

How To Attend Travel Shows (148)

Exhibiting at trade show and events provides useful opportunities for your route to showcase products and expertise, network with potential customers and suppliers and keep up to date with news and developments.

There are numerous travel shows both in South Africa and abroad that is worthwhile attending. The most popular among the South African shows is the Getaway Show, which is held in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Open Africa attends the Getaway Show from time to time and all the routes in the network are invited to participate. Routes will need to pay for the cost of the stand, furniture rental and marketing material that will be distributed at the show and it is up to the route to raise the necessary funds for accommodation and travel to and from Cape Town or Johannesburg.

This Guide will help you prepare for an event by completing the right administration, planning your stand and preparing your employees. It also includes hints and tips and sources of further information.

While travel shows are useful events to market your route and its members, they can be expensive to attend and often hundreds of other businesses and competitors take stands. So it is vital to prepare well so that everyone involved in your delegation and the members along your route can get the most out of an exhibition. The fundamental aim of a route attending a trade show is to stand out and to attract potential customers.

There are also Guides on marketing route (using various media), a Guide on How to Develop a Marketing Plan, and a Marketing Toolkit by Open Africa.

Why are travel shows important?

Travel shows usually are open to the public, so they bring us face to face with potential customers. These people are at the show because of their interest as tourists, so they are a good group to target as they are more likely to buy what we have to offer.

The shows are also important as a networking opportunity among other tourism providers, many of whom have services that could feed into our route. For instance, tour operators may not know much about your area – this is your opportunity to sell your route to them and bring in bus-loads of tourists.

How can the route make best use of travel shows?

A travel show is an exhibition of products and services in the tourism sector, usually open to the public – where exhibitors promote themselves to visitors and network with others in their sector. The events are usually organised by professional events management companies but smaller shows are sometimes arranged by trade associations or government agencies to promote a particular areas or sectors.

Deciding where to exhibit

Not every trade show, exhibition or convention is worth the time, effort and/or money it takes to organise a successful stand. In order to find suitable events to get involved with you will need to:

- **Identify exhibitions** that are relevant to your business. Trade associations sometimes publicise key events and exhibitions relating to tourism. Ask other businesses that have exhibited previously whether they found it a cost-effective event.

- **Find out who visits the exhibitions** you are interested in. You want as many potential customers as possible to see your products and services so check the exhibition has an established reputation. Ask the exhibition organisers to send you visitor figures and profiles for the past few years.
- Find out if the exhibition is **open to the public or the trade only**.
- **Research the visitor profile** to identify whether the demographics fit with your target audience.

Once you've identified a show to exhibit at, the next step is to check the costs and practicalities of exhibiting. Before booking space or registering with an exhibition organiser consider the following:

- **Facilities** – establish exactly what is included in an exhibitor's contract price. Hiring exhibition space is usually divided into two categories: 'space only' means that you are expected to provide all your own structural equipment, including a stand, screens, furniture and lighting. By contrast, a 'shell scheme' provides basic structural panels, but you will still need to provide your own livery, literature and any other promotional materials, electricity supply, lighting and furniture.
- **Costs** – set a budget for the event. Check out not only the obvious costs but also the hidden charges that will arise for electricity and use of facilities. A standard carpet is usually included in the stand price but there will be an additional cost if you want cupboards, chairs and tables, or spotlight and electricity sockets.
- **Extra facilities** – ask if demonstration space or private meeting rooms are available at the venue.
- **Location and access** – check that the venue can be accessed easily by all your potential customers and visitors.
- **Labour requirements** – establish who is allowed to carry

out work on your stand if you have booked space only and book subcontractors' time well in advance. Some venues and exhibition organisers insist the construction of stands and the installation of facilities are carried out by the venue's own contractors.

- **Opportunities for workshops and seminars** – these are a useful way to create awareness of your business and its products and/or services and can drive visitors to your stand. Remember, don't use them as a sales pitch, more as an educational tool.

Preparing for an exhibition

Once you have decided on a suitable exhibition, you should appoint a member of the route forum to be responsible for organising the exhibition or, if you have hired a specialists, liaise with them. Whoever you decide should be responsible will need to deal with the following issues:

- **Venue** – if attendance at a particular exhibition is crucial to you, book well in advance to ensure the best choice of stand and make sure deposits and hire charges are paid promptly. You may be able to get a discount if you book at the last minute, are exhibiting for the first time or book more than one exhibition with the organiser (if they are part of a series).
- **Accommodation** – some exhibitions last several days, so participants will need hotel accommodation if the event is some distance away from your route. Book this early to avoid last-minute problems, especially with large exhibitions. Many exhibition organisers negotiate special rates with local hotels.
- **Transport** – you will need suitable vehicles or a courier service to transport your exhibition material and equipment including computers and leaflet stands. Remember that posters, literature, models and samples can take up more space than you think.

- **Insurance** – check that your business adequate insurance has been taken out for the exhibition. You should pay particular attention to the Public Liability insurance. Some venues require you to have a minimum level of insurance cover in place so you should check this in advance.
- **Site and stand** – whether you have booked a shell scheme stand or arranged for the construction of your own stand, you should attend the venue at the earliest opportunity to check that everything is satisfactory. Even with a shell scheme stand you will usually have to hire and pay separately for furniture and electrical equipment and supply.
- **When you arrive** at the venue check carefully that all screens, shelving, desks, seating, display aids and lighting are in place and that all electrical sockets are working properly. If participants are expected to erect a stand themselves, they will need to be shown how to do it prior to the event.
- **Storage** – check that there is adequate storage for personal belongings, literature, refreshments and anything else you plan to take along. You should also consider having some lockable storage space to keep valuable items secure.
- **Badges and permits** – you need to book, collect and distribute all your exhibitors' entry permits for participants and guests. Check that each member of the team has a personal badge that clearly shows their full name, job title and the name of your route.
- **Presentation** – make sure the stand and your staff always look neat, tidy and professional. Ensure that any corporate clothing and uniforms have been organised or a dress code agreed.
- **Computer equipment and screens** (if appropriate) – check that you have all the printers, laptops and screens that you will need or arrange to hire them. Ensure that your staff know how to operate the equipment and that it

works properly.

- **Parking** – check that sufficient parking permits for you and your staff have been issued and that arrangements have been made to allow extra deliveries where necessary.
- **Extra space** – if you need meeting rooms or demonstration areas, check that they have been reserved and are not double booked.
- **Participants**– choose enthusiastic members of the route who are natural communicators. Don't forget to draw up staffing rotas to ensure you have enough people to allow for proper meal breaks, rest periods and attendance at relevant seminars. Your stand should never be left unattended, even for a few minutes, while the exhibition is open.
- **Training** – ensure that your team is fully briefed and clear about your aims before the exhibition begins. They will need a thorough knowledge of any products and services you are promoting at the event.
- **Literature** – check that you have all the stationery, brochures, business cards, order forms, leaflets, corporate gifts and giveaways you need. Take plenty of spare stationery and paper as you often need more than you think.
- **Deadlines** – the exhibition organiser will usually provide you with an exhibitor's pack. This may be a manual or details of a web portal you can access. It will include a list of key deadlines (for example, when payments need to be made, when bookings must be confirmed and deadlines for submitting forms).
- **Marketing** – send out invitations to the exhibition to your potential and existing customers and suppliers, the media, corporate guests and other VIPs. Promote your attendance at the exhibition on your website, in newsletters, e-mails, social media and promotional literature. Find out who else is exhibiting as they may be potential partners or customers. Contact them

- beforehand to arrange meetings at the exhibition.
- **Finally**, and most importantly, ensure that you have proper systems to record the contact details of all new customers who are interested in your route. At the very least, each member of your team should be issued with a notebook and plenty of pamphlets.

What should you do immediately before an exhibition?

Draw up a checklist including everything that you need to take with you to the event and all the details you need to arrange, together with contact names and numbers of all suppliers. Remember to include items to cover all contingencies, including first aid and refreshments for participants, and take plenty of back-up supplies and equipment.

Draft a contingency plan to adopt if anything should go wrong and ensure that the venue can provide bureau services if you need them.

Ensure that you have set goals and targets by which you can measure the effectiveness of the exhibition afterwards.

Consider informing your local press and obtaining PR coverage of your attendance at the event.

It is vital that every member of the team is properly briefed before they take part in an exhibition. A week before the event you should give all participants a briefing pack to ensure that they fully understand the following:

- Product and services.
- Prices.
- Sales techniques to be used or avoided. If necessary, organise role-playing sessions to ensure everyone is fully familiar with your expected standards of behaviour.

- Rotas, including meal times and rest breaks. Make sure the participants are clear about how much time they need to set up and close down.
- Dress code.
- Contact numbers for the whole team and emergency numbers for the exhibition organiser and venue manager.
- Enquiry handling – make sure that team members know who to consult if faced with an enquiry they feel unable to answer.
- Accommodation and transport – staff should know exactly where they are staying and how they are expected to travel to the venue.
- Targets and objectives – make it clear to your staff what you expect of them and what outcome you expect from the exhibition.

What do you need to do during the exhibition?

It is critical to ensure that you maximise visitor numbers to your stand and capture contact information from potential clients so that you can follow them up afterwards with a view to converting enquiries into sales.

The most important thing to monitor throughout the exhibition is the appearance of your stand. You or your exhibition coordinator should regularly restock empty brochure displays, tidy shelves and cabinets and clear away rubbish.

During the exhibition you should visit other stands to network with exhibitors, find out what they are doing and what they are offering to customers. This also provides an opportunity to build partnerships and find customers and suppliers for your route (or your members along your route).

After the exhibition you will want to evaluate your business' performance and balance the achievement of objectives against the cost of attendance. Therefore during the event you should

record the following:

- Number of visitors and enquiries taken.
- Number of samples and leaflets taken.
- Number of hits on your website.
- Positive comments.
- Negative comments, including complaints and criticisms.
- Any issues raised by visitors.
- Details of any press or media interest.

Who is involved with trade shows?

The Route Forum can research the available travel shows that members would find useful, and discuss these options with members before a decision is made on which ones to attend. They can also use the links with Open Africa to explore which shows have been most useful in the past, and perhaps even where there might be funding to cover some of the costs of attending certain shows.

Trade associations (or chambers of commerce) in the route's nearest towns – as well as the local and district municipalities – may also be involved in trade shows. They may be organising their own shows or may be instrumental in getting delegations from their area to attend a show elsewhere. The route and its members could take advantage of these links by talking to chambers and municipalities before making your own plans.

How could the route deal with trade shows?

In the experience of Open Africa, the best way to make use of travel shows is for the route itself to take the exhibition space on behalf of members – and then all members can be promoted at the show. This does not necessarily mean that all members must attend – many do not have the time or resources.

Those who can exhibit on the stand must do so, and those members who can't be there can send their brochures and other promotional material.

It might be necessary to set up a small committee of members to assist with all the planning for such an event – including the preparation of marketing material like banners, brochures, business cards, price lists, etc if these do not already exist.

Practical tips

- If you are unsure whether to exhibit at a particular exhibition or venue, you could visit your chosen exhibition first before committing to booking a stand at the next one.
- Try to choose the best position for your stand that your budget will allow. A central position in the exhibition hall, corner sites and sites at the ends of walkways are best.
- Printing can be expensive, so have detailed brochures available for serious enquirers and leaflets for casual visitors.
- Don't let people linger around the walkways outside your stand – invite them in!
- Consider hiring a professional photographer because you can use pictures of your stand in future sales literature.
- Remember that exhibitions are news – don't be afraid to contact local or trade press.
- Don't forget to follow up all leads with a telephone call, e-mail or letter after the exhibition has closed.
- Take advantage of the fact that some exhibition organisers provide lists of visitors after the show for direct marketing purposes.
- Analyse and review the effectiveness of your attendance at the exhibition in terms of leads generated, sales

achieved and objectives met, quantified against costs and investment of time.

- Check with the organiser whether there are special requirements for playing music or serving alcohol on your stand.

Use of this Guide

The route functionaries can use this guide to help research, select and plan the next travel show where you want to exhibit; it can also be used to brief members on what is involved in getting ready for such an event. It is the members who must mainly man the exhibition stand, so they all need to know what is expected.

Someone from the route who is good at exhibitions could also use this guide as part of a training session for members before going to a travel show; the training can be quite informal and only needs to take a couple of hours.

Other Factsheets

There are other factsheets available on the topic of marketing your route. These include:

- Guide: [How To Develop A Marketing Plan](#)
- Resource: [Video – How To Do An Elevator Pitch](#)
- Resource: [Video – How To Set Up A Facebook Fanpage](#)
- Example: [How To Attend Travel Shows](#)

Contacts

The Exhibition Association of South Africa has a list of upcoming exhibitions at: <http://www.exsa.co.za/events>

There are also a range of provincial tourism portals that advertise trade shows:

- Gauteng Tourism: www.gauteng.net
- Western Cape Tourism: www.tourismcapetown.co.za
- Eastern Cape Tourism Board: www.ectourism.co.za
- Northern Cape: www.northerncape.org.za
- Northwest Province: www.tourismnorthwest.co.za
- Free State Tourism: www.freestatetourism.org
- Limpopo Tourism: www.limpopotourism.org.za