accept?
- What type of credit does your company offer - 30, 60 or 90 days? Open credit line?
- What type of distribution network do you have?
- Does your company have experience in exports? Where? Who are your clients?
- What type of distribution network does your company currently use?
- What is the shortest delivery time possible?
- What is the exportable supply?
- Is it necessary to place a minimum order?
- What is the ex works price (EXW) ?
- What is the FOB price?
- What is the CIF price to a major target city?
- Does the price vary according to the volume?
- Is the commission included in the price?
- How does the company help to promote its products?
- How would you describe your company's promotion plan for potential markets?

Company representatives should carefully study the show manual, which specifies the requirements or commitments to be met by each company, together with the deadlines and general rules for participants: everything from the distribution of promotional materials, and product sampling to security and garbage collection, etc.

Step 3.6 Preparing promotional materials

Promotional materials are vitally important to effectively promote the company and its products. These generally consist of printed materials, such as posters, brochures, catalogues, price lists and press releases, but may also include videos or digital presentations.

As there is little time to motivate a potential client during a first meeting, we strongly suggest preparing a good oral presentation, which should be accompanied by printed material, instead of videos or digital presentations (which are usually not very interactive). If a client shows interest in your product and is willing to return for a longer meeting, then videos and

digital presentations can play an important role in conveying the company's image and showcasing the quality of its work.

We can therefore consider two types of materials: one for the first meeting and another for subsequent encounters. The first type includes general company brochures and business cards; the second should include the technical specifications for each product, price lists, the website and videos. The boxes below offer suggestions for preparing these materials:

Recommendations for preparing a company

The brochure is the first stage of any promotional plan, and should be attractive, informative, creative, easy to read and visually appealing. It is best to leave the design and printing to professionals. However, before you do so, define - preferably in writing - the following aspects:

- Products and /or services offered by your company
- Target markets
- Current clients
- Benefits offered
- Proof of the company's capacity: experience, number of satisfied clients, main destinations of its exports, leading clients at national level, testimonies, references.
- What do you expect to achieve with the brochure?
- Obtain purchase orders?
- Introduce your company or its products?
- Act as a reminder to clients?

Other aspects to consider:

- Appoint a person in charge of preparing the brochure.
- Do not include all the information available. Only include the most important points and save the rest for another occasion.
- Identify two or three firms that can prepare the brochure. Meet with their representatives to discuss your company's objectives and the budget.

Recommendations for designing business cards

Business cards are one of the basic tools of good promotion and follow-up. They should be easy to read, have a visually attractive design and be printed on good quality paper. In addition, they should be consistent with the rest of your promotional materials. They must be up to date and include all the relevant information. All business cards should include the following basic information:

- Logo and name of the company
- Full name of the company representative
- His/her position
- Telephone and fax numbers (do not forget to include the country and area codes, if applicable)
- Postal address (do not forget to include the city, province or state and country)
- E-mail (avoid using free accounts such as Yahoo, Hotmail or Gmail, as these suggest informality)
- Web site

Recommendations for preparing product profiles and price lists

Product profiles are among the most widely used promotional elements in negotiations with possible buyers, either consumers or distributors. The product sheets should include, on a single page, technical information that facilitates decision-making, and should include at least the following aspects:

- Brand or product name.
- Company name and contact information.
- Detailed description of the product; for example, 'Pulp with 100% fruit'.
- Presentations of the product; for example, 'Flavors: mango, tamarind, papaya and pineapple'. Each with a description, number code and bar code.
- Shelf life and storage method.
- Product packaging; for example, 'Tamarind pulp in 14-ounce bags'. For each presentation indicate the number of units per box, together with the weight and size of the box; the number of boxes per pallet, together with the weight and size of the pallet, and, finally, the number of pallets per container, according to the size of the container.
- Differentiate the product. Indicate its use and mode of preparation/consumption; also mention its nutritional attributes, health benefits, organoleptic or nutraceutical properties and origin, among others. All statements must comply with the entry requirements to the target market (see Manuals 1, 2, and 3 of the Agribusiness Series, Export Handbooks).

The sum of all the company's products will comprise the company's 'product catalogue'.

It is also a good idea to prepare product specification sheets with export prices. These should include, at least, the ex works price (EXW), the FOB price and the CIF price[1], preferably in United States dollars (USD). The price list should be handled with discretion, especially if the company is still in the process of negotiating with distributors.

[1] *For further information on export costs and prices refer to Volume 6 of the Agribusiness Series, Export Handbooks, entitled "How to calculate the export costs for agricultural products", which may be obtained at: www.infoagro.net/agribusiness.*

Recommendations for creating a Website

In a world in which information is increasingly disseminated online, the Website is becoming one of the most useful promotional tools for companies. A Website may have two functions: to provide information to the general public, clients, suppliers, distributors, the media, etc.; or to promote sales, either among existing clients (general public, distributors) or to potential clients.

Regardless of its function, the company should ensure that the message conveyed through its Website is clear, simple, up to date, easy to access and adapted to the target public. A Website should include the following:

- Pictures of each product accompanied by a general description.
- Specific details of each product.
- Information about the company: a brief description.
- Proof of the company's capacity: national and international clients, testimonies, press releases and certifications, among others.
- Contact details: e-mail, physical address, telephone and fax.

The following points should be considered when designing the Website:

- Present all the information in the fewest number of clicks possible.
- Make it easy to read and visually appealing: clear screen backgrounds, letters in dark colors and in a large size, short paragraphs.
- Be sure to use a universal format; i.e., one that it is not affected by the type of navigator used by visitors.
- Make sure that visitors always know where they are: "products > pulps > tamarind pulp".
- Provide a site map.
- Always offer the possibility of contacting the company.
- Facilitate a visitors' database

Recommendations for preparing company videos

Videos should be clear and concise, produced by professionals and should focus on very specific issues, such as: the production process, quality and safety program, uses and benefits of a given product.

Step 3.7 Beginning promotional activities

To ensure that your company's participation in a show is a complete success, it is a good idea to identify - in advance - some of the firms that might be interested in your products. Export promoters are an important source of information, as are export chambers and other organizations of this sector.

We also recommend contacting the show organizers, who will often provide the service of sending out invitations and promotional materials to potential buyers or distributors. If they do not offer this service, it is advisable to request a listing of companies that have participated in previous shows, as well as a list of those that have confirmed their attendance at the upcoming event.

Once you have a list of potential leads or clients, it is a good idea to send them an invitation - by post or by e-mail – to visit your stand at the show, and include a brief description of your company. If you manage to arrange an appointment, either in your booth, or the client's, or at the offices of a potential customer, be sure to confirm it a few days in advance.

If you were unable to obtain a list of potential clients for your products, or did not get the expected response to the invitations you sent out, or wish to identify other companies, you should plan to arrive at your destination a couple of days before the event begins, so that you can visit sales points and information centers and identify other potential buyers.

The following box shows an example of how to identify possible distributors when visiting the destination market.

Example of how to identify possible distributors when visiting the destination market

Once you have arrived in the target market, we suggest the following steps:

- Identify, and then visit, the main sales points, stores and local (ethnic) markets, distribution centers and wholesalers.
- Identify competing products or substitutes.
- Check product labels to identify the distributors.
- Make a list of the leading distributors, together with their contact details. If the label only shows the distributors' names, find out how to contact them through the yellow pages or online.
- Contact the distributors to assess their interest and to invite them to visit the show.

Visits to sales points and distribution centers will also allow you to assess the competition, find out about the prices and quality of products that compete with yours, discover the latest trends in packaging and study the labeling requirements.

Step 3.8 Sending out samples

Given the visual nature of shows, it is important that companies take samples of their products. Beforehand, however, the company should define what strategy to follow with these samples. For example, do you intend to deliver samples only to the distributors interested in your product or do you plan to make a mass distribution to assess its acceptance among the visitors at the show?

Samples should be sent out through experienced customs agents whose staff are trained in these types of shipments. They should also have a representative in the market of destination to arrange for the temporary admission of the products.

It is useful to contact several customs agents in order to be better informed before selecting one. Also, before contacting the agents, the company should have the following information to hand: place of destination; address of the location or premises where the delivery is to be made; type, dimensions and content of the shipment; business invoices and other necessary documents.

It is very important to have a contingency plan. We recommend that you always take some samples and promotional materials in your personal luggage—if this is permitted by the laws of the destination and transit countries—in case any problems arise with the samples shipped through the agent. and distribution centers to fine-tune their strategy; the promotional materials and samples will have been delivered at the show venue and the stand will be ready to receive visitors.

STEP 4.
PARTICIPATING IN THE FAIR

Participating in the show itself is the shortest but most intense part of the entire process. It is the stage when all the effort made during the preparatory phase will pay off. If you have prepared carefully, by the time the show opens the company representatives will be ready to negotiate with potential customers in the target market. They will have visited sales points and distribution centers to fine-tune their strategy; the promotional materials and samples will have been delivered at the show venue and the stand will be ready to receive visitors.

Before the official opening of the show, it is a good idea to inspect the site and make sure that everything is in order. The following points should be checked:

- That all staff members are present.
- Product displays and promotional materials.
- Utensils for tasting product samples.
- Lighting
- Telephone lines, fax, computer equipment, Internet access, etc.

Here are some additional tips to put into practice.

- Arrive early and leave late. Many exhibitors take advantage of the periods before and after the official opening hours to calmly wander around the show visiting other booths, in the knowledge they are not missing out on potential clients.
- Make sure that your stand is never left unattended. Remember, companies should try to have at least two representatives at the show: one to deal with potential clients and another to welcome other visitors to the stand.
- First impressions are crucial. It is a proven fact that visitors are influenced by the appearance and demeanor of the people working in the booth, long before they have an opportunity to say their first words. Therefore, company representatives should always dress in a professional manner,

wear their name tag in a visible place, conduct themselves properly and make an effort to keep the stand clean and tidy.

- The representatives' demeanor has a major influence on visitors' perception of the company. It is important to avoid "standing guard" with arms folded at the edge of the stand, remaining seated or appearing bored.

The main challenge during the fair is to attract and "hold" the clients who are really interested in your products and, at the same time, politely disengage yourself from those who are only interested in browsing, collecting promotional materials or discussing general topics.

There is nothing better than an exciting stand to attract visitors. New products are a great plus, as most visitors who attend shows are looking for new things. In this case, make sure that a sign with the word "new" is prominently displayed next to the product, in the language of the host country and, if you are attending an international event, also in English. Similarly, if the company is looking for distributors, a sign may be placed inviting distributors to come forward.

But, how do we "hold" a potential client? The challenge is to "break the ice" and engage him or her in a pleasant conversation. It is advisable not to begin by discussing business matters and not to be aggressive. It is best to make a polite and sincere comment. For example: Did you find what you were looking for? What do you think of the show so far? What brings you here? It is always a good idea to read the visitor's name and company on the name tag and to ask about their business.

Considering that fairs are strategic places for gathering market intelligence, interviews with visitors may provide one of the best sources of direct and up to date information. However, to take full advantage of these encounters, company representatives must be willing to stop talking for a moment and, especially, listen to what other people have to say. During these exchanges it is essential to accept criticism without getting into an argument; such comments should be regarded as a valuable opportunity to improve your products or adapt these to the tastes and preferences of potential clients.

Likewise, remember that in international business it is important to respect cultural differences. This means being able to adapt not only to the commercial practices of the country of destination but also to its customs and protocol. We therefore recommend that your research aspects such as appropriate forms of greeting, gestures, the distance to be kept between

one person and another (respect for personal space), punctuality, dress code, the significance of after-show social activities, the use of business cards, etc..

Another task for the company representatives at the show is to be able to rapidly distinguish ("filter") the people who are truly interested in the company and its products and those who only have a general interest or who are just looking for samples or promotional material.

Although exhibitors should certainly begin their conversations with visitors by discussing general topics (the introduction), they should also be able to lead the conversation towards subjects that will help determine, as soon as possible, whether the person is a potential client. We therefore recommend asking questions such as: What does your company do? Do you work with similar products or of the same sector? Do you import products directly or acquire them through distributors? If the answers suggest that this person is not going to help you achieve your objectives, do not waste much time with him or her. And remember to be especially careful with your compatriots, who are always anxious to have news of their homeland. However, if you consider that the person you are talking to is a potential client, try to offer a more private place where the conversation can continue.

Whatever the result of the "filter" process, the most important thing is to safeguard the company's good image.

During the show, the representatives' work is not simply limited to receiving visitors. It is also important that they scout for potential clients among the other exhibitors or find out whether these can provide useful information about potential clients. For this reason, it is important to obtain, as soon as possible, a listing or directory of the companies attending the show to see which ones are of interest. It is also advisable to walk around the show ground to check that no potential client is being missed. Having identified the exhibitors who are of interest to your company, it is a good idea to visit them and arrange an appointment at a mutually convenient time. As mentioned previously, the periods before and after the show's official opening hours can be the best time for this.

Remember, the work of the fair does not end when the event ends. To follow up on leads, exhibitors must take notes constantly and keep these, together with business cards, well organized.

STEP 5.
FOLLOW-UP

Many people believe that follow-up begins when they return to their own country, but to make meaningful progress, this task should begin during the show.

As noted at the end of the previous chapter, the responsibilities of the company representatives attending the fair include: taking notes, organizing the notes and business cards, recording details of the commitments made, sending out additional information, sending quotes, etc. Those who have attended shows previously know that the number of contacts made can be overwhelming and that unless you have a proper system for organizing the information, the process can become complicated.

To carry out effective follow-up of visitors and potential clients a contact form is used. An example of this type of form is included below and is based on the methodology proposed by GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) and by the CBI (Center for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries). The form consists of six sections that are used as follows:

- The first section is used to attach the business card of the potential client. We recommend taking Scotch tape or a stapler for this purpose.
- The next section classifies potential clients. Clients classified as "A" are the ones who showed greatest interest in the product, and should be given immediate follow-up; clients in group "B" are those who showed some interest, and who will require further follow-up; and the clients in group "C" are those who showed the least interest.
- The third section is used to note down the client's contact details, either to complement the information included on the business card, or to furnish basic data if the visitor has not provided a business card.
- The fourth section identifies the type of company: agent, importer, distributor, wholesaler, retailer, manufacturer or competitor. The space "other" is included, in case the company is none of the above.
- The fifth section is a checklist recording the visitor's interest or requirements (for example, requests for samples, an offer letter, etc.), and follow-up instructions (e.g. visit, phone, send fax, file the document, etc.).

- Finally, the sixth section provides a space to note down observations, i.e., any other relevant information about the client, the interest shown or follow-up to be given.

EXAMPLE OF A CONTACT REGISTRATION FORM

Business Card	Classification of the potential client: A,B, or C	
Company Details: Name: Contact: Country: City: Phone: Fax: E-mail: Website:		
Type of Company: Agent Importer Distributor	Wholesaler Retailer Manufacturer	Competition Other
Interested in: Information only Offer letter Send samples Send material Negotiate contract Other	Follow-up: Send e-mail Visit Phone Send fax File document	
Observations:		

To correctly classify a potential client, company representatives should inquire about the following aspects during the interview:

- The client's business activities
- Products purchased. Where possible, beside each product note down the quantity, origin and price.

- Possible quantities to be negotiated.
- Market segments served and distribution channels.
- Main clients.
- Resources available (number of sales staff, size of distribution center, number of trucks, capacity to store frozen products etc.).
- The visitor's negotiating and decision-making power.

If the client is really interested in the product, the company representative should request a visit to the client's premises or offices. This will not only serve to confirm the information obtained in the interview but will also open up the possibility of more substantive negotiations.

We recommend that you begin your follow-up activities immediately, preferably in the country of destination: this will help you to "beat" the competition and convince potential clients that you and your company are serious, business-like and highly professional.

It is important that client follow-up is done in the most personalized way possible; hence the importance of correctly filling in the client registration form. The first follow-up activity is to send a note thanking the people who visited your stand. Priority should be given to clients classified as "A" and "B".

Successful follow-up also means delivering on promises made: if you agreed to send someone additional information, do so as soon as possible. If you do not have the necessary information to hand, send a note explaining that you are working on it, and give an approximate date for sending it. The same applies if you agreed to send samples or promised to call a potential customer to arrange a visit or a further appointment.

As part of follow-up, it is useful to hold a short meeting with the company representatives after the show each day, to assess the day's events. The following points could be touched upon during the meeting:

- What went well?
- What could have been done better?
- If we could turn back the clock, what would we do differently?
- Who deserves recognition for the efforts made and for the results achieved?
- What can we do to improve our results the following day or at the next fair?
- What should we begin to do now to be ready for the next event?

If you came to the show well-prepared, took full advantage of the event and carried out the follow-up properly, your company will be much closer to

achieving its final goal: closing the deal with a satisfactory agreement for both parties.

Finally, using all the information obtained from the forms, the follow-up meetings and the visits, prepare a report on the fair or exhibit. This should include as many variables and parameters as possible, for example, sales estimates, total number of qualified leads, cost per useful lead (total cost of the event for type "A" and "B" leads), and number of new clients. Based on this information, determine whether or not the company achieved its objectives at the event.

Remember, exporting to a new market is a process that takes time, and although attendance at a trade fair may help you achieve your objectives, the results are not normally seen in the short term. Perseverance, honoring commitments and time are your best allies.

CONCLUSIONS

- International trade shows are excellent venues for gathering market intelligence, finding out about technological developments and penetrating new markets, as they bring together large numbers of buyers, sellers and experts, at the same time and in the same place.
- It is essential to set goals for participating in the fair well in advance, in order to determine the best strategy to follow. These goals should be achievable and measurable.
- There are different types of shows, with different objectives. Before choosing, carefully consider which type of show is best suited to your company's needs.
- Before committing to a show, prepare a detailed budget of the costs to determine if the company has the necessary resources to successfully participate in the event.
- Selecting the right show and training the people who will represent your company at the event will determine the success of your participation.
- If you plan to participate in a major international exhibit, it is advisable to begin making travel arrangements and reservations one year in advance; remember that booth spaces, hotels near the show venue and flights quickly fill up.
- Prepare good promotional materials and begin promotional activities well in advance. This will help increase your success at the event.
- The show itself is the shortest part of the process but the most intense. Therefore it is vital to act correctly; make an effort to arrive early and leave late, to respect cultural differences, to always be pleasant and polite, and finally, to attract and hold potential clients.
- Participating in a show is not limited to exhibiting products and receiving visitors. Companies should send at least two representatives- one to deal with visitors and another to wander around the show ground identifying potential clients among the exhibitors.
- Follow-up is an essential part of the process. Contacts must be kept "active" and this means honoring commitments and doing so in the shortest time possible and in a personalized way.
- Follow-up begins as soon as the fair opens. Be sure to obtain a visitor registration form and ask the necessary questions to assess the real interest of visitors.
- Entering a new market takes time. Although fairs help, the results are normally seen in the medium term. Therefore, perseverance, patience and honoring commitments are your best allies.

ANNEX - CHECKLIST OF ACTIVITIES

Time	Activities
10-12 months prior the fair	- Set participation goals - Appoint a person to be in charge. - Obtain general information about the fair: type of show, available area, products exhibited, visitors and countries that participated in previous events, type of visitors, etc. - Obtain specific information: cost of setting up a stand (see budget details on page 16 of this guide), registration period, requirements for sending samples. - Make a first selection of the products to be exhibited - Prepare a general budget. - Contact the show organizers to let them know you are interested in participating in the exhibit and request further information. - Fill in and submit the pre-registration form and request information on the show's promotional plans.
7-9 months before	- Select the staff members who will attend the show. Make the necessary travel arrangements and reservations (visas, tickets, hotels, etc.). - Plan the display for the stand. - Decide who will be in charge of designing, building and getting the exhibit ready, or if external staff will be hired to do this. - Plan promotional activities and the budget prior to the fair. - Decide what type of promotional materials to take and appoint the people in charge of preparing them. - Select a customs agent and arrange for the exhibit materials to be shipped.
6 months before	- Check the design of the booth or stand and the construction schedule. - Choose the samples, gifts and promotional materials to be taken to the fair. - Choose the sales system you will use during the show (demonstrations, printed material, multimedia presentations, conversations with visitors) - Promote your attendance at the show (by sending invitations, contacting the media, publicity).

Time	Activities
	- Decide on the decoration, lighting and "identity" of the stand. - Review the budget.
4 months before	- Finalize all shipping preparations. - Check promotional and sales materials. - Decide whether you need external staff (interpreters, assistants) and hire them. - Prepare the price list. - Train the staff who will work in the stand and prepare their schedules and shifts. These individuals should be familiar with the company's products, prices, shipping and handling capacity and customs requirements, etc.
3 months before	- Check, once again, all supplies, materials and equipment to be used. - Coordinate the shipping and insurance of the exhibit. - Approve advertising and local publicity. - Prepare the I.D.s (name tags) of the staff working in the company stand.
2 months before	- Send the show organizers a list of the staff who will attend the event. - Send invitations to potential clients and distributors to visit your stand. - Send details and information for the fair catalogue. - Check flight and hotel reservations and other travel preparations. - If you are taking product samples for tasting, find out about the requirements. Hire the necessary services and equipment.
1 months before	- Allocate a sum of money to deal with contingencies. - Check all the planned activities to ensure that everything is in order. - Send reminders to clients and possible distributors, together with passes and invitations to those who confirm their attendance. - Obtain information about show participants to begin

Time	Activities
	looking for potential clients or people with whom to make appointments. - Prepare the client registration forms or cards and make the necessary copies. - Obtain information about planned seminars and meetings, to determine whether these are of interest to the company. - Prepare and send out samples and promotional materials.
1 week before	- Check hotel and flight reservations. - Confirm appointments with possible clients. - Confirm the delivery of samples and promotional materials at the venue. - Coordinate the hiring of photographers and /or cameramen.
The day before the show opens	- Final arrangements for the stand decorations, furniture, samples and equipment. - With list in hand, check that nothing is missing - materials or services contracted for the stand. - Final review of the timetables/shifts of the booth staff. - Tour the fair venue and visit the stand with all staff members and review each person's objectives and responsibilities.
During the fair	- Plan a daily meeting with the staff, early in the morning, to plan and coordinate the day's activities. - Observe the competition every day. - Locate suppliers of complementary products, with a view to possible distribution alliances.
After the fair	- Coordinate the dismantling of the booth or stand. - Organize the transportation of materials, equipment and products. - Check the invoices for service accounts - Hold a meeting with all the staff to discuss the results. Ask for their observations, recommendations and suggestions to make improvements in future shows. - Plan to stay one or two days longer to attend additional appointments with the contacts that showed the most interest. - Begin follow-up activities. - Close the budget and prepare the final balance.