

Trade Show Selection: A Comprehensive Guide

A step-by-step guide to finding, evaluating and prioritizing
trade shows that will produce business results

Skyline[®]

Introduction

Have you ever felt the weight of choosing the right trade show from the myriad of options out there? It's even a tougher call when you're aiming to produce measurable business results on limited resources. But relax, we've got your back!

Welcome to our comprehensive guide on selecting trade shows. The steps in this guide are based on key criteria and designed to help you evaluate and rank various trade shows, ensuring the highest impact and ROI (return on investment). It will walk you through the various factors to consider when choosing a trade show and demonstrate the significant impact that a well-chosen event can have on accomplishing your business goals.

As an added bonus, we have included a link to our trade show database within this guide. So, now it's time to start the search for the perfect trade show.

Happy hunting!



U.S. companies plan to attend an average of 12.5 national trade shows and 5.1 international trade shows in 2024.

Source: Statista

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STEP

01

Define Objectives



01 Define Objectives

Before diving into the sea of trade shows, it's important to define your goals. As you evaluate each show ask yourself two key questions:

Why now? Why this show?



85% of exhibitors' primary reason for exhibiting at a trade show is to generate leads and sales.

Source: The Trade Show Labs



87% of exhibitors find exhibitions highly valuable for achieving business sector promotions.

Source: The Conference Source

Are you aiming for lead generation, brand amplification, or an impactful product launch? Define your success with measurable metrics like leads collected, sales generated, or social media engagement. Pin down your intentions before making your move. It's all about taking proactive strides toward maximizing your trade show experience.

To effectively define your objectives, consult with key internal stakeholders. This includes discussing your goals with marketing, product management, and sales leaders to gather valuable insights and perspective. Marketing managers can provide details on the target customer profile, geographical areas of interest, and competitive analysis, helping align trade show goals with broader marketing strategies.

Product marketing leaders often provide specifics on marketing goals, market trends, and valuable trade shows based on their industry expertise. Engaging with the sales team is also essential to understand customer needs and align them with your company's objectives for participating in trade shows.

It's not just about showing up; it's about aligning your goals with specific business objectives which, in turn, will enable stronger returns on investment and engagement.

STEP

02

Understand Your Target Audience

02 Understand Your Target Audience

Your target audience is the cornerstone of trade show success. It's not just about getting attendees to visit your booth; it's about engaging with the right people in a meaningful way. To make a big impact at trade shows, you need to define your target audience, analyze and understand their needs, and align your product or service to address those needs.

Defining your target audience involves specifying who you are trying to reach with your booth and understanding their needs, interests, and pain points. Highlight how your product or service provides solutions for them, being mindful to speak in benefits rather than features, and tailor your booth presentation to resonate with your audience's desires and challenges.

Additionally, analyzing the attendee profile in terms of industry, job titles, and purchasing authority is essential for ensuring that the trade show attracts your target audience. By understanding who you want to connect with and ensuring that the trade show aligns with their profile, you can maximize the impact of your exhibit experience.

92%

of trade show attendees'

main reason for attending is to see new products being showcased.

81%

of attendees

can recall at least one exhibitor they visited at a trade show, even six months later.

46%

of attendees

only visit one trade show per year.

The average time a trade show attendee spends at a live event, like a trade show, is 5.5 hours.

STEP

03

Find, Evaluate and Prioritize the Best Trade Shows



03 Find, Evaluate and Prioritize the Best Trade Shows

With tight budgets and limited resources, every choice matters. Utilize a strategic perspective when selecting and evaluating trade shows. To find your shows, first seek feedback from your current and prospective customers. Dive deep into the shows they attend, the value these events hold for them, and their genuine interest in attending.

If possible, conduct formal surveys and informal interviews to better understand your target audience's sentiments towards different trade shows and the role these exhibitions play in their purchasing decisions.

Click below to explore various shows, locations, and venues in our U.S. & Canada Trade Show database.

[View U.S. & Canada Trade Shows](#)

The screenshot shows the Skyline Trade Show Calendar interface. It features a search bar with filters for Show Name, City, Country, Region, Industry, and Month. Below the search bar is a table of trade shows. A white mouse cursor icon is pointing at the 'Request Info' button for the InfoComm event.

Show Name	Next Dates	Location	Attendees / Exhibitors	Request Info
Consumer Electronics Show - CES	JAN/07/2025 JAN/10/2025	Las Vegas, NV, United States	Attendees: 138,759 Exhibitors: 4,300 Net Sq. Ft.: 2,500,000	Request Info
InfoComm	JUN/07/2025 JUN/13/2025	Orange County Convention Center Orlando, FL, United States	Attendees: 35,967 Exhibitors: 833 Net Sq. Ft.: 407,000	Request Info
National Electrical Contractors Association - NECA	SEP/28/2024 OCT/01/2024	San Diego Convention Center San Diego, CA, United States	Attendees: 10,000 Exhibitors: 500 Net Sq. Ft.: 55,000	Request Info

Thinking beyond traditional shows, explore smaller regional events and other opportunities that attract your target audience. And when researching potential trade shows, it's crucial to evaluate each show's industry relevance and historical data. Look for well-regarded trade shows in your industry and analyze attendance numbers, exhibitor lists, and attendee demographics. Seek feedback from past exhibitors and attendees and keep an eye on competitors' presence to identify the best opportunities for your brand.

Another critical step in this journey is connecting with the show's organizers. This pivotal conversation arms you with essential insights, despite the challenges presented by inconsistent reporting and the absence of independent audits. Consider the location, dates, and the event's track record. Delve into the statistics and demographics

of previous years' shows and seek firsthand accounts from businesses that have participated. This rigorous approach ensures that the chosen trade show aligns with your brand's vision and goals, setting the stage for a show-stopping exhibit experience.

In addition, creating a strategically ranked and prioritized list gives you the flexibility to pivot and add parachute events – a last-minute selection where you need to quickly attend a trade show due to unforeseen circumstances. Without a strategy in place, it's nearly impossible to take advantage of parachute opportunities, such as when a competitor pulls out of a coveted show or a change in your company's market focus.

03 Find, Evaluate and Prioritize the Best Trade Shows

When evaluating shows consider the business benefits you hope to receive. Here are 7 business benefits to consider.

Top Business Benefits of Trade Shows:

1. Generate leads
2. Demonstrate a new product
3. Connect with your customers
4. Reach a new market
5. Increase brand awareness
6. Scope out your competition
7. Recruit new employees



What To Ask Show Organizers:

- What was the total attendance at last year's trade show? Was this up or down from previous years?
- What were the key interests of last year's attendees? What did they feel was missing from the show floor?
- What else can you tell me about the attendees?
- What was the net attendance on the show floor? This weeds out vendors, staff and exhibitors. Ask if this figure is audited and verified by an outside agency - if not, take it with a grain of salt.
- What is the total number of hours the exhibit floor will be open? Is that up or down from previous years?
- How many exhibitors? Is this up or down from previous years?
- What was your total net (not gross) square footage of exhibit space used by all exhibitors combined?
- What is the cost per square foot?
- What are the hours and dates for speeches, banquets, and educational programs that typically draw prospects off the trade show floor?

STEP

04

Conduct a Competitive Audit

04 Conduct a Competitive Audit

“Know your enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster.”

– Sun Tzu



54% of businesses attend trade shows solely because their competitors are present.

Source: The Trade Show Labs

When it comes to evaluating a trade show, taking a glance at what your competitors are doing can be just as informative as an in-depth look at your own performance.

Look at your top competitors, both direct and indirect, and investigate their presence at the trade shows you are considering. Figure out if they took part and consider their booth size, and what types of activations they included. Did they feature product demos, digital elements or offsite events? Did they sponsor signage or receptions? These insights can help identify both gaps in the market, and areas of opportunity for your brand.

Social media is another powerful tool to audit competition. Searching for posts around the time of last year's trade show can shed light on how successful they were, and what type of content and messaging resonated with attendees.

Remember, when it comes to trade shows, it's not just about taking part - it's about standing out in a sea of competition and creating a lasting impression.

STEP

05

Evaluate Location and Timing

05 Evaluate Location and Timing

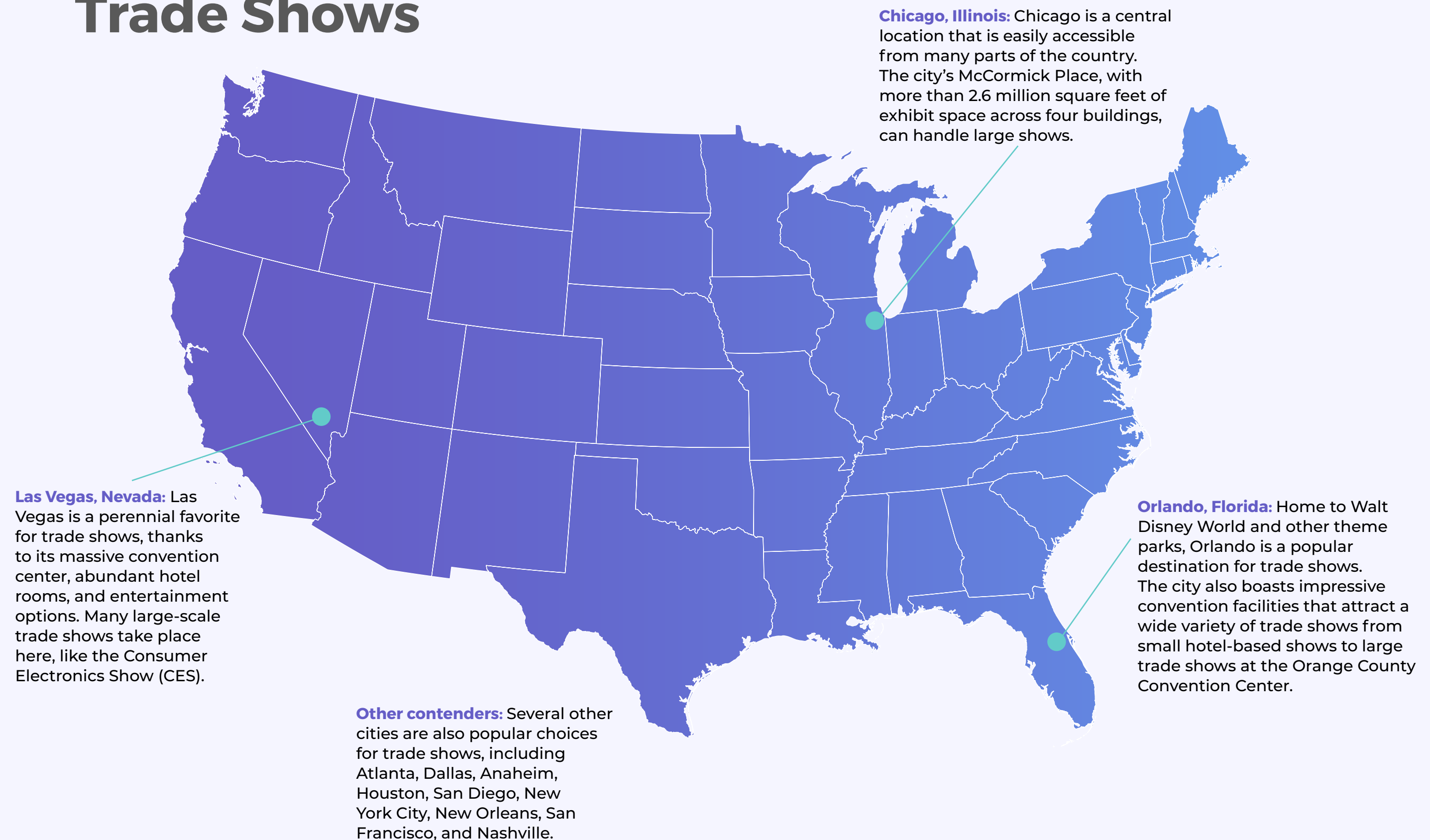
When it comes to selecting a trade show, the location and timing can make a significant difference in how successful it is. Aligning your trade show attendance with busy seasons in your industry ensures that potential customers are more receptive to your offers.

But timing isn't just about industry trends - it's about your budget and resources too. Spread out your trade shows throughout the year, avoiding the temptation to bunch them together, which can strain your team and budget. And don't forget to consider your competitors' schedules. While a little overlap can be beneficial, strategically choose shows where you can differentiate yourself and make a lasting impression.

When it comes to location, target your audience where they are most concentrated. Choose shows in locations that are convenient for your target audience to attend, minimizing travel costs and accommodations for your team. Accessibility is key, so consider the ease of the major venue cities that are well equipped to handle trade shows.

Consider whether the trade show's location aligns with your market area and ensure the timing doesn't conflict with other important events or peak business periods.

Top U.S. Cities for Trade Shows



05 Evaluate Location and Timing



Expert Tip:

Consider sending an observer to the show the year before to see if it is a good fit.

5

The Top Five

Top Cities by Number of Attendees

Las Vegas
New York
D.C.
Chicago
Denver

Top Cities by Venue Square Footage

Las Vegas
Orlando
Chicago
Atlanta
New York

Top Cities with the Most Exhibitors

Las Vegas
Orlando
Chicago
New York
Atlanta

Largest B2B Shows in the U.S. by Number of Attendees

National Farm Machinery
AAPEX
SEMA
CES
World AG Expo

Top Industries with the Most Exhibitors

Healthcare
Transportation
Building & Construction
Food & Beverage
Sporting Goods & Recreation

Industries with the Most Square Footage of Exhibit Space

Transportation
Building & Construction
Healthcare
Sporting Goods & Recreation
Agriculture & Farming

Source: [The Trade Show Calendar](#)

STEP

06

Align with Budget Considerations

06 Align with Budget Considerations

If you've previously exhibited at a show, calculate its value using metrics from the earlier show. Consider the following:



Cost per qualified lead.

Divide the total cost of the exhibition by the number of leads. For instance, if 125 qualified leads were collected and total show costs were \$20,000, the cost per lead would be \$160.



Cost per impression.

Add the total number of people who visited the booth and divide that figure into the cost of the show. To take it further, consider additional impressions such as those from social media and press coverage.



Cost per revenue dollar.

Divide the cost of the show by the amount of sales made at the show to determine the cost per revenue dollar. But remember: Low results may be because of a weak exhibit experience or lack of strategy, rather than a weak show.

Calculating costs is just the beginning of aligning your trade show program with your budget. From booth space and design to travel and marketing expenses, every dollar spent must be a calculated investment with a potential return on investment. By estimating the ROI potential based on lead generation, sales, and brand exposure, you can ensure that every dollar invested generates tangible results for your business.

When considering your budget for a trade show, the devil is in the details. The exhibitor's fee and the trade show exhibit build are the two substantial fees to account for, but don't overlook the costs of travel, accommodations, shipping, staffing, promotional items, and any unexpected

expenses that may arise. Crafting a comprehensive budget will not only keep your spending in check but also ensure that every investment is aligned with your strategic objectives and maximizes your impact at the show.

When it comes to the exhibit structure there are a few things to consider. One is whether you will rent or purchase the exhibit. At Skyline, we rent the exact same modular structures that we sell – enabling our clients to get the look of a custom booth in a way that best fits their budgets. And don't forget to account for the reuse of your trade show exhibit. It's much more sustainable to invest in a booth that can be refreshed, reconfigured and reused time and time again.



52% of business leaders believe that trade shows and events provide more potential ROI compared to other marketing channels. Trade shows account for

40% of B2B marketing budgets. 40% of businesses plan to increase their trade show budget. 84% of exhibitors will upgrade to a larger space if high-quality attendees attend a trade show.

Source: The Trade Show Labs

STEP

07

Evaluate Marketing and Sponsorship Opportunities



07 Evaluate Marketing and Sponsorship Opportunities



For 64% of exhibitors, the quality of attendees is the most important factor when deciding to participate in a trade show.

Source: The Trade Show Labs

Evaluating sponsorship opportunities is a crucial step in achieving your marketing and sales objectives. Choosing the right sponsorship can make or break your success on the show floor. Before you commit to a sponsorship, it's essential to plan your pre-show marketing activities and explore opportunities for speaking engagements and promotions during the show. And don't forget to develop strategies for post-show follow-up, considering the support you'll need to maximize your ROI and follow up with leads generated on the show floor.

When considering sponsorship opportunities, the first question to ask yourself is whether the opportunity aligns with your business objectives and puts you in front of your target persona. Ensure the industry focus and attendee demographics match your ideal customer base, and scrutinize the benefits offered at each sponsorship level. Look

beyond just logo placement and consider opportunities like speaking engagements, workshops, product demonstrations, and networking events.

Consider factors like lead generation, brand awareness potential, and access to decision-makers. And don't forget to ask the organizers for details on how they measure the success of sponsorships, as this will provide invaluable metrics and reporting for future events. Be sure to follow contacts made through sponsorships and trade show attendance all the way through the buying cycle. In many instances, you may create new marketing contacts that are not yet in the buying cycle, but if you continue to nurture them, will eventually become customers.

STEP

08

Choose the Best Booth Location



08 Choose the Best Booth Location



72% of businesses are concerned about charges for floorspace and utilities.

Source: The Trade Show Labs

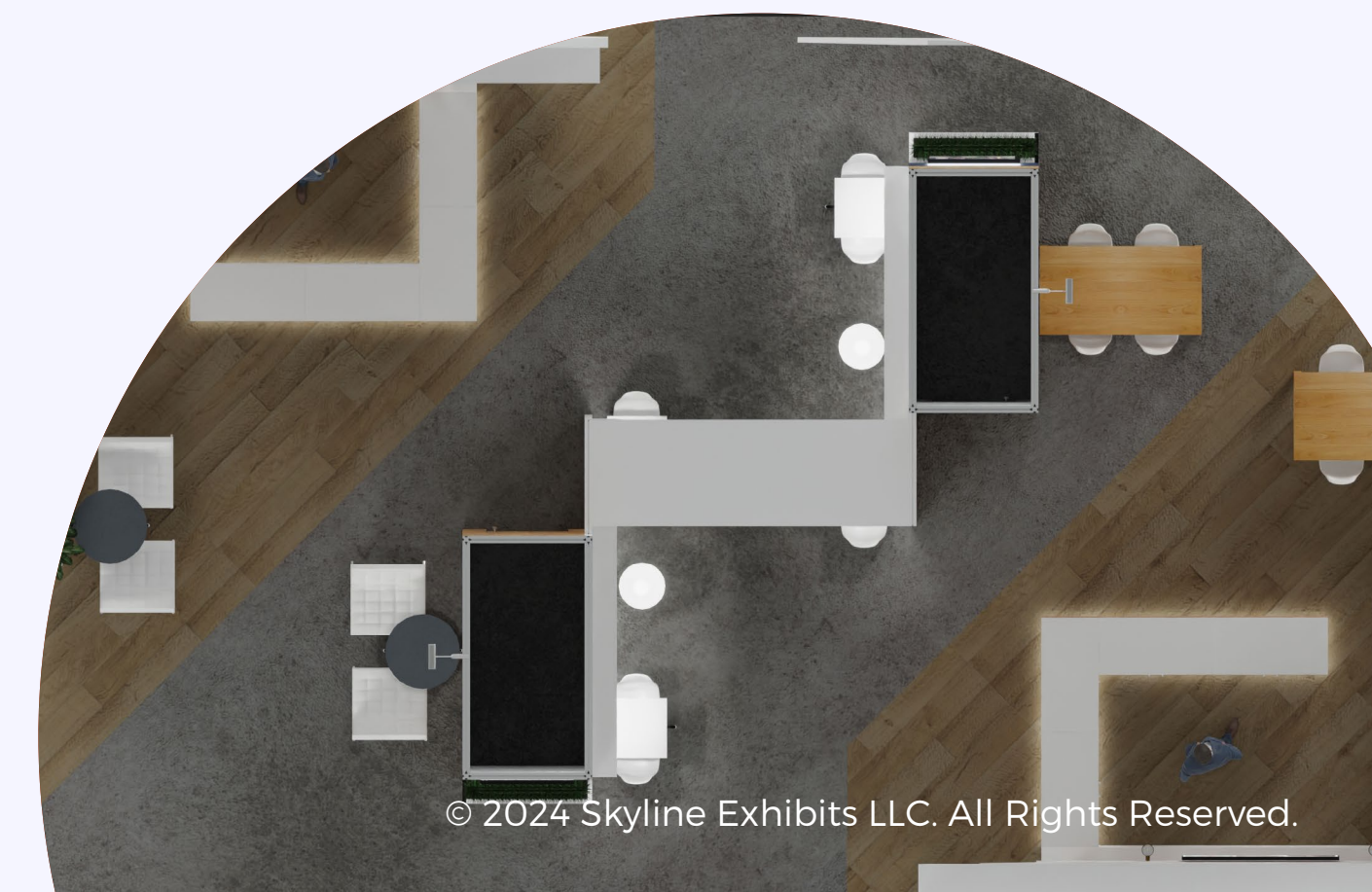
When evaluating your options, it's essential to consider prime locations within the venue. While these areas often come at a higher cost, they offer unparalleled exposure due to higher foot traffic. By staking your claim in a prime location, you position your brand for greater visibility and engagement, boosting your chances of securing valuable leads and connections.

Beyond location, choosing your booth size and configuration is key. Ensure that the space you choose can accommodate your exhibit's design elements and interactive features. Whether you opt for a bold, sprawling booth or a sleek, sophisticated setup, size matters. Pay close attention to the dimensions and layout, allowing ample space for demonstrations, product displays, and attendee interactions. Ideally, you should purchase a modular booth that can be reconfigured to work in different spaces and sizes.

However, before you finalize your location, you must confirm availability. With your budget in mind, ensure that the selected space aligns

with your trade show display and desired booth configuration. Review the exhibition floor plan and map out the best options based on traffic flow and proximity to key attractions.

Consider the traffic patterns and strategic positioning near common areas such as hospitality and relaxation zones. Understanding attendee flow and congregation points will guide you in selecting a location that maximizes engagement opportunities. Furthermore, it's essential to be aware of your competitors' placements, particularly if you are in a smaller, inline booth. By strategically positioning yourself relative to competitors, you can carve out your own space and attract the attention of attendees, ensuring that your brand stands out from the crowd.



STEP

09

Secure Logistical Support

09 Secure Logistical Support

To ensure your exhibit stands out and delivers on objectives, review the event services offered by the trade show. Shows have varied and detailed regulations especially regarding booth height, onsite labor and receiving. Look for an exhibit partner who offers support services like I&D assistance, technology support, and lead retrieval systems that streamline your operations and enhance attendee engagement.

Moreover, navigating the rules and regulations governing booth setup and conduct is key to compliance and success. Understanding the trade show's guidelines on marketing materials, booth setup, and conduct ensures a seamless experience that aligns with industry standards and elevates your brand image.

Review the Exhibitor Manual.

It will have all the guidelines and deadlines for shipping and receiving.

Plan Early.

Early planning saves money.

Work with a Specialized Logistics Partner.

Look for a logistics provider with experience handling trade shows.

Follow Show Guidelines.

The exhibitor manual may have specific requirements, such as labeling protocols.

Meet Deadlines.

Missing deadlines can result in hefty fees.

Double Check Paperwork.

Ensure all your shipping paperwork is accurate and complete.

Consider Renting.

With custom rentals, you can tailor your exhibit design without worrying about maintenance, storage and pull & prep fees.

Plan for Storage.

Work with an exhibiting partner who offers asset management. If you have a large booth, be sure to pre-stage it.

Track Your Shipment.

Get tracking numbers for your shipments and stay updated on their whereabouts.

9-Steps to Choosing a Trade Show

Step One: Define Objectives

- Ask yourself: Why now? Why this show?
- List your business objectives/goals.
- Consult with business partners, such as marketing, product management, and sales leaders, for insights.

Step Two: Understand Your Target Audience

- Define your target audience and align your product/service with their needs.
- Analyze attendee profiles and industry relevance.

Step Three: Find, Evaluate and Prioritize Trade Shows

- Use our [Trade Show Calendar](#) to research national and regional shows.
- Gather feedback from customers.
- Connect with show organizers for insights.

Step Four: Conduct a Competitive Audit

- Investigate competitors' presence at trade shows.
- Analyze their booth size and activations.
- Use social media to gather insights.

Step Five: Evaluate Location and Timing

- Align with industry busy seasons.
- Spread out trade shows throughout the year.
- Consider competitors' schedules.

Step Six: Align with Budget Considerations

- Calculate costs for booth space, design & build, show services, travel, and more.
- Craft a comprehensive budget aligned with strategic objectives.

Step Seven: Evaluate Marketing and Sponsorship Opportunities

- Evaluate sponsorship opportunities.
- Explore speaking engagements and promotions.
- Plan pre-show and post-show marketing activities considering sponsorships.

Step Eight: Choose the Best Booth Location

- Consider prime locations for higher exposure.
- Choose booth size and configuration carefully.
- Confirm availability and align with your trade show display.

Step Nine: Secure Logistical Support

- Review event services for I&D assistance and technology support.
- Ensure compliance with trade show guidelines.
- Partner with an exhibit expert for seamless operations and enhanced engagement.

In Conclusion

Trade shows are a significant investment, and the stakes are high with every decision affecting the return on your investment. With our comprehensive guide for selecting trade shows, you're equipped with the insights and actionable steps needed to select the most fitting trade shows for your business. At Skyline, we believe in empowering marketers like you to command attention and achieve unparalleled goals at every trade show. Our commitment to creating sustainable, reusable exhibits that stand out on the show floor and deliver on business objectives puts you at the forefront of your industry. With our unwavering support and expertise, you can confidently navigate the complexities of selecting the perfect trade shows, ensuring that your exhibit experiences are not just memorable but game changing.

If you are looking for a partner, we are here to help.

Let's get to work.





As one source for all your exhibit needs, Skyline manufactures custom modular exhibits and offers a full range of services, providing you with everything necessary to create brand-elevating experiences. Our exhibits offer the perfect blend of custom design and modularity, providing flexibility, scalability, and the creative freedom to make a lasting brand impact.

Skyline[®]

To learn more:

Visit skyline.com

Call us at: 1-800-328-2725



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