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## Preparing for an exhibition

**Exhibitions are a highly-effective way of raising your profile. This guide looks at how you can improve your results by ensuring your message reaches the widest possible audience.**

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#### London

0207 788 7905

#### Tokyo

03 6890 8577

[www.ei.do](http://www.ei.do)

[info@ei.do](mailto:info@ei.do)

Exhibitions take a lot of organising; the stand design, its position, what marketing material is available and who will be dealing with visitor enquiries at the show. You might be thinking about special promotions or special offers to help create extra interest. These are all essential elements of a successful show and need careful planning. However just thinking about the immediate execution of the show and its follow-up means that opportunities to promote your company *outside* of the exhibition hall are sometimes missed – opportunities that with a little forward planning could help ensure your marketing campaign has a far greater visibility than might otherwise have been the case.

### Your marketing starts when the organiser's does

A common mistake is not utilising the facilities put in place by the show organisers to promote the event. The main attraction for any exhibition is not the seminars, demonstrations or features – it's you, the exhibitor: That's what most visitors are coming to see. It

is therefore your information that is of the greatest value to both the organiser and you.

Organisers go to enormous lengths to publicise their events through direct mail, advertising, email campaigns, PR campaigns, websites, flyers and news sheets. All of these channels provide incredibly useful marketing opportunities for you. And the best part of it is...they are usually free.

To capitalise on these opportunities, you need to be prepared. This means having useful material to hand that you are able to supply to the organisers as part of their build-up to the show. Remember, we are talking up to *six months in advance* of the event itself, so you need to be well organised. Useful material means interesting and relevant stories, of the sort that might persuade someone to visit your stand at the show. An example might be, a new product to be launched at the show, a special offer for the duration of the event or some other kind of promotion. It could even be news

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Exhibitions are time consuming and expensive, but can be spectacularly successful ways to promote your business. But only if you prepare properly to maximise the return on your investment of time and money.



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## Preparing for an exhibition

about a new service or product you've recently started supplying. Anything that would make you think "I'd like to find out more about that" is a potential winner.

### Exploit the channels to your advantage

The first step is the simplest one: When your exhibitor manual arrives ...*read it all!* It is a fact that many exhibitors do not spend nearly enough time looking at what marketing channels the organiser has provided for them and how they can be used to their advantage. For example, they'll often publish exhibitor stories on the show's website; send out email marketing newsletters in advance of the show and run a show blog site. The larger shows often

services like Facebook and LinkedIn can be used to meet visitors even before the show opens, meaning that when you do eventually meet, you're dealing with a qualified lead rather than a prospect.

### And finally... don't forget the media

The trade press likes to cover exhibitions because a busy journalist or editor can meet a lot of companies in a short space of time. However with the best will in the world, an editor is not going to visit every stand and unless you signal your presence at the show, there's a good chance you'll be missed.

## Your marketing starts when the organiser's does

have printed show newspapers and magazines. All of these are potential outlets for your company news. Read through the exhibitor manual and find out what information they need and when. And don't just stop at one story – send two or three good stories, supported by good quality photographs, together with information on any promotions you'll be running.

### Use the power of social media to boost your visibility

Don't forget about Social Media – Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn are the most popular services used by businesses. Setting up an account is free, and posting your stories (including keyword links) will help make your website show-up in searches better. Don't forget official show sites on

The best way to do this is to make sure you have provided the show's press office with a press pack. The press office is used as a base by visiting journalists, so it's a convenient place for them to pick up information about your company via your press pack. Again, it's startling how many companies fail to utilise this free promotional opportunity. Don't be one of them: Many key magazines will be writing show reviews, which means editors will be looking for interesting products to write about. Make it easy for them and you could be rewarded with publicity that travels further and lasts a lot longer than the show and its immediate impact.

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## The press release

*Press releases aren't difficult to get right once you know the rules*

Press releases are a really effective way to publicise your involvement in an exhibition and promote your company. The trade press likes to cover exhibitions because they are an efficient way of gathering information about new products and services. In the run-up to the show, and at the show itself, editors and journalists will be actively searching for stories to print about new products, new services and newsworthy events. But unless you make this information easily accessible to them, it's likely you'll miss out on this opportunity.

### WHAT MAKES A GOOD PRESS RELEASE?

There's no magic formula to writing a successful press release, however there are a few ground rules that will help your story get noticed. You should ideally keep your story brief (300-500 words) and focused on the product or service you are writing about. Put the most important facts at the top and try to make your headline really descriptive and catchy.

#### Key points

- Don't forget to include your contact details!
- Include a good quality image with your story - **not** a company logo.
- The most important information a journalist needs is "who", "what", "why", "how" and "where"
- Don't offer opinions as facts: as in "the world's leading..."
- Focus on **one** story per release



## The press pack

*Follow these tips to maximise the chances of your company being noticed*

Editors and journalists often visit shows in person, so it is extremely important that you prepare plenty of press packs in advance of the show and deliver them to the Press Office before the show opens. During the show, it is a good idea to pop into the press office from time to time to make sure they haven't run out.

### Make it stand out...

A nicely-presented press pack containing one or more interesting press releases is perhaps the most effective way of getting your products noticed by the media.

### ...but keep it simple

Try and be creative in your approach, but not over-the-top. A thoughtful promotional item included in your press pack might help to sell your story, but a bagful of cheap gimmicks probably won't; A simple company brochure can help give useful background to your press release, but a weighty collection of irrelevant marketing material will ensure it stays on the shelf.

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