

# **The Right Place to Exhibit – A Strategic Approach**

**By Barry Siskind**

Business Week Magazine reported that “a trial and error approach to selecting a place to exhibit results in an average of 2.5 exhibit participations before you choose the right event.” When you multiply that by the thousands of dollars and incredible amount of human resources to participate in a show, the cost of choosing the wrong place to exhibit is massive.

Here is a two step approach to choosing the best places for you to exhibit.

## **Step #1 - Understand Your Objectives**

Everything starts with your objectives. Understanding your objectives will influence all your choices.

## **Step #2 - Define Your Audience**

Who do you want to attract to your exhibit? If your answer is “Anyone with a pulse and a wallet,” your response may be misleading you. Rarely will one product or service be appropriate for everyone. Follow this plan to ensure you select the right events the first time.

### **a. Establish a Customer Profile**

The best place to start is to clarify who your real customer is. Understanding your existing customers and how they perceive the features and benefits of what you have to offer is the place to begin. This involves an in depth demographic and psychographic analysis of the person who is most likely to help you achieve your objectives.

Demographics answer the question, “Who is my customer?” It is an analysis of all the pertinent data that defines the characteristics of your customer. For a business-to-business transaction, the qualifiers may include: size of company, type of products sold, revenue, budget, number of employees, number of branches, ownership, industry sector, and so on.

Psychographics answer the question, “What do they do?” This is a chance to examine your target audience’s attitudes, beliefs, and emotions. In the business-to-business marketplace, psychographic elements include: social responsibility, environmental conscience, business style, position within an industry, innovations, affiliations, employee relations, workforce type, management style, employee remuneration, shareholder relations, and so on.

### **b. Rank Your Customer Profiles in Order of Priority**

The next step is to determine which targeted group will deliver the greatest return on your investment. Let’s say you have identified three distinct users of your product or service. Ask which will give you the biggest bang for your buck. Now, when faced with various potential show selections, you can simply examine the audience quality, see where it fits in your priority, and decide.

Let's assume the following:

- Customer profile 1 is your "A" priority.
- Customer profile 2 is your "B" priority.
- Customer profile 3 is your "C" priority.

Your analysis may look like this:

<i>Show</i>	<i>Total Audience</i>	<i>Percentage Who Fit Criteria</i>	<i>Potential Audience</i>
New York	12,000	Priority A, 3% Priority B, 2%	360 240
Chicago	8,000	Priority A, 4% Priority B, 0%	320
Atlanta	10,000	Priority A, 10% Priority B, 3.5%	1,000 350
Toronto	7,500	Priority A, 14% Priority B, 8%	1,050 600

In the above example, Toronto is the clear winner, although the total overall traffic is smaller than the other three shows.

### **c. Choose the right type of event**

Choosing the right event is a matter of style, taste, logistics, budget, ability, and geography. Geography is an important factor since it refers to your marketing reach and begs the question "Where is the best place to reach my targeted customer?" Think of your geographic reach as three tiers: regional, national, and international.

#### **Tier 1: Regional Events**

If you select a regional show, you might be able to influence visitors from as far away as 200 miles from the site.

#### **Tier 2: National Events**

National events attract an audience from across the country. They are usually wider in scope and focus.

#### **Tier 3: International Events**

In the international arena there are fewer events, but they are designed to attract visitors from a wider geographic area. These events are usually well established and well known in the industry, and because they are often timed according to business cycles, they become a must-see event for attendees and attract all levels of decision-makers.

When you choose your event you may also want to include such factors such as market priority, competitor profile, ability to generate leads or take orders, media opportunities, networking, access to an exhibitor's list, reputation of the show, show organizer's promotion strategy, sponsorships layout, and timing. Your list of factors should include the things that best meet your criteria for success.

#### **d. Establishing a Selection Criteria**

Your criterion generally falls into two broad categories: Strategic and tactical. Strategic considerations are where you should place your emphasis. Audience profile and geography are, for most exhibitors' crucial strategic elements.

The tactical elements revolve around logistical elements that can often be overcome. Show layout, move-in and move out considerations fall under this category.

Take each of your strategic and tactical elements and rate each on a continuum of 1 – 10, with one being a “nice to” but not critical to your success to ten being a “must have” element that is critical to your success.

The following provides an example of how your ranking might look:

#### **Strategic considerations**

High Ranking Elements (weighting of X3) would be considered as the “must-have” elements that drive a company's decision to participate in a particular show. If the show is missing any of these elements, the odds are that it is not worth participating in.

Examples of “High Ranking” Elements:

- Market Priority
- Audience Fit
- Exclusivity of Opportunity

Important Ranking Elements (weighting of X2) include those elements that significantly extend the reach and impact of your exhibit program, and contribute to the overall strength and viability of show selection.

Examples of “Important Ranking” Elements:

- Ability to contribute to lead generation
- Opportunity to impact audience
- Reputation of Show / Credibility of Show Organizer

#### **Tactical considerations**

Other Ranking Elements (Weighting X1) are usually attributed to specific activities and are considered less important on their own, but support the overall objectives of the exhibit program.

Examples of “Other Ranking” Elements:

- Show Organizer Promotion Strategy
- Competitor Presence
- Exhibitor Profile Opportunities
- Media Opportunities
- Networking opportunities with targeted decision-makers
- Access to Attendee Lists

**e. Use the Ranking Criteria and Evaluation Grid**

Once ranking of criteria is completed, the next step is to place desired elements in an Evaluation Grid.

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Weighting for the current year</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>Value of Element (out of 10)</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>Total Score</b>
<i>Strategic</i>					
Audience Fit	3	x	8 (general audience with 40% from target market)	=	24
Uniqueness of Opportunity	3	x	8 (one of 3 shows in this market)	=	24
Lead Generation	2	x	8 (mixed audience over 8 halls)	=	16
Visibility	2	x	10 (great visibility opportunity, reasonably priced)	=	20
<i>Tactical</i>					
Exhibit Location	1	x	10 (opp. for great location)	=	10
Competitor Presence	1	x	8 (most major competitors)	=	8
Media Opportunities	1	x	10 (pre-show profile, media centre on site)	=	10
<b>Total</b>					<b>112</b>

**Conclusion**

Finding the right show is difficult. Don’t jump at the first opportunity that knocks on your door. You have lots of choices. Take your time and do your homework. The right show is a blend of audience, cost and logistics. Good event selection is a solid base upon which the rest of your exhibit program is built.