

Business actions of exhibitors at trade shows: Implications for sales versus non-sales staff and type of trade show

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ABSTRACT

Direct communication in business markets is important due to the specific characteristics of business markets – where communication channels are shorter and the emphasis is placed on direct selling. Due to the differences in business-to-business markets, organisations select Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) elements that are more direct and personal in nature. The role of trade shows, as a communication medium, therefore, in business markets has been growing and they are playing an important role in one-on-one interaction between buyers and sellers. To be successful at a trade show, a business would need to go through specific actions. The study was explorative in nature, in order to establish the business actions taken for trade shows by exhibitors while looking at the role of exhibiting staff (sales or non-sales people) and the type of trade show. The data were gathered by means of a self-administered questionnaire at four trade shows, resulting in a sample of 232 – using probabilistic multi-stage sampling. A MANOVA analysis was used to test the proposed hypotheses. This study interestingly enough found that there are no significant differences between sales and non-sales exhibiting staff and the types of trade show.

Keywords: Trade shows, Business-to-Business marketing, Integrated Marketing Communication, Type of trade show, Sales and non-sales people, Business actions

It is estimated that in South Africa, trade show revenues will reach R 3705 billion by 2019; and at the time this article was written, the 2017 revenues were not yet available, although they were estimated to reach R 3317 billion (Myburgh, 2015:189). This is an indication that trade shows are an important marketing element in business markets in South Africa and they will continue to grow in the next few years. Trade shows in business-to-business markets have, however, been ignored as a marketing element, although trade shows are ranked secondly, as one of the most important marketing elements after direct selling for industrial product organisations (Gilliam, 2015:1879). Although trade shows form an

important marketing element in business markets, they have received little attention from academics in terms of their evolution and theoretical development (Gottlieb, Brown & Drennan, 2011:1642; Wilkinson & Brouthers, 2006:238). There has only been a real and renewed interest in trade shows in the last two years, with a small number of studies being done (Adams, Coyle, Downey & Levette, 2017; Lin, 2016; Gilliam, 2015; Lin, Jiang & Kerstetter, 2015).

This explorative study was done to establish the business actions of exhibitors at trade shows – in an attempt to contribute to the understanding of how these events are utilised – and to increase the knowledge base on the topic.

Pitta, Weisgal and Lynagh (2006:159) note that trade shows are not clearly understood by industrial organisations; although they are the most cost-effective means of reaching customers and for providing them with the necessary hands-on knowledge and information. Bello and Barczak (1990:43) agree with Pitta et al. (2006:159) that trade shows are a major promotional element for industrial firms; and these authors add that many businesses fail to exploit their full marketing potential as a marketing communication medium.

With trade shows being an important element in the promotional mix, a better understanding must be reached on how exhibitors use these shows and determine the components that will lead to the best use of their trade show budgets (Lin, 2016:2630).

At trade shows, a number of business actions take place. These include: image-building, sales-related activities, information gathering, relationship improvement and the motivation of staff (Lee & Kim, 2008:786-787). Trade shows, therefore, have a number of different activities, however, differences exist between corporate and marketing executives' opinions on the effectiveness of trade shows: both as a selling and a non-selling tool (Herbig, O'Hara & Palumbo, 1998:426). Poor opinions of trade shows amongst executives are often exacerbated; because a very low percentage of businesses participate in trade shows; and many companies only exhibit at trade shows because others in the industry do so (Pitta et al., 2006:159).

The result is that many of the businesses that participate in trade shows have no specific or clear promotional objectives; and they, therefore, cannot assess the effectiveness of trade shows' activities (Blyth & Rayner, 1996:23). This could imply that businesses are exhibiting at trade shows; but they are not using them to their full potential.

Two aspects that influence business actions at trade shows are: whether the exhibiting staff are sales people or non-sales people, and secondly,

the type of trade show. At trade shows, exhibitors go through a multi-stage selling process (Ling-Yee, 2008:35). Due to this multi-stage process, the assumption would be that sales people would be the more appropriate exhibiting staff to man an exhibition stand and there will be differences between sales and non-sales people.

This is an important aspect since one of the advantages of trade shows is one-on-one contact (Sacramento, Simões & Farhangehr, 2015:132). The other aspect is the type of trade show and whether exhibitors should exhibit at trade shows that best link their products to their markets. Brennan et al. (2011:189) point out that by matching the supply market with the target audience, trade show exhibitors can show off their expertise to a specific-industry sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Business actions of exhibitors

In the planning of a trade show, the exhibitors start off by setting specific objectives and this is done to measure their success. Two broad objectives are set by the exhibitors: those that can be measured, such as the number of sales, new prospects etc.; and those, which cannot be measured, such as image-building, market research etc. (Shoham, 1992:340). As part of business actions, there are a number of other objectives. These would include: commercial objectives that include elements, such as branding, awareness and the image of the organisation; individual departmental objectives that deal with the specific products or services available inside the organisation; and individual objectives, in which the exhibiting staff might see a trade show as an opportunity for personal growth (Siskind, 2005:10-15). It must be noted that 70% of exhibitors, however, set no objectives for trade shows (Stevens, 2005:50).

Although exhibitors set objectives to measure their business actions at trade shows; the focus in many cases is only placed on the sales activities (Adams et al., 2017:712). However, there are other business actions of exhibitors, such as building relationships with their current customers, and

creating new ones; and maintaining and enhancing the motivation of staff. These aspects should not be neglected (Hansen, 2002:3-4; Lee & Kim, 2008:786-787; Tafesse & Korneliussen, 2011:44-46).

To build relationships with the attendees at trade shows, the right exhibiting staff must be appointed and trained.

The exhibiting staff, who will man the exhibition stand must have the requisite interpersonal skills; knowledge and communication abilities, in order to increase the success of the exhibitor at the trade show (Li et al., 2011:442). The exhibiting staff – as well as their training and communication abilities – have a direct impact on the success of the trade show (Søilen, 2013:118, Seringhaus & Rosson, 2004:161). Providing the correct training to the exhibiting staff would contribute to the sales and the follow-up after the trade show (Ling-Yee, 2008:42).

Exhibitors not only see trade shows as a place to provide information but also as an opportunity to gain new knowledge, as part of their business actions.

Due to the nature of trade shows, both the exhibitors and the attendees acquire knowledge on their industry (Reychav, 2011:238) and these can provide exhibitors with valuable information on their competitors by observing competitors' product offerings, and by making a comparison of these with their own products on display (Bathelt & Schuldt, 2008:862). Trade shows are, therefore, a strategic marketing tool, from which information about the market and the competitors can be gathered (Tafesse & Korneliussen, 2011:47). More specifically, information on new competitive products and programmes can be obtained (Dwyer & Tanner, 2009:333).

Sales and non-sales people

Trade shows, as part of the promotional mix, are an extremely useful element to develop and maintain the customers' loyalty, due to the one-on-one interaction between exhibitors and the attendees (Kirchgeorg, Springer & Kästner 2010:68). Attendees visit trade shows, according to their own free will and they would be more likely to be interested and open to receive information

from the exhibiting staff (Gosztonyi, 1997:13). Trade shows provide a number of benefits in the communication process, namely: one-on-one contact between buyers and sellers; they take place in a neutral location, where there are less interruptions; they are attended by staff from buying centres; and the attendees mostly arrive with a positive attitude – because there is less sales pressure (Shoham, 1992:336).

Exhibitors have to staff their exhibition stands with staff that have the ability to communicate on the technical nature of the products; and they should be able to demonstrate or display new products – to ensure repeat visits by the attendees (Whitfield & Webber, 2011:446). The type of trade show can have an impact on the exhibiting staff needed (Bathelt & Schuldt, 2008:859).

At specific types of trade shows, a specialist might be needed to discuss the technical aspects of the products with the attendees (Whitfield & Webber, 2011:446). At trade shows, like Afrimold for example, expert exhibiting staff are needed to explain the technical aspects of the moulding machines that are exhibited there.

Exhibitors need to change the way in which they manage trade show activities – especially the approaches to attendees – and how the exhibition stands are to be manned (Blyth, 2010:57). This is important; since the ability to reach the right people would determine the exhibitors' return on the investment from trade shows (Woolard, 2007:34). In many industries, not only are specialised experts needed; but different exhibiting staff are required to perform specific activities.

Exhibiting staff might include: general managers who can assist in image-building; production managers who can help with any technical aspects; and salespeople that can generate sales and build relationships (Tafesse & Korneliussen, 2011:47). A number of exhibition stands at trade shows, such as the IFSEC for example, would need to include security personnel explaining the technical aspects managers who can socialise with the attendees; and salespeople who can inform the attendees on how and where the products may be purchased.

When it comes to the product offering, the exhibitor has control over the four main

elements relating to the product, namely: product knowledge; product demonstrations; comparison of one's products with those of the competitors; and product enthusiasm (Miller, 1999:89-91). The lack of product knowledge is one of the main complaints that attendees have about the staff who exhibit at the stand. Therefore, it may be assumed that salespeople would be the best to staff an exhibition stand – due to their knowledge of the products.

Salespeople would probably be more capable of demonstrating and showing enthusiasm towards their own products (Miller, 1999:89-91).

Although sales people might be the best to man the exhibit stand; in a study done on Chinese trade shows, it was established that most exhibitors were at the show as public-relations officers – and not for selling or signing contracts (Liu, Zeng, Teng & Xin, 2011:449). This could raise questions on the impact of salespeople in the sales process at trade shows; since selling is not the main focus of the exhibitors. However, a previous study indicated that 26 per cent of attendees sign a purchase order at a trade show, while 50 per cent buy, as a result of the show (Chonko & Ponzurick, 2001:4).

Trade shows are, therefore, an important element in the sales process – to sell or generate leads for the organisation (Pitta et al., 2006:159).

Trade shows reduce the sales process, or the selling cycle; and they can assist in exhibiting organisations to reach unknown buyers (Saget, 2006:113-114). It must be noted that trade shows promote communication between organisations and possible prospects; since they move the sales process further (Alessandra, Underation & Zimmerman, 2009:69). Trade shows can be seen as one of the most cost-effective ways to achieve sales; since people entering the exhibited stand are more likely to purchase than a prospect encountered in industry (Goldblatt, 2005:11). Purchasing professionals, for example, prefer trade shows to seeing many vendors; since they do not have time for sales calls in their office (Tanner, 2002:229). With the afore-mentioned in mind, it may be assumed that in exhibitors' logical choice of trade shows, the stand personnel should comprise sales people (Brennan et al., 2011:195);

since these events can improve the results in sales leads (Dwyer & Tanner, 2009:332).

Trade shows provide the opportunity to create a large number of sales leads (Blyth & Rayner, 1996:21). The effectiveness of the exhibiting staff is an important factor in the efficiency of lead generation; and this shortens the lead conversion after a trade show that carries over into cost savings for the exhibitors (Seringhaus & Rosson, 2004:161; Gopalakrishna & Williams, 1992:220). Exhibitors must, therefore, focus on attendees, and not on volume; since excellent trade show leads can complement the selling effort that reduces the cost of closing the sale (Gopalakrishna et al., 2010:245). The salespeople who therefore man the exhibiting stand must know their organisation and product – in order to help the attendees in their decision-making (O'Connor, 2001:152-154).

The salespeople of an organisation use trade shows – not just to find sales leads – but to inform and educate their customers, and to demonstrate their products, and/or sell their products and services. Previous research has addressed a number of aspects on the role of personal selling at trade shows. These aspects include: what sales actions are taken by salespeople before, at, and after, a trade show. Elements, such as how attendees are invited to trade shows; what sales methods are used; and how exhibitors follow up after the show (Adcock, et al., 2001:345; Manning & Reece, 2001:172, Naudi, 2006:11, Valero, 2006:3, Pitta et al., 2006:159, Drohan, 2007:32; Ling-Yee, 2008:35; van Eck, 2008:11; Gopalakrishna, Roster & Sridhar, 2010:245; Rinallo, Borghini & Golfetto, 2010:255; Blyth, 2010:57; Yuksel & Voola, 2010:293).

Ling-Yee (2007:367) argues that internal knowledge, such as sales knowledge, contributes to superior trade show performance, making salespeople the obvious choice to man the exhibiting stand. However, Blyth (2010:60) indicates that one of the mistakes of exhibitors is to man exhibiting stands with salespeople; and this results in only focusing on closing deals and selling. Ling-Yee (2008:39) furthermore, states that salespeople are better trained and they could use their sales skills to determine whether an attendee is a possible prospect and thereby to

ensure more sales.

With the afore-mentioned issues in mind, the logical choice of exhibiting staff should be salespeople (Brennan et al., 2014:195). Dwyer and Tanner (2009:332) agree with this statement and they postulate that salespeople must be involved with trade shows; since they are personal and they provide sales leads, due to the nature of B2B markets (Ellis, 2011:318). Although salespeople might be the best exhibiting staff, in a study done by Liu et al. (2011:449), on Chinese trade shows, it was established that most exhibitors were at the show as part of public relations, and not for selling or getting contracts and consequently, firms should make more use of non-salespeople.

From the above discussion, it is clear that both sales and non-sales people might be utilised at trade shows. It is not, however, clear whether there would be any differences in how they view the different business actions and their importance.

Type of trade show

By matching the supply market with the target audience, trade shows can show off the expertise of a specific-industry sector (Brennan et al., 2011:189). The afore-mentioned statement indicates that trade shows can be either regional in a country, or held for a specific type of industry. Trade shows, however, are not only classified, according to regional offerings or industries; rather they can be classified in different ways (Kirchgeorg, 2005:48-49). In this study, the researcher will only classify trade shows, according to their geographical scope.

Geographical scope refers to the region that is covered by a trade show. Three types of geographical trade shows can be identified: international, national and regional. In this study, the researcher will determine the geographical scope of the trade show.

International trade shows can be defined as “shows that draw at least 10% of the total number of exhibitors, or at least 5% of the total number of visitors from abroad” (Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, 2012). International trade shows typically also last longer than other trade shows; and this provides exhibiting organisations with the opportunity to meet buyers directly to

investigate the markets and their products; to observe their competitors; and they are a way to gather marketing research data (Robbe, 2000:14-15; O’Hara, Palumbo & Herbig, 1993:234).

In South Africa, there are a number of international trade shows, such as ElectraMining that attract both exhibitors and attendees from across the world. Not all trade shows, however, are international; since many take place locally inside a country.

A national trade show is a trade show that is not international; and the visitors attending the trade show are only from one country, or from the surrounding areas extending beyond a given region. In many cases, trade shows only focus on one country. An example of this is the SA Cheese Festival that attracts South African cheese producers and distributors.

Regional trade shows visitors come from a specific area or country. Dwyer and Tanner (2009:329) state that regional trade shows are held at various locations around a country; and they can attract regional exhibitors and attendees.

The type of trade shows at which an exhibitor displays can impact the way in which they apply the different stages of the sales process (Kirchgeorg, 2005:47). Ling-Yee (2007:365-366) found that the knowledge and the skills needed for at-show selling differed between the various types of trade shows and this had a significant influence on the achievement of trade show objectives. Furthermore, Kijewski, Yoon and Young (1993:291-292) point out that there are different objectives, depending on the type of trade show. For example, there are national shows focusing more on new product and market segments, regional shows supporting sales activities, and international shows on identifying new distributors.

Furthermore, Hansen (2004:9) argues that trade show performances (sales, information-gathering, relationship building, image building & motivation activities) are often better at global or international trade shows. A possible explanation could be that international trade shows typically last longer than other trade shows; and this provides exhibiting organisations with the opportunity to meet buyers directly, to investigate the markets,

the products, to observe the competitors; and this is a way to gather marketing research data (Robbe, 2000:14-15; O'Hara et al., 1993:234). Herbig et al. (1997:373) point out that businesses that exhibit at international trade shows are more globally driven and they have more customers and more product lines; and consequently a more complex sales process should be followed.

National trade shows comprise those trade shows that are not international, but still relatively large in size – and the visitors attending the trade show are only from one country, or from areas extending beyond a given region. This, therefore, limits the number of contacts and how contact is made (Kirchgeorg, 2005:47), suggesting a less-complex sales process with limited activities in each stage.

Regional trade shows are even smaller in size than national trade shows and they are held in a specific area of a country at various locations for attracting regional attendees (Dwyer & Tanner, 2009:329). Godar and O'Conner (2001:82) point out that regional trade shows attract a higher portion of low-level operating attendees compared to national and international trade shows. It may, therefore, be assumed that sales strategies and actions employed during the sales process might be different – based on the fact that they sell to a different type of attendee.

Shoham (1992:337) also indicated that the type of trade show can influence the type of attendee, thereby resulting in a different type of sales process to be followed. Even the attendee contacts differ at the various trade shows as large international trade shows often have organised evenings where socialising takes place; whereas at smaller regional trade shows, exhibitors make more use of spontaneous social events, such as lunch: thereby implying that the promotional approach used in the sales process should also differ.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the sales processes followed at regional, national or international trade shows could differ significantly

RESEARCH METHOD

Descriptive research answers the questions: Who, what, when, where and why (McDaniel &

Gates, 2010:49) and it describes the characteristics of objects, people, groups, organisations or environments (Zikmund & Babin, 2010:51). Furthermore, it can be used where the emphasis is on determining the frequency with which something occurs, or whether there is a relationship between two variables (Churchill et al., 2010:79). As this study aimed to determine 'what' business actions were performed, at 'which' frequency, and by 'whom,' as well as trying to 'understand' and 'describe' the business actions as part of the sales process at trade shows; descriptive research was used.

The population consisted of exhibitors at regional, national and international trade shows. Due to the complexity of the trade show industry, a multistage sampling approach was used. In the first step of the multistage sampling, a list of the exhibition organisers was obtained from EXSA (Exhibitions South Africa Association). The second stage determined which of the exhibition organisers on the list obtained from the EXSA arranged trade shows, should be approached. This was done since it was established that a large number of the exhibition organisers only arrange consumer expos and not trade shows.

According to the list provided to the researcher by EXSA of expositions and trade show organisers, there were 23 organisers. In discussions with EXSA, it was established that only 13 of the exhibition organisers arranged trade shows; while eight organisers focus only on consumer expos. While trade shows, are business-to-business events that are not open to the public, expos are open to the public and frequently consumer-focused. Consequently, they should be excluded from the sample.

The names of the different Trade-Show Training group were also excluded; since they are only a training company; and so also were the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair Company; since they arrange trade shows in Zimbabwe only.

The research used stratified sampling at this stage, by listing only the exhibition organisers that arrange trade shows. All 13 trade show organisers attended; but only three gave their consent and were willing to participate in the study. From the three trade show organisers, two

gave their permission for one trade show each; and the Specialised Exhibition Montgomery organiser gave permission for two of their trade shows to be used.

As indicated, the researcher obtained permission for four trade shows, namely: International Safety and Security (IFSEC), which focuses on the security industry; Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), which focuses on health and safety; Afrimold that deals with the moulding industry; and the Cape Town Industrial trade show that deals with a number of different types of industrial products and services.

In the third and last stage of the sampling method, the researcher distributed questionnaires at each of the trade shows to each of the exhibitors' stands. It must, however, be noted that the researcher did establish that many exhibitors exhibit at more than one trade show and he was careful to avoid duplication in doing the fieldwork.

In this quantitative study, survey research was used, with a self-administered questionnaire. In selecting a self-administered questionnaire, the researcher looked at a number of different options relating to the selection; since this impacted the rest of the design process (Wiid & Diggins, 2013:115; McDaniel & Gates, 2010:293). The main reason for the selection of self-administered questionnaires was the nature of trade shows. In discussions that the researcher had with both the organisers and the exhibitors, it transpired that the exhibitors had no control over which attendees would visit their exhibition stands. It was pointed out to the researcher that the exhibiting staff would be able and more willing to complete the questionnaires – if they could do so in their own time at the trade show.

Section A of the questionnaire consisted of the demographic profile of the exhibitor's business, the exhibiting information, as well as the exhibiting staff. Section B made use of the 5-point Likert-scaled questions (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) to determine the exhibitors' level of agreement with the business actions evident at the trade show. These business actions included elements, such as: marketing; the setting of objectives; evaluation and planning; the staff at trade shows; the training of the exhibiting staff, the introduction of products, and the measurement of success.

Limited previously tested scales existed for the

sales process at trade shows therefore, this study was exploratory in nature; and this is one of the possible limitations of this study. However, the literature explored, as well as the existing scales of Hanchett (2007:146-150), were used pertaining to the exhibiting staff and the objectives; while the Seringhaus and Rosson (2004:164) scales for communication used to attract the attendees, staff training, prospecting and the exhibiting service. Lastly, Ling-Yee (2007:378) questions relating to the trade shows' performance were used.

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.892 indicated the reliability of the scales used.

The questionnaire was pre-tested with members of the defined population, in order to ensure that all the questions and statements were clearly understood.

RESULTS

Descriptive analysis of business actions taken regarding trade show

In Table 1, the first section of the questionnaire will be discussed that deals with the different business actions taken regarding trade shows. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of agreement of the exhibiting staff and the business actions of the organisation before the trade show. The scale ranged from one to five, with the scale points labelled: strongly disagree to strongly agree. The results are presented in descending order, based on their mean value.

From Table 1, the following deductions can be made on the levels of agreement regarding the business activities utilised at trade shows. The top-five business activities utilised before a trade show are: "Trade shows are applied to develop new customer contacts" (M=4.19, SD=0.859); "Trade shows are applied to enhance the business image" (M=4.08, SD=0.908); "Our business provided the exhibiting staff with product/service material to prepare themselves for the trade show" (M=4.03, SD=0.949); "Our business measures trade show success by the number of new prospects" (M=3.99, SD=0.897); and "Our business exhibits at trade shows, in order to get sales" (M=3.86, SD=1.147).

Three of the exhibitors' strategies are currently in the top five, namely: selling; inbound; and outbound communication. Business-image

**TABLE 1:
BUSINESS ACTIONS TAKEN REGARDING TRADE SHOW**

<i>Business actions taken regarding trade show</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1 Trade shows are applied to develop new customer contacts	4.19	0.859
2 Trade shows are applied to enhance the business image	4.08	0.908
3 Our business provided booth staff with product/service material to prepare themselves for the trade show	4.03	0.949
4 Our business measure trade show success by the number of new prospects	3.99	0.897
5 Our business exhibit at trade shows to get sales	3.86	1.147
6 Our business train and brief booth staff before the trade show	3.83	1.034
7 Trade shows assist our business with other marketing communication functions	3.82	0.948
8 Our business use trade shows to introduce new products	3.72	1.106
9 Our business planned before the trade show to exhibit to specific target customers	3.69	1.018
10 Our business have written promotional objectives for the trade show	3.67	1.107
11 Trade shows are used to maintain contact with existing customers	3.66	1.073
12 Trade shows are used to get a competitive advantage over non-exhibiting competitors	3.64	1.107
13 Trade shows provide our business with information on my industry	3.63	1.065
14 Our business has a tracking system to keep information on attendees that visited our exhibit stand	3.62	1.186
15 Non-financial aspects are used to measure trade show success	3.52	0.971
16 Our business measures success at the trade show in terms of financial gains	3.46	1.611
17 Our business have written sales objectives for the trade show	3.41	1.147
18 Our business have written financial objectives for the trade show	3.25	1.155
19 Trade shows are used to as a platform to test new product concepts	3.25	1.182
20 Trade shows assist our business to motivate staff	3.09	1.129
21 The business I work for use trade shows to collect information about competitors	3.07	1.182
22 Trade shows assist our business in the training of staff	3.01	1.160

building is also higher than sales that are in line with research done in China (Liu et al., 2011:449). Consequently, it is clear that trade shows are viewed as playing a role in the image- building strategies for many businesses.

The last variable that deals with getting sales at a trade show, however, loaded a $SD=1.147$. This indicates that there is no agreement between the exhibiting staff, and that their responses were heterogeneous.

The variable of “Our business training and briefing the staff before the trade show” ($M=3.83$, $SD=1.034$) only loaded sixth, and almost agreed. It must be noted that a number of studies indicated a lot of focus is being placed on the training of the exhibiting staff before a show (Seringhaus & Rosson 2004:156; Lee & Kim; 2008:786; Ling-Yee, 2008:42; Pitta et al., 2006:163; Hanlon, 1982:99).

However, it is interesting that in this study it was not one of the most of the most important actions; and that image-building, for example, is

viewed as being more important.

One of the least-used business activities was: “Our business has written financial objectives for the trade show” ($M=3.25$, $SD=1.155$); “Trade shows are used as a platform to test new product concepts” ($M=3.25$, $SD=1.182$); “Trade shows assist our business to motivate staff” ($M=3.09$, $SD=1.129$); “The business I work for uses trade shows to collect information on the competitors” ($M=3.07$, $SD=1.182$); and “Trade shows assist our business in the training of staff” ($M=3.01$, $SD=1.160$).

Although the mean values indicated agreement; it seems as if this does have the same importance for exhibitors, as do other business actions.

The high mean value for the activity: Developing new customer contacts is in line with the findings of a number of previous studies (Burgess & Bothma, 2007:349; Bettis-Outland et al., 2012:386; Saget, 2006:113-114). It must also be noted that a number of previous studies point

to the setting of sales objectives for a trade show and the importance thereof (Bellizzi & Lipps, 1984:52; Kirchgeorg et al., 2010a:64; Miller, 1999:44; Shoham, 1992:340).

In this study, however, the setting of sales objectives had a low mean value ($M=3.41$). This means that it is not used often and that it can have an impact on measuring their success at trade shows.

Hypotheses testing

MANOVA testing, which assesses the difference between groups collectively, rather than individually, was used to test hypothesis one. The researcher relied on a 95 % level of confidence, and a subsequent significance level of 5% ($p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$) to interpret the results of the hypothesis testing. Preliminary assumptions on the testing were conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, and the homogeneity of variance, and no serious violations were noted.

H_{o1} There exist no significant differences between salespersons and non-salespersons on the business actions used.

H_{a1} There exist significant differences between salespersons and non-salespersons on the business actions used.

The Wilks' Lambda value indicates that there are no significant differences between salespersons and non-salespersons exhibiting staff on the business actions used ($F(22.208)=1.501$, $p=0.076$; Wilks' Lambda=0.863; partial Eta Squared=0.137).

The null hypothesis H_{o1} was thus accepted; since there is no support for the hypothesis that there is a significant difference between salespersons and non-salespersons on the business actions used.

H_{o2} There exist no significant differences for the type of trade show on the business actions used.

H_{a2} There exist significant differences for the type of trade show on the business actions used.

The Wilks' Lambda value indicates that there are no significant differences between the different types of trade shows on the business actions used ($F(44.414)=0.863$, $p=0.720$; Wilks' Lambda=0.839; partial Eta Squared=0.084).

The null hypothesis H_{o2} was accepted; since there is no support that there is a significant difference between the different types of trade shows on the business actions used.

CONCLUSION

The section on business actions for trade shows dealt with a number of aspects that included elements, such as: marketing; the setting of objectives; evaluation and planning; staff at trade shows; the introduction of products, the measurement of success, and more of such issues.

The performance of trade shows can be evaluated by using five measures, namely: image-building; sales-related activities; information gathering; relationship improvement and motivation. In the findings of this study, it was agreed by the exhibitors that each of these measures forms a part of their business actions when exhibiting at a trade show. Image-building is thereby done; and the exhibitors agreed that the business image was enhanced through the use of trade shows ($M=4.08$). There were also sales-related activities, such as acquiring sales ($M=3.86$) at the trade show. Furthermore, information-gathering can be done by using trade shows as a place to provide the businesses with information on their industry ($M=3.62$); and they can also be used to acquire information on the competitors ($M=3.07$).

The afore-mentioned information-gathering done demonstrates that trade shows can be seen as a strategic marketing tool (Tafesse & Korneliussen, 2011:47). Trade shows also assist in relationship-improvement by developing new customer contacts ($M=4.19$) and also to maintain contact with the existing customers ($M=3.66$). Exhibitors can also make use of trade shows to motivate their staff ($M=3.09$); although this is not as important as creating new contacts or image-building. This is in line with other research, which found that one of the selling motives for exhibiting

was to enhance or maintain the business' profile (Hansen, 1996:47).

Another activity is that of the non-selling actions. These include aspects, such as the introduction of new products. In this study's findings, it was evident that the exhibitors agreed that the introduction of new products (M=3.72) and the testing of new product ideas (M=3.25) can also be done at trade shows.

It is suggested that exhibitors take three actions, in order to be successful at trade shows. From the findings in this study, it was evident that exhibitors agreed that they implement these three actions. Firstly, it was indicated that they plan to exhibit to a specific group of targeted customers (M=3.69). Secondly, they agreed that trade shows assist with other marketing communication (M=3.82); and lastly, it was agreed that trade shows are used to acquire new customers (M=4.19) and that tracking systems are used to determine those who visited the exhibition stand (M=3.62).

Exhibitors not only have to market the trade show; but they also need to set objectives, in order to measure their success (Kirchgeorg et al., 2010:64). Objectives are important for measuring success. From the findings in this study, it was evident that exhibitors agreed that their businesses have both written sales objectives (M=3.41) and written financial objectives (M=3.25); although these were not considered to be as important as the promotional objectives.

Staff-improvement was another factor, in line with other studies, where staff training is a part of the pre-show activities (Seringhaue & Rossen, 2004:156; Lee & Kim, 2008:786). In this study, it was established that businesses do emphasise the training of staff (M= 3.83), and of providing them with product material to prepare themselves for the trade show (M=4.03).

No differences were found between the salespeople and the non-salespeople on the business activities at trade shows. This needs to be further investigated; although it could be speculated that non-sales staff through training are just as well-equipped to man the exhibition stand. This is in line with the research done by Pitta et al. (2006:163) and Hanlon (1982:99),

which highlighted the importance of staff training before a trade show. Another reason could be that the same staff members are used by the exhibitor for a number of different trade shows – where they gained the necessary knowledge.

There were also no significant differences in the business actions of the various types of trade show. This is an interesting finding; since the type of trade show influences the objectives: for example, with national shows focusing more on new product and market segments; regional shows supporting sales activities and international shows on identifying new distributors (Kijewski, et al., 1993:291-292). It may be that in the South African context – regardless of the type of trade show business at which they exhibit, they follow a more standardised approach.

This is good news as this means that exhibitors exhibiting at regional trade shows can easily move to national or international shows – without any major adjustment to their sales strategy. This could streamline the process, and lead to cost-reduction in, for example, staff training etc.

At each stage of a trade show, the exhibitors have specific actions that they need to take. The different business actions include both sales and non-sales activities that provide exhibitors with aspects that are important for being successful in exhibiting. By establishing the importance of these elements, the exhibitors should be able to plan for trade shows. Through better planning, exhibitors can link their actions to sales and non-sales outcomes – and thereby better satisfy their customers. The added advantages are that the focus can be placed on those trade show actions where the staff need further training. This should also provide trade show organisers with guidelines for their exhibitors, when planning to exhibit.

Although not without its limitations, such as the limited number of existing scales that resulted in using multiple sources to construct the questionnaire therefore, the explorative nature of the study and the limitations on the statistical analysis that could be applied; this study has, nevertheless, contributed to the sparse academic literature on trade shows, as well as providing valuable insights for exhibitors.

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